

The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13

Lesson 4 – The Parable of the Wheat and Tares

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

March 24, 2024

Special Introduction / Why Kingdom Parables?

At the start of lesson 3, I asked a question of the class: “How many feel that the 2 introductory lessons were enough to help pay the foundation for our study of these Kingdom parables?” Since the response was weaker than I expected, so I want to ensure that everyone at least has a basic understanding of 1) What the Kingdom is and how it relates to these Matthew 13 (and some other) parables; 2) Why the Kingdom did not immediately start in the time of the Gospels; and 3) Most significantly, what age are these parables referring to and why. Some of the answers are imbedded in the lessons themselves of course, and I have already started adding an appendix to each lesson, starting with the last lesson, which I am hoping will enlighten us all as to the concept of the Kingdom of God in the Bible overall. So, I will now add a brief Special Introduction to each lesson starting with this lesson. I am hoping this will help us to comprehend the aspects of how these parables illustrate the Interregnum or Inter-advent period, which is what they are about.

①

So, what is the Interregnum or Inter-advent period? It is the gap between Christ’s ascension in Acts 1 and His eventual return in Revelation 19 (and also predicted in many OT and NT prophecies. It is the time period we ourselves now find ourselves living in. In this interregnum, Christ is not physically on earth now, but He resides in heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father on the Father’s throne (cf. Rev. 3:21) in what theologians call “His Session.” He is not, despite views to the contrary, functioning as King, but as the Book of Hebrews describes in great detail, as our High Priest of the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 4:14-5:10). He will not reign as King on David’s throne (cf. Luke 1:30-33; Jer. 3:17) until He returns (Rev. 19) in Jerusalem over the entire world, and will have His disciples (and others NT / OT) as co-regents over cities, nations, etc.

But why a gap that has lasted so long and is still not ended? Israel was offered the Kingdom – and they understood that the Kingdom offered was the same Kingdom prophesied by almost every OT prophet as the Millennial / Mediatorial / Messianic Kingdom, yet the offer was contingent on Israel’s acceptance of Jesus as their Messiah and King. But, in Matthew 12:22-45, Israel’s leaders rejected Christ completely.

The kingdom was cancelled for Israel at that point, but not forever. Instead, it was set aside, postponed and will be given to a future generation of Israel who will (as a result of the pressure of the Tribulation period (the time of Jacob’s Trouble per

Jer. 30:7), call out for their Messiah to save them (as they cried out in the book of Exodus) – cf. Matt. 23:37-39.

When they cry out, God the Father will act and will send Jesus back to earth to stop the destruction of the Tribulation, and kill the armies amassed against Jerusalem, judge the Sheep and Goats (Matt. 25: 31-46) and finally set up the Millennial Kingdom over the whole world, with Israel as His main people.

Introductory Remarks

This 2nd Matthew 13 parable, while not as well known as the first one, also presents us with an agricultural motif – that of planting seeds which symbolizes the sowing of lives, in this case, again, some to salvation, and some to unbelief. However, differing from the Parable of the Soils, here we have two types of seeds, and two sowers.

Here in this parable, we encounter for the first time, the phrase, *“The Kingdom of heaven may be compared to...”*. Other important phrases not found in the first parable are also present in this one – there *are “other men”* involved in the sowing of the ‘good’ seed; an enemy sowing weeds (tares or darnel) among the *“wheat.”* The sower, the master, decides to let both grow together so that the good plants are not at risk of accidental removal while getting rid of the weeds before it is naturally obvious which is which. Identification of the weeds vs the wheat will be much easier to do at harvest time.

②

In Jesus’ explanation of this parable to His disciples (in the house away from the crowds), He tells us who the sower is – it is the Son of Man. In the first parable, it may also be Christ, but there is no warrant within that first parable to assert that. I was surprised by how many commentators insisted that it was Him. We are also told here that *“the field is the world,”* and *“the enemy who sowed the weeds is the devil.”* Plus, *“the harvest is the end of the age,”* and *the reapers are the angels.”* I think it is an important distinction to see that the phrase is *“the end of the age”* and not the “end of the world” as some translations say.

