

# The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13

## Lesson # 8 – The Parable of the Pearl of Great Value

### Matthew 13:45-46

February 2, 2025

#### Special Introduction

The Church is such a big part of the New Testament and our world, but as we've looked at these Kingdom Parables, Israel has been the main focus of the Kingdom delayed and the Kingdom promised. We have discussed during some of our lessons how the Church is a mystery as far as OT prophecy goes ( cf. Eph. 3:3-6; Col.1:25 ). So is the gap we've been calling the Interregnum, that began at Jesus' ascension and will come to a close at Christ's second coming. Although the Interregnum ( Mystery kingdom / inter-advent period, Christendom ) is the dominating aspect of history thus far ( "the times of the Gentiles ). The Church is the dominating feature of the early stages of the Interregnum until about the later half of the 1800's. Since then, with the effect of Darwin's Theory, faster and faster travel per ( Dan. 12:4 ), including international travel; Christianity has been accosted by liberalism, post-modernism, and a tidal wave of world religions, challenging the exclusivism of Christ – especially in the last 50 years, which has affected the influence of the Church in societies all over the world. And in that last 50 years, the rise to world dominance of Islam has been terrifying. The evidence of the predicted Satanic pervasive evil influence during this history has been quite obvious and is increasing, just as the first 4 parables have been prophesying. (1)

At the start of this Interregnum stands the cross and tomb, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and at the end stands His glorious return to judge the wicked and set up His Messianic Kingdom over the whole world, with Israel at the center, visibly reigning from David's throne from Jerusalem. His Word will flow outward from Jerusalem to every place on earth for 1,000 literal years., then seamlessly transitioning into the eternal state as the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven to earth, and all of God's people will dwell with Him in a glorious, timeless existence of eternal peace, safety and comfort.

Clarence Johnson says the following regarding the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Value;

"Jesus told the parables of the Hidden Treasure and pearl of great price only to His disciples. In contrast to the mixed crowd, He spoke to the disciples as those who had appropriately received the Word. The theme of His teaching then shifted from obstacles of the Kingdom to the precious value of the Kingdom."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clarence Johnson; in Thy Kingdom Come, Jim Showers & Chris Katulka, ( Gen. Editors ); FOI, 2019; Pg. 95

## Introductory Remarks

Up to now, you have probably noticed that the preceding parables have mostly been focussed on Israel, but all have had the basic concept of a delayed kingdom, as well as describing what will be taking place from this point until the kingdom finally arrives. This means there will be an interregnum before the Millennial Kingdom, and this period ( which we now live in ) we now know has lasted about 2,000 years and counting. It will be ( and has been ) a time of seeds being planted, growth, salvation, and fruit but also, attempts by Satan to inject evil into the mix in an attempt to overthrow God's plans and purpose as outlined by these parables.

As with other kingdom parables, the true interpretation of these last 4 is vastly different from the most popular views. As we go through this lesson ( as we have with the others ), I will reveal the best view that makes much more sense hermeneutically. Since these 8 parables are a cohesive series, one can't deviate from the other 7 in thematic interpretation. I believe that I have made a supportable case that these parables, given by Christ in one day, have the characteristics of a discourse, not just a series of snippets. This means they have an underlying theme that ties them together.

While the first 4 parables demonstrated that evil will progress in this age and the one that precedes the return of Christ, and parable 5 ( Hidden Treasure ) told us that God's program for Israel and the kingdom would remain in a state of postponement until the Messianic Kingdom arrives, God is still at work in this present age and that divine work is revealed in brief in the Parable of the Pearl of Great Value. Like the Parable of the Hidden Treasure, this parable is also usually misinterpreted as being a lesson about personal salvation. It is not about that. (2)

A.W. Pink notes how this popular view is framed:

"The general conception of its meaning is this! Christianity is likened unto one who earnestly desired and sought salvation. Ultimately his efforts were rewarded by his finding Christ, the Pearl of great price. Having found Him as represented in the Gospel, the sinner sold all that he had; that is to say, he forsook all that the flesh held dear, he abandoned his worldly companions, he surrendered his will, he dedicated his life to God; and in that way, secured his salvation."<sup>2</sup>

But, in the best interpretation of this parable, the "*man*" or "*merchant*" is not a believer, He is Christ. If he is a believer rather than Christ, then this parable is teaching works salvation.

Pink points out, quite correctly, three reasons why this cannot be describing a believer "buying his salvation." Although what follows is all Pink's thinking, I have tried to modernize his wording. Any error in what follows is mine, not his.

