

50 Keys to Dynamic Bible Study
Footsteps of Jesus in the Old Testament: A Triple Bread Story
Read 2 Kings 4:42-44; Exodus 16:9-26; Mark 6:33-44

The puffs of dust produced by the man's feet as he traveled with his sack of bread were reminders that it had rained little for several harvests. Undernourished bodies that he passed were painful to his sight. They reminded him of the taunts of his wife who begrudged his decision to give away their limited supply of bread from the first of the grain in their fields. He had reminded her of the stories of old--how Cain had merely given some of his fruits to Yahweh his God, not the first and best. Abel, on the other hand, had given the firstlings of his flock. Abel and his gift had been acceptable to Yahweh, whereas, Cain and his gift had not. But the months of insufficient food had affected his wife's faith. And the man had left her weeping. Others might think his sacrifice was great. He, however, regarded the sacrifice of his sack of bread as a reasonable act of service toward his God.

Elisha's servant brought Elisha the sack left by the man. "Elisha, there is enough bread to feed you and me for several meals—twenty small loaves." Elisha gazed at the students of the Law of Moses, in deep discussion a short distance away. Their last meal had been a stew the day before. "No," said Elisha, "give them to the men that they may eat." The servant's face creased with dismay. "These tiny loaves won't be enough for them; there are a hundred men here!" he said. Elisha's thoughts backtracked to the manna Yahweh had provided for his people in the wilderness. Yahweh had said to Moses that the people would eat manna, and on the day before the Sabbath they would have enough left over for the next day. So Elisha commanded his servant to place the bread around a table; and all the men ate and had some left over, just as Yahweh had said.

From the five books of Moses to the last prophet to write in the Old Testament, we discover the footprints of Jesus. This is particularly so in the life of Moses, since God had pledged that One would come who would remind us of Moses—"I (Yahweh) will raise up a prophet from among the people's countrymen like you, Moses" (Deut. 18:18). That One was Jesus. Predictably, every prophet after Moses had both the characteristics of Moses and of Jesus. Thus, God's provision through Elisha of enough bread for the students, along with the leftovers, echoes back to God's provision through Moses of abundant manna in the wilderness, including leftovers for the Sabbath. But Elisha's story also points forward to Christ's plentiful provision of bread, as well as leftover loaves, when He had compassion on the people who followed Him into the wilderness.

Mark's gospel story of Jesus multiplying the bread begins with the crowds following Jesus. They were not murmuring for food, as Moses' people had, but they were in a wilderness. Moreover, there was not enough bread—just five loaves and two fish—when Jesus decided that the people needed to eat. To Jesus, the people were "like sheep without a shepherd." So, Jesus understood that He must feed his people. He had them recline on "green grass" as a shepherd would have his sheep "lie down on green pastures." Though the supply was initially feeble, when Jesus blessed it, broke and gave the loaves out, "they all ate and were satisfied." In the same way, Moses' people were able to gather as much manna as they could eat. There was neither excess nor shortage, until the day preceding the Sabbath. On that day only would they have leftovers, enough

for the next day, when work would be curtailed. The five thousand men, plus women and children, reclining with Jesus also had leftovers: “twelve full baskets of broken pieces, and also the fish.”

No wonder the people believed that Jesus was the prophet like Moses. Not only did Jesus’ actions place His footprints in the lives of both Moses and Elisha--for Jesus’ deeds imitate Elisha’s, and Elisha’s, in turn, parallel Moses’--but also, like Moses and Elisha, Jesus was exhibiting the qualities of a shepherd. The shepherd always provides food for his sheep. The apostle Peter, in 1 Peter 5:4, declared that Jesus is the “Chief Shepherd,” and the writer of Hebrews 13:20 claims that Jesus is the “Great Shepherd of the sheep.” It is to Jesus, therefore, that we can say, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want....”