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# **The Kingdom Parable of Leaven. (2013)**

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## The Kingdom Parable of Leaven.

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### Topics.

- The leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herod.
- The three changes the Pharisees made to Judaism.
- Why Jesus used a woman in this parable.
- The present Kingdom or the future Kingdom.
- The Old Testament Kingdom and the New Testament Kingdom.
- The progression of leaven.

Matthew 13:33 ----- <sup>33</sup>Jesus told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

How amazing is this? This parable has only one verse (twenty-four words). The title the Kingdom of Heaven does not mean that the Kingdom is in heaven. Luke in his account of this parable wrote: -

- Jesus said "Whereunto shall I liken the Kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened (Luke 13:20-21).

This clearly shows that the title the Kingdom of Heaven does not mean that the Kingdom is in heaven. The following Scriptures are just another couple of the many that show that the title the Kingdom of Heaven is the same as the Kingdom of God (Mark does not mention this parable).

- Matthew wrote: -
- Jesus answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the *Kingdom of Heaven*, but to them it has not been given (Matt. 13:11).
- Mark wrote: -
- Jesus said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the *Kingdom of God*, but for those outside everything is in parables (Mark 4:11).
- Luke wrote: -
- Jesus said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the *Kingdom of God*, but for others they are in parables (Luke 8:10).

These verses clearly show that the title the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God refer to the same Kingdom which is God's Kingdom on earth.

**Leaven used naturally:** refers to yeast which when making bread is mixed with the dough to make it ferment (cause a change). This process causes a chemical change which alters the original, natural and real form of the substance that the leaven is added to. Once the leaven has mingled itself with the dough it is impossible for it to ever be separated from it again because it has changed the nature of the dough.

The implication of leaven as used in Scripture implies changing the natural nature of what a thing should be to something else. When used in terms of the Kingdom of God it has the connotation of changing the divine design of the Kingdom from its original form and when leaven is used symbolically in the Bible it is uniformly symbolic of that which disintegrates or breaks up and generally symbolises corruption evil and wickedness.

## The Leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herod.

- Jesus said, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.” (Matt 16:6).
- Jesus said, “How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt. 16:11-12).
- Jesus said, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod (Mark 8:15).
- Jesus said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (Luke 12:1).
- Paul wrote, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? <sup>7</sup>Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup>Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor. 5:6-8).
- Jesus asks, “When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8).

These verses show something leavened symbolises hypocrisy, malice, evil and twisted and distorted teaching while something unleavened symbolises sincerity and truth.

**The Pharisees** (means the separated ones”) they were rulers of the Jews and the most-strict and by far the most influential sect of the three prominent societies of Judaism that were around at the time of Christ (the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes). Pharisees loved to wear distinguishing garb so as to be easily recognised and were found everywhere in Palestine not only in Jerusalem.

They influenced and brought into the Jewish faith: -

1. Legalism.
2. Formalised religion.
3. The organisation of the Jewish faith.

So that ultimately Pharisaism and Judaism became almost synonymous. They pledged themselves to obey all facets of the traditions to minutest detail and were sticklers to ceremonial purity. This developed into a feeling of superiority over other nations and people. From this superior feeling as well as religious emotion, pride found its most extreme expression. The Pharisees were haughty and arrogant because they believed they were the only interpreters of God and His Word. They made life difficult for themselves and bitter for others, and despised those whom they did not consider their equals. Their teaching that salvation came by maintaining tradition and keeping the law had such a strong influence on the minds of their followers that God's grace was thought to come from self-effort rather than grace so it was only natural that such a religion would ultimately become a matter of externals and not a faith of the heart.

For further information see: -

- Pharisees in, Bible Dictionary (ON WEBSITE MENU).

**The leaven of the Sadducees:** the Sadducees became the party favourable to the Roman government because they were more interested in maintaining the political status quo than in the religious purity of the nation. They were the political party of the Jewish aristocratic priesthood as aristocrats they were naturally very conservative and held only to the written Law. They resisted Christ, resisted his teaching, resisted the grace of the Gospel, were hostile to those who confessed Christ throughout the book of Acts and denied the future Messianic age.

