

Yeast is one of the scripture's clearest symbols. Indeed, Jesus himself used yeast to teach his disciples that they were to understand the world symbolically, not always literally. Recall the moment when Jesus warned the disciples to beware the yeast of the religious leaders. The disciples, thinking literally, assumed Jesus was chastising them for forgetting bread. No, Jesus remonstrated, he had just fed five thousand and then four thousand more from his own bread. Jesus then repeated to beware the religious leaders' yeast, forcing the disciples to draw their own correct conclusion that Jesus had construed yeast symbolically for the infection of the religious leaders' false teaching.



The lesson is not just that Jesus frequently taught indirectly, parabolically, using parables and symbolism, to disguise his meaning from those who would reject it anyway. It's not just that Jesus may have been prolonging his time to preach and teach, by not confronting the religious leaders directly until his time had come for crucifixion. The lesson may be that the world itself is symbolic. We do not understand the world unless and until we see its relationships among common forms. Understanding is always symbolic, dependent on the relationship of symbols to events and conditions. The more ready we are to see the richness and depth of the world's symbols, the better we understand it, and the better we understand Jesus.

So yes, yeast helps to make bread by spreading through the flour, oil, and water until the dough rises. That's how a materialist would see yeast, and that's how the disciples saw it. But broadly, yeast shows the world's propensity to turn a pinch of poison into a thoroughgoing infection, whether the subject is bread, the human body, religious instruction, or any other item, entity, or situation. Yeast shows that you can't make holiness with a single confession or worship service. You must instead at all times guard the body, discerning and rejecting the infection. The world is symbolic, and Jesus consummated its symbolism.