

LEADER'S GUIDE

Discussion Questions: The Parable of the Leaven

The Parable of the Leaven can be found in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21.

The Parable of the Leaven has been a source of confusion for scholars for many years. It is considered a challenging parable since there is very little information available to interpret it. Unlike the Parable of the Sower or the Parable of the Tares, the disciples did not ask Jesus to provide further details on this parable. Additionally, the gospels do not expand on what Jesus said or what the disciples might have thought about it.

1. **What is leaven?** leaven was a small batch of older fermented dough, containing yeast and good bacteria. This mixture was alive and stored for later use, when it would be added to a much larger batch of dough to cause it to “rise” by creating a foaming action that would lighten as soften it.

Parable of the Leaven. (Both verses are almost identical, read the verse outlined in black: Matthew 13:33).

2. **What is your interpretation of this parable based on what you've heard or read in church?** This is open to group discussion.
3. **Please provide the group with any study notes or comments you have in your Bible regarding Matthew 13:33?** This is open to group discussion.
4. **Please provide the group with any study notes or comments you have in your Bible regarding Luke 13:21?** This is open to group discussion.

Scholars have provided three interpretations of this parable.

The most popular interpretation, and probably the one you are most familiar with, is the first one.

5. Leader to read: The woman represents the church, and the leaven represents the good news or the gospel that is to be spread. It is regarded as a positive force that initiates a gradual yet irreversible transformation of the world. It works tirelessly behind the scenes, unnoticed yet persistent until its impact is felt on a global scale until the return of Jesus Christ.

Here is a similar way to interpret Jesus' parable comparing the Kingdom of God to leaven or yeast. Just like yeast transforms the dough into bread, the presence of Jesus in our lives can transform us into better people. We become more loving, joyous, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, humble, and self-controlled, which reflects the Kingdom of God within us.

Jesus' power works silently but surely, just like the yeast in bread. Although we cannot see how the Holy Spirit works within us, others can see the positive changes

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in our behavior and attitude. Therefore, it is essential to act like yeast ourselves and spread Jesus' message of love and peace to others.

Jesus encourages us to go out and make disciples of all nations, just as yeast spreads in the dough. By doing so, we can help others experience the transformational power of Jesus and the Kingdom of God.

6. The second interpretation is similar to the parable of the tares. In this interpretation, the enemy represents sin, and he sows weeds that symbolize the corrupting influence of sin. This view suggests that the world will eventually infiltrate every church, and that no church will be able to maintain its purity and holiness until Jesus Christ returns. The use of leaven as a metaphor for sin reinforces this idea. Consequently, churches will face persecution as they strive to remain faithful to God's teachings amidst a world that is increasingly hostile to the gospel.

Neither of the first two interpretations of the parable fully explain the woman or the three measures, or why the leaven was hidden instead of kneaded into the dough. In several parables and metaphors, Jesus is supposed to represent the church. (Colossians 1:17-20, Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26) The idea that the kingdom of heaven spreads like yeast through the church and the gospel is a popular interpretation, but it doesn't fully account for all the details in the parable.

As part of our investigation, we examined every instance of the words, "leaven" and "unleavened" in the Bible using Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance. Our research found that throughout the Old and New Testaments, leaven is consistently portrayed as something bad, while unleavened is good. There are a few instances where leaven is burned as an offering.

This makes the parable of the leaven somewhat unique, as it is the **only** time where leaven is described as a positive force. Some scholars have interpreted this as a metaphor for the transformative power of the gospel, but it's important to recognize that this interpretation goes against the usual biblical understanding of leaven.

Here is a breakdown of the scriptures identified. We will include several of these in the study guide.

