

John 6:51

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

Analysis

Jesus intensifies the bread of life discourse with the shocking declaration 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven' (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἄρτος ὁ ζῶν ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς). The definite article emphasizes exclusivity—THE living bread, not a bread among many. 'Living' (ζῶν/zōn) contrasts with the manna that sustained physical life temporarily; Jesus is bread that imparts eternal, spiritual life. The phrase 'came down from heaven' identifies Jesus' divine origin—He is not merely heaven-sent but heaven-originated, pre-existent deity taking human form. The promise 'if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever' extends universal invitation while promising eternal life. The shocking conclusion follows: 'and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world' (ὁ ἄρτος δὲ ὃν ἐγὼ δώσω ἡ σὰρξ μου ἐστὶν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς). Jesus explicitly identifies the bread as His 'flesh' (σὰρξ/sarx), pointing to His incarnation and crucifixion. The verb 'will give' (δώσω/dōsō) indicates voluntary sacrifice—Jesus actively gives His flesh. The preposition 'for' (ὑπὲρ/hyper) means 'on behalf of' or 'in the place of,' indicating substitutionary atonement. The scope is cosmic: 'the life of the world.' This verse anticipates the Last Supper ('This is my body given for you') and the cross, where Jesus' physical body was broken to provide spiritual sustenance for humanity. 'Eating' His flesh symbolizes appropriating His sacrificial death by faith—receiving the benefits of His atonement through personal trust.

Historical Context

This discourse occurred in the Capernaum synagogue (John 6:59) the day after Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 with five loaves and two fish. The crowd, seeking another miraculous meal, found Jesus across the Sea of Galilee. When they asked for a sign like the manna Moses provided, Jesus declared Himself the true bread from heaven. The Jewish audience would have understood manna as God's miraculous provision during wilderness wandering (Exodus 16). Rabbinic tradition expected Messiah to provide manna again. Jesus' claim to be superior to Moses' manna and His identification of the bread as His flesh scandalized hearers. The language of eating flesh violated Jewish dietary law (Leviticus 17:10-14) and sounded like cannibalism, causing many disciples to abandon Jesus (John 6:66). Jesus was introducing concepts that would only become clear after His death and resurrection: His body would be broken on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice; believers would participate in His death and life through faith; the Lord's Supper would commemorate this sacrifice. Early church debates over the Eucharist centered on this passage. Roman Catholics developed transubstantiation (the bread literally becomes Christ's body), while Protestants generally understood Jesus' words as metaphorical—eating represents believing and receiving Christ by faith. The verse emphasizes that eternal life comes not through religious ritual (receiving manna from God) but through receiving Christ Himself (God's Son) through faith in His atoning sacrifice.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. What does it mean to 'eat' Jesus' flesh, and how does this metaphor illustrate saving faith?

2. How does Jesus as the 'living bread' contrast with the manna in the wilderness, and what does this teach about His superiority to Old Testament provisions?
3. Why did Jesus use such offensive language ('eat my flesh') to describe faith in Him?
4. How does this verse connect Christ's incarnation (taking flesh) with His crucifixion (giving His flesh) as inseparable aspects of redemption?

Interlinear Text

ἐγώ	εἰμι	τοῦ	ἄρτος	τοῦ	ζήσεται	τοῦ	ἐκ	τοῦ	
I	am	which	bread	which	he shall live	which	from	which	
G1473	G1510	G3588	G740	G3588	G2198	G3588	G1537	G3588	
οὐρανοῦ	καταβάς·	ἐάν	τις	φάγη	ἐκ	τούτου	τοῦ		
heaven	came down	if	any man	eat	from	this	which		
G3772	G2597	G1437	G5100	G5315	G1537	G5127	G3588		
ἄρτος	ζήσεται	εἰς	τοῦ	αἰῶνα	καὶ	τοῦ	ἄρτος	δὲ	ἦν
bread	he shall live	for	which	ever	G2532	which	bread	and	that
G740	G2198	G1519	G3588	G165		G3588	G740	G1161	G3739
ἐγώ	δώσω,	τοῦ	σάρξ	μού	ἐστιν	ἦν	ἐγώ	δώσω,	ὑπὲρ
I	will give	which	flesh	my	is	that	I	will give	for
G1473	G1325	G3588	G4561	G3450	G2076	G3739	G1473	G1325	G5228
τοῦ	τοῦ	κόσμου	ζωῆς						
which	which	of the world	the life						
G3588	G3588	G2889	G2222						

Additional Cross-References

Luke 22:19 (Parallel theme): And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

John 6:33 (Parallel theme): For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.

Matthew 20:28 (Parallel theme): Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

John 3:13 (Parallel theme): And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

Titus 2:14 (Parallel theme): Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Hebrews 10:20 (Parallel theme): By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

2 Corinthians 5:21 (Parallel theme): For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Ephesians 5:2 (Parallel theme): And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

John 1:29 (Parallel theme): The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

John 3:16 (Parallel theme): For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.