

# The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13

## Lesson 5 – The Parables of the Mustard Seed and The Leaven

Matthew 13:31-32 and 13:33

April 21, 2024

Teaching Notes

### Special Introduction

As we continue our investigation of the Kingdom Parables, its good to remember that these 8 parables are a unit, actually a discourse in a sense like the other discourses in Matthew records for us. Note how each “discourse” is wrapped up by Matthew;

- 1) The Sermon on the Mount ( Matt. 5-7 – and note 7:28-29; “when Jesus finished these sayings.”
- 2) Missions discourse – Matt. 10 – ( note 11:1; “when Jesus had finished instructing His disciples...” )
- 3) Humility Discourse – Matt. 18 – which also includes the parable of the unforgiving servant; ( note: 19:1; “now when Jesus had finished these sayings...” ).
- 4) Olivet Discourse – Matt. 24-25 – ( note: 26:1 – “When Jesus had finished all these sayings...” ).
- 5) The Matthew 13 Kingdom Parables: ( note 13:53 – “And when Jesus had finished these parables...” )

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So why bring this up? Because it tells us that these parables should be considered as a unit, as a discourse with a common thread.

In Matt. 13:36, He left the crowds and went back into the house and explained the parable of the Wheat and Tares. Then, the last 4 parables, He told only to His disciples. The first 4 were given to the crowds, the last 4 were given to the disciples only. Why is that important to know? The two parables we’ll start today, are the last two of the first group of 4 parables, spoken to the crowd, and they both follow a similar tenor as the first 2 parables, also given to the crowd.

It’s important to see this division of 4 + 4, here is what A.W. Pink says; “What is in view in the first 4 parables is the sphere of human responsibility, and hence, it is a picture of failure that is presented to us. In the first, only one of the four castings of the good Seed yields any fruit. In the second, the crop as a whole is spoiled by the mingling of the tares among the wheat. In the third, the little mustard-seed develops into a great tree, whose branches afford shelter for the agents of Satan. In the fourth, the three measures of meal are, ultimately, completely corrupted by means of the leaven surreptitiously introduced into them.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.W. Pink cited in Andrew Wood, The Coming Kingdom, pg. 124

We aren't specifically told why this division takes place, but the themes of these parables tell us it clearly does. Remember that Mark 4:34 tells us "*Jesus explained every parable to them,*" since the OT gave no outright prophecy of a kingdom postponement, or described such a gap that will take place until Jesus returns to setup the Kingdom, Jesus' explanation of ( at least ) the first two parables, plus the two we will look at here, describes this interregnum as a time when the Church ( though not even named until Matthew 16 ) will experience growth, but it will be tainted by the work of Satan throughout, making the Church an object of a mixture of good and evil, holiness and false doctrine, infiltration of hypocrites and apostates, and "*ravenous wolves among the congregations!*" ( Acts 20:29-32 )

Now, Jesus will teach the last 4 of the 8 parables to the disciples to encourage them that, although the Devil will be working hard during the Interregnum to destroy God's plan ( and especially against Israel, the "apple of God's eye" – Zech. 2:8 ) throughout the inter-advent period, don't forget that God will also be at work and His program and purpose will surely prevail.

As we examine the last 4 parables, plus an important one from Luke 19:11-27, ( Lesson # 6 ) – The Parable of the Minas – we will see a definite "light at the end of the tunnel," revealing God's kingdom program to be incredibly rich in promised blessing for Israel. Here again, A.W. Pink adds an explanation of God at work in the last 4 parables;

"Now the first key to this parable [ by this he also means the last 4 ] is found in the fact that it is spoken by Christ after He had dismissed the multitudes and taken His disciples into the house. This parable, unlike the 4 which precede it, was spoken to the disciples only. Those disciples must have been perplexed and dismayed at the gloomy picture which Christ had drawn of the form which His kingdom was going to assume in the world after His departure. He told them, or at least He had said in their hearing, that they would go forth and scatter the Good seed broadcast, but with meagre results...Second, He had said that the Devil would turn farmer and over-sow the field with tares. And they were forbidden to pluck them up...Third, He had warned them that His professing cause on earth would develop so extensively that it would be like a little mustard seed growing up into an herb, ultimately becoming a tree, with wide spreading branches; but the Devil and his agents would find shelter in them; Fourth, He announced that into the meal, which was the emblem of His pure truth, a foreign and corrupting element would be introduced, stealthily and secretly, and the outcome should be that ultimately the whole of the meal would be leavened."<sup>2</sup>

So, we will see, when we get to these last 4 parables, The Hidden Treasure, The Pearl of Great Price, The Dagnet, and the Householder, how Jesus introduces encouragement to His disciples, and if we will accept it, to us, the readers.

