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The Bread of Life Sermon

> Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. (John 6:54–58)

These concluding statements in Jesus's powerful and heavily symbolic Bread of Life discourse caused confusion, consternation, and even anger among many of its original hearers, both among the Jews and among some of Jesus's own disciples. The

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discourse given in John 6:26–58 is the central of seven of Christ's discourses in John's Gospel that teach important truths about who Jesus is and what He does for mankind.[1] Thus, this sermon, along with the other discourses in John, focuses on Christology—understanding the person and the work of Jesus as the Messiah, or Anointed One.

Biblical scholarship has, for the most part, interpreted the discourse along one of three lines. One approach tends to focus on the sacramental aspect of the discourse, using the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to interpret it. A second approach interprets the sermon largely as a metaphor, seeing in the sermon a description of Jesus's role and the believer's response to Him. A third position does both, seeing the original discourse delivered by Jesus as primarily symbolic while acknowledging that John could well have intended the imagery to be applied to the sacrament.[2] These approaches echo the questions that Elder Bruce R. McConkie raised at the beginning of his own analysis of the discourse: "How do men eat the Lord's flesh and blood? Is this literal or figurative? Does it have reference to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper or to something else?"[3]

A sacramental approach to the Bread of Life sermon is particularly attractive since the Gospel of John strikingly omits any reference to the institution of the sacrament in its account of the Last Supper in John 13–14. Nevertheless, the discourse's focus on Christology was necessitated by the historical circumstances at the time of its delivery. Jesus's original audience consisted of several different groups: the crowd whose members had been present at or heard about the miraculous feeding of the five thousand (John

6:26–40), a specific group that John identifies as "the Jews" (vv. 41–59), and finally Jesus's followers, both a group of disciples and His innermost circle of the Twelve (vv. 60–71). Each of these groups misunderstood in some way either who Jesus was or what His mission was, allowing Jesus to adjust the focus of the discourse for each group. Therefore, the third approach to the sermon—considering it symbolic but recognizing its imagery in the ordinance of the sacrament—is particularly useful for understanding how Jesus's immediate audience responded to Him, which helps us better understand what we must believe about what He did for us by suffering and dying for the sins of the world. In the Easter season, this is particularly appropriate, since the imagery of eating Jesus's flesh and drinking His blood recalls to mind His suffering and death.

The Passover Setting and the Preceding Miracles

John establishes the setting of the discourse, "And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh" (v. 4), and consequently provides important interpretive hints. Unlike other Passovers in John, in this instance Jesus does not attend the festival in Jerusalem. Instead, He ascends a "mountain" (v. 3) in a locale that the synoptics identify as a wilderness (*erēmos topos*, KJV "desert place"), which strengthens the association of Jesus with the new Moses. It also provides imagery of deliverance and bread that makes Jesus's feeding the multitude in the wilderness so reminiscent of the Lord's sustaining the children of Israel while they were in the wilderness with Moses.[4] The

Passover setting establishes some of the fundamental symbolism necessary for understanding the Bread of Life discourse, including deliverance, the crossing of the sea, miraculous feedings in the wilderness, and the saving role of the Paschal Lamb. Although this episode does not take place in Jerusalem where the Passover was properly celebrated, it does associate this scene closely with the final Passover of Jesus's ministry.

Associating the two miracle stories of John 6—the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:5–15; parallels Matthew 14:13–21; Mark 6:33–44; Luke 9:11–17) and Jesus's walking on water (John 6:16–21; parallels Matthew 14:22–36; Mark 6:47–51)—with the Passover helps establish the imagery of the Bread of Life sermon. First, the miraculous, filling meal of bread and fish for the multitude re-creates the table fellowship of the Passover meal; Jesus extends the blessings of His meal to the thousands whom He fed, all the while hearkening back to Jehovah's provision of manna and flesh to the Israelites in the wilderness.[5] Jesus is established as the new Moses.

Second, Jesus walking on the water as told in John 6:16–21 continues the Passover imagery from the book of Exodus, recounting the crossing of the Red Sea; this miracle makes an important Christological statement, identifying Jesus directly with Jehovah and providing an important corrective to the contemporary messianic expectations encouraged by the record of the feeding of the five thousand. Whereas the feeding miracle could be interpreted too narrowly, as a sign that Jesus was only a messianic king, His walking on the water and miraculous completion of the sea voyage serves as a sign that He was

far more. In the first verse of this pericope, John records, "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone" (v. 15). The crowd's desire to make Jesus a temporal ruler reflects many of the messianic expectations of the time, which, at least since the time of the Maccabees, have suffered an overly political interpretation which actually presented a false Christology of who the Messiah would be—a political ruler—and what He would do—deliver them from Herodian rule and Roman occupation.

