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### **Isaiah chapter 55 English Standard Version**

**1**“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. **2**Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. **3**Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. **4**Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. **5**Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

### **Psalms chapter 136 English Standard Version**

**1**Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. **2**Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. **3**Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever; **4**to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever; **5**to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever; **6**to him who spread out the earth above the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever; **7**to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures

forever; **8**the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures forever; **9**the moon and stars to rule over the night, for his steadfast love endures forever;

**23**It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever; **24**and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever; **25**he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever. **26**Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.

## **Romans chapter 9**

### **English Standard Version**

**1**I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit— **2**that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. **3**For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. **4**They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. **5**To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

**6**But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, **7**and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” **8**This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. **9**For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” **10**And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, **11**though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— **12**she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” **13**As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

## **Romans 9:1**

### **ESV**

I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—

**What does Romans 9:1 mean?** Paul turns suddenly from the previous topic and begins to focus on the people of Israel. He has just finished making the case that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, all who come to God by faith in Christ will be loved by God forever. In fact, nothing in all of creation will be able to separate anyone who is in Christ from God's love (Romans 8:38–39).

Perhaps that led Paul to think of his own people Israel. Some Jewish people had come to faith in Christ, but the vast majority had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Paul shows here how deeply that breaks his heart in this and the following verse.

He starts out by insisting passionately that he sincerely means what he is about to say. Perhaps he was concerned that some readers would not believe him. After all, wasn't he in grave conflict with the Jewish religious leaders? Hadn't they tried to kill him? They had done just that repeatedly to try to stop Paul from preaching the good news about Jesus. Still, Paul declares that his conscience vouches for him in the Holy Spirit that what he is about to say in the following verse is true. He is heartbroken for his Jewish brothers and sisters.

## **Romans 9:2**

### **ESV**

that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

**What does Romans 9:2 mean?** This continues a sudden change in Paul's topic. At the end of chapter 8, he was discussing the way Christ's love cannot be severed from those who are saved (Romans 8:38–39). Here, he has begun a new topic, starting by insisting on his own sincerity (Romans 9:1).

Paul has famously conflicted with Jewish religious leaders over the issue of Jesus Christ. His mission in life is to preach that everyone can come into God's family, through faith in Christ alone, by God's grace alone (Galatians 3:27–29). In particular, he has taught that this salvation cannot be accomplished by following the law (Galatians 3:10–13). The Jewish religious leaders have repeatedly tried to kill Paul to suppress this teaching (Acts 14:19).

That's why Paul insisted so boldly in the previous verse that he was not lying in what he is about to say about the Jewish people: He is heartbroken for them. In fact, Paul writes that he has great sorrow and unceasing anguish. He is deeply and continually saddened about his people, the Jews.

**Romans 9:3****ESV**

For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

**What does Romans 9:3 mean?** With great declarations about his honesty and sincerity, Paul has stated that he is deeply and continually heartbroken about his people, the Jews. Though Paul was a Roman citizen, he was born to Jewish parents, studied the law, and became a Pharisee, as his father had been (Acts 23:6), before being converted to Christianity on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

Paul is so heartbroken about the Jews' rejection of Christ that he makes what sounds like a rash statement. It is certainly a bold one. He could wish that he himself could be accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his Jewish brothers by birth. Paul does not appear to be actually asking God to make this happen. After all, as one who is in Christ, not even a prayer like that could separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:39).

Rather, Paul seems to be saying he *would* wish for such a thing *if* it was permissible. He feels so strongly that he would trade his own eternal place in God's family through faith in Christ to have his Israelite kinsmen believe in Jesus. Paul is not only referring to his immediate family, though he may be thinking of some of them, as well. He is speaking of all God's chosen people Israel. His heart breaks for all of them to trust in Christ and be permanently justified before God.

**Romans 9:4****ESV**

They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

**What does Romans 9:4 mean?** Paul has declared his great heartbreak that his people by birth, the Jews, have rejected Christ. He has even said he would trade his own place in Christ—if such a thing made sense—in order for them all to come to Christ.