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<sup>2</sup> IBID, pg. 125

This very short parable is the first of a total of 5 short parables ( as opposed to the longer parables of the Sower and the Wheat and the Tares ) in Matthew 13. These shorter parables are to the point and Jesus uses them effectively. They might not seem to require explanation from Jesus to His disciples, but Mark 4:34 tells us that *“privately to His own disciples he explained everything.”*

Both this parable and the Parable of the Leaven, “Link the kingdom with small beginnings that eventually explode into something grand. This growth of the kingdom could be linked with two developments. First, the message of the kingdom is spreading in this age. Second, the number of those who believe in the kingdom message is growing. Thus, while the kingdom itself awaits establishment at the second coming, the kingdom grows as the message of the kingdom and sons of the kingdom increase.”<sup>3</sup>

We need to keep in mind that these 8 parables are meant to interconnect – they are part of a discourse, so they must exhibit consistent thought and harmony. This 3<sup>rd</sup> of the 8 parables can’t be in conflict with the message being conveyed with the rest of the parables, especially the first 2.

The most common interpretation of these Matthew 13 Kingdom Parables is ( according to A.W. Pink and Andrew Woods ) “that they are announcing the glorious success that the gospel going out will achieve. The tiny mustard seed is planted and will explode in growth, meaning a rapid expansion of Christianity and the church of Christ. Ultimately, it will cover the whole earth. But this is not what these parables are about.”<sup>4</sup>

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A.W. Pink develops 4 points from this brief parable which bear considering.  
1) These parables are connected. In the Parable of the Sower, of the 4 soils in which the seed is planted ( i.e., the gospel ), only 1 soil sprouts forth fruit, while the other 3 soils fail to produce lasting belief. In the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, the field of good seed – the wheat – was oversown of weeds planted by Satan. The wheat and tares would be allowed to grow together until the harvest at the end of the age, when they’d be harvested together and the weeds would be collected, bundled and burned. This is difficult to reconcile with a kingdom-now concept when we should expect a world so affected by the evil one that the entire world will not be won over before Christ returns.

For a number of reasons, this is an odd topic for a parable, but in seeing the kingdom aspect of it, it begins to make more sense. What we need to figure out is this; is the incredible growth of this tiny mustard seed a good thing or is the opposite? There are varying views of the answer to that question, and the variance is wider between dispensation and amillennial or postmillennial and progressive dispensationalists.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Vlach, He Will Reign Forever, Lampion House, 2020, pg. 331

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Woods, The Coming Kingdom ( loosely quoted ) pg. 114

Non-dispensational writers typically see this parable of the mustard seed as in incredible growth of the church. One example of this is from Simon Kistemaker; “By means of the parable, Jesus teaches that God’s kingdom may seem unimportant and insignificant, especially in Galilee in AD 28. But the gospel of the kingdom proclaimed by a carpenter-turned preacher will have a tremendous impact upon the world at large. Jesus’ followers consisted if a few “uneducated” fishermen who were told to make disciples of all nations. These followers set the world on fire with the message of salvation, which today is proclaimed in nearly all the known languages of the world. The tiny seed sown in Galilee at the dawn of the new age of Christianity has become a tree which today provides shelter and rest to people everywhere. And yet, then day is not spent.

The tree has not yet reached maturity; it is still growing. We look at the phenomenon of the growing tree and know that God is at work developing His kingdom. We know that countless people on this globe have not heard the good news of God’s forgiving love. Entire nations are devoid of the shade and shelter extended by God’s kingdom. The tree’s branches must continue to grow and extend to those regions which still need the gospel so that multitudes may find refuge and rest. And when then gospel of God’s kingdom has been preached to all the nations of the world, then the end will come ( Matt. 24:14 ) and the tree will be fully grown.”<sup>5</sup>

The above quote is a fairly popular way to interpret this parable by mostly Covenant theologians. I want to point out a few things – I’ve underlined above. In the beginning of the first paragraph, what he says is mostly accurate, as today the gospel is proclaimed in nearly all the known languages of the world. But there are still many millions of unreached people who have never heard the gospel. (4)

In paragraph 2, as the tree grows, “God is at work developing His kingdom.” I would disagree with the wording. If the time Jesus is in heaven as High Priest, is this development of the kingdom, the interregnum is the time this “tree” grows, then it is not developing his kingdom. It makes more sense to say its preparing for the arrival of the kingdom, not “developing” it. The Kingdom will be established on God’s timetable, and it is not here yet.