**The leaven of Herod:** was the lust for power, self-exaltation (greatness) and self-indulgence in excessive worldly possession of material things. Herod was a Jewish Roman client king of Israel; he had ten wives and fourteen known children. History records him as a madman who murdered his own family and a great many rabbis. He is known for his colossal buildings including the second temple sometimes referred to as Herod's temple.

Herod feared the new born King would surpass his rule and became so jealous and threatened that he gave orders to his soldiers to kill all boys of the age of two and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity. Herod's lusts were so great rather than stop having an affair with another man's wife he had the one man (John the Baptist) who told him it was wrong beheaded. The greatest leaven of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and Herod was their aggressive hostile denial of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Why Jesus used a woman in this parable:** some might wonder why Jesus used a woman in this parable as the one that hid the leaven in the meal. Many scholars relate the woman to the Catholic or the Roman Church but there are many other false teachers in all sorts of churches corrupting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus may well have mentioned a woman simply because during Christ's generation it was normal for the woman to do the cooking while the man was sowing seed in the field.

Tending to the crops of the field was the man's work while making bread in the home was generally a woman's task. No doubt Jesus often watched Mary his mother, knead the dough and baking the bread and now in this parable he is using this homely illustration to great effect.

**NOTICE:** the woman did not need to add leaven to the whole lump, just a small amount added would eventually affect it all.

### **The Present Kingdom and the Future Kingdom.**

Some teachers use this parable to teach that the Kingdom of God will grow into a great and perfect Kingdom on earth. This is a true statement, but the reality of this truth will not be seen on earth until the King of the Kingdom returns in glory as the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16) to establish God's Kingdom of righteousness, justice, joy and peace on earth. The following show that from the time of the early church leaven has infected the Lord's present spiritual Kingdom and will continue to do so until Christ returns.

- The first parable shines a spotlight on four things, firstly; upon Jesus proclaiming the Gospel to the world and bringing people with a right heart attitude into his Kingdom. Secondly; upon people who cause all sorts of sin entering the Lord's Kingdom; thirdly, upon angels being sent at the end of this present age to gather out of the Kingdom those who cause sin and fourthly; upon those who remain shining like the sun in the Kingdom of their heavenly Father (Matt. 13:1-8). (Matt. 13:36-43).
- The second parable has a man sowing good seed in his field and then his enemy comes and sows bad seeds among the good seeds and they are both left to grow together until harvest time (Matt. 13:24-30).
- The third parable has a man planting a mustard seed which grows larger than every other plant and becomes a tree that the birds come and make their nests in" (Matt. 13:31-32) (symbolizing abnormal growth in God's Kingdom and professed religion in its outward worldly form). (In the previous parable the birds ate the good seed being planted).
- The fourth parable has a woman hiding leaven in three measures of flour which over time makes the whole thing leavened (Matt. 13:33). (Symbolizing internal doctrinal corruption).
- The fifth parable has a man selling all that he has to buy treasure he found hidden in the world (Matt. 13:44) (symbolizing Christ laying down his life and redeeming faithful believers and the faithful church).

- The sixth parable has a man finding one pearl of great value and selling all that he had to buy it (Matt. 13:45) (symbolizing Christ laying down his life for his faithful church).
- The seventh parable has angels separating out of the Lord's Kingdom the evil from the righteous at the end of the age (Matt. 13:47-49).

At the beginning of this study we have seen that both Jesus and Paul use leaven in the context of corruption so it is not surprising to see that the parable of the leaven follows the theme of continual decline and corruption in the Kingdom of God (also called the church). The progression of these Kingdom parables shows that they refer to Christ's present spiritual Kingdom existing now (prior to his return). We know this because they begin with a sower sowing seed and progress to the final parable which pictures the Lord returning to collect out of his already existing Kingdom those that belong to him. This clearly shows that the focus is upon the present spiritual Kingdom of God which at this present-time is outwardly expressed and manifested through those who confess to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and the global churches worldwide.