Now Paul begins to list many of the things the Israelites have been given by God, describing why they are so special as a people. He first mentions Israel's adoption as God's children. This appears to be a different adoption than Paul

described for Christians in Romans 8. Israel was adopted in a national sense. God described them as his firstborn son in Exodus 4:22.

Also belonging to Israel was "the glory," probably meaning that God had favored Israel by revealing His glory to them, especially during the time of Moses (Exodus 16:10; 24:17). Next, Paul lists the covenants. This would include God's covenant agreements with Abraham (Genesis 15:18) and David (1 Samuel 7:12–16). Then Paul lists the giving of the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 5:1–22), something Paul has written about extensively in Romans.

Next, Paul lists "the worship," meaning God's appointment to Israel of the task of worshipping Him in the temple and through the sacrificial system. This verse concludes with the statement that the promises belong to Israel, as well. These promises include all the things promised to Israel throughout the Old Testament, including the coming of the Messiah.

### **Romans 9:5**

#### **ESV**

To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

**What does Romans 9:5 mean?** Paul is heartbroken that the vast majority of his people, the Jews, have rejected Christ as the Messiah and the way to salvation. In the previous verse, he began listing the privileges the Israelites have enjoyed as the chosen people of God. The list so far includes national adoption as the children of God, being witnesses to God's glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law of Moses, the worship in the temple, and the promises of God.

Now Paul adds two more privileges Israel has enjoyed. The first is the patriarchs, meaning the founding fathers of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God gave many great promises to the patriarchs and all of their descendants.

The final privilege Paul lists is that through the line of the patriarchs came Christ Himself, the promised Messiah. Paul writes that Christ is, in fact, God over all and blessed forever. The fact that Christ is God is the very truth that Israel as a nation had rejected. They had missed the Messiah, though many individual Jewish people had come to faith in Christ through the teaching of Paul and the other apostles.

Paul insists that God honored the Israelites by sending His own Son to earth as a Jewish man, a descendant of Abraham and of David. However, Paul does not

describe Christ Himself as one of the gifts given to the Jewish people, since they rejected Him.

## **Romans 9:6**

### **ESV**

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel,

**What does Romans 9:6 mean?** Paul has expressed his broken heart over the fact that the majority of Jewish people had rejected Christ as the Messiah and the way to salvation. He has listed many of the privileges God has given to Israel as His chosen people.

Paul now begins to deal with an enormous question, one that will dominate the next three chapters of Romans. If God gave to Israel all of those covenants and promises and privileges, what happens to His relationship with Israel now that they have rejected His Son?

Paul's first answer here is to defend the character of God. His Word has not failed. He will still keep His promises to Israel. God does not go back on His word. Then Paul begins to make a distinction between the physical descendants of Israel and what we might call "true Israel." He says something similar to what he wrote at the beginning of this letter in Romans 2:28–29: "For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter..."

Here Paul puts it more simply in saying that not everyone who is descended from Israel, ethnically, belongs to "true Israel." This matches similar statements made by Jesus during His earthly ministry (John 8:36–39).

## **Romans 9:7**

### **ESV**

and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named."

**What does Romans 9:7 mean?** Not everyone physically descended from Israel actually belongs to Israel. That's what Paul wrote in the previous verse. He

seems to have meant something similar to what he wrote in Romans 2:28 that "no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly." The spiritual aspect of our relationship with God is far more important than our ethnicity, heritage, or biology.

Now Paul begins to give examples from Israel's history to clarify his point. To begin with, not all of Abraham's offspring were counted as the "children of Abraham." Some of them were not included in God's promises to Abraham's descendants. Both Abraham's son Ishmael, born before Isaac (Genesis 16), and his sons with Keturah, born long after Isaac (Genesis 25:1–4) were excluded from Israel.

Paul quotes from Genesis 21:12 where God said to Abraham that it is through Isaac that his offspring will be named. Jesus made similar remarks to His critics, as recorded in the gospel of John (John 8:36–39).