Although earlier in his book ( not cited here ), he commented on the birds that the tree’s branches will support once it grows large enough. He mentions the birds by citing Daniel 4:12 ( Nebuchadnezzar’s dream ); Ezek. 17:23 & 31:6. All of these passages he claims put birds in a good light, as symbolic of blessing and finding shade and shelter and food under its branches. However, Kistemaker doesn’t consider that birds are not always a symbol of good in Scripture. As recently as Matt. 13:4 ( cf. 13:19b ), they represent the evil one. In Genesis 15:10-11, as God is making His covenant with Abram, birds of prey come to attempt to defile the cut up animals of the covenant ceremony. Abram drives them away. In Deut. 28:26, the birds are part of the promised curse for disobedience; and in Rev. 18:2, note the reference to the birds, and the final mention of them in Rev. 19:17,18,21 – as Christ’s first act on His return is judgment of the wicked at Armageddon at the

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<sup>5</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, The Parables of Jesus, Baker Books, 1980, Pg. 47

“Supper of God.” So, in all likelihood, Jesus is referring to birds in the branches of the Mustard Tree’s branches is not a good thing, not a blessing.

A.W. Pink says about the birds in this parable;

“The birds lodging in the branches of this tree makes altogether against the current interpretation. If Scripture be compared against Scripture, it will be found that these “birds symbolize Satan and his angels.”<sup>6</sup> Pink also cites the passages above.

Pink then continues and cautions;

“How then, can this great tree represent the true church of Christ. While its branches afford shelter for the devil and his emissaries?”<sup>7</sup>

Pink then admits that in the OT ( citing some of the same passages that Kistemaker did ) the tree was “a familiar OT figure whose wide spreading branches afforded lodgment for the birds, as a familiar figure for a mighty kingdom which gave shelter to the nations.”<sup>8</sup> So it is in our parable. We’ll come back to Pink’s summary soon, but I want to also comment on Kistemaker’s last statement.

Kistemaker’s last sentence seems to be very hopeful that his tree’s growth over the many intervening years since the mustard seed is planted, means “the gospel is preached ( he implies successfully ) “to all the nations of the world, the end will come ( MT 24:14 ) and the tree will be fully grown.” Sounds like a nice summary, but it ignores the effect of the birds, which Pink, Woods, Habershon, Gaebelein, and others pick up on.

Now, let’s see how Pink develops his argument. This is a lengthy but important quote;

“The history of Christendom clearly confirms this. At the beginning, those who bore the name of Christ were but a despised handful...Finding that force as of no avail, the Enemy changed his tactics. Failing to intimidate as the roaring lion, he now sought to insinuate as the subtle serpent. Ceasing to attack from without, he now worked from within. In the first parable, the assault was from without – the fowls of the air catching away the Seed. In the second parable his activities were from within – he sowed his tares among the wheat. In the third parable we are shown the effects of this. Satan now moved worldly men to seek membership in the churches of God. These soon cause the truth to be watered down, discipline to be relaxed, that which repelled the world to be kept in the background, and what would appeal to the carnal mind to be made prominent. Instead of affections set on things above, they were fixed on things below...The distinctive truths of Christianity were abandoned, the gospel was adulterated, the pilgrim character of professing saints ceased...

Thus we may discern in the first three parables of Matthew 13 a striking and sad forecast of the development of evil. In the first, the Devil caught away part of the good seed. In the second, he is seen engaged in the work of imitation. Here in the third, we are shown a corrupted Christianity affording him shelter.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in The Coming Kingdom, Andrew Woods, pg. 116-117

<sup>7</sup> Ibid p. 117

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 117

<sup>9</sup> A.W. Pink, per Andrew Woods, IBID, p. 117-118

Arno Gaebelien concurs with Pink's assessment. In his commentary on Matthew, he says,

"The birds which roost in that tree would mean, if the parable applies to the church, converted sinners. Do birds ever represent clean persons?...Birds in this parable mean unsaved, unconverted people and nations who flock for selfish motives to the tree, the outward form of Christendom, and find shelter there. But they defile the tree."<sup>10</sup>

John Walvoort comments here:

"The other parables, though left uninterpreted, contribute further elements of the present age. The parable of the mustard seed ( MT 13:31,32 ) indicates the tremendous growth of the professing church from a small beginning, symbolized by the mustard seed, to its tremendous proportions. History has certainly confirmed this interpretation as well as the details which are added, namely, that the birds of the air, representing Satan and those that he controls, will come and lodge in its branches."<sup>11</sup>

James Montgomery Boice also comments on the Parable of the Mustard Seed;

"First, the growth of a mustard seed into a tree is abnormal. That is, a mustard seed does not grow into a tree; it grows into a shrub. Anyone to whom Christ spoke would know that. So when He spoke of the great and unusual growth of this seed, His hearers would immediately have been alerted to the fact that something was wrong. If Jesus wanted to stress the "victorious church" view, He should have referred to an acorn growing up to be an oak or a cedar seed growing up to be one of the mighty trees of Lebanon.

