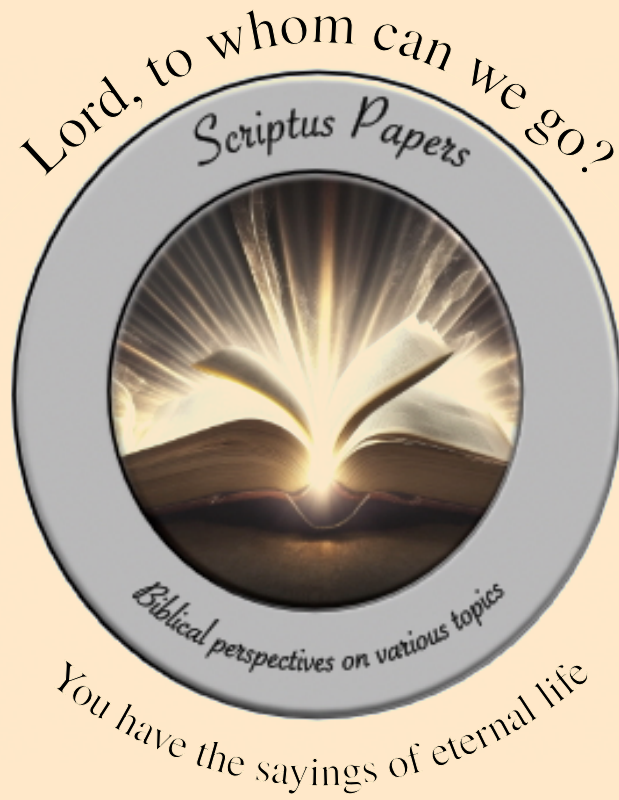


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Introduction

This Q&A paper investigates the events that triggered the following question that Peter put to the Lord:

Lord to whom can we go (John 6:68)?

It was his answer to the Lord's question put to the 12: **Do you also wish to go away (6:67)?** The Lord's forlorn question arose because many disciples had deserted Him. Let's investigate 'why?'

1. Triggers

Feeding 5000

After Jesus returned to Capernaum from Jerusalem, He travelled east to Bethsaida on the north side of the Sea of Galilee (hot spot on picture shows estimated location). The crowds followed Him because they were attracted by the miraculous signs that He performed on the sick, so to draw them away from the populated areas He led them up the hill (Luke 9:10, John 6:1).

Jesus told His disciples to make the crowd of 5000 people sit down on the grass in the place. From five barley loaves and two fish the Lord feeds these people. When they were satisfied, 12 large baskets of leftovers were counted. The Lord's sign of overabundance is obvious and the people acknowledged His heavenly origins, and wanted to make Him king, which He avoided (John 6:1-21).



Theological lesson

The second trigger, was the Lord's theological lesson that He drew from His feeding the 5000 after the crowd followed Him back to Capernaum. The main points that Jesus made in His lesson were:

1. The crowds followed Him for base physical satisfaction (food), not because they recognised and understood signs, a sign (*semeion*) being a meaningful symbol. In the Greek classics a *semeion* could describe anything from a marker on a border, grave or monument to a signalling flag in battle, a figurehead on shields, even a password or secret handshake. In logic, *semeion* denoted an example, a demonstration or other such proof, and the Stoics and Epicureans used this word to describe the observable as opposed to the unobservable. The medical profession used *semeion* to describe representative symptoms of a certain disease.
2. So, for the Lord, His miracle wasn't just about filling empty stomachs but a sign, symbolising that He wanted to fill, and could fill all of their non-physical desires. Put simply, loaves and fishes were food that perishes, where the forces of nature can decompose it and break it down to its constituting elements. Food does not perpetuate; it has a limited shelf life. On the contrary, Jesus said, His audience needs food that endures into eternal life, which He as the bread of life from heaven could provide.

Also, people needed to work to put food on the table, but the 5000 received food on their tables without working for it. He taught them to put the same work effort into getting the food that endures into eternal life, which was exactly zero, except believe (John 6:29).

However, that sign they missed. They did not understand that the source of this perpetual food that endures is the Lord himself, the Son of Man, Who has God's seal of approval, having been being authenticated by the miracle of the loaves and fishes. Christ is the true bread from heaven, the bread of life for the world, and whoever comes to Him will never be hungry, and whoever believes in Him will never be thirsty, and the Lord will make him stand to the final day.

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2. Three reactions

The Jews

The Jewish leadership wildly debated His claim that He was the bread that came down from heaven. As far as they saw Him, He was just the son of Mary and Joseph, a mere human being. However, the Lord added fuel to their fire by asserting that as the living bread from heaven, whoever eats of this will live forever; and the bread that He will give for the life of the world is His flesh. That set the cat among the pigeons and they had a heated discussion among themselves about this (John 6:52-58).

Many disciples

When many of the disciples heard the Lord's theology, they described it as dried up and crooked due to dryness, hard and inflexible, and questioned who could understand it. This, of course, is where faith begins, but like the Jews, they just wildly debated the Lord's teaching instead of believing it. Consequently, many of His disciples turned back and deserted Him. It was their departure that motivated the Lord's question to the 12: **Do you also wish to go away (6:67)?**

The 12

Peter's reaction to the Lord's question in full was:

Lord, to whom can we go?

You have the utterances of eternal life.

We have believed and have known that you are the Holy One of God (6:67-68).

