

The Bread of Life Chiasm in John 6:35-51
A Series on the Old Testament Believer: Part 2

Among the many difficult biblical passages to understand is the phrase “all that the Father gives Me” (John 6:37, 39; 13:3; 17:2) or the similar phrase “all things have been handed over to me by My Father” (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 3:35).

To understand the chiasm of John 6:35-51, it is important to understand what is happening at the moment.

The author begins John 6 with the phrase “after these things” which is a reference to some prior events. However, the apostle John is referencing events that took place approximately 6 months earlier and in Jerusalem which is far from John 6’s location of the Sea of Galilee. In John 5, Jesus heals a paralytic on the Sabbath to the outrage of Jewish religious leaders who felt that such work was prohibited by Mosaic Law.

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God and equal to God capable of resurrecting life, judgment and granting salvation (John 5:18-30). John the Baptist testified to His Deity (John 5:33-35). Jesus’ miraculous work testified to His Deity (John 5:36-37). Scripture testified to His Deity (John 5:39-46).

Jesus makes the following assertions about Jewish religious leaders.

You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. (John 5:38)

I do not receive glory from men; but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. (John 5:41-42).

Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (John 5:45-47)

Jesus is explicitly saying that a genuine Believer of God (an Old Testament Believer) would believe in Jesus because he would: a) have God’s word abiding in him, b) have the love of God in himself, and c) believe in the Scriptures.

John 6 heralds a new event but with an association with the events of John 5. It is the second of three Passovers recorded in John, about 1 year before Jesus’ death (John 2:13-23; 6:4; and 11:55), and the miraculous feeding of the five thousand occurs on the northeastern side of the Sea of Galilee (John 6:1-4). Three questions from the crowd and Jesus’ responses illustrate their spiritual bankruptcy.

The crowd: “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal. (John 6:26)

Despite this miracle, the Jewish crowd do not recognize Jesus as deity, and do not recognize Jesus’ salvation of deliverance from sin (Matt 5:17; 9:13; Luke 4:16-21; 9:55-56).

The crowd: “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?”

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This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent. (John 6:29)

Influenced by Judaism's misunderstanding of the Mosaic Law, the crowd perceives salvation as based on the works of one's own efforts.

The crowd: "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'"

Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world. (John 6:32-33)

The crowd equates Jesus with Moses and display a poor knowledge of the Scriptures: a) the first generation Jews of the Exodus did not believe God, and b) while both Moses and Jesus were authenticated by God's miracles, the Jews still did not listen to either. Jesus' bread and life was a reflection of Deuteronomy 8:3.

Against this background John 6:35-51 presents an interesting chiasm, and the study of its literary structure provides clarity to the meaning of the phrase "all that the Father gives Me."

A. Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

B. But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.

C. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, **that of all that He has given Me** I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

D. Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven."

X. They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?"

D'. Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves.

C'. **No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' **Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.** Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.

B'. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.

A'. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.

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By rearranging the chiasm about the inflection point, it becomes easier to observe the similarities and contrasts of the chiasm's parallelism and gain a fuller understanding of the ideas that Jesus was presenting to the Jews.

Verses	Inverted Parallel Verses	Observations
A. I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger.	A' . Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness and they died.	Believing in Jesus was essential for eternal life. By calling Himself the "bread of life", Jesus was making a contrast to other food that came from heaven that provided for the Jews physical well-being. Jews, like the Sadducees, would have found this difficult to accept, because they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead nor the eternal life of a soul.
B. You have seen Me, and yet do not believe.	B' . He who believes has eternal life.	Faith was simply believing that Jesus was the Messiah. This would have been difficult for all Jews as they believed that faith required work in compliance to the Law of Moses.
C. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me , and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."	C' . No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father.	Jesus presents 3 ideas that are closely related: a) All that the Father gives Me will come to me. b) No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. c) Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.
D. The Jews were grumbling about Him.	D' . Jesus answered and said to them, "Do not grumble among yourselves."	The Jews' disbelief is displayed by their attitude towards Jesus.

The chiasm is an indictment of the Jews; they are unaware of what a genuine faith in God is, and the inflection point places emphasis on their failure and lack of knowledge of the Old Testament.

By connecting John 6 with John 5, the apostle John appears to be elaborating upon the Jesus' assertions of John 5:

If a genuine Believer of God (an Old Testament Believer) has a) God's word abiding in him, b) the love of God in him and c) a belief in the Scriptures, then he has "heard and learned from the Father" and comes to Jesus. This implies that knowledge of the Scripture and its prophecies of the Messiah would provide the basis of discerning who the Messiah was. Since the Holy Spirit is the author of Scripture, it can be seen how God draws.

In this light, what God gives to Jesus may well be genuine Old Testament Believers who are "God's people and His possession" (Ex 19:5; Deut 7:6; Mal 3:16-18). This suggests a transition for genuine Old Testament Believers from salvation under the Mosaic Law to salvation under the coming New Covenant.

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The inflection point of the chiasm (John 6:42) highlights the failure of the Jews to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" (John 6:42)

The Jews do not know Scripture and fail to recognize the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah's virgin birth (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:22-23). This stands in contrast to those who did recognize the baby Jesus as the Messiah: Simeon (Luke 2:25-35), Anna (Luke 2:36-38), the Magi (Matt 2:1-12), and the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20).

Is it correct to understand the phrase "all that the Father gives Me" (John 6:37, 39; John 13:3; 17:2) or the similar phrase "all things have been handed over to me by My Father" (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 3:35) as a reference to Old Testament Believers?

The phrases appear to be a reference of more than just Old Testament Believers. The phrase "all things," or something similar, appears to be everything belonging to God and the authority over everything including judgment and salvation (John 5:21-22; 9:39).

During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the **Father had given all things into His hands**, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. So He came to Simon Peter. He said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?" Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter." Peter said to Him, "Never shall You wash my feet!" Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head." Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you." For He knew the one who was betraying Him; for this reason He said, "Not all of you are clean." (John 13:2-11)

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as **You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him**, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. "I have manifested Your name to the men whom **You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me**, and they have kept Your word. Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. (John 17:1-10)

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. **All things have been handed over to Me by My Father**; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. (Matt 11:25-27)

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At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. **All things have been handed over to Me by My Father**, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." (Luke 10:21-22)

For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and **has given all things into His hand**. He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Therefore when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were), He left Judea and went away again into Galilee. (John 3:34-John 4:3)

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, "How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. **My Father, who has given them to Me**, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (John 10:24-30)

Could the phrase "all that the Father gives Me" (John 6:37, 39; 13:3; 17:2) or the similar phrase "all things have been handed over to me by My Father" (Matt 11:27; Luke 10:22; John 3:35) include New Testament Believers?

It does not appear to be so. Jesus states that if He is raised, He will draw all men; God is not invoked as the means of drawing.

Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." (John 12:31-32)

Note: Identifying the existence of the Bread of Life chiasm is vitally important to the interpretation of John 6.

They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" (John 6:42)

The significance of this inflection point cannot be understood unless one realizes that the Bread of Life chiasm is Jesus' response to the Jews' question, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You?" (John 6:30)"

By asking Jesus to provide a sign that He is the Son of God, because they do not believe in Jesus' virgin birth, the Jews prove that they do not have faith in God. The virgin birth was the very sign they sought; however, in asking Jesus for the sign discredited any love they may have professed for God.

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us." (Matt 1:22-23)

Therefore **the Lord Himself will give you a sign**: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Isa 7:14)