There is a lot more to deal with in this parable than in the first one. Andrew Woods comments,

“[This] parable, like all of the Matthew 13 parables, should not be understood as communicating the present manifestation of the kingdom. The presence of the tares, or unbelievers, continuously co-existing among the wheat, or believers until the end of the present age is enough to dispel the notion that the present age represents the kingdom.”¹

Instead, it is describing the time leading up to the kingdom, from the present forward until Christ’s return. Whereas the Parable of the Soils described for us the measure of success or failure the gospel would receive among the Gentiles and Jews, this second parable describes the nature of the opposition to the Gospel

¹ Andrew Woods, *The Coming Kingdom*, Grace Gospel Press, 2016, pg. 113

progress among the nations. It interestingly finds its prophetic nature being fulfilled in Revelation 14:14-20. It is also noteworthy that by the end of the age, the Tares will be of sufficient quantity that they would need to be bound in bundles.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum comments;

“The second parable (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43), the Parable of the Tares, teaches that the true sowing of the first parable will be imitated by a false countersowing and so there will be side-by-side development as a result of the two sowings. Only the judgment at the end of the Mystery Kingdom Age will separate the two with the good brought into the Messianic Kingdom and the bad excluded. This is the same as the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31-46.”²

Matthew 13:24-30 The Parable Itself

v. 24 – The simple initial sentence appears to indicate that Jesus has gone outside the house – cf. 13:1, 13:36 again to continue preaching to the crowds in parables. We have already see the reason He has been doing this in Matt. 13:11-17.

This parable is an explanation of Christendom (not necessarily the church, because other religions will also be within this time period that play a dominating role, such as Islam) over almost 20 centuries to our present day. True believers co-existing alongside unbelievers side by side, some masquerading as believers. It starts off with “*A man sowed good seed in his field...*” in a similar way to the first parable, “*A sower went out to sow.*” In both parables, the seed is not the problem, it is described as “*good seed.*” (3)

In v. 25, a new problem is inserted. Now, an enemy sows weed seeds, while the first sower’s men are sleeping. So right on the heels of the planting of the ‘good seed’ (now at night), the enemy sows tares or darnel – both being plants that look a lot like wheat as they grow. This nighttime sowing sounds like Satan’s work, and in v. 39 we learn that it is in fact, his work.

The sleeping of the good seed sower’s men seems to represent an unwatchful condition that seems ever-present in NT times and the NT warns us of that in verses like I Pet. 5:8-9.

We should not think that Satan is stupid either. Rather than plant thistles or some other obvious weed like milkweed, the weeds he plants mimic the wheat (a counterfeit) . Although there are subtle tell-tale differences between the darnel/tares and wheat as they grow, at harvest the head (grain) on wheat is golden, but the darnel grain is black. Note vv. 26-28a. The servants notice the discrepancy once the growing begins and ask the master of the house, the sower if he wants them to rip out the weeds? He replies “*An enemy has done this.*” In other

² Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, Israelology, Ariel Ministries, 1992 / 2022 Revised, pg. 556

words, this is not happenstance, it has been engineered. So the servants ask then (v. 28b), and the master replies in vv. 29-30. The tares will grow along with the wheat.

Andrew Woods brings up an excellent point;

“How can such activity be confused with the kingdom since the kingdom represents a time in history when Satan will be bound and thus inactive (Rev. 20:1-3)?”³

A.W. Pink, cited in “The Coming Kingdom,” says helpfully,

“But Christ here explicitly declared that the wheat and the tares should “grow together until the harvest,” which He defined as “the end of the age.” He gave no hint that the “tares” would gradually die out, or that they would decrease in numbers; but announced that, at the end, they would be found in such quantity as to need binding in bundles.”⁴

So the weeds are allowed to remain growing alongside the wheat so that some of the good crop is not rooted up along with the weeds accidentally. In fact, in this parable, the weeds actually dominate the story, and any gardeners knows that weeds can grow anywhere even in bad soil or stony ground. These seeds will grow.

So the intention of the sower/master is to tell the reapers – those who will harvest the crop – to gather the weeds first, bind them, and bundle them, then burn them. Then store the wheat in the barn. So there will be plenty of weeds, enough to require collection and bundling of them, which will be dealt with separately and first, and a crop large enough to store in the barn.

④

Andrew Woods in a lesson on his You Tube presentations, comments, “In the coming age, it will be difficult to distinguish between the saved and unsaved within professing Christendom.”⁵

In a practical comparison of what is being said in this parable here, and in this age we live in, we see this happening in the Church at large (and in local churches) that there will be believers and unbelievers (who are not known to be unbelievers because they act as believers) fellowshipping together. Even within Jesus’ group of disciples (not the church but who will form and build the first church in the book of Acts), there is an unbeliever in their midst who goes for months being an unbeliever and is unsuspected (cf. Matt. 26:20-22).