### **Romans 9:8**

#### **ESV**

This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

**What does Romans 9:8 mean?** No Israelite would have disagreed with Paul's example in the previous verse. He pointed out that not all of Abraham's children were included in the line of God's promises to Israel. Only those who came through Isaac were included. So, while the promise was certainly given to Abraham's offspring, it was not promised to *absolutely all* his descendants.

Now, though, Paul gets to the point of his illustration: It's not enough to simply be born "of the flesh" into Israel. It is the children of the promise who count as offspring. They are the ones who are truly Israel and will inherit God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul will build from this argument to describe the difference between these two groups.

This parallels similar statements made by Jesus, who pointed out that being a true "child," spiritually, is not a matter of biology. It's a question of one's spiritual state, and their relationship with God (John 8:36–39).

**Romans 9:9****ESV**

For this is what the promise said: "About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son."

**What does Romans 9:9 mean?** Paul is pulling examples from Israel's history to show what distinguished a "true" Israelite from one who is merely born into the nation. He wants to show, in the end, that God will keep His promises to Israel through those who are truly children of the promise. Mere biology is not the key; what ultimately matters is whether or not a person has the right relationship with God. Paul will use this line of thought to explain why Gentiles, and not only Jews, can be part of God's plan of salvation.

He points here to one of the promises given by God to Abraham. After many years of promising that Abraham and Sarah would have a son, God now promises that Sarah will give birth in one year's time (Genesis 17:21; 18:10, 14). Only that child, Isaac, was the child of a promise. Abraham's other children, born before and after Isaac, were not born as the result of a promise of God.

**Romans 9:10****ESV**

And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac,

**What does Romans 9:10 mean?** Paul is building an argument that there exists a difference in Israel: between those who are truly Israelites and will receive the promises of God, versus those who are merely born into the nation. He is pulling examples from Israel's history to make his case. His first example was that not all of Abraham's offspring were included in the line of promise, only Isaac.

Now Paul points to Isaac's sons to show that God even picked one twin and not another to receive His covenant promises. Not *every single one* of Abraham's descendants was made part of the promise of God. There was still an element of God's sovereignty and choice in deciding whom to bless. Paul is emphasizing this point to show that a saving relationship with God is never as simple as merely being born from the right parents.

Isaac's wife Rebekah conceived two children by one man, meaning that she was carrying twins. Only one would carry the promise that was given through Abraham.

### **Romans 9:11**

#### **ESV**

though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—

**What does Romans 9:11 mean?** Paul is building an argument that not everyone born into Israel is truly a child of the promises of God. He is using illustrations from the very beginning of Israel's history to make his case. His first example was that only one of Abraham's children, born to one woman and not the others, was included in the line of promises from God.

Now he takes his argument up a notch by pointing to the twins born to Isaac and Rebekah. Before they were even born, God made a choice about the two boys to serve His own purpose of election. That is, God elected one of the two, through which His line of promise to His chosen people would continue.

Paul wants us to understand that God's choice was not based on behavior, good or bad, since the boys were still unborn. He repeats that it was not because of their works. Clearly, God's choice was not because one was born to one woman and not another. And as the following verse will show, God did not make the choice based on their birth order.

Paul used the word *elect* in the previous chapter (Romans 8:33) to refer to all of us in Christ chosen by God to be included in His family through faith in Christ. Now he uses the word *election* to describe God's action in choosing one son of Isaac over another to include in His covenant promises.

### **Romans 9:12**

#### **ESV**

she was told, "The older will serve the younger."**What does Romans 9:12 mean?** This verse completes the long sentence begun in verse 10. Paul wants us to see that God's choice about which of Rebekah's twin boys would receive the covenant promises had nothing to do with their merits or their attributes. It

was not about their works, since God declared His decision before they were born. It was not about their parents, since they came from the same two people.

