

Luke 13:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Analysis

It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. This second kingdom parable parallels the mustard seed but emphasizes internal transformation rather than external growth. "Leaven" (ζύμη, zymē, yeast) was a small amount of fermented dough saved from previous baking, mixed into new dough to cause rising. The verb "hid" (ἐνέκρυψεν, enekrypsen) literally means concealed or buried—the woman thoroughly mixed yeast throughout the dough until invisible.

The phrase "three measures of meal" (ἀλεύρου σάτα τρία, aleourou sata tria) represents an enormous quantity—approximately 50 pounds of flour, enough to feed over 100 people. This alludes to Sarah preparing bread for angelic visitors (Genesis 18:6) and Hannah's thanksgiving offering (1 Samuel 1:24). The massive amount emphasizes the kingdom's extensive reach—not a small, exclusive movement but a transforming force affecting all creation.

The phrase "till the whole was leavened" (ἔως οὗ ἐζυμώθη ὅλον, heōs hou ezymōthē holon) describes complete permeation. The kingdom works invisibly but irresistibly, transforming from within. Unlike violent political upheaval, God's kingdom spreads through quiet, organic influence—changing hearts, families, communities, cultures. The parable promises ultimate success: the gospel will leaven the whole lump, fulfilling God's purpose to fill the earth with His glory (Habakkuk 2:14).

Historical Context

In Scripture, leaven usually symbolizes sin or corruption (Exodus 12:15, Matthew 16:6, 1 Corinthians 5:6-8), making Jesus' positive use here striking and deliberate. He redeems the metaphor, showing that kingdom influence, though starting small and hidden, transforms everything it touches. First-century bread-making was daily work; every Jewish woman understood the leavening process. Jesus' choice of a female protagonist (after the mustard seed's male planter) demonstrates the kingdom's inclusivity—both men and women participate in kingdom work. The parable encourages patient faith: transformation takes time but is inevitable once the leaven is introduced.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does the leaven parable illustrate the kingdom's invisible but irresistible transforming power?
2. What does the woman's role in this parable teach about gender inclusivity in kingdom work?
3. How should this parable shape Christian expectations about cultural transformation versus political revolution?

Interlinear Text

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|---------|----------|--------|-------|---------|--------------|-----------|-------|
| όμοία | ἐστὶν | ζύμη | οὗ | λαβοῦσα | γυνὴ | ἐνέκρυψεν | εἰς |
| like | It is | leaven | which | took | a woman | and hid | in |
| G3664 | G2076 | G2219 | G3739 | G2983 | G1135 | G1470 | G1519 |
| ἀλεύρου | σάτα | τρία | ἕως | οὗ | ἐζυμώθη | ὅλον | |
| of meal | measures | three | till | which | was leavened | the whole | |
| G224 | G4568 | G5140 | G2193 | G3739 | G2220 | G3650 | |

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 13:33 (Parallel theme): Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

1 Corinthians 5:6 (Parallel theme): Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

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