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The Leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees Matthew 16:5-12 and Mark 8:13-26

The leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees 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 click link Cw – to see 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 (Mt 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 **Ezeki'el 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 ha-Kodesh** 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 (Mark 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]