And, now, Paul quotes what God said to Rebekah before the twins were born (Genesis 25:23): "The older will serve the younger." That means that God's choice to give the covenant promises to Jacob was also not about birth order. God simply chose to serve His own purposes before any human factors came into play.

Paul is building toward the argument that God decides who will receive His promises and who will not. His *election*, as mentioned in the prior verse, is something subject only to God's own sovereignty. Paul will use this concept to explain not only that God has the right to choose whom to save, but that He has the right and ability to save those who are not ethnically part of Israel: the Gentiles.

### **Romans 9:13**

#### **ESV**

As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

**What does Romans 9:13 mean?** This quote from Malachi 1:2–3 contains a startling statement. Paul has just established that God chose between Jacob and Esau which of them would receive the covenant promises and which would serve the other. God made this choice before they were born based on nothing other, apparently, than His own will and purpose.

The quote from the lips of God seems contrary to our usual understanding of Him. We easily understand that He would love an unborn child, but why and how could He have hated Esau, let alone before birth? That's not the God we think we know. We have to keep in mind that cultures differ in how they speak, which involves more than just the specific words they use. Different societies use different forms and figures of speech, as well. In that era, the love-hate phrasing is meant to show a contrast, not to imply that one side is looked at in some insulting way.

It helps to look at another example of the word "hate" in the New Testament. Jesus said this to those who were deciding about whether to follow Him or not: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Clearly, Jesus doesn't want us to carry bitter, angry feelings toward our fathers, mothers, wives, and children. After all, we are commanded in Scripture to honor our parents, love our wives, and to raise our

children wisely. In this case, the word "hate" is about comparison. Jesus wanted disciples who were so deeply committed to Him that their love for their family members looked like hate by comparison.

The same idea is at work in God's use of these contrasting words in Malachi and quoted by Paul here. God's act of love for Jacob, in choosing to give to him the covenant promises, was well beyond His actions towards Esau, in declaring that Esau would serve Jacob. There is a strong contrast there: one is clearly being given the preferred treatment, the other is not. Using dramatic, contrast-enhancing language, it can be said that one was "loved" and the other "hated."

The bigger issue for Paul's argument is that God made this decision based on nothing more than the fact that God has the right to decide. Is that fair? Paul will address that in the following verses.

## Matthew chapter 14

**13** Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. **14** When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. **15** Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." **16** But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." **17** They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." **18** And he said, "Bring them here to me." **19** Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. **20** And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. **21** And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

## Matthew 14:13

### ESV

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.

**What does Matthew 14:13 mean?** What did Jesus hear that prompted Him to withdraw to a desolate place? Merely starting at the previous verse might suggest He was responding to the death of John the Baptist, as reported by John's disciples. However, Matthew began this chapter with Herod's remarks on Jesus' fame and power, which he associated with John the Baptist. What follows was the backstory about John's death. Now Matthew seems to pick up where verse 2 left off. In short, the "this" which Jesus is hearing about seems to be Herod's notice, not the death of John.

Jesus lived and ministered in the territory under the rule of Herod Antipas, who had been manipulated into killing John (Matthew 14:3–12). It was probably Herod's attention which motivated Jesus to move away from busy Capernaum to a sparsely populated area. The disciples remained with Jesus; He was by Himself in the sense that He was away from the crowds of people that constantly followed Him. He wouldn't be away from them for long, however.

We know from the same account in Luke that the lonely place Jesus headed for was Bethsaida (Luke 9:10). It was on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. The crowds of people, though, figured out where Jesus and the disciples were headed. As they travelled by boat, the crowds ran along the shore of the lake from Capernaum up and over the Jordan river and down to Bethsaida. When Jesus arrived for some alone time with the disciples, He found the crowds waiting for Him.

### **Matthew 14:14**

#### **ESV**

When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

**What does Matthew 14:14 mean?** Jesus has travelled with His disciples by boat for the specific purpose of getting away from the ever-present crowds of people wanting to be healed and to hear His teaching. The people figured out where Jesus was headed and ran along the shore on foot to be in Bethsaida when He arrived. Bethsaida was on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee.