Jesus's power over the water reveals, however, that He is far more than a great ruler or a worldly deliver. He is, in fact, King of Heaven and Earth, and, implicitly, their Creator. John emphasizes this fact by employing the formula "I Am" (Greek *egō eimi*) even more explicitly than do Matthew and Mark.[6] In John's substantially briefer account of Jesus's control of the raging sea and bringing His disciples safely to shore, He is manifested as the one exercising the power that the Hebrew Bible attributes to Jehovah alone (see Job 9:8, 38:16; Habakkuk 3:15).[7] Thus, in the Passover context of the Bread of Life sermon, Jesus's walking on the water reveals Him as both the one who created the deep and brought the Israelites through it. As Bertil Gärtner writes, "Just as the Lord ploughed a path for Israel through the sea, leading them to freedom from bondage, so Jesus, when he walks on the water, shows that as Messiah he has power over the seas."[8]

WORDS TO THE MULTITUDE (6:22–40)

As noted, the Bread of Life sermon can be divided into three parts. In each part Jesus addresses a different target audience, each of which has misunderstood who Jesus is and what He came into the world to do. The first part begins with a narrative transition from the miracles that preceded the sermon in which the people (*ho ochlos*, which the KJV translates "the multitude") have followed Jesus and the disciples across the Sea of Galilee and found Him at Capernaum (John 6:22–25). This first part of the discourse, delivered to the multitude, consists of two distinct sections, a more general discussion of the Bread come down from heaven, which focuses on correcting the crowd's incorrect expectation of who the Messiah would be (6:26–34), and a specific pronouncement that Jesus Himself is the Bread of Life, which explains why Jesus came into the world (vv. 35–40).

In the first section, Jesus notes that the multitude have sought Him not because it has seen the miracles and recognized other divine signs of His identity but because it has eaten the bread which He had provided the previous day (v. 26). The manna that Israel had enjoyed under Moses came six days a week for forty years until it ceased after the last Passover Israel celebrated before coming into Canaan (see Joshua 5:10–12).[9] Because Moses had promised in Deuteronomy 18:15 that a prophet "like unto [him]" would come, the crowd expects the Messiah to perform the same miracles that Moses had, including providing manna. Intertestamental writings, for instance, confirm that a tradition arose that a second deliverer, the

Messiah, would bring a new dispensation of manna at the opening of the new age as Moses, the first deliverer, had provided manna during the Exodus.[10]

Although Jesus avoided the multitude's attempt to make Him king the day before, the crowd's desire for more bread betrays a worldly conception of a Messiah whose primary purposes are not only to deliver them politically but also to provide for their temporal needs. Accordingly Jesus immediately tries to move the multitude away from the idea of manna and, in fact, even beyond His own miraculous feeding of the crowds the previous day. Recalling that the Mosaic manna quickly decayed and that even His own bread did not permanently satisfy the people's need for food, Jesus enjoins, "Labour not for the meat [*brōsin,* a generic word for "food"] which perisheth, but for that meat [*brōsin*] which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you" (v. 27).

Joseph Smith's translation adds an important idea to the previous verse, "Ye seek me, *not because ye desire to keep my sayings*, neither because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled" (Joseph Smith Translation, John 6:26; emphasis added). This helps explain why the multitude, subtly rebuked for its selfish expectation of the Messiah's mission, begins to realize its responsibility to respond in some way to Jesus in order to receive this imperishable food, and asks, "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (John 6:28). Jesus responds, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he has sent" (v. 29). Instead, the crowd demands a sign and returns to the theme of bread, proclaiming, "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, he gave

them bread from heaven to eat" (v. 31; see Psalm 78:24). To this Jesus replies, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven" (v. 32). Besides qualifying that God, not Moses, gave the Israelites the manna that sustained them in the wilderness, Jesus's response focuses His audience on true bread, as opposed to perishable food that sustains life for only a day. While actual bread sustains physical life, both the bread and human life are temporal and perish. More important are what the manna during the Exodus and the loaves at the feeding of the five thousand represented.