Second, in the context of Matthew 13 the birds, who ( in this parable ) rest in the branches ( v. 32 ), have already ( in parable one ) been identified as the devil or the devil's messengers ( v. 19 ). It is true that an element of one parable need not carry the same meaning if it is used in the next, but it surely would be strange if an element that symbolized such evil at the start of the chapter carried a totally different meaning just thirteen verses later. Who are the birds who roost in the church's branches if not those whom the devil has sown among the organized church? If they are not Satan's people, then who they are is left unexplained. On the other hand, if the birds are the devil's followers, then there is an immediate and obvious carryover into the parable of the yeast..."<sup>12</sup>

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## The Parable of the Leaven          Matthew 13:33

This single verse parable, the 4<sup>th</sup> in Jesus' series of Matthew 13 Kingdom Parables, is short, but makes important points.

There are only 4 objects in this parable – "The kingdom of God," "leaven," "a woman," and "three measures of flour."

This brief, 1 verse parable is controversial to many. The main controversy lies with who 'the woman' is, what 'the leaven' is, and what the 'meal' or 'flour' is. But the main controversy centers on what the leaven represents. This single verse is more

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<sup>10</sup> Arno Gaebelien, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Loizeau Brothers, 1961, pg. 285

<sup>11</sup> John Walvoort, *The Nations, Israel, and the Church*, Zondervan Academic, 1967, pg. 28-29

<sup>12</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Parables of Jesus*; Moody, 1983, pg. 26

complex to interpret than we might think. Interpreting correctly what ‘the leaven’ symbolizes means all the difference in how the parable is interpreted, and the context is always a significant basis for how to interpret a passage.

Some are convinced that ‘leaven’ in this parable is a good thing and its role in this verse is to act as yeast, and make the dough being made by the flour grow in size and be filled with the leaven. Those who take this view must of necessity see the ‘woman’ as the Church and the three measures of flour as humanity in general, so that the leaven is the gospel spreading throughout the world as the church grows as more and more people are evangelized.

First of all, here is an interpretation principle I fully accept, not related to this particular verse, but must be applied to it, because it is pertinent to how a recurring word in Scripture should be handled:

“Notice that the word “kingdom” in the expression “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” is left undefined by John the Baptist, Christ, the Twelve, and the Seventy. This lack of a NT definition shows that the notion of the Kingdom was understood by how the concept had already been developed in the OT. As we have learned, the OT specifically and descriptively defines and portrays a coming earthly, messianic kingdom. This kingdom is anticipated in the office of Theocratic Administrator that was lost in Eden, in the biblical covenants, in the earthly theocracy governing Israel from the time of Moses and Zedekiah, and in the predictions of the OT prophets.

At this juncture, many errantly fill the NT word “kingdom” with a purely symbolic, allegorical, or spiritualized meaning independent of its terrestrial OT development. Yet, such an approach is to disrespect how language functions. Michael Cocoris states an often neglected hermeneutical principle in this regard; “The nature of communication is such that once authors define a term, they are obligated to use that term the same way, until they notify the readers otherwise.” Since the use of the term “kingdom” early on in the gospels is left undefined, and consequently the reader is left without any clue as to its alleged abrupt change of meaning into something entirely spiritual, this NT use of the term must be identified by its OT usage.”<sup>13</sup> (7)

Subsequently, when we encounter the word ‘leaven’ here in this verse, we cannot arbitrarily say, “Jesus must mean that leaven is a good thing here.” Yet, notice below;

In Scripture, according to an ESV Concordance<sup>14</sup> the word “leaven” appears 21 times, “leavened” appears 15 times, and “leavens” appears twice. The word “unleavened” appears 62 times. Both testaments are involved. The two places leaven appears in a more positive light are both in Leviticus – 7:13 & 23:17. In both cases it is requested as part of the law to provide breads which end up being eaten by the priests, alongside unleavened wafers and unleavened breads. Since leaven adds some flavor, its chief use would be to help the bread rise giving it a

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in Andrew Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, pg. 56

<sup>14</sup> Crossway ESV Comprehensive Concordance, compiled by William D. Mounce, 2002, pg. 588

better appearance as well. Every other use ( Matt. 13:33 pending of course as we discuss it ) shows leaven to consistently have a connotation of evil.<sup>15</sup>

So this establishes the proper precedent to interpret the meaning of the word, “Leaven.” Yet, 2 Bible scholars, both dispensational in their views, ( Pentecost & MacArthur ) insist arbitrarily that leaven here means evil. ( I have quoted Pentecost in this lesson )

John MacArthur comments on pg. 372 of his Matthew Chapters 8-13 regarding 3 points of this parable;

**“The first point** in this parable is that small things can have great influence, in the way that a small piece of leavened dough can permeate a large piece of unleavened dough to make it rise. The power of the kingdom of heaven is great, far greater than its initial size and appearance would suggest. The smallest part of the kingdom that is placed in the world is sure to have influence, because it contains the power of God’s own Spirit. The influence of the kingdom is the influence of the King, of His Word, and of His faithful people.

