



## The Significance of The Bread of Life

In the Gospel according to John there are a total of eight "I AM" statements. Around each of them there are events that help speak to the meaning of the statement. The statements also relate directly to God in the Old Testament, and point to the deity of Christ. In this paper, this author has chosen to examine the first "I AM" statement found in John 6:35, "I AM the bread of life."

The first I AM statement occurs after a fascinating miracle. So fascinating that Matthew, Mark, and Luke also record the same event in their Gospel's.<sup>1</sup> This miracle is the feeding of the 5,000, which takes place at the beginning of Jesus' third year of ministry, before he and his disciples make their way to Jerusalem for the Passover (John 6:4).

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<sup>1</sup> Morris, Leon. *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 300.

At this point in Jesus' ministry he has become quite popular because of "the signs that he was doing on the sick" (v. 2, ESV). Because of his popularity there is a large crowd that follows Jesus and his disciples up a mountain off the coast of the Sea of Galilee.

When Jesus sees the large crowd he asks Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" (v. 5). John adds his commentary when he says that Jesus asked this to test him, because Jesus already knew what he was going to do (v. 6). Philip answers the Lord, "two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to eat a little" (v. 7). One denarius was a day's wage, meaning that 200 denarii would equate to 8 months of income.<sup>2</sup> "But the crowd was so large (v. 10) that even such a large sum of money would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite".<sup>3</sup>

In response to this problem, Andrew brings to Jesus a boy who has "five barley loaves and two fish" (v. 9). It is with this small amount of food that Jesus feeds the 5,000 so that they all "had eaten their fill" (v. 12).

Added context to the first "I AM" statement is after this miracle has taken place. The next day, Jesus and his disciples arrive in the city of Capernaum (v. 21, 24) and the crowd finds him there. In response to a question from the crowd, Jesus says, "Truly, Truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you" (vv. 26-27). They then ask what they need to do, "to be doing the works of God" (v. 28), to which Jesus responds, "believe" (v. 29).

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<sup>2</sup> Carson, D.A. *The Gospel According to John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 269.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

An amazing part of this passage is the next verse. Keep in mind that the context of all of this is the feeding of the 5,000, as discussed above. In response to Jesus telling them to believe, they essentially say, prove it: "What sign do you do, that we may see and believe you?" (v. 30). This is the context of the first I AM statement. Just a few verses after this request for Jesus to prove that he is the Son of God Jesus proclaims to the crowd, "I AM the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (v. 35).

As stated in the opening paragraph, all of the "I AM" statements point back to God in the Old Testament. In the verses before the "I AM" statement from Jesus, the crowd tells him that Moses gave their fathers manna to eat from heaven while they were in the wilderness (v. 31). Jesus corrects them and says that it was God who provided the bread (v. 32).

While the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God provided to them manna every single day. This manna served as their nourishment while they were in the wilderness and provided life for them. Just as Jesus states that he is the Bread of Life, so to was God to the Israelites before they arrived to the promised land.

While the connection with God in the Old Testament to the Bread of Life "I AM" statement is obvious in light of the context, the deity of Christ is even more obvious. The manna that the crowd is speaking about was a temporary solution to a temporary problem that the Israelites had. They needed food to live on a daily basis and God provided this to them as they needed it. Although this is extremely miraculous, the crowd here in John 6 is still only looking after their physical needs in referencing the manna from heaven. Not just the physical need of hunger, but even that of their desire for "a messianic revolt...Manna was thought to be

characteristic of the kingdom of God.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus is not speaking of a physical condition, but a spiritual.

He says to them, "the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven" (v. 33).

Immediately Jesus draws a parallel to the manna that came from heaven. Just as it came from heaven, was of God, so to is "he" who comes from heaven. They are both provisions from God. While using the parallel of the manna, Jesus takes a turn in the minds of the crowd and says that this bread, the new bread, "gives life to the world" (v. 33).

He continues the turn, so to speak, in verse 35, "whoever comes to me shall not hunger." This is different than what the manna did in the wilderness. While the manna was from God, and from heaven, it only provided temporary relief from hunger. The bread that Jesus gives, his life, gives eternal life to the world, "whoever comes to [him]...whoever believes in [him]" (v. 35).

This thought is continued a few moments later in verse 49: "Your fathers at the manna in the wilderness and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die." And in an effort to speak to the eternal life that is given to those that believe in Him, he tells them that he is the bread that came down from heaven (v. 51).

The deity of Christ is again spoken of a few verses prior to 51. In verse 46, Jesus says, "not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father." Jesus later promises that any who "feed on [his] flesh, [the bread of life], and drinks [his] blood has eternal life, and [he] will raise him up on the last day" (v. 54, also v. 39, 44). Not only is Jesus from God (vv. 38, 44, 46, 50, 51), but he can do something that only God can do: provide eternal life (Rom. 6:23).

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<sup>4</sup> Towns, Elmer. *The Gospel of John: Believe and Live*. DChattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2002), 63.

"I AM the bread of life" (v. 35). Such a simple statement yet full of profound meaning for all of those who heard these words spoken from the mouth of our Lord, and those who have the ability to read them in their Bible today. When John wrote his Gospel he almost always has a discourse go along with a miracle, and with this first "I AM" statement, his readers are able to sit on that mountain with the multitude and partake in the temporary solution to a temporary problem. John's readers are also able to stand in the crowd as Jesus is peppered with questions and are given opportunity to see how it was God who provided the manna, not Moses. The readers of John's Gospel are able to witness "Jesus...making clear his heavenly origin and the fact that he alone supplies the spiritual need of his hearers".<sup>5</sup> Finally, as a part of the audience of John, his readers are given an incredible truth: if they believe in Christ, if they eat of the bread he gives, he "has eternal life, and [Jesus] will raise him up on the last day" (v. 54).

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<sup>5</sup> Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 111.



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