Interlude Verses 34-35 – Two Short Parables

Before Christ explains this parable, (and He is asked to explain it), He gives 2 short parables between this one and the explanation. We will look at these 2 parables in a separate lesson.

³ Woods, The Coming Kingdom, pg. 114

⁴ IBID, A.W. Pink, pg. 113

⁵ Andy Woods, The Coming Kingdom, YouTube Lesson # 18 at 28:59 time mark, accessed March 6, 2024

They are The Parable of the Mustard Seed (vv. 31-32) and The Parable of the Leaven (v. 33); then at vv. 34-35, Matthew comments that Jesus taught now only in parables and cites Ps. 78:2, a sort of parallel to 13:14-15 (Isaiah 6:9-10).

The Explanation vv. 36-43

v. 36 – Once again, Jesus leaves the crowd and enters “the house” where His disciples ask Him to “explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” Although He gave 2 short parables before this (which we’ve just mentioned), the one the disciples want explained is this one. Note, even this, by how they request this they see the weeds as the dominant aspect of this parable.

In vv. 37-42, Jesus answers their question.

- v. 37 – The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man
- v. 38a – the field is the world (not the church) and the good seed is “the sons of the kingdom”
- v. 39a – The weeds are the sons of the evil one
- v. 39b – the Harvest is at the end of the age, not at the end of the world
- v. 39c – the harvesters are the angels – cf. Rev. 14:14-20

So, in these explanatory verses, Jesus gives the key to the symbolism of the actual parable.

Regarding verse 38, I wanted to pause here and reflect on the wording here. The way this verse reads, someone might read 38a and think that this must be saying that the interregnum is the Kingdom, because the “sons of the kingdom” are here. (5) But that is not the case. What his verse explains is that this is what these “*sons*” will experience in the mystery age, when the kingdom is not yet here. This is not the kingdom, but vv. 39-40 then draw our attention to the end of the interregnum when the kingdom will arrive.

In fact, Paul, in Galatians 4:4-7, (especially v. 7) defines for us what a “son” is in relation to God and His kingdom. If you and I are redeemed are sons or daughters, then we are heirs too. We are not now in the kingdom, because it is not here yet, but we will inherit it when it arrives. Those identified in v. 38b as “*sons of the evil one*” – which means Satan – will not inherit the kingdom, but their end is described in vv. 39-42, and note v. 43, “then”, at the end of the age, this is their fate, when the kingdom does finally come.

Then, still talking about this parable, Jesus describes prophetically how the end of the age will come for those described in the parable. In Rev. 14:14-20, we see (especially in vv. 17-20), the harvest of the wicked (i.e., the weeds), but here, the symbolism is a winepress, not fire (not yet) and the spilling of blood is prominent, yet here in Matthew 13, the angels sent by the Son of Man gather – all those who are sinners and law-breakers and they are thrown into the fiery furnace. Matthew 42b adds, “*in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*”.⁶

⁶ Other verses that have this same imagery are: Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; LK 13:28; 13:42 & 13:50

This parable shows the connection between the kingdom and this present age. Michael Vlach comments;

“The parable of the wheat and tares shows connections between the kingdom and this present age. First, there are people called “sons of the kingdom.” They have believed in King Jesus and are related to His kingdom. Second, an era will exist in which the sons of the kingdom will co-exist alongside the sons of the evil one in this world before the establishment of Jesus’ kingdom. During this period there will be no attempt to forcibly remove unbelievers. Third, the kingdom comes with the second coming of Jesus when unbelievers will be removed from His kingdom. Kummel is correct that with this parable “the emphasis is not on the growth of the Kingdom of God in the present, but on the separation taking place at the judgment, at the coming of the Kingdom of God.”⁷

Arno Gaebelein also sees three great facts this parable teaches;

- The enemy, the devil, began his work at the beginning of the age
- The age is mixed, good and evil growing together. This condition will not be changed during this time period
- The mixed condition will cease with the completion of the age. The sons of the Kingdom will inherit the Kingdom. The darnel, after being bundled up are burned with fire.⁸

In the case of the sentence in v. 42b, “In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” this is a curse against those who have rejected Christ, who will end up in outer darkness, in Hell. In each case, it seems to be a warning against Israel – those who refuse to accept Christ as their Messiah and King. It is designed to demonstrate a condition of great sorrow or remorse, and intense pain that will never end, and utter despair. ⁶

So, this parable, which begins in the present of the start of massive evangelism once Jesus ascends to heaven, ends at the end of the age as God (Christ) begins to gather together those who will be judged. This will begin the wrapping up of the judgments of Revelation as the Tribulation reaches its 7 year terminus. It will include the multitude coming out of the Great Tribulation to be judged according to the evidence of faith or lack of it in Christ (Matt. 25:31-46) before anyone will enter the Messianic Kingdom- note v. 34 and v. 46, and the severe contrast, and the duration of each outcome is eternal.