- a. Scriptures referring to **Unleavened** is good or a feast of Unleavened Bread:

Genesis 19:3	Leviticus 23:6	2 Chronicles 30:13
Exodus 12:8	Numbers 6:19	2 Chronicles 35:17
Exodus 12:17	Numbers 9:11	Ezra 6:22
Exodus 12:18	Deuteronomy 6:3	Ezekiel 45:21

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Exodus 12:20	Deuteronomy 16:16	Matthew 26:17
Exodus 12:34	Joshua 5:11	Mark 14:1
Exodus 12:39	Judges 6:19	Mark 14:12
Exodus 13:6	1 Samuel 28:24	Luke 22:1
Exodus 13:7	2 Kings 23:9	Luke 27:7
Exodus 23:15	1 Chronicles 23:29	Acts 12:3
Exodus 34:18	2 Chronicles 8:13	Acts 20:6
Leviticus 6:16	2 Chronicles 30:13	1 Corinthians 5:7
Leviticus 10:12	2 Chronicles 30:21	1 Corinthians 5:8

b. Scriptures referring to **Leavened** as bad (sin):

Exodus 12:15	Leviticus 2:11	Matthew 16:12
Exodus 12:19	Leviticus 6:17	Mark 8:15
Exodus 12:20	Deuteronomy 16:3	Luke 12:1
Exodus 13:3	Deuteronomy 16:4	1 Corinthians 5:6
Exodus 13:7	Hosea 7:4	1 Corinthians 5:7
Exodus 23:18	Matthew 16:6	1 Corinthians 5:8
Exodus 34:25	Matthew 16:11	Galatians 5:9

c. Scriptures refer to **Unleavened** bread as a sacrifice.

- Exodus 29:23 (Wave Offering)
- Leviticus 2:4 (Grain Offering)
- Leviticus 2:5 (Grain Offering)
- Leviticus 7:12 (Law of the Sacrifice of Peace)
- Leviticus 8:2 (Sin Offering)
- Leviticus 8:26 (Wave Offering)
- Numbers 6:15 (Sin Offering)
- Numbers 6:17 (Sin Offering)
- Judges 6:20 (Gideon's Offering)
- Judges 6:21 (Gideon's Offering)

d. Scriptures refer to **Leavened** bread as a sacrifice.

- Leviticus 7:13 (Sacrifice of Thanksgiving of the Peace Offering)
- Leviticus 23:17 (Feast of Weeks)
- Amos 4:5 (Sacrifice of Thanksgiving)
- Matthew 13:33 (Sacrifice to get into the Kingdom of Heaven)

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e. Luke 13:21 (Sacrifice to get into the Kingdom of Heaven)

7. Let's read some examples from both the New and Old Testament scriptures:
 - a. Exodus 12:19-20, Exodus 13:6-7, Leviticus 6:16, Leviticus 10:12, Deuteronomy 16:3, Matthew 16:6, Matthew 16:12, Mark 8:15, Mark 14:1, Luke 22:7, and 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.

Leader to read: Consider this: God stated many times through Moses that leaven is bad or sinful and should not be ingested. Additionally, God said many times through Moses that unleavened bread is good. The "Feast of Unleavened Bread" is commonly referred to as the "Passover." However, if God is perfect in every way, then why did Jesus simply state that leaven is now good and represents the spreading of the good news and the Gospel, without providing any further explanation? This seems to contradict what God has said in the past. Jesus would not go against what His Father (God) has clearly stated.

8. **What is the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" commonly referred to as?** Passover.

The third interpretation of this parable is not mainstream, but it closely examines the words used by Jesus and how they are consistently used throughout the Bible. The keywords are "leaven" or "leavened." In 21 scriptures, the word "leaven" describes something bad, while in 39 scriptures, "unleavened" represents something good. It is unlikely that Jesus would go against this consistent metaphor without providing an explanation. Since Jesus did not clarify why leaven should be good, we must maintain the consistent metaphor used throughout the Bible that leaven is bad and unleavened is good.

Now, let's examine the keywords in this parable that are not explained. We will attempt to clarify and explain our interpretation of these conclusions.