Old Testament images of eating and drinking, wherein God's people eat His word (see Jeremiah 15:16; Exekiel 2:8, 3:1), specifically established food as a metaphor for spiritual sustenance.[11] The later Jewish understanding that manna represented the Torah, or Law,[12] is supported by Jesus's own words regarding bread and the word of God. Although John lacks an account of Jesus's temptation in the wilderness, the use of bread in the temptation accounts of the synoptics is illuminating (see Matthew 4:1–4; Luke 4:1–4). In them, Satan tests Jesus, encouraging Him to make bread out of stones, an act which, if performed, would have foreshadowed His turning water into wine or the multiplication of bread. Jesus's response is to quote part of Deuteronomy 8:3, which in full bears the Bread of Life sermon: "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth

man live." Therefore, as Moses had given spiritual food in the form of the Law, Jesus—the Son of Man—was offering true bread from heaven not merely to support physical life but also to support spiritual, everlasting life.

Because manna could represent the Torah in Moses's context, the multitude no doubt expects its question about working the works of God to be answered in terms of keeping the injunctions and ceremonies of the Law. As a result, the crowd may very well have misinterpreted Jesus's next saying, "For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (John 6:33). Although the Aramaic or Hebrew original is not preserved, the Greek for "he which cometh down" (*ho katabainōn*) is ambiguous because *ho katabainōn* can either be taken substantively as "*he* who comes down" or in agreement with the preceding "bread" (*artos*) as "*that* which came down."[13] In other words, the multitude may have heard "the bread of God is *that* which came down from heaven," which they took to mean the word of the Lord, or the law that came from heaven, rather than the Son of God who Himself would give life. Thus, in the first part of His teaching to the multitude Jesus had led them away from their previous expectations of who He was—He was not, in this first coming, a political deliverer and an earthly king, nor was He merely a miracle worker who could provide for His people's needs and usher in the new messianic age of peace and prosperity. By identifying Himself as the Bread of Life, He corrected the idea that He was a new prophet and giver of law in the mode of Moses.

In the section of Jesus's words to the multitude (vv. 35–40), He begins to explain why He had come into the world,

"I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (v. 35). This resonates immediately with Jesus's words to the woman of Samaria in the Water of Life discourse (John 4:4–42), in which Jesus had said, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).[14] Thus, Jesus combines the symbolism in Exodus of manna and the water that came from the rock (see Exodus 17:6; Deuteronomy 8:15), a fact confirmed by Paul: "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers . . . did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:1–4).

Here in the first part of the discourse, Jesus makes no explicit reference to eating the Bread of Life, saying simply that those who come to Him will not hunger. The earlier images of eating manna and eating the word of the Lord, however, made this implicit, albeit still comfortably metaphorical. Here and throughout the discourse, the symbol of eating powerfully represents accepting Jesus fully and internalizing Him and what He represents. A precedent for this may be found in the Bread of the Presence (*lecḥem panim*, KJV "shewbread") used in the Tabernacle and both Jerusalem temples. The Bread of the Presence represented the presence of the Lord in the temple and was "most holy," meaning that it conveyed holiness to those who touched it—in this instance, to the priests who ate it each week.[15]

Like the manna sent from heaven, Jesus testified, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38); this answers the Christological questions regarding the person and work of the Christ in a single pronouncement. As a proclamation on the person of Jesus, "came down from heaven" is an identification of His divine origins, a proclamation used by Jesus with Nicodemus (see John 3:13) and by John the Baptist with his disciples (John 3:31). Thus, Jesus was not simply a messiah in a general sense—an anointed Davidic king or an anointed high priest—rather He was *the* Messiah, the one who came down from heaven. As for the work of the Messiah, He did not come to do His own will but the will of the one who sent Him.

Words to "the Jews" (6:41–59)

Up to this point, John has described Jesus's audience as the multitude (*ho ochlos*) translated variously in the KJV as "the multitude" (v. 2), "the company" (v. 5), and "the people" (vv. 22, 24). Suddenly, in this second section of the sermon, John's description of the audience shifts to a group he calls *hoi Ioudaioi*, or "the Jews" (vv. 41, 52).[16] This shift may also signal a change of scene from the harbor or some other outdoor setting where the crowd first found Jesus to the synagogue in Capernaum, which verse 59 indicates to be the place where much of the discourse was delivered.[17] While members of the multitude and certainly many of Jesus's disciples may have followed Him into the synagogue and heard this second part of His discourse, the sudden change of tone and markedly sharper rhetoric in

verses 41–59 strongly suggests that Jesus is focusing His attention on a new, more hostile audience.