**The second point** of the parable is that the influence is positive. Leavened bread has always been considered tastier and more enjoyable than unleavened. To symbolize the break with their former life in Egypt, God commanded His people to eat only unleavened bread during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which began on Passover evening. They were not even allowed to have leaven of any sort in the house during the seven days of the feast ( Ex. 12:15,18-19 ). But the bread they ate the rest of the year was leavened and perfectly acceptable to the Lord. To the average person of Jesus’ day, Jew or Gentile, there is no evidence that leaven carried any connotation of evil or corruption.” ( pg. 372 )

**The third point** is that the positive influence of the kingdom comes from within. The leaven must be hid in order to have any impact. The idea here is not that of hiding so as not to be seen but rather of hiding in the sense of penetrating deeply, completely permeating the world as leaven completely permeates the dough. Christians are not to be of the world, but we are to be in the world , because that is the only way the gospel can reach and affect the world ( JN 17:14-16 ). Christ sends His people into the world just as the Father sent Him into the world ( v. 18 ). The supreme purpose of the church is to go into the world and preach the gospel to all creation ( Mark 16:15 ).”<sup>16</sup> ( pg. 374 )

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While John MacArthur is one of my theological heroes, to me, this is a very arbitrary interpretation, and cuts against the grain of what is going on in these parables.

This parable has been interpreted 2 different ways throughout history, which we will look at. I thought a 1 verse parable would be simple to teach about, turns out I was wrong.

It’s appropriate to mention here that, as I said earlier, these Matthew 13 Kingdom Parables are a set, not just a series of unconnected stories without a common theme. There is a theme common to them all, and they all seek to teach that theme

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<sup>15</sup> Correspondence with Pastor Richard Byrne on January 22, 2024

<sup>16</sup> John MacArthur, Matthew 8-15, Moody Press, 1987, pgs. 372, 374

to us and Jesus' disciples, although the general crowds ( per MT 13:10-17 ) were not going to get the meaning ( per God's design ).

The thing that is introduced into each parable is the element of evil that arrives in the parabolic scenes having to do with the long period of time between Christ's rejection by Israel, His death, resurrection and ascension, and His second coming to establish the Kingdom. Ada Habershon comments;

"In these 4 parables there is a marked increase in the form which the evil takes. In the first, birds of the air hurriedly catch away certain seeds; in the second, the enemy sows tares deliberately, though secretly; in the third, there is no concealment, the birds of the air make their home in the shrub before the eyes of all; and in the fourth, the woman is not the least ashamed of mixing leaven into the meal, she is rather proud of it, and is quite under the impression that she is actually improving it. In the first and third, there are the birds of the air; in the second and fourth, the actual addition of evil.

The parable of the mustard seed describes the outward growth of the branches; and the parable of leavened meal, the inward permeating of evil principle."<sup>17</sup>

The more traditional ( safer ) view of this parable veers from the idea that leaven being introduced into the flour ( meal ) is evil, even though, by and large leaven in Scripture, especially for Jews, was a symbol for evil, not for good. It interprets the 4 objects of the parable this way;

- The Kingdom of God – is here and now
- The leaven is the gospel and its internal power, and it works its way into all of humanity
- The woman is the church
- The 3 measures of meal is humanity in general

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This is quite likely the view we've all heard most over our years of hearing sermons, lessons or reading books on the parables. But, if Jesus meant to teach to His Jewish audience that 'leaven', a term they were very familiar with, that this leaven, which they were taught symbolizes evil, could be the power of a process to bring about good in the world, He contradicts what He taught in the first three parables. 'Leaven' to Jewish people meant something evil. It was excluded in every offering unto the Lord made by fire ( cf. Leviticus 2:4-5,11; 7:12; 8:12; 23:6 ).

Conscientiously, the orthodox Jew searches his dwelling before keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread, if perhaps somewhere a morsel of bread with some leaven may be hidden. He purges out the leaven.<sup>18</sup>

Dwight Pentecost, often a helpful ally in dispensational arguments, falls short as he says this about the Parable of the Leaven:

"The leaven hidden in the meal ( MT. 13:33 ). When leaven is used in Scripture it frequently connotes evil ( Ex. 12:15; Lev. 2:11; 6:17; 10:12; Matt. 16:6; Mark 8:15; I Cor. 5:6,8; Gal. 5:9 ). Its use in sacrifices that represent the perfection of the person and work of Christ ( Lev. 2:1-3 ) shows it is not always so used.