#### **NOTE.**

The fact that the final parable has angels coming at the close of this age to separate out of the Lord's Kingdom the good from the bad (Matt. 13:47-50) highlights the reality that the leaven planted in the Kingdom of God on this side of Christ's return is continuing to spread its corruption so much so that it takes angels to separate the righteous from the unrighteous.

#### **The Old Testament Kingdom and the New Testament Kingdom.**

Sadly the prophet Malachi ends the Old Testament era calling the inhabitants of God's kingdom to repentance. The priesthood had not only become corrupt they considered serving the LORD a burden because there was not enough profit in it for them. Added to this wicked attitude they were causing many who were seeking God to stumble and go astray and ignoring social justice (i.e., fairness for all) and worship had become a matter of routine in contrast to being from the heart. When we finish reading Malachi we enter the New Testament and find that the religious leaders of Israel (the chief priests, Pharisees and scribes) are still full of hypocrisy, pride and selfish-ambition, but even worse than this they are not only aggressively rejecting their Messiah the Christ and the Saviour of the world, but also plotting his murder.

**A personal note:** I have no-doubt (this is only my personal thoughts) that the religious leaders of our world who profess to believe, but are in the ministry for the same reasons that the religious leaders of Jesus day were will do the same as the chief Priests, Pharisees and scribes did in Jesus generation and out of jealousy and the lust for power gather together to plot how they can destroy the Lord when he returns to rule and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords since he will once again threaten their religious empires, but since the Lord is not coming this time as the Lamb to be slain, but the royal King to rule in majestic glory, God will destroy those who plot his destruction.

**The wonder, glory, majesty of God's love and God's grace:** some may think that because they have entered into gross sins or even turned from the Lord they have no hope, but consider the following: Israel and Judah had been enormously rebellious throughout their generations, their land was full of gross idolatry---Baal altars, Asherim, star and planetary worship, the deity of Moloch was acknowledged in the sacrifice of children in the Hinnom Valley, astrology, occultism, altars for worshiping the host of heaven were in the temple court, and there was shedding of innocent blood.

Added to these they were cheating the innocent out of justice, not helping the less fortunate and oppressing the poor for their own gain---all these had permeated the Kingdom of God throughout Israel's generations, yet God says, "Return to me and I will return to You." Here is the glory of the God Christians believe in, no questions asked, none needed, a new beginning, a new start. When a sinner returns to the LORD in honest heartfelt repentance it is as though they have not sinned at all.

The grace God lavishes on those who come to the Lord with an honest repentant heart is so vast that God does not dwell on the ugliness and darkness of a person's past.

Malachi wrote: -

- A book of remembrance was written before the LORD of those who esteemed his name and the LORD of hosts said, "They shall be mine in the day when I make up *my treasured possession* and I will *spare* them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him (Malachi 3:16-18).

**The progression of leaven:** sadly leaven continued to infect the Old Testament Kingdom of God with pride, hypocrisy, legalism corruption, malice, selfish ambition right up to the rule of the hypocritical prideful religious leaders of Jesus generation (the chief priests Pharisees and scribes) until it reached its peaked with the religious leaders plotting the murder of their Messiah, the Christ and Saviour of the world. Now in the New Testament both Matthew and Luke paint a very similar picture of God's Kingdom ending in a similar manner.

This parable of leaven is a picture of Jesus and his message being perverted and growing into a false or corrupted Kingdom by those who confess the Lord's name, but serve him for their own gain and selfish ambition because they like the Pharisees of old love the power, the importance, the exaltation, the fame and worldly riches. Every faithful brother and sister devoted to the Lord in love should be encouraged by the following words of Jesus, because they tell us that the Lord we follow personally knows us. This means he not only knows our hearts, our minds and our motives, but also understands our human limitations.

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27).

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