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Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God reveals his grace and presence by feeding and nourishing his people. To demonstrate how God nourishes his people through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, I will explore John 6, the feeding of the five thousand and the bread of life discourse. Unlike the synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John does not include the historical institution of the Lord's Supper as a part of the upper room narrative. However, John uses Jesus' words of eating his flesh and drinking his blood to highlight our spiritual union with him, in general, and how this feeding on Christ finds its clearest expression in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

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## Meals, Food, and Table Fellowship in the Old Testament

- (1) God provided an abundant supply of food for Adam and Eve before the Fall (Gen. 1:29) and for Noah and his family after the flood (Gen. 9:3)
- (2) The Passover - a covenant meal that God provided as both a rescue from Egypt and as a remembrance of his mighty deeds (Ex. 12)
- (3) The covenant meal with Moses and the seventy elders (Ex. 24:9-11)
- (4) The “Bread of the Presence” (Num. 4:7) and various food offerings made at the tabernacle and the temple (Lev. 6-7)

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Because Jesus points back to the “bread from heaven” as part of the bread of life discourse (John 6:32), we will focus on Exodus 16 and explore this narrative as a poignant example of how God nourishes his people and provides food for our journey.

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Exodus – Written by Moses in either the 15<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

Outline of Exodus:

(1) In Egypt (1:1-15:21)

**(2) In the Wilderness (15:22-18:26)**

(3) At Sinai (19-40)

*This outline highlights how God delivers his people from Egypt, provides for them in the wilderness, and further establishes his covenant with them at Mount Sinai.*

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## Exodus 16 – Food for the Journey

### Background:

After a month of traveling, the Israelites are low on food and anxious about how they will survive. They begin to murmur and complain.

They are in the Wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Sinai (Ex. 16:1)

## 2. Israel's Exodus from Egypt and Entry into Canaan



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Exodus 16 – Food for the Journey

In the Wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Sinai (Ex. 16:1)

## **A Few Takeaways:**

- (1) Murmuring & Complaining (God hears and answers)
- (2) Divine Provision (manna)
- (3) Divine Governance (also miraculous)
- (4) The Sabbath Principle (learning to trust God for their provision)
- (5) Remembering God's nourishment and provision (an omer of manna in the ark)

*Like the ancient Israelites, we have to be reminded of the Sabbath principle, for we often rely on our limited, human ability to manage resources out of a fear of scarcity. The purpose of pilgrimage is learning to trust and become totally dependent upon God. We also remember and pass on the story of God.*



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Gospel of John – Written by John the apostle, the son of Zebedee, and beloved disciple (John 13:23) near the end of the first century A.D.

Outline of John:

(1) Book of Signs (1-11)

(2) Farewell Discourse, Death and Resurrection (12-21)

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John 6:1-15, 22-59 – The Bread of Life

## Background:

Sign – Jesus miraculously feeds a crowd of five thousand (fourth of seven signs in John’s Gospel)

Discourse – Jesus gives his “Bread of Life” discourse in a synagogue at Capernaum (John 6:59). It was near the Passover (John 6:4). According to Guilding, Exodus 11-16 would have been read during the six weeks around Passover in Year II of a three-year Jewish lectionary cycle. Thus, it is possible that as Jesus offers his discourse on the bread of life, he is building upon the lectionary reading of the day (Exodus 16).



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## Sacramental Reading of John 6?

Though the Gospel of John has no formal mention of the institution of the Lord's Supper "there is more sacramental teaching in John than in any other gospels." (Barrett)

"Between the miraculous loaves into which John reads Eucharistic symbolism and the final squall that greets Christ's explicit summons to eat his Eucharistic body and blood winds a dialogue of great depth and intricacy on themes of heavenly bread, manna, the Word of God, faith, and resurrection." (Ruland)

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John 6:1-15 – Feeding of the Five Thousand (Near Bethsaida)

## **A Few Takeaways:**

- (1) Basis for the Bread of Life Discourse
- (2) A “test” for the disciples, similar to Exodus 16:4
- (3) Eucharistic Overtones (take, give thanks, distribute, gather, fragments)
- (4) Reference to the Passover (John 6:4) is crucial to an understanding of John 6 as a whole - the contour of the narrative from sign to discourse, Moses to Jesus, from bread to flesh
- (5) All were satisfied, nothing was lost

***Jesus graciously nourishes his people, revealing that they can trust him to provide what they need in the same way the Lord was teaching his people to trust him in the wilderness.***

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John 6:22-59 – Bread of Life Discourse (In a Synagogue at Capernaum)

## A Few Takeaways:

- (1) John 6:31-35 & 1 Cor. 10:1-4 - We eat the same spiritual food as our ancestors in the wilderness. For them, it was manna; for us, it is Christ the Bread of Life.
- (2) Similarities between the murmuring of the people in John 6:41-42 and in Exodus 16.
- (3) The narrative builds in intensity up to John 6:51-58 and provides echoes of the Last Supper scene which the synoptic Gospels describe.
- (4) John 6:54 and “eternal life.” Eucharistic allusions are set in the broader framework of Jesus’ saving work.
- (5) Paul and the Gospel describe the institution; John 6:51-58 describes how the Lord’s Supper is personally meaningful for the believer, “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them” (John 6:56).
- (6) John 6 reveals “the true meaning of the Lord’s Supper as clearly as any passage in Scripture.” (Carson)