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<sup>17</sup> Ada Habershon, *The Study of the Parables*, Kregel, 1957; pp. 134-135

<sup>18</sup> Arno Gaebelein, *The Gospel of Matthew*, pg. 286-287

Here the emphasis is not on leaven itself as though to emphasize its character, but rather in the fact that the leaven has been hidden in meal, thus stressing the way leaven works when once introduced into the meal. When leaven is introduced into the meal, and irreversible process has begun that will continue until it has completed its leavening action. This is intended to stress the way the new form of the kingdom will develop. The power in the kingdom will not be external but internal. By its internal working it will effect and external transformation. All previous kingdoms had been introduced by military might...But this new kingdom will flourish, not by military might, but by a new principle, the power within.<sup>19</sup> I have underlined the sentences that concern me here. Lev. 2:1-3 does not say what he says it does!! He is making the interregnum the new kingdom. In fact, contra to his statement about this kingdom not beginning with military might, note Daniel 2:44-45; Rev. 19:11ff; Zech. 14, etc.

Simon Kistemaker is helpful to define for us what leaven is in comparison to what we know as 'yeast' today;

"Yeast as we know it today is clean, fresh, wholesome, and even tasty. It is made from a cultivation of a mineral salt-sugar solution to which starch is added. Leaven, however, was produced by storing a piece of dough from the previous week and adding juices to promote the process of fermentation. Should the leaven become infected with a harmful bacterial culture, it would be passed on in the bread until the process was broken when people ate unleavened bread for a week, as they did during Passover."<sup>20</sup>

Notice in Exodus 12:8,14-15, at the first Passover, the strict ordinances to remove leaven from their houses or be "*cut off from Israel.*"! The first use of unleavened bread in the Bible is found in Gen. 19:1-3 as Lot bakes it for his two angelic visitors. Maybe leavened bread would be inappropriate to serve to angels. These are just a couple early OT examples. (10)

In the NT, we also find leaven mentioned in an unappealing light. In Matt. 16:12 ( and par – Mark 8:15 ), using leaven to warn of the errant doctrinal teaching of the Jewish leaders, and Paul uses it in I Cor. 5:6 and Gal. 5:19 in a similar sense meaning something evil or bad.

Gaebelein again comments:

"It is then evident in Scripture language that leaven never means anything good [ and ] always stands for evil and corruption. It is impossible that it should mean only once something good and that the Lord, without further comment, should use it here as a type of the gospel."<sup>21</sup>

Boice continues his earlier quote, now about the Parable of the Leaven, which he calls yeast; "The yeast would represent the same thing as the birds do in verse 32. The Parable of the Yeast would just add the thought that the presence of evil is pervasive. In nearly all the cases in the OT ( and in Jewish life today ) yeast is a symbol of evil. In the sacrificial laws of Israel it was excluded from every offering to the Lord made by fire. At the time of the feast of unleavened bread, every faithful Jew was to scour his home for any trace of yeast and get rid

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<sup>19</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come, Zondervan, 1964, pg. 148

<sup>20</sup> Simon Kistemaker, The Parables of Jesus, Baker Books, 1980, p. 49

<sup>21</sup> Gaebelein, OP CIT, pg. 289

of it. That is done today by orthodox Jews and symbolizes for them, as it did earlier, the putting away of sin. Jesus spoke of the leaven ( or yeast ) of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and Herod, in each case meaning their evil influence ( Matt. 16:12; Mark 8:15 ). Paulk described deviation from the truth of the gospel as Satan's persuasion, adding that believers should be beware since, "a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough" ( Gal. 5:9; cf., I Cor. 5:6 ). Some have argued that yeast is not always a symbol of evil. Sometimes it is simply yeast. But when it has a symbolic meaning it is nearly always used of something evil rather than something good. It is difficult to see how an important and thoroughly understood symbol of evil could be used by Jesus to represent the exact opposite, namely, the blessed impact of His gospel on the world.

Finally, it is significant that these two parables are bracketed by that of the devil's work in sowing tares among the wheat ( vv. 24-30 ), and Christ's explanation of that parable ( vv. 36-43 ). This structure suggests they should not be taken as teaching something entirely different from the parable of the tares, but as expanding it."<sup>22</sup>

Take note here of the contrast between a non-dispensational theologian and a dispensational one. First Simon Kistemaker;

"Jesus' intention is not to call leaven something evil. He uses the concept of leaven because of its hidden power. Yeast and leaven cause the dough to rise by permeating the whole batch. The yeast or leaven, after it was mixed in with the flour, could not be found anymore. It was hidden and invisible."

Then Kistemaker adds, on pg. 50;

"The point of the parable is that the yeast, once added to the flour, permeates the entire batch of dough until every particle is affected. The yeast is hidden from sight, and yet its effect is visible to all. That is how the kingdom of God demonstrates its power and presence in today's world."<sup>23</sup>

My main comment about Kistemaker's statement is that exactly how does He know how Jesus intended to apply leaven? The context of it as an evil influence in the previous parables speaks of evil infiltrating the good.

