



## John 6:35, 41-51

*Short, easy to read, thought provoking background commentary for your sermon, bible study lesson, or scripture reflection.  
Listed on The Text This Week, [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com).*

**Year B, Season of Pentecost**

**Proper 14, Ordinary Time 19**

**Sunday Between August 7 and August 13 Inclusive**

**10th Sunday After Pentecost 2009**

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

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With this lesson, we begin with the first of the seven great "I AM" statements in John:

I am the bread of life

*Verse 35*

And we also begin the first of three weeks of attempting to faithfully decipher, understand, make sense of, and find the Good News in the last 28 verses of this Chapter 6.

As always with John, the key is to **NOT** get lost in the repetition of words and phrases; but rather to use them like bread crumbs left to mark a clear path through a dark wood. The dark wood is the dull imagination of our earthly flesh and blood that is perishable. The clear path is Jesus who reveals life that is imperishable.

There are 3 sets of key words - each word of which illuminates the others:

1. Bread, flesh, life, heaven, truth, eternal, forever (contrasted with: manna, wilderness, death).
2. Eat, believe, come, see, hear, learn.
3. Come down, raise up, send, draw, give.

And in all of these, notice that it is the Father who is the source.

When Jesus says, "I am the bread of life," all of his hearers would know that bread **IS** life. Malina and Rohrbaugh note that 50% of the daily calories for non-elite people were from bread. (Page 133, see footnote below.) Jesus is not the bread roll on the side plate of life.

# Holy Textures

## Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

But the whole point of this passage is that while earthly bread nourishes earthly life (all of which will pass away), Jesus has been sent so that we might come / see / hear / learn / believe / eat the bread from heaven / the true bread that gives eternal life.

Unlike Matthew, Mark and Luke who begin with a heavenly spirit descending on Jesus like a dove; John wants us to **SEE** that Jesus himself crosses back and forth between the heavenly realm and this earthly one. John does **NOT** mean that Jesus' earthly body crosses between these realms. The only modern day parallels that I can think of are what we call an out-of-body experience; a mystical or ecstatic experience; a really real experience of God's presence; a visitation. Don't get stuck on the up-down language. Heaven is not literally located "up there." But do get stuck on the idea that there is more to life than the flesh and blood eye can see; that there is more to life than bread which perishes and flesh and blood that dies.

And if the Judean elite thought they had something to murmur about in Verse 41 (about bread which came down from heaven), Jesus ups the ante in Verse 51:

and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.

*Aside: Malina and Rohrbaugh state that the use of "Jews" in John is a mis-translation of the underlying Greek text. It should be more accurately translated as "Judeans." That is what the Greek word actually means. And that translation better highlights the real-world tension between the country bumpkin Galilean, Jesus, and his peasant followers. Especially since the Judeans in question are from the elite. This question of the status difference between Jesus the Judeans is what is being highlighted in Verse 42:*

*Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?*

*This question needs to be read with a mocking sneer, and punctuated by spitting on the ground at the end.*

For us Protestants, (and all vegetarians) the passage ends on a yucky, cannibalistic note: flesh.

We'll be dealing with this in more detail next week, but for now it is important to stress one more time that John is fighting against the tendency then, as now, to *believe ABOUT* Jesus, instead of to *believe INTO* Jesus.

John is stressing the importance of our relationship with Jesus. John does not just want us to believe Jesus; John wants us to bond with Jesus; to trust Jesus; to be loyal to Jesus. John wants us to eat Jesus.

# Holy Textures

Understanding the Bible in its own time and in ours

And as I said at the outset, it is important for us to be as metaphorical with "eat," as we are with "bond," "trust," and "be loyal;" and to be as literal with "bond," "trust," and "be loyal" as we are with "eat." John deliberately uses these words inter-changeably so that we might hear / see / learn how they illuminate and transform each other.

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\* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.