

Matthew 13:33-35

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-13/matthew-1333-35/>

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to leaven hidden in flour resulting in a feast's worth of bread.

The parallel Gospel account of this parable is Luke 13:20-21

After the *parable* of the mustard seed, *Jesus spoke another* (the fourth of this chapter) *parable* about *the kingdom of heaven to the crowds*.

He compares the kingdom of heaven to leaven. Leaven is a substance used in bread-making. In Jesus's day it would have most likely been yeast. When *leaven* is added to the dough, it permeates the *four* and water mixture and causes it to slowly rise. Without *leaven* the dough remains flat. *Leaven* gives the dough a new form. It allows bread to take shape. *Leaven* is the catalyst that changes the good *flour* into bread which is very good.

And it does not require much *leaven* to bring about this transformation. (For instance, modern bread recipes call for only 1 tablespoon of yeast for 6 cups of *flour* and two cups of water.) A small amount of leaven brings about this enormous change.

Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is like this leaven. In the same way that a small amount of *leaven* permeates the dough and gives it shape, so does *the kingdom of heaven* give shape and texture to society. Living out *the kingdom* principles from the heart and seeking "Dikaiousune"/harmony with God makes an incredible difference in human relationships. It moves people to seek forgiveness from their brothers (Matthew 5:23-24). It causes people to go the extra mile (Matthew 5:41). It empowers people to pray for and even seek what is best for their enemies (Matthew 5:44). Like salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16), these *kingdom* actions *leaven* relationships and elevate society.

But there is more to this *parable* than the simple leavening of *flour*. *Jesus* elaborates that *the kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened*. It is interesting that *Jesus* mentions that it is a woman who does this. In the Jewish culture of the day, women did not enjoy the same status as men. Women were often overlooked or even looked down upon by men. In using *a woman* in this *parable* about *the kingdom of heaven* *Jesus* is elevating women (and others on the fringes of society) and He may be suggesting how anyone can do great things in *the kingdom*.

The third remarkable element of this parable is the *three pecks of flour*. A peck is an English unit of measure that is equivalent of 2 gallons in volume. The Greek word used by Matthew was "saton." It was a Greek translation of a Hebrew word "Sehaw." Both words are a dry unit of measure equivalent to 1/3 an ephah or three gallons in volume. Using modern bread recipes, *three satons of flour* could make over fifty loaves of bread! *Jesus* is describing *a woman* who is

making enough bread to feed scores of people. *The kingdom of heaven is also like this woman whose leavening of flour blesses many, many people.*

After this *parable*, Matthew comments that *Jesus spoke all these things to the crowds* of people by means of *parables*. Moreover, Matthew points out that *Jesus did not speak to them without a parable*. Christ had already explained to His disciples why He spoke to the crowds in parables (Matthew 13:10-17). But Matthew adds that Jesus's teaching through parables was a fulfillment of another prophecy of from scripture from Psalm 78.

This is the fourteenth time Matthew has explicitly pointed out how *Jesus* fulfilled Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. (The previous thirteen are found in Matthew 1:22-23, 2:5-6, 2:15, 2:16-18, 2:23, 3:1-3, 4:4-6, 4:13-16, 8:17, 10:35-36, 11:10, 12:17-21, and Matthew 13:14-15. This list does not include the three additional Messianic prophecies that *Jesus* alluded to in Matthew 11:5-6).

The prophecy Matthew cites comes from the second verse of Psalm 78.

*I will open My mouth in parables;
I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world*

This Messianic prophecy in Psalm 78 is attributed to Asaph. Asaph was a Levite and became the chief musician of the tabernacle in King David's reign (1 Chronicles 16:4-7). Twelve psalms are attributed to Asaph (Psalm 50, 73-83). It is believed that they were either written by him or by "his sons"—musicians who were a part of his school or tradition.

During the exile and reconstruction period temple musicians referred to themselves as "sons of Asaph" (Ezra 2:41; Nehemiah 7:44; 11:22-24). Asaph was not only regarded as a skilled and influential musician, but also a prophet. Apparently, during the national revival King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to sing some of the Psalms attributed to Asaph (2 Chronicles 29:30).

It is not unreasonable to suppose these Levites when they sang and worshipped God they sang Psalm 78.

Psalm 78 is a reminder of God's faithfulness from the very beginning. It focuses on the events of the Exodus and God's miraculous deliverance of His people from slavery in Egypt. It exhorts, Israel to "not forget the works of God" (Psalm 78:7) nor be like the "sons of Ephraim" who "did not keep the covenant of God;" "refused to walk in His Law;" "forgot His deeds and miracles that He had shown them" (Psalm 78:9-11).

Biblical Text

He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened. All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

**“I will open My mouth in parables;
I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.”**