It is interesting to me that John MacArthur, in his study Bible and in his commentary on Matthew takes this same position, and he is dispensational.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum makes a more sensible comment;

"The fifth parable ( MT 13:33 ), the Parable of the Leaven, teaches that the Mystery Kingdom will be marked by inward doctrinal corruption. Frequently, a woman is used symbolically as a symbol of a false religious system resulting in spiritual fornication ( Rev. 2:20; 17:1-18 ). Whenever the word leaven is used symbolically, it is always a symbol of sin ( I Cor. 5:6-8 ) and frequently the specific sin of false doctrine ( MT 16:6, 11-12 ). The three measures of meal in which the leaven is hidden points to the fact that Christendom develops into three main divisions: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. All three, to a greater or lesser degree will have false doctrine."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> OP Cit, Boice, p. 27

<sup>23</sup> Kistemaker, pg. 49-50

<sup>24</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Israelology, Ariel Press, 2022, pg. 556

The “three measures of meal” ( fine flour ) is not representing corrupted humanity. It comes for “the wheat” as mentioned in the second parable ( its proximity to that parable may imply that ). Tares or weeds could never produce fine flour. In Genesis 18:6-9, Abraham fed the Lord and 2 angels 3 measures of meal and a tender calf. This 3 measures or 3/10ths an ephah ( in unleavened bread ) appears also in a good light in Numbers 15:9,28:12,20,28; 29:3,9,14 and by Gideon in Judges 6:18,19; and by Hannah in I Sam. 1:24; and in Ezekiel 45:24; 46:5,7,11. These passages are all without leaven.

Gaebelein says flat out, “It is all folly to twist Scripture language around, and make three measures of meal mean corruption, when it always denotes purity.”<sup>25</sup>

Charles Hodge, takes a different viewpoint, Hodge’s Postmillennialism is revealed in that he believes this “Israel-Church-Kingdom” “is the leaven by which it is ultimately pervaded.” This entity is the means by which the world will be eventually converted, and the Millennium brought in.”<sup>26</sup> ( that is, The Kingdom, by which he means the church )

Regarding the woman, the one mixing the leaven into the flour in our parable, A.W. Pink’s comments are helpful. He makes mention of the fact that, in this verse, “she took and hid” the leaven in the flour “till it was leavened.” Pink comments;

“Is this the way in which servants of God preach His gospel? Is the evangel something to be whispered in secret? Does God bid His servants act stealthily? No, the Lord has said to them, “What I tell you in darkness, that speak in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetop ( MT 11:27 ).”<sup>27</sup>

⑫

He believes, in this parable, the woman ( who he thinks represents the Papacy or other corruptors of truth ) to be acting deceitfully and dishonestly by introducing a corrupt influence into the flour; therefore the leaven symbolizes the corrupting of God’s truth by the introduction of evil doctrine ( cf. MT 16:12 ).

Like Ada Habershon earlier in our lesson, Pink also summarizes the first 4 parables of Matthew 13;

“What is in view in the first 4 parables is the sphere of human responsibility, and hence, it is a picture of failure that is presented to us. In the first, only one of the four castings of the good Seed yields any fruit. In the second, the crop as a whole is spoiled by the mingling of the tares among the wheat. In the third, the little mustard-seed develops into a great tree, whose branches afford shelter for the agents of Satan. In the fourth, the three measures of meal are, ultimately, completely corrupted by means of the leaven surreptitiously introduced into them.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gaebelein, OP CIT pg. 290

<sup>26</sup> Fruchtenbaum, IBID, p. 39

<sup>27</sup> A.W. Pink, The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13, RST, ND, pp 50-51

<sup>28</sup> Cited in The Coming Kingdom, pg. 124

So, as we observe the meaning so far of the first 4 Kingdom Parables, it should be becoming apparent that Jesus' teaching here, rather than depicting the kingdom becoming an immediate reality as His time on earth drew near to a close of His first advent, something else is afoot as a result of Israel's rejection of Him as their king. It is not that Israel has been completely forsaken, but that before the kingdom is established, a time period, called the interregnum, that will include both good and evil trying to usurp that goodness, intervening until the kingdom does arrive.

In our next lesson, we will move temporarily out of Matthew 13 to look at a parable in Luke 19 that clearly depicts this delay and the reasons for it in parabolic form.

To close out this lesson, here is Michael Vlach's take on it;

"Matthew 13 reveals important new truths about the kingdom in the aftermath of the Israel's rejection of Jesus. The kingdom will not be established with Jesus' first coming. There must be an intervening age between His first and second comings and then the kingdom will be established. Yet this period between the two comings is related to the kingdom program. There exists a growing nucleus of people called "sons of the kingdom" who have believed the "word of the kingdom." But the kingdom itself will not be established until the second coming of Jesus. Later, Matthew 19:28 & 25:31 link Jesus' kingdom reign with the second coming, the transformation of the earth, and coming judgment. So, even after Matthew 13 the kingdom is still presented as future and earthly by Jesus.