The members of the multitude that Jesus has already addressed and His own followers, whom He will speak to in the final part of the discourse, were all Jewish. Clearly "the Jews" who are the target of Jesus's harsher words here are a specific group, generally regarded as the religious and political leadership who increasingly opposed Him during His ministry.[18] According to this view, "the Jews" of verses 41 and 52 include either the national leadership or the local aristocracy and religious leaders. This is in line with the observation of Elder James E. Talmage: "There were present in the synagogue some rulers—Pharisees, scribes, rabbis—and these, designated collectively as the Jews, criticized Jesus. . . . Chiefly to this class rather than to the promiscuous crowd who had hastened after him, Jesus appears to have addressed the remainder of his discourse."[19]

Like the teachings to the multitude, this part of the discourse contains two sections. The first section, the murmurs of "the Jews" and Jesus's response to them, focuses largely on the issue of who Jesus is (vv. 41–50). The second, through the jarring image of flesh and blood, concentrates on the central act of Jesus's work, His salvific death, and believers' acceptance and incorporation of it (vv. 51–59).

In the first section "the Jews" have a particular, and increasingly violent, theological reaction to who Jesus testifies that He is. Their murmuring results directly from Jesus's claim that He is "the bread that came down from

heaven" (v. 41), which identifies Him as the Son of the Father. To counter this claim, they respond by charging: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" (v. 43). Their emphasis on Jesus's presumed parentage suggests that they fully understood the implications of the claim that Jesus had come down from heaven. By attributing Jesus's paternity to Joseph the carpenter, the synagogue leadership is clearly trying to negate Jesus's claim to be God's Son; its murmuring echoes the murmuring of the children of Israel against both Moses and the Lord during the Exodus, which was later understood to be caused by unbelief (see Psalm 106:23–25).[20] Furthermore, disbelieving Jesus's testimony, "the Jews" are repeating the mistake of their fathers in the wilderness and keeping themselves from coming to Christ; consequently, Jesus's pointed statement "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead" (6:49) takes on particular significance for this audience.

The Christological error of the multitude has mostly concerned what Jesus would do, but once they begin to grasp the idea that He has come to give new bread as Moses—or God through Moses—gave them the law, they are eager to accept "this bread." On the other hand, "the Jews," resistant to changing their idea of who Jesus was, cling more tenaciously to Moses and the old law. Although Moses is not explicitly named, the return to the theme of manna in the wilderness, which represents the Lord's sustaining His people in the wilderness and also typified Moses's giving of the law, compares the law of Moses

unfavorably to the grace of Christ: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).[21] For them, manna represents both the miracles that the Lord worked for their fathers through Moses and the law that He gave through Moses. Those ancestors received the means to maintain their physical lives for a season, but they are now dead; likewise the law that the manna represents failed to give life. Jesus, on the other hand, is "the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (v. 50).

The focus of the second section of Jesus's address to "the Jews" shifts to the central act of His role as the Christ, or Anointed One: His salvific death whereby He brought life to the world. Describing this gift as giving His flesh immediately leads the *Ioudaioi* to complain, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (v. 52). This complaint seems disingenuous since even the broader crowd has understood bread as a symbol for the law, and those educated in religious discussions and imagery should have seen that Jesus was using a metaphor.[22] In response to their reaction, Jesus extends the metaphor: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (vv. 53–54). Modern, particularly Christian, readers—accustomed to the sacramental imagery of partaking of bread and either wine or water which represents the body and blood of Christ—may not always appreciate the impact of this imagery on its original audience. Given biblical injunctions against consuming blood,[23] the addition of "drinketh my blood"

sharpened the rejection from "the Jews," but this is vital for correctly understanding Jesus's teaching here.