How would Jesus respond? It would seem reasonable to us and, perhaps to the disciples, that Jesus would find another way to escape the demanding crowds. Perhaps they could sail on to another lonely place. After all, that's why they left Capernaum.

Jesus, though, seeing the great crowd waiting for Him on shore is filled with compassion. Paul described Jesus as the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). He shows us what God the Father is like. Jesus reveals in this moment and countless others that God is the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction" (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). Jesus had come, in part, to minister to Israel, and here were the people of Israel waiting for Him. He would not turn them away, no matter how great His desire to be alone by Himself.

### **Matthew 14:15**

#### **ESV**

Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves."

**What does Matthew 14:15 mean?** It wasn't the plan for Jesus and His disciples to spend the day healing sick people on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee. They had set out for a desolate spot in Bethsaida to get away from the crowds. The people, though, found them. Jesus, full of compassion, spent the day healing people anyway.

Here, the disciples have identified a complication in Jesus' impromptu action. It was late in the day, and nobody had any food to eat for an evening meal. The crowds do not seem to have planned to spend the day so far away from any towns. They have simply stayed to receive Jesus' healing of their sick.

The disciples have a plan that is perfectly reasonable, if a little callous: send the people away to go into the closest villages to get food for themselves. Jesus will say no. He has another plan.

### **Matthew 14:16**

#### **ESV**

But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

**What does Matthew 14:16 mean?** The disciples literally lived to serve Jesus. Their primary work was to learn from Him, but a disciple of any master also agreed to serve him in exchange for their training. Jesus' disciples, especially,

had begun to understand they would spend their entire lives serving Jesus by ministering to others.

Expected or not, this would have been difficult at times. In this case, the men planned to arrive at a desolate place to be alone, not to spend the day serving Jesus as He healed crowds of sick people. Now it was time for the evening meal and neither they nor the crowds had food to eat. Very reasonably, if not very compassionately, they suggested to Jesus that He send the people to nearby villages to get themselves food.

Jesus rejects that plan. The people don't need to leave. The disciples should give them food, Jesus says. The disciples knew for a fact that this was impossible. They simply did not have the resources to do what Jesus asked. Other gospels include their understanding that this would have required far more bread, and far more money, than were available (Mark 6:37; John 6:6–7). He would show them that His power makes anything possible.

### **Matthew 14:17**

#### **ESV**

They said to him, “We have only five loaves here and two fish.”

**What does Matthew 14:17 mean?** Jesus has told his closest disciples to do an impossible thing: give the crowds of people gathered in this desolate place something to eat. This is not merely a large gathering; the total number of men, women, and children in this space might have been as many as 15–20,000 (Matthew 14:21).

The disciples likely have only enough food for themselves to eat. Beyond that, at best, they've located five loaves of bread and two fish. These were acquired by Andrew, who received the donation from a boy in the crowd (John 6:8–9). That would make for a meager meal even if no other people were with them, let alone the thousands gathered in this empty country.

Perhaps the disciples thought that when Jesus had the facts, He would change His mind and agree to their plan. There is no question that they lack the physical resources to do what's being asked of them. This is not a question of being frugal, clever, or resourceful. Jesus is literally asking them to accomplish a task their current abilities will not achieve. It was impossible...for them. Part of the point of this miracle, in fact, is that nothing is impossible through the power of God.

**Matthew 14:18****ESV**

And he said, "Bring them here to me."

**What does Matthew 14:18 mean?** Disciples of Jesus have just been instructed to perform an impossible task. They are to feed thousands of people gathered in a desolate place at dinner time (Matthew 14:13–16). Later we will learn that the adult men number some five thousand, meaning the total of men, women, and children could have been as many as twenty thousand! The disciples have reported the facts: all they've been able to acquire are five loaves of bread and two fish (Matthew 14:17; John 6:8–9). Jesus now asks that they give this tiny amount of food to Him.

