

The Leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees

Matthew 16:5-12 and Mark 8:13-26

DIG: In light of all the miracles that Jesus had already done, why would the Pharisees demand a sign from heaven? How might they have responded if Messiah had provided one? What is **the leaven** about which the Lord warned? How does **the leaven** differ from Yeshua's bread? How do the apostles take His comments? With what tone of voice do you hear Christ speaking with in Mark 8:17-21? Why? Where are the numbers **five**, **seven** and **twelve** used elsewhere in the Gospels? What is Jesus' point in highlighting these numbers? What should the Twelve understand about Him by these numbers and feedings? What was Messiah's point in the series of questions? Why were the apostles so slow in understanding Him?

REFLECT: How can you guard against false teaching and the bad spirit that often comes with it? How can **the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees** be seen today? How does it show in the way people relate to God? To one another? What does **hardness of heart** mean to you? How has Yeshua made your **heart** softer?

Then Jesus left the skeptical Pharisees and Sadducees, got back into the boat with the apostles and crossed to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As the western shore faded with the glorious memories of the greatest days of His past ministry, Christ must have been in a pensive mood. The Master was sure that the Twelve did not realize the danger that He and they were facing by the conspiracy of **the Pharisees, Sadducees and the Herodians**. There had already been a great defection of the masses, brought about in large measure by the false doctrines, teaching and leadership of these **men**. They hated Him and would leave no stone unturned until they had done away with Yeshua and His ministry.

The greatest danger for His talmidim, on whom so much depended for the future, was that they might become contaminated with the false teaching of these combined enemies. Those scheming **Pharisees** had just placed Jesus in a trying position, where He might have easily been misunderstood, by their asking for **a sign from heaven** (Matthew 16:1; Mark 8:11). His apostles might have wondered why He didn't give them one. Hadn't the TaNaKh foretold that the Messiah would do so? The Twelve must be warned against the seductive influence of those hypocritical enemies, who under the appearance of religious zeal, were seeking to destroy both Him and them.

While in the boat, the talmidim realized that they had completely forgotten to bring bread along with them, except for one loaf they had with them (Matthew 16:5; Mark 8:13-14). Had their quick departure from **the Pharisees** caused this? At any rate, their failure set the stage for **the Messiah** to teach His apostles an important lesson. **Be careful**, Jesus warned them. The verb is in the imperfect tense, meaning He repeatedly warned them. **Watch out for the leaven** [Hebrew *chametz*] **of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and that of the Herodians** (Matthew 16:6; Mark 8:15; for more information on **the Herodians** see **Cw - Jesus Heals a Man With a Shriveled Hand**). The talmidim were to perceive by the use of their eyes. It is used in a metaphorical sense, *to see with the mind's eye, to discern mentally, to understand*. They were to be constantly keeping a watchful eye open to consider and **watch out**.

The Hebrew word *Chametz* is a bacteria that is essential for the baking of **bread**. **But the rabbinic tradition has emphasized the *chametz* is also a fitting symbol of sin which puffs up and permeates the human soul (Tractate Berakhot 17a)**. It is a powerful symbol that at Passover, traditional Jews and messianic believers are commanded to remove **the *chametz*** from their houses as a reminder to cleanse their spiritual lives as well.⁸⁵²

Whenever *chametz* is used symbolically in the Scriptures, it is always a symbol of sin (Matthew 13:33, 16:12; First Corinthians 5:6-8). But within the Gospels, whenever *chametz* is used, it always symbolizes false doctrine or false **teaching** that works invisibly. All three of the religious sects from Yerushalayim were spreading false **teaching** about **Jesus**, and He warned the **apostles** not to believe it. All three used different lies. **The *chametz* of the Pharisees** lied and said that **Jesus** was demon possessed; **the *chametz* of the Sadducees** lied and said that **Jesus** was against the worship in the Temple set down by Moshe; **the *chametz* of the Herodians** lied and said that **Jesus** was opposed to Roman rule through the house of Herod.⁸⁵³ Once admitted into the heart or into society, this false **teaching** would spread until it made obedience to **ADONAI** impossible.

In light of the insincere questions of **the Pharisees and Sadducees** and the lack of **bread** to eat, **Yeshua** made the perfect connection between the two. Some of the **teaching** (and motivations) of those rabbis was like a spiritual *chametz* that could corrupt **their** souls. At first, **the talmidim** did not understand this **teaching**, they could only think of the most obvious connection. They discussed this among themselves in the boat and said: **Jesus is saying this because we didn't bring any bread (Matthew 16:7; Mark 8:16)**.