The Exodus imagery of the discourse's Passover setting provides an important, although often overlooked, image that connects this flesh and blood symbolism directly to the original discourse that Jesus delivered—namely, the Paschal Lamb which was sacrificed so that its blood would ward off death and whose flesh was eaten in a festive meal. Nevertheless, comparisons between the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the flesh and blood section of the Bread of Life discourse must be qualified, however, because the symbolism of the sacrament is actually much broader than Jesus's statement here. While the sacrament is certainly commemorative, causing Christians since Jesus's mortal ministry to look back at both His suffering and His death, the fact that it is to be celebrated specifically until He comes again (see 1 Corinthians 11:26; Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18) suggests that it can also, in a sense, be proleptic—anticipating His glorious return and foreshadowing the great end-time messianic feast (see Isaiah 25:6–8; Ezekiel 39:17–20; Zechariah 9:15; D&C 27:4–14).

Perhaps this is why all sacramental references in the New Testament are to the body (*sōma*: Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24, 27, 29) of Jesus rather than specifically to the flesh (*sarx/sarka*: John 6:51, 53–55).[24] Jesus's institution of the sacrament among the Nephites may illustrate the difference, since to them He explains that the sacramental bread is "in remembrance of my body, *which I have shown to you*" (3 Nephi 18:7; emphasis added), referring in that instance to

His resurrected, immortal body as opposed to the mortal body of His earthly ministry. As both a commemorative and a proleptic act, the celebration of the sacrament in Latter-day Saint theology therefore not only looks back to His atoning death, but also looks forward to the Resurrection—emphasizing the possibility of current and future communion with Him.[25]

Although this distinction between body (*sōma*) and flesh (*sarx*) should not be pressed too far,[26] the combination of flesh and blood suggests that Jesus was speaking of His mortal body because the phrase "flesh and blood" consistently refers to living, albeit mortal, bodies (see Ether 3:8–9; Leviticus 17:11–14; Ecclesiastes 14:19; 1 Corinthians 15:50), as contrasted with "flesh and bone," which can refer to immortal, resurrected bodies (see D&C 129:1–2; 130:22).[27] Therefore, while Jesus's blood was shed both in Gethsemane and on Calvary (see Luke 22:44; Mosiah 3:7; D&C 19:16–19),[28] the Bread of Life discourse seems to focus on His Crucifixion. Thus, the sacrament is a memorial of a wider range of Jesus's atoning acts—His suffering, death, resurrection, and return in glory to live with His Saints—while the flesh and blood in the final section of the Bread of Life discourse refer more narrowly to the fact that Jesus has really come in the flesh and that He, the Lamb of God, did so to sacrifice that flesh for His people.

While the imagery of the sacrament overlaps in many ways with the imagery of the Bread of Life sermon, interpreting the discourse backwards with the ordinance that Jesus established at the end of His mortal ministry can limit our current understanding of both. The sacrament

holds a wider range of symbolism—especially for the body (*sōma*)—but the flesh and blood in the last portion of the Bread of Life sermon illustrate a particular Christological point about the work of Jesus, specifically the salvific nature of His death: eternal life is found only in Jesus as the Son of God who came down from heaven to die for the world, a fact that "the Jews" placing their trust in Moses and the law, could not accept.

Words to the Disciples and Twelve (6:60–71)

At the conclusion of the Bread of Life sermon, Jesus moves out of the synagogue and addresses the final groups mentioned in John 6: "the disciples" (vv. 60, 66) and "the Twelve" (vv. 67, 71).[29] Whereas the crowd created an incorrect idea about Jesus's person and work and "the Jews" rejected the truth when He taught it to them, Jesus's followers, collectively referred to as "his disciples" (v. 61), do not reject the idea of a divine Son who came down from heaven: they accept who Jesus is. Indeed the Twelve had a particular testimony of this. Nevertheless, many of the disciples do not understand or cannot accept what Jesus has come to do as it is represented by "flesh and blood" passages of the sermon—namely that He has come to die for His people. While these passages are disturbing if taken literally, even for those disciples who may understand that the passages are a metaphor for accepting the death of Jesus, they prove to be "a hard saying." The disciples also begin to murmur at the proposal that their Messiah will need to give His flesh and blood by dying.