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

Why are the Kingdom Parables Called “Kingdom Parables”

Jim Weller asked me this question. Israel had a unique and predicted offer to accept the kingdom being offered to them in the early stages of the Synoptic

⁷ Michael Vlach, He Will reign Forever, Lampion House, 2020, pg. 330

⁸ Arno Gaebelein, The Gospel of Matthew, Loizeaux Brothers, 1961, Pg. 281

Gospels (Matthew – Mark – Luke). This kingdom was prophesied throughout the OT. We looked at this at the end of our last lesson. The concepts of the Universal Kingdom (always there – God directly ruling) and the Theocratic Kingdom – where God has a Theocratic human king or Administrator in charge of the world on God’s behalf. Adam was that first Theocratic king, so this ‘kingdom’ began as Adam was created (and Eve). We don’t know how long it lasted until Adam sinned and God removed him from that position.

Andrew Woods explains:

“Satan’s success in inciting this rebellion (in Eden) effectively removed the office of Theocratic Administrator from the earth, as Satan at that point became ruler of the world (LK 4:5-8; JN 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; I JN 5:19). What then is the storyline of the Bible? It is how this office is restored through the Messianic Kingdom. Just as God the Father originally intended to indirectly govern the physical world through the first Adam, He will one day govern the world through the last Adam or God the Son.

The restoration of the physical kingdom or office of Theocratic Administrator as the dominant theme of the Bible has been recognized by numerous theologians. Note Charles’ Ryrie’s explanation;

“Why is an earthly kingdom necessary? Did He not receive His inheritance when He was raised and exalted in heaven? Is not His present rule His inheritance? Because He must be triumphant in the same arena where He was seemingly defeated. His rejection by the rulers of his world was on the earth (I Cor. 2:8). His exaltation must also be on this earth, And so it shall be when He comes again to rule this world in righteousness. He has waited long for His inheritance; soon He shall receive it.”⁹

7

So what takes place in Matthew 12 (& John 11) and at Calvary is the rejection of the King and thus the kingdom by Israel. This suspends or postpones the kingdom offered to that generation of Israel, until the final generation of Israel repents and calls on Christ to be their King. (cf. Matt. 23:39). There are also a couple verses in the OT that give us some explanation of why Christ returns when He does – cf. Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11; and in the NT, Acts 15:13. Israel has no Davidic King on the throne of David from Zedekiah (586 BC) till now.

So, as Israel rejects her King and Messiah, and as Christ dies, is resurrected and ascends, the Kingdom does not start. The question of the disciples in Acts 1:6 is answered by Jesus in vv. 7-8. This passage sets the tone of what age is about to commence. The gap (interregnum) is not the Kingdom, and the church which begins in Acts 2 is not the Kingdom, and does not replace Israel, although the church is extant throughout most of the interregnum. Christ ascended 40 days after His resurrection, then Pentecost (the birth of the church in Acts 2) came. And the church will be removed at the Rapture prior to the 7 year Tribulation which precedes Christ’s return in Revelation 19. Upon His return He will judge the nations (Matt. 25:31-46), then setup His Millennial (Mediatorial / Messianic) Kingdom, and will rule from the world from David’s throne in Jerusalem.

⁹ Woods, The Coming Kingdom, pg. 9

So, what the Kingdom Parables are about is that they describe the inter-advent period or age that will begin once Jesus ascends to heaven. Again, Andrew Woods is helpful;

“Due to Israel’s rejection of the kingdom offer, resulting in the messianic kingdom’s postponement, Christ began to explain the spiritual conditions that would prevail during the kingdom’s absence. This interim program includes His revelation of the Kingdom mysteries (Matt. 13) and the church (Matt. 16:18). Before describing these spiritual realities, five preliminary remarks must be made about this new interim age.”¹⁰

I will begin to describe these 5 remarks starting in the appendix in the next lesson.

¹⁰ IBID, pg. 78