Aware of their discussion, Jesus made the connection for them in the form of a loving rebuke. He asked them: **You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread. Do you still not see or understand?** The verb is imperfect, speaking of continuous action. He said this over and over again, half speaking to them, half to Himself. **Are your hearts hardened (Matthew 16:8-9a; Mark 8:17)?** They clearly did not understand that He was not only pointing to their lack of bread. He then quoted Ezekiel 12:2 when He said: **Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?** This sounds amazingly close to the passage He just quoted about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. They are very similar passages. Essentially Yeshua is saying, "Are you like the rest who have rejected Me?" Are you going to **have ears** and not **hear**? Are you also going to **have eyes** and not **see**? Which direction would they go? We soon find out with Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi.

If nothing else, the apostles should have had fresh on their minds the feeding of **the five thousand** (see Fn - **Jesus Feeds the 5,000**), and the feeding of **four thousand** (see Fu - **Jesus Heals a Deaf Mute and Feeds the 4,000**). **Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and twelve basketfuls of pieces you picked up? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and seven basketfuls of pieces you picked up (Matthew 16:9b-10; Mark 8:18-20)?** It was as if He was saying, "If I was only concerned about our having bread, I would simply create some **Myself!**" **How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread?** In view of the tremendous issues at stake, there was agony of soul in the background of His questioning, but without the **Ruach HaKodesh** to guide them, they still had a lot of learning to do in Christ's apostolic college. Jesus finally had to explain to them that He was talking about the doctrines of **the Pharisees and Sadducees**.

The Lord was not merely talking about bread. He said to them: **But be on your guard against the chametz of the Pharisees and Sadducees.** In other words, the teaching of the Oral Law (see Ei - **The Oral Law**) was like **chametz** in that it permeates and even corrupts the pure understanding of the Torah. Christ could be referring to both **their** false teaching as well as **their** dishonest attitude as seen in **their** deceitful encounters with Messiah. Then they understood that Jesus was not telling them to guard against the leaven used in bread, but against the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:11-12; Mark 8:21).

When **Christ and the Twelve** came to **Bethsaida Julias** (where **the 5,000** had been fed) it was probably late in the afternoon and **they** must have spent the night there. **Their** entrance into the town, however, had not gone unnoticed. Early the next morning **some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him (Mark 8:22)**. This was after **The** official rejection by the Sanhedrin and **He** was no longer doing miracles for the masses to authenticate **His** messiahship. **His** healing was done only on the basis of personal need (see **En - Four Drastic Changes in Christ's Ministry**). Thus, **He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village** where no one else could see what **He** was about to do.

When they got outside the village **Jesus put some spit on the man's eyes and put His hands on him, asking: Do you see anything?** The man looked up and said: **I see people, they look like trees walking around.** This revealed that the ability to **see** had been restored, but **the man** was not yet able to focus so as to **see** more than an outline. **He** could not yet distinguish the details. In this, **his** sight was like that of any newborn baby who can see shapes, but is not able to focus and **see** details.⁸⁵⁴ **Once more Yeshua put His hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight restored, and he saw everything clearly (Mk 8:23-25).** The word translated **clearly** (Greek: *telaugos*) means *clearly at a distance*, and indicates the complete restoration of **the man's sight**.

We may conclude from this that there was no formula to **His** healing. Then **Jesus sent him home, saying: Don't go into the village (Mark 8:26).** The policy of silence continued. This is the only miracle **Yeshua ha-Mashiach** performs in two stages that we know of. **This two stage healing mirrors the healing of Isra'el herself and the two step cure of His blindness speaks of the Lord's First and Second Comings.**

The first time the Lord placed **His** hands on **the man**, **he** could only see vague outlines of people. They looked more like **trees** to **him**. This describes the confused and incomplete way **Isra'el** viewed their **Messiah** the first time **He** came. Their vision of **Yeshua** wasn't clear enough to allow them to recognize **Him** when **He** came.

The second time **Jesus** touched **the man's eyes**, **he** could **see** clearly. In the same way, the next time **the Messiah** comes the remnant of **Isra'el** will know exactly **Who He** is. **Zechariah 12:10** says: **They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.**

In the next section, Peter's confession illustrates the first stage of Isra'el's partial sight. Rabbi Sha'ul wrote: I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Isra'el has experienced a partial spiritual blindness until the full number of Gentiles has come in (Romans 11:25). The second stage will come at the end of the Great Tribulation when the entire nation accepts Jesus as the Messiah (see my commentary on the book of Revelation Ev - The Basis of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ) then all Isra'el will be saved, as it is written: The Deliverer will come to Zion. He will turn godlessness away from Jacob (Romans 11:26).⁸⁵⁵