9. **What narrative could explain this parable by creating a passageway to get into the Kingdom of Heaven?** In order to enter heaven, Jesus must remove all of our sins while we are on Earth. The Parable of the Leaven explains this concept in a unique way. It compares sin to leaven, Jesus to the bread of life (John 8:35) and the process of removing sin to baking bread. According to the parable, Jesus takes on our sins, like dough, and is placed in the fire to remove all the sin from us and the bread. This process is what makes us pure.

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The first unusual aspect of this parable is that the central character is "a woman." In all the other parables in Matthew chapter 13, a man represents Jesus. Therefore, in the Parable of the Leaven, "a woman" does not represent Jesus. This means that if Jesus is being metaphorically represented, He needs to be something other than the woman.

10. **Who does the woman represent?** The Holy Spirit. God is the Father; Jesus is the Son. Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. The Holy Spirit baptizes all members of the one body, including many, as is Christ. The Holy Spirit immersed us in Christ.

The second one is the three measures of a meal. Notice Jesus does not state the leaven was hidden in a loaf of bread or dough. He specifically says it was hidden in a meal—three measures.

11. **What is "three measures of a meal?"** When Jesus said, "three measures of a meal," he referred to a meal offering. The Jews would have understood this. It is a meal offering. (the King James version may say "meat offering.")
12. **What does a meal offering consist of?** One ephah of flour.
One measure = 1/3 ephah.
13. When the priests gave an offering, they gave 1/10 of an ephah. (Read Leviticus 6:20-21) **Why did the priest only give 1/10 of an ephah?** Because even the priest was supposed to tithe. 10% belongs to God.
14. **Can you put leaven in a meal offering?** According to Leviticus 2:11 and 6:17, any meal offering made to God must not contain leaven. This means that the offering should not be baked with leaven and must be kept pure and free from it. The meal offering represents Jesus, and therefore it is vital for the followers of Jesus to avoid using leaven in their meal offerings as it is an essential part of their religious practices.
15. **How is the meal offering created?** Leviticus 2:7 instructs to make an offering of fine flour mixed with oil to avoid any lumps. Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. This is further emphasized in Matthew 3:16 and John 1:32, where the Holy Spirit was poured upon Christ. The flour represents the humanity of the Lord, and the intermingling of flour and oil represents the incarnation. The addition of frankincense to the meal offering makes it a sweet savor, pleasing to God. The meal offering represents the Messiah. Jesus is often referred to as the bread of life (John 8:35), and He will sustain us for all eternity.
16. **What happens to Jesus when the Holy Spirit hides the leaven in dough?** Please read 2 Corinthians 5:21: He made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that we might

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become the righteousness of God in Him. The words "to be" are not originally present. It means "he has made him sink or a sin offering." Jesus sacrificed himself to absorb our sins so that we may be pure enough to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the meal offering.

Also, read 1 John 2:2. Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, not only for ours but also for the whole world. Propitiation means to offer a sacrifice that appeases God's just judgment and righteous against us and our sins. Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins.

The third word is "hid." The woman did not "knead" the leaven into the dough, but rather she hid it.

17. Why did the woman hide the leaven in the anger dough? "Hid" means to conceal something or mix one thing with another. The woman kept it a secret that she hid the leaven in the dough until the bread was leavened. In 1 Corinthians 2:7-8, it says that even though God's wisdom is hidden, it is spoken in a mystery. God concealed his wisdom on how he would save and redeem us.

18. What happens to leaven bread when it is placed into the oven? The passage talks about the symbolism of leaven in the Bible. In one interpretation, the leaven represents sin, and it is mixed into the bread of life (John 8:35), which represents Christ, in a way that nobody notices until it's too late. Then, the bread is placed in the oven, which represents hell, and the fire destroys the leaven. In another interpretation, leaven represents the sin in the world that enters into the churches and leaves them impure and unholy until Jesus Christ returns.

After completing the creation of this study, we believe that leaven is bad or represents sin, and anytime leaven is used, it is used as a sacrifice. Therefore, the author suggests re-reading the scripture from the point of view that leaven is a sin and is to be used as a sacrifice.