The general reaction of the disciples here parallels the reaction of the Twelve to Jesus when He began to teach them more directly that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die, as told in the synoptics. In the three great predictions of His coming suffering, Peter and the other Apostles, who have gained a great testimony by revelation of who Jesus is, still find it hard to embrace what He must do.[30] Elder McConkie wrote: "By the simple expedient of teaching strong doctrine to the hosts that followed him, Jesus was able to separate the chaff from the wheat and choose out those who were worthy of membership in his earthly kingdom. Before entering the synagogue in Capernaum to preach his great discourse on the Bread of Life, Jesus was at the height of his popularity . . . [but] unable to believe and accept his strong and plain assertions about eating his flesh and drinking his blood, even many classified as disciples fell away."[31]

John records that "from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him," at which point Jesus, turning to His final audience, poignantly asks the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" (6:6–67). Peter's response, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (6:68–69),[32] contrasts sharply with the position of "the Jews" in the discourse on the Divine Son (5:39): Jesus, not the Jewish scriptures, has the words of eternal life. Peter and the other Apostles now understand the answer to the first part of the Christological question, who Jesus is. While they may not yet fully understand why He must die, their determination to follow Him after the Bread of Life discourse reflects their growing faith in Him. Doubtlessly the complete meaning of Jesus's "flesh and

blood," which focuses the "work" of Jesus on the necessity of His giving His life for the life of the world, is not clear to the Twelve or to any of the disciples until after the Passion and Resurrection. Then, however, it would become the central focus of the apostolic proclamation.

That the Son of God came down from heaven and became flesh and that He laid that flesh down and shed His blood is the fundamental definition of the gospel that believers must accept and internalize. What Jesus taught in metaphor in the Bread of Life discourse He taught directly to the Nephites after His Resurrection:

> And my Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw all men unto me, that as I have been lifted up by men even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—
>
> And for this cause have I been lifted up; therefore, according to the power of the Father I will draw all men unto me, that they may be judged according to their works.
>
> And it shall come to pass, that whoso repenteth and is baptized in my name shall be filled; and if he endureth to the end, behold, him will I hold guiltless before my Father at that day when I shall stand to judge the world. (3 Nephi 27:14–16)

Elder McConkie taught that for the Latter-day Saints and all Christians today, "to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God is, first, to accept him in the most

literal and full sense, with no reservation whatever, as the personal offspring in the flesh of the Eternal Father," and working the works of God is, in practical terms, "keep[ing] the commandments of the Son by accepting his gospel, joining his Church, and enduring in obedience and righteousness unto the end."[33] To this we can add a lesson from "the Jews" and those early disciples who could not easily accept that their Messiah had come to die: part of accepting Jesus as the Son of God includes accepting—indeed focusing on—the salvific necessity of His suffering, death, and Resurrection that constitutes the true meaning of Easter.

NOTES

1. The seven discourses in John are the New Birth (3:1–36), the Water of Life (4:1–42), the Divine Son (5:17–47), the Bread of Life (6:35–58), the Life-Giving Spirit (7:16–52), the Light of the World (8:12–59), and the Good Shepherd (10:1–18).
2. See the surveys of scholarship by Vernon Ruland, "Sign and Sacrament: John's Bread of Life Discourse," in *Interpretation, a Journal of Bible and Theology* 18 (1964): 450–52; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, rev. ed., The New International Greek Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 313–15; and Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, Francis J. Moloney, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 229–233. G. H. C. MacGregor, "The Eucharist in the Fourth Gospel," in *New Testament Studies* 9 (1962–63): 114, observes that confessional biases have tended to

affect the interpretation of the discourse, Catholic writers generally interpreting it sacramentally and conservative Protestants denying any reference to the sacrament.

3. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 358.
4. John Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature, and Theology of the Johannine Community*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 264. For an older, yet detailed, discussion, see Bertil Gärtner, "John 6 and the Jewish Passover," *Coniectanea Neotestamentica* 17 (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1959), 14–19.
5. John M. Perry, "The Sacramental Tradition in the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics," in *Jesus in the Johannine Tradition*, Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher, ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 157, calls this "a eucharistic midrash on the Exodus story." See also C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 335.
6. Simply translated, *egō eimi* means "I am," and when used by Jesus, the formula sometimes appears as a simple self-identification (John 6:20, "*I* that speak unto thee *am he*"), with a predicate (for instance, John 9:5, "*I am* the light of the world"), or absolutely without a predicate (John 8:58, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, *I am*"). See the detailed discussion of Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 533–38, and Catrin H. Williams, "'I Am' or 'I Am He'?" in *Jesus in the Johannine Tradition*, Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher, ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 343–48.
7. As in the earlier stilling of the storm recorded by the synoptics (Matthew 8:18–27; Mark 4:35–41; Luke 8:22–25),

the raging sea resonates with the image found in both the Old Testament and throughout Near Eastern mythology of the great deep representing the surging force of uncreated chaos. See Williams, "'I Am' or 'I Am He'?" 346.

