

John 6:33

"For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven."

John 6:38

"I came down from heaven."

John 6:51

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven."

John 6:58

"This is that bread which came down from heaven."

Problem:

These passages are considered to be proof that Jesus existed in heaven prior to his coming to the earth.

Solution:

1. The words of this chapter were an "hard saying" (vs. 60) and as a result "many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him". (vs. 66). An understanding of the analogy with the manna provides the key to the right understanding of this passage.
2. The bread "from heaven" (vs. 31) did not mean that it was actually manufactured in heaven and descended through the atmosphere, but rather that it was produced on the earth by God's Holy Spirit power. "From heaven", therefore, emphasizes the divine origin of the bread.
3. Similarly, Christ came down from heaven, not literally, since it was the Holy Spirit which descended upon the virgin Mary to effect the conception. (Luke 1:35). "From heaven" emphasizes his divine origin as a person (i.e., his father was God) and the divine origin of his teaching. Unlike the manna which profited only temporarily, his words were "spirit" and "life". (vs. 63).



To help us understand Jesus' words in John 6, it is useful to compare them with similar words spoken in John 16:28-30:

"I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again, and going to the Father." His disciples said, "Lo, now You are speaking plainly, and are not using a figure of speech. "Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God."

In John 16:28, Jesus stated that he "came forth from the Father." In John 6:38, Jesus said that he "came down from heaven." These two phrases mean the

same thing. But what exactly do they mean?

We can learn what Jesus meant by studying how his disciples responded, which we find in John 16:30. When the disciples heard Jesus say, "I came forth from the Father", they understood Jesus to mean that his teaching was from God. Jesus' disciples said, "We know that you know all things, and have no need for anyone to question you; **by THIS we believe that You came from God.**"

The disciples understood Jesus' statement that he "came forth from the Father" differently from orthodoxy. The disciples understood that Jesus was speaking of his knowledge and wisdom. The disciples did not confuse his words to mean that Jesus preexisted in heaven, or that he had come down from heaven and took up habitation in Mary's womb as an embryo, and was later born. How do we know this? Because Jesus confirmed that the disciples had interpreted the meaning of "coming from God" correctly, for Jesus responded positively to their confession of faith, saying, "You believe at last!" In other words, the disciples finally got something right for once.

The disciples believed rightly that Jesus' "coming from heaven" was nothing more than a reference to Jesus, that he "knew all things," and that Jesus did not need to have anyone tell him anything. In short, "coming forth from God" is shorthand for "being taught by God."

We find this figure of speech also repeated in John 6. In John 6:42 the Jews ask, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" The Jews stumbled over Jesus' words, for they took Jesus statement literally. In trying to explain what he meant, Jesus chose to quote from the Old Testament:

"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' (John 6:45)

"Being taught of God" therefore is the equivalent of "coming forth from God," according to Jesus. The latter is a figure of speech, and not to be taken literally. If we continue to read further in John 6, we will see that Jesus often speaks figuratively.

In John 6, Jesus compares himself to the manna from heaven. John 6:51 says, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven." Here Jesus is speaking figuratively -- not literally -- for he compares himself to the heavenly bread (manna) which sustained the Israelites in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus then goes on to say that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood. Do Protestants take Jesus' words here literally? No, they do not. So why do they take Jesus literally when he says "I came down from heaven"?

In John 6:31 the manna is referred to as "bread from heaven". The literal translation is "bread out of the heaven." Was the manna baked by the angels in heaven, or by God Himself, and then hurled towards the earth at the speed of

light, only to land on the desert floor in the wilderness of Sinai? Of course not! When something (or someone) is described as having come from God, it means that its source can be attributed to God. The source of the manna can be attributed to God, therefore the manna is described as "bread out of heaven". Likewise, the "source" of Jesus is God, and therefore Jesus could correctly state that he came from heaven (i.e. from God), just as the manna in the wilderness came out of heaven. But such a statement does not mean that Jesus preexisted in heaven before his birth -- no more so than did the manna preexist in heaven before it appeared in the desert of Sinai.

If we continue reading John 6, we learn some other important truths about the identity of Jesus:

"Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. (John 6:46)

Notice that Jesus says that he is "from God." Jesus does not state that he is God.

Unfortunately, Jesus was often misunderstood by the Jews of his day, as was the case in John 6, for the Jews took his words here literally. As a result, many of Jesus' disciples forsook him. In spite of all this, it is worth noting what Peter said at the end of John chapter 6:

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. (John 6:67-69)

After hearing all that Jesus said about himself "coming from heaven," what was Peter's response? Did Peter finally comprehend that Jesus was in fact "God the Son" as orthodoxy asserts? No! Rather Peter concluded and confessed, "You art that Christ, **the Son of the living God**" (some modern translations have Peter's confession as simply, "You are the Holy One of God"). Either way, Peter did not come away with the idea that Jesus was God, but rather that Jesus was "of God."

Source: Philip Kapusta