

The Parable of the Leaven

Matthew 13:33-35 and Mark 4:33-34

DIG: Who comprises the invisible universal Church? Why is it invisible? Why do messianic Jews think of leaven as being sin and not the Gospel? What does three measures of flour represent? Why? What does the woman represent? Why? What does the summary statement and prophecy at the end of this file indicate about how and why Messiah used proverbs? What did Jesus and Rabbi Sha'ul say about leaven?

REFLECT: Where in your life or in your place of worship have you seen the leaven or mustard seed at work? What accountability do you have for yourself? How can you detect doctrinal corruption? Whose responsibility is it to detect it (see Acts 17:11)? How can you protect yourself against doctrinal error (see Ephesians 6:10-20)?

The one main point to the parable of the leaven is that the doctrine of the visible church will be corrupted.

The second couplet is made up of the parables of the Mustard Seed (external) and the Leaven (internal), where we see the corruption of the visible church. Hence, we need to examine the difference between the visible church and the invisible universal Church. A false religious system will be introduced into the visible church and it will be a result in the internal corruption of church doctrine. It is a picture of "Christendom" (Baptists, Catholics, Methodists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Protestants, Seven-Day Adventists, and Mormons) that we can see with our own eyes. Some people in the visible church are saved but most are not. But, the invisible universal Church, the Bride of Christ (John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3; Ephesians 5:25-27; Revelation 19:7-8 and 21:9-10), is made up of true believers, or the body of Messiah (1 Cor 10:15-17 and 12:27; Eph 4:16; Colossians 1:18), as we are placed in Him (see Bw - What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith).

Because the apostles would be commissioned to proclaim the message of the Kingdom to the ends of the earth (Mattityahu 28:19-20), it would be easy for them to feel that the harvest depended on their efforts. The Lord of Life wanted to make it clear that although the visible church would grow tremendously, false doctrine would enter the congregations of God. There is indeed a narrow gate that leads to life, and the wide gate that leads to destruction (see Dw - The Narrow and Wide Gates). However, they should not be surprised or discouraged because Christ had forewarned them.

The Master, teaching in a boat by the sea told the crowd still another parable: **The kingdom of Heaven is like leaven that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until the whole batch was leavened (Matthew 13:33)**. When a woman is used symbolically in the Scriptures, the symbol is frequently that of a false religious system and results in spiritual adultery (**Revelation 2:20; 17:1-18**). When the word **leaven** is used symbolically, it is *always* a symbol of **sin**, frequently the specific **sin** of false doctrine (**Matthew 16:6, 11-12**). The **three measures of flour** in which the **leaven is hidden** point to the fact that "Christendom" eventually developed into three major divisions: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. All three, to a greater or lesser degree, have had false doctrine grow within their denomination.

There are those who interpret **the leaven** as the Gospel; but nowhere - I repeat, nowhere, is **leaven** used as a principle of good. It is *always* a principle of **evil**. The word **leaven** occurs ninety-eight times in **God's Word** - about seventy-five times in the TaNaKh and about twenty-three times in the B'rit Chadashah - and it is *always* used in an **evil** or **sinful** sense. In the Dispensation of the Torah it was forbidden in the offerings made to **ADONAI** (see my commentary on **Exodus Fb - The Five Offerings of the Tabernacle: Christ, Our Sacrificial Offering**).

Rest assured when messianic Jews hear or read the word **leaven**, they do not think of the Gospel, they think of **sin**. That is why **God** would not even allow this symbol of **sin** to be eaten by the Jewish people during **the festival of Pesach** or to have it in their homes or to have it anywhere in the land of Israel. While **the Passover** itself was fulfilled by the death of **the Meshiach**, **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** is fulfilled by the sinlessness of **His** blood-offering (**Hebrews 9:11 to 10:18**). In that passage, **His** offering of sinless blood was for three things: first, for the cleansing of the heavenly Tabernacle; secondly, for the removal of the **sins** of the righteous of the TaNaKh (see my commentary of **Revelation Fd - The Resurrection of the Righteous of the TaNaKh**); and, thirdly, for the application of the blood to believers in the New Covenant.⁷⁰¹