8. Bertil Gärtner, "John 6 and the Jewish Passover," 18; see also Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 245; Valletta, "John's Testimony of the Bread of Life," 182.
9. See Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 1:265.
10. 2 Baruch 29:8.
11. Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 301.
12. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 336–37; Gärtner, "John 6 and the Jewish Passover," 41; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 319.
13. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, 262–63; Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah*, 273; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 322–23.
14. Painter, *The Quest for the Messiah*, 269–70. After the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, Jesus told His disciples, "I have meat [*brōsin*, or "food"] to eat that ye know not of" (John 4:32), a foreshadowing perhaps of this very discourse.
15. Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 70, 87–91, 93, 274.
16. Painter, *Quest for the Messiah*, 267.
17. Painter, *Quest for the Messiah*, 253, 278; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 327. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 339, however, places the entire discourse in the synagogue, and Gärtner, "John 6 and the Jewish Passover," 14–19, makes an interesting argument that connects explicitly the feeding, walking on

water, and Bread of Life sermon with the Jewish texts that may have been read in the Capernaum synagogue as part of a Passover festival for those who could not travel to Jerusalem for the feast.

18. John's use of *hoi Ioudaioi* throughout his gospel is problematic and has been the focus of much debate in studies of John's writings. For a detailed discussion of the meaning of "the Jews" in John, see Eric Huntsman, "The Bread of Life Sermon," in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ: From the Transfiguration through the Triumphal Entry*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 273–75.
19. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 341.
20. Painter, *Quest for the Messiah*, 279; Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 327n111.
21. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 337.
22. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 342, 347–47n10.
23. Note that the Old Testament injunctions against drinking blood (see Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 19:26) were reaffirmed in the New Testament (see Acts 15:30; 21:25).
24. See Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 331–32, especially note 125. For the semantic ranges of the respective nouns, see Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), "sarx" and "sōma," 743–44, 799–800.
25. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965–73), 1:724. McConkie further states, "Jesus promises, at his Second Coming, to again partake of the sacrament with the Twelve, or rather the eleven, for without doubt Judas

had already fled into the darkness of the night. This same promise was expanded by modern revelation to include Joseph Smith and the worthy modern-day Saints, as also Moroni, Elias, John the Baptist, Elijah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph who was sold into Egypt, Adam, and by necessary implication the righteous of all ages (Doctrine and Covenants 27:1–12)."

26. Third Nephi 18:28–29, for instance, speaks of partaking of the sacrament improperly as "partaking of my flesh and blood unworthily," although this may have particular reference to improperly trying to lay hold of the fruits of the Atonement, being somewhat analogous to "crucifying the Lord afresh" (Hebrews 6:6) and even "assenting unto his death" (D&C 132:27). On the other hand, see also Doctrine and Covenants 20:40, which refers to "administering the bread and wine—the emblems of the flesh and blood."
27. "After the resurrection from the dead our bodies will be spiritual bodies, but they will be bodies that are tangible, bodies that have been purified, but they will nevertheless be bodies of flesh and bones, but they will not be blood bodies, they will no longer be quickened by blood but quickened by the spirit which is eternal and they shall become immortal and shall never die" (Joseph Fielding Smith, in Conference Report, April 1917, 63).
28. See Andrew C. Skinner, *Gethsemane* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 76–78.
29. Painter, *Quest for the Messiah*, 267.
30. First prediction: Matthew 16:21–23; Mark 8:31–9:1; Luke 9:19–27. Second prediction: Matthew 17:22–23; Mark

9:30–37; Luke 9:43b–45. Third prediction: Matthew 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–45; Luke 18:31–34.

31. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:361.
32. Although harmonizing events in John with the synoptics is difficult, Peter's confession following the Bread of Life discourse appears to anticipate that which he delivers at Caesarea Philippi shortly before the Transfiguration (see Matthew 16:13–20; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:19–21; see Ruland, "Sign and Sacrament," 452).
33. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:358.