

Mark 8:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.

Analysis

And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven. Jesus responds to the disciples' despairing question (v. 4) with a practical inquiry about available resources. **He asked them** (ἐπηρώτα αὐτούς, epērōta autous)—the imperfect tense suggests Jesus questioned them deliberately, perhaps to draw out their faith and prepare them for the miracle. **How many loaves have ye?** (πόσους ἔχετε ἄρτους, posous echete artous)—Jesus doesn't debate the impossibility but focuses on what's available. Πόσους (posous) asks for quantity. "ἔχετε (echete) present tense emphasizes current possession—what do you have right now?

And they said, Seven (οἱ δὲ εἶπαν, Ἐπτά, hoi de eipan, Hepta)—the disciples inventory reveals minimal resources. Seven loaves for four thousand people is laughably insufficient by human calculation—one loaf per ~571 people. The number seven carries biblical significance representing completeness or perfection, though here it primarily indicates the literal count. Later, seven baskets of leftovers will be collected (v. 8), emphasizing abundance from scarcity.

Jesus' question teaches crucial principles about faith and provision. First, God uses what we offer, however inadequate it seems. The disciples might have hesitated to mention such meager supplies, but Jesus specifically asks for them. Second, divine multiplication begins with human obedience—offering what we have, trusting God to supply what's lacking. Third, the focus shifts from what we lack to what we have. The disciples fixated on impossibility; Jesus directed attention to available resources, however small. This pattern repeats throughout Scripture: God uses the

widow's two mites (Mark 12:42-44), the boy's five loaves and two fish (John 6:9), Moses's staff (Exodus 4:2), David's sling (1 Samuel 17:40). God delights to display His power through weak instruments, ensuring He receives glory.

Historical Context

Bread (ἄρτος, artos) was the staple food of ancient Palestine, typically made from barley (cheaper, common) or wheat (more expensive, premium). The loaves were likely flat, round barley cakes—substantial but nowhere near adequate for four thousand. The fact that disciples had seven loaves after three days suggests they'd been rationing supplies carefully. Ancient bread didn't keep long without preservation, so these were likely fresh or at most a few days old. The question-and-answer format (Jesus asking, disciples responding) appears frequently in Gospel narratives, serving pedagogical purposes—Jesus teaches through questions that expose wrong thinking and build faith. This Socratic method required disciples to examine their own resources, acknowledge their insufficiency, and then witness divine sufficiency. The early church saw this miracle as demonstration of Christ's deity—only God can create matter ex nihilo or multiply existing matter. Theologically, this anticipates the Lord's Supper where bread multiplied spiritually feeds the church across centuries.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' question about available resources challenge our tendency to focus on what we lack rather than offering what we have to God's service?
2. What 'seven loaves' (seemingly inadequate resources) might God be calling you to offer in faith, trusting Him to multiply them for His purposes?

3. How does this pattern—God using weak, insufficient means to display His power—ensure that He receives glory rather than human instruments taking credit?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἐπηρώτα αὐτούς Πόσους ἔχετε ἄρτους οἱ δὲ

And **he asked** **them** **How many** **have ye** **loaves** **οἱ** **δὲ**

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εἶπον, Ἐπτά

they said **Seven**

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