While the expression 'the Holy One of God' only appears in the NT, it follows along the magisterial highway of the Hebrew Bible where the title 'Holy One of Israel' occurs 30 times. There He is Israel's Redeemer (Isaiah 48:17, 49:7, 54:5). In the New Testament, it is the unclean spirits, apart from Peter, who are very clear that Jesus the Nazarene is the Holy One of God (Mark 1:24, Luke 4:34). Again, Peter, speaking of Jesus the Nazarene, the 'Holy One' in Acts 2:22-28, declares Him to be the pathway to life and gladness in God's presence. This fits with the meaning of the word 'holy' (*hagios*), which describes that which bursts with life and zest and natural authority (Abarim), and is an appropriate segue to the sayings of Jesus.

3. Three utterances of Jesus

Now, what utterances of eternal life did the Lord make? It seems as if though those sayings can be categorised into three - the source, the security, and the satisfaction of eternal life.

The source of life

'Eternal life' are signature words for John who employs them 17 times in his gospel and six times in his letters, 23 out of a total of 43 in the NT. The word 'eternal' (*aiionios*), means precisely, lasting an age. It was used to describe the term of an office when it was to be held for a life time (an *aion*). First and foremost, the reason that the Lord can say things about eternal life, is because He is 'the eternal life, as John later wrote:

This is what we proclaim to you...what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and our hands have touched concerning the word of life, and the life was revealed, and we have seen and testify and announce to you the eternal life that was with the Father... (1 John 1:2).

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The source of life continued

Therefore, this evidence illustrates that the utterances of Jesus were not the words of others, but the very expression of who He is. He is eternal life; eternal life is personalised in Him. When Peter acknowledged that the Lord has the sayings of eternal life, he used a Greek verb mostly that describes the set of features that collectively define identity. Whereas in English "to have" emphasises possession and control of external things, with Peter 'have' was a matter of 'Who He is', not so much what 'He has'.

This is *eternal life*, to **know** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one God sent (John 17:3).

This statement defines eternal life. To know' means to have and handle knowledge in one's mind (Abarim). Peter asserted that *We have believed and have known that you are the Holy One of God* (6:67-68). There is an order here that believing precedes the knowing, but there is also the sense that the two are together simultaneously-they are contemporaneous. This is a relational knowing of God and Christ.

Moreover, God cannot be **known** through wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:21), or idolatry (Galatians 4:8). And, the Lord Jesus will mete out punishment on those **who do not know God** and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

- The Father who sent me has given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak, which is *eternal life* (John 12:44-50).
- Jesus gives *eternal life* to everyone given by the Father to him (John 17:2).
-

The security of eternal life

- The righteous go into *eternal life*, not eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46).
- Joyfully, *eternal life* means no judgment (John 5:24).
- Those given *eternal life* will never be exterminated, eradicated totally, or wiped out (John 10:28).
- Those who have *eternal life*, will be made to stand to the last day (John 6:40, 54).
-

The satisfaction of eternal life

- The water that Jesus gives quenches thirst forever, an inner fountain springing up to *eternal life* (John 4:14).
- Jesus advised His audience not to work for food that decomposes and breaks down, but for the food that remains to *eternal life*, which He gives (John 6:27).
- Those who follow Jesus will inherit *eternal life* (Matthew 19:27-29; Luke 18:18-30).
- The one who reaps receives reward and gathers fruit for *eternal life* (John 4:36).

3. Human action

Study

- Study the scriptures thoroughly because in them you possess *eternal life* (John 5:39).

Believe

- Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who *believes* in him may have *eternal life* (John 3:14-15).
- Anyone who hears my word and *believes* him who sent me has *eternal life* (John 5:24, 6:40, 47).

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Believe continued

'Believes' (*pistis*) means to have faith, that is: to behave as someone who has been persuaded into sureness and certainty in every way. *Pistis* referred to the mental substance that results from intelligent and reasonable inquiry or instruction; the mind's response to valuable information. Someone's *pistis* comprised everything a person was certain of, on whatever level and whatever field, without distinction between scientific, artistic and religious certainties or even little practical certainties to help with daily chores.

Serve

- Those who prize (have excessive love for) their life (*psuche*) destroy it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep (guard) it for **eternal life** (John 12:25-26).

The noun soul (*psuche*) means the nature and character of a living human being. Further, neither love nor hate are mere emotions. Love is a converging force whereas hate is a diverging force, a force that makes and enlarges space between elements, a force that diminishes knowledge shared between elements, and ultimately leads to rejection and expulsion (Abarim Publications). It seems then, that the 'hate' here refers to a rejection of all that we are as living human beings. Like Jesus His followers must count their lives as nothing so that they may do the will of God. We must choose, as He did, between a life of self-gratification, and a life of obedience to God. Those who would enjoy eternal life must first, like a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die. They must turn their backs on their own lives, dying to their old ways, and live a life approved to God, letting Christ live out His life through them.

Conclusion

This Q&A paper investigated the question that Peter put to the Lord: **Lord to whom can we go (John 6:68)?** Which happened to be his answer to the question that the Lord first asked the 12: **Do you also wish to go away (6:67)?**

The triggers that gave rise to these questions were the Lord's feeding of the 5000, the theological lesson symbolised by the miracle, and the reactions of the Jewish leadership, many of the Lord's followers, and finally the 12.

The Jews were scoffers, the many disciples thought His lesson was so hard to swallow that they deserted Him, which left the 12 - hence the question and answer session. For the 12, there was no one else that they could turn to, for the Lord alone was the source of eternal life, and in His eternal-life utterances, they had found security and satisfaction.

Consequently, they made the right response. They studied His sayings, believed Him, and served Him at all costs. A model for us all.

Reference

Word meanings are taken from the Abarim Publications online interlinear Greek/English New Testament. The online address is <https://www.abarim-publications.com/Interlinear-New-Testament/index.htm>