Two extremes must be avoided. First, it is wrong to deny any connection between the kingdom and the present age. The kingdom program is related to the present age I regard to the message of the kingdom and the growth of kingdom citizens. Second, it is incorrect to hold the kingdom of reign itself has been established in this age. That will occur at Jesus' second coming."<sup>29</sup>

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## Answers to Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God in the Bible – Appendix Part III

Continuing from where we left off in the last lesson – the 5 remarks about the inter-advent period per Andrew Woods.

I am starting these 5 remarks here, but will not get all 5 done this lesson. Recall that this interim age was set to start as Jesus ascended in Acts 1. Woods comments about this age in the following quotation;

"In sum, first-century Israel's rejection of the kingdom offer has led to a genuine new age of time between Christ's two advents. This intervening age is something that was never before disclosed up until Christ's teaching in Matthew 13. Although this new age represents an important time period when God is clearly and authentically at work, it should not be confused with the Davidic Kingdom. Its source is Christ's present session at the Father's right

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<sup>29</sup> Michael Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, Lampion House, 2020, p. 332

hand where He functions in His role as Melchizedekian priest ( Heb. 7:1-3 ) rather than as Davidic King.”<sup>30</sup>

I am using Andrew Woods, sub-titles here, my own words, and a few of his.

## 1. An Authentic Age

The postponement of the kingdom was not known or expected by Israel. It wasn't prophesied in the OT or in any Psalm. A gap between Jesus 1<sup>st</sup> advent and second was just not expected. Jesu, along with John the Baptist and the disciples, prior to Matthew 12, were announcing “*repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near.*”

After Matthew 12, in fact, many believe the Matthew 13 parables were taught that same day, as Jesus shifted His priorities and began to use His time to teach the disciples in order to prepare them for what was coming into their lives very soon. A good example of this sort of training takes place in the Upper Room in John 13-16. Israel was to receive judgment for their sinful rejection of the Messiah and King, while the disciples were learning useful preparatory truths, which included the explanations of the parables ( all 8 of them according to Mark 4:34 ), which the general population was not receiving – cf. Matt. 13:10-17.

In the parable of the Ten Minas ( Luke 19 ), notice v. 11, which we've already looked at as an overview in lesson 1 ( but we will look at it in more detail in our next lesson ), proceeds to tell the crowds the story about to unfold in the Kingdom Parables. “This particular parable was given to dispel the notion of the crowds that the kingdom was still imminently to appear; and to prepare them for the start of a mystery age involving the kingdom's lengthy postponement.”<sup>31</sup>

⑭

The arrival of this kingdom would coincide with Jesus' return, and His disciples would be rewarded when this kingdom would be established. The rewards would be based on their faithfulness to dispense and employ the resources God had entrusted to them during the inter-advent age which was “the kingdom postponed.”

This parable makes no sense if the parable was not postponed, and its coming preceded by a lengthy ( and up till then ) undisclosed period of time.

A.W. Pink comments;

“Because Israel rejected their King, He temporarily rejected them, and therefore the setting up of His Messianic Kingdom on this earth was postponed. The King would depart from this world and be absent for a lengthy season, before He returned again and set up His kingdom - see Luke 19:12,15.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Woods, Coming Kingdom, pg. 101

<sup>31</sup> IBID, pg. 79

<sup>32</sup> IBID, citing A.W. Pink pg. 79

## 2. An Age Caused by Israel's Unbelief

The offer of the kingdom to Israel was legitimate. God knew they would reject it, but that doesn't mean it would not happen. It was a bona fide offer. God uses the things His created people do to advance His agenda and purposes ( cf. Acts 2: 23-24; 4:27-28 ).

Lewis-Sperry Chafer talks about God's foreknowledge;  
"God not only knows beforehand the choice His creatures will make, but is Himself able to work in them to will and to do of His own good pleasure. The Scriptures present many incidents which disclose the fact that the will of God is executed by men even when they have no conscious intention to do the will of God...Was the death of Christ in danger of being abortive and all the types and prophecies respecting His death of being proved untrue until Pilate made his decision regarding that death?"<sup>33</sup>

Andrew Woods adds,  
"In other words, when Israel of its own free will rejected the kingdom offer, that decision was used by an all-powerful God to usher in the next phase of His pre-ordained plan. This plan entailed both Christ paying the sin debt of the world by dying on the cross as well as God's present work in the interim age."<sup>34</sup>

We will assess the next 3 points at the end of our next lesson.

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<sup>33</sup> IBID, citing Lewis-Sperry Chafer

<sup>34</sup> IBID, pg. 80