In the B'rit Chadashah, **Christ** warned: **Be on your guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:6)**. And Rabbi Sha'ul spoke of the leaven of malice and wickedness (**First Corinthians 5:8**). Remember that this parable is a picture of what happens to the doctrine of **the visible church** during the Dispensation of **Grace** (see my commentary on **Hebrews - The Dispensation of Grace**). That is the interval between the birth of **the invisible universal Church** at the festival of Shavu'ot in **Acts 2:1-47**, and **His** return to set up **His** messianic Kingdom (see my commentary on **Revelation Ex - The Eight Stage Campaign of Armageddon**).

As a result, this **parable** teaches that the **mixture** of false doctrine into **the visible church** will finally lead to apostasy: **The kingdom of Heaven is like leaven that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until the whole batch was leavened (Matthew 13:33)**. Yeshua ben David Himself asked the question: **When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?** The Greek construction here demands a negative answer. In other words, He is saying that when He does return the world will be in *total apostasy*. And Rabbi Sha'ul writing to a young man studying for the ministry, warns that **the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine, they will gather around them a great number of [false] teachers to say what they want to hear (Second Timothy 4:3)**. Finally, the total apostasy of **the visible church** is revealed in **John's** letter to the church of Laodicea (see my commentary on **Revelation Bf - The Church of Laodicea**).

The Gospel is represented by **three measures of flour**. How do we know this? Because flour is made out of **grain** or **seed**, and **Jesus** has already told us in **the Parable of the Soils**, that the seed represented the Word of **God**.⁷⁰²

In this **parable a woman mixed in three measures of flour**. Often when **a woman** is used symbolically it always symbolizes a false religious system (**Revelation 2:20** and **17:1-8**). When the Bible uses symbols it always uses them consistently. The word **leaven**, when it is used symbolically is always a symbol of **sin**, especially the **sin** of false doctrine (**Matthew 16:6; First Corinthians 5:6-7**). The **flour** has some degree of **leaven** in it. **The visible church**, or **the church** that we see with our natural eyes, eventually split off into **three** major religions: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism. All **three** of these religions will contain some degree of false doctrine. So there will be internal doctrinal corruption to some degree.⁷⁰³

Before **Jesus** interpreted **the Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds**, He spoke all these things to the crowd in parables, as much as they could understand; He did not say anything to them without using a parable. This was not an accident, but had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier. But later that same day, when **Messiah** was alone with His own apostles, He explained everything (**Matthew 13:34; Mark 4:34**).

Asaph, a prophet and seer (**Second Chronicles 29:30**), wrote **Psalm 78:2**, from which **Mattityahu** quotes here: **I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world (Matthew 13:35)**. The rejection of His messiahship did not catch the Lord by surprise, and the postponement of **the Kingdom** was not a backup plan. The things hidden since the creation of the world related to the mysteries of **the kingdom of Heaven**, which **Yeshua** explained to His talmidim but not the unbelieving crowds nor pharisaic Judaism (**Mattityahu 13:11-16**). To those who rejected Him, He spoke in

parables; because **though seeing, they [did] not see; though hearing they [did] not hear or understand (Matthew 13:13)**. ADONAI did not waver from His plan of redemption. Everything was exactly on schedule and according to what the prophets had foretold.⁷⁰⁴

We are going to look at nine parables that develop a basic flow of thought: (1) **The Parable of the Soils (Et)** teaches that there will be different responses to the scattering of the Gospel throughout the Church Age. (2) **The Parable of the Seed Growing By Itself (Eu)** teaches that Gospel seed will have an inner energy so that it will spring to life on its own. (3) **The Parable of the Wheat and the Weeds (Ev)** teaches that the true planting will be imitated by a false counter-planting. (4) **The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Ew)** teaches that the visible church will assume abnormal outer growth. (5) **The Parable of the Leaven (Ex)** teaches that the doctrine of the visible church will be corrupted.⁷⁰⁵