In Mark's account of this same moment (Mark 6:37), the disciples also point out that they don't have enough money to even go into a village themselves and buy bread for the crowds. It's not that the disciples had not done the math. They knew what it would take to obey Jesus' instruction. They also knew it could not be done with their limited resources. This is not a brain teaser, or a test of their creativity. This task is literally, clearly, and obviously beyond the means of the disciples. Yet Jesus asks, anyway.

That, in fact, is the point of the miracle. Jesus was about to show them how unlimited His resources are, when we faithfully give Him what little we have.

**Matthew 14:19****ESV**

Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds.

**What does Matthew 14:19 mean?** Jesus has asked His disciples to do something which, for those men, is absolutely impossible (Matthew 14:13–18). He has told the disciples to give the crowds something to eat. The end of the story reveals that the crowd consists of 5,000 men, in addition to women and children—possibly twenty thousand in all (Matthew 14:21). The disciples have located five loaves of coarse bread and two fish (John 6:8–9). The disciples do

not lack imagination or sincerity. This is not a task for creative problem solving; it's something Jesus knows full well they cannot do on their own.

However, it's not Jesus' intent that they do this alone. Rather, He has asked them to accomplish something, and the proper response is to give Him all they have. So, Jesus takes the bread and the fish and creates some order. He tells everyone to sit down on the grass. He looks up to heaven, in the direction of God the Father, and says a blessing. Then Jesus breaks the loaves in the customary way of sharing bread and gives the broken pieces to the disciples to distribute to the crowds. The disciples do exactly that—just as instructed, they begin to feed the mass of people.

And, as it turns out, they not only finish feeding the people, they must be careful not to waste the leftovers (Matthew 14:20).

It's not clear from the story exactly where the miracle happens. Does Jesus keep reaching into a bag and pulling out loaves of bread after the first five are gone? Do parts of loaves keep popping into the disciples' baskets as they worked their way through the crowd of thousands of people handing them out? We don't know. All we're told in the following verses is that everyone eats. Everyone ends up full.

### **Matthew 14:20**

#### **ESV**

And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over.

**What does Matthew 14:20 mean?** This miracle is impressive for several reasons. First, it begins with an impossible command to Jesus' closest followers. He seems to want them to understand that what He is asking them cannot be done—not by their own power or resources—and then for them to see Him do it. Lacking a clear supernatural miracle, there's no way five loaves of bread and two fish should be able to fill up thousands of people for an evening meal.

The miracle is also impressive because it replicates and adds to the miracle God did through in Elisha in 2 Kings 4:42–44 where a hundred men ate and had leftovers from 20 loaves of barley bread and some grain in a sack. What Jesus does makes that look quaint by comparison. If Elisha feeding a hundred with 20 loaves showed he had the power of God, then Jesus feeding thousands with even less food shows even more power.

Not just a little was left over. After everyone had eaten their fill, twelve full baskets of broken pieces were left over, one for each of the core disciples. The message of this miracle is both challenging and uplifting: when Christ asks us to accomplish, and give Him what little we have, He'll empower us to accomplish that task above and beyond what we could have imagined.

### **Matthew 14:21**

#### **ESV**

And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

**What does Matthew 14:21 mean?** The total number of people who ate the food Jesus created from five loaves and two fish could easily have been 15–20,000. This verse reveals that five thousand "men" were present, specifically not counting the women and children. How did they come up with such a precise number of men since crowds are notoriously difficult to count? Mark's telling of the story shows that Jesus had the men sit in groups by hundreds and fifties (Mark 6:40). Jesus wanted the disciples to be able to come up with an accurate number of those fed to be able to provide a reliable report about the miracle.

One other reason this miracle is so impressive: God fed His people food. During a time when poverty was commonplace, Jesus showed that He could create food to provide for His people. That's a thing that God does. Jesus' ability to do this was likely to make the people even more eager to crown Him as Messiah and King. In fact, John's telling of this event ends with Jesus "perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king" (John 6:15). Jesus and His disciples quickly left the area.