Just a Thought

4,000 – 5,000

“And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over.” (Matthew 15:37, ESV)

Jesus fed five thousand people.

Later, He fed four thousand.

At first glance, the second miracle may seem almost unnecessary. Jesus had already demonstrated that He could take a few loaves and fish and miraculously feed a multitude. Why essentially repeat the same miracle?

Perhaps because it was not the same miracle.

The feeding of the five thousand occurred in a predominantly Jewish setting. Jesus took five loaves and two fish, fed the multitude, and afterward the disciples gathered twelve baskets of fragments.

Five thousand. Five loaves. Twelve baskets.

Later Jesus traveled into predominantly Gentile territory. There another great crowd gathered around Him. This time there were seven loaves and a few small fish. Jesus again gave thanks, broke the bread, and fed the multitude.

Four thousand. Seven loaves. Seven baskets.

The differences are difficult to overlook.

Scripture frequently uses numbers in meaningful ways, although care must be taken not to discover symbolism where Scripture does not establish it. Five naturally brings to mind the five books of Moses, the Torah that stood at the heart of Israel's covenant life. Twelve unmistakably appears throughout Scripture in connection with Israel and its twelve tribes.

Four frequently appears in expressions describing the whole earth—the four winds and the four corners of the earth. Seven repeatedly communicates fullness or completeness.

But even without pressing the symbolism of every number, something remarkable is happening.

Jesus fed Israel.

Then Jesus fed the Gentiles.

The first crowd was hungry. So was the second.

The first crowd could not provide enough food for itself. Neither could the second.

Christ had compassion on the first crowd. He also had compassion on the second.

And there was more than enough for everyone.

The disciples should have understood something from the first miracle, but Mark tells us after Jesus walked on the water:

“for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” (Mark 6:52, ESV)

What was there to understand about the loaves?

Certainly they revealed the extraordinary power of Christ. But perhaps there was more to understand. The One who provided bread in the wilderness was revealing who He was.

John records that after feeding the five thousand Jesus declared:

“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35, ESV)

The bread pointed beyond itself.

It pointed to Christ.

And the second feeding demonstrated that this Bread would not be restricted to Israel.

The gospel would eventually go beyond Jerusalem and Judea. It would cross the boundaries separating Jew and Gentile and travel to the nations of the world. Jesus had already provided a picture of what was coming.

Four thousand and five thousand.

Different crowds. Different locations. Different numbers.

The same Christ.

Paul would later write:

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.” (Romans 10:12, ESV)

There are not two Saviors—one for Israel and another for the nations. There are not two gospels or two ways of salvation.

There is one Lord.

There is one gospel.

There is one Bread of Life.

The Jewish multitude ate and was satisfied. The Gentile multitude ate and was satisfied. And after both meals there was bread remaining.

No shortage.

No exhausted supply.

No sinner will ever come to Christ and discover that there is not enough grace remaining for him.

Perhaps that is what we were supposed to understand about the loaves.

Christ is sufficient for the whole world.

Just a thought.

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