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<sup>2</sup> A.W. Pink, cited in *The Coming Kingdom*, Andrew Woods, Pg. 130

- 1) No one seeks God, no one decides on their own to follow Christ. Luke 19:10 summarizes it, *“The Son of man is come to seek and save the lost.”* What caused any of us to seek the Lord? He sought us first; He is the Shepherd seeking His sheep! His Holy Spirit changed our hearts and gave us the gift of faith ( Eph. 2:8-9 ), so that we would respond in the positive when confronted by the Gospel.
- 2) No one could ever “sell all he has” and purchase the Pearl. The sinner has nothing to sell, and he/she has no righteousness ( cf. Rom. 3:19-20 ) and Isaiah 64:6 tells us any righteousness we think we might have is *“as filthy rags.”* He/she has no faith until God gives to him/her as a gift. The popular view turns God’s truth upside-down, for He declares that salvation is without cost and without price ( Isa. 55:1 ). Some other verses that tell us you can’t buy salvation ( or that it was purchased on our behalf ) are: Titus 3:5; I Cor. 6:11, 20; I Pet. 1:3,8-19; 3:21; Rom. 3:27; Eph. 2:4;
- 3) Like point 2 above, even if it were possible ( which it is not ) to purchase the Pearl, to think you could is blasphemous. “So you’re saying you can purchase Christ? Note Titus 3:5 and Romans 6:23. Salvation is a gift from God, not a purchase by us!<sup>3</sup> [ also notice Acts 8:18-20 / Simon Magus and his attempt to purchase the Holy Spirit’s power for his own nefarious purposes ]

We can only properly interpret this parable ( or any of the parables ) if we properly identify the principle person in it. The merchant ( man ) is Christ. You must start here to get this right.

Andrew Woods, comments to summarize Pink’s exegesis;

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“The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price refers to Christ’s death that will redeem many Gentiles and Jews throughout the mystery age. Although evil will advance throughout the mystery age, God’s redemptive program will also simultaneously advance. Through this parable, Christ taught His desire for, value of, and price He would pay for all who would come to saving faith in Christ in the present mystery age. No doubt, the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price brought much needed comfort to the disciples who were most likely beleaguered due to their discovery of the progress of evil in the new age, as had been disclosed to them in the prior parables.”<sup>4</sup>

It is incredible that the very thing that caused Jesus to teach in these parables, taken to its logical conclusion – from hate to rejection, to desire to kill Him to actually killing Jesus - is what brought home the very thing that has provided the greatest value for humanity on earth! ( cf. Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28 ).

So, how is God’s redemptive program advancing in this current mystery age? Israel is set aside temporarily ( as we’ve seen in earlier lessons and reviews of Romans 9-11<sup>5</sup> ), so what is the entity God utilizes? Of course, it’s the church. This is what Christ ( the merchant in this parable ) purchases with His blood ( I Peter 1:18-21 ).

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<sup>3</sup> IBID, pp. 131-132

<sup>4</sup> IBID, Andrew Woods, pg. 132

<sup>5</sup> I hope to present the final lesson this session as the exegesis of Romans 11:25-27, DV

While reading an excellent book on an altogether different topic from these parables, I ran across the following pertinent and connected but lengthy quote which describes, with Scripture how God's redemptive program is currently advancing, even though for Israel, things are postponed. Here is Abner Chou pointing out that the church is introduced in the NT. It was not a conception brought forth in any OT prophecies.

"New developments occur not foreseen in the OT. We can frame this by talking about what is "missing" and what is "new and added." On one hand, even though Christ has come, Israel is not restored as the OT envisioned ( cf., Isaiah 2:1-4; 11:1-9; 53-54; Amos 9:11-15 ). That part is noticeably missing, as evidenced by the disciples who wondered when Christ would restore the kingdom to Israel ( Acts 1:6 ). On the other hand, the Gospels and Acts proclaim God's salvation and hope to the Jewish people ( Acts 3:19 ). As such, the church is God's instrument for this time ( Acts 4:12; 11:26 ).

The question is whether these missing and additional pieces change the story line portrayed by the OT. The answer is arguably no. The Gospels and Acts still portray the "ending" of redemptive history consistent with what the prophets described. Luke's gospel describes that Christ's coming will fulfill the Davidic and Abrahamic covenantal promises ( Luke 1:69-73 ), including national deliverance and spiritual restoration ( Luke 1:75-79 ). Jesus' Olivet Discourse weaves a variety of OT prophecies together ( Isa. 27:13; Dan. 9:9-13; 12:1; Zech. 9:14 ) to describe a great time of tribulation for those in Jerusalem and Israel. Following this, Christ will come and usher in great deliverance ( cf. Matt. 24:29-31 ). In Acts, the church does not declare a new story line but rather they proclaim hope for Israel. The nation should repent so that Christ will return and establish the times of refreshing ( Acts 3:19-21 ), a term referring to the OT expectation of how God will set the world to rights ( Isa. 60:1-22; 65:17 ). As opposed to beginning a divergent plotline, the church participates in facilitating the same redemptive historical plan. They are the firstfruit ( Acts 2:1-4 ) who demonstrate that indeed history is in the latter days ( Acts 2:17-21; Joel 2:28-32 [ Heb. 3:1-5 ] ) and that Israel should repent in light of the coming Day of the Lord ( Joel 3:5 ). Rather than creating a new plan or plotline, the church participates deeply within it. In fact, even their commission by the Lord echoes what Isaiah proclaimed ( Acts 1:8; Isa. 49:6 )."<sup>6</sup>

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Dwight Pentecost basically agrees with Woods and Pink, and sees the treasure of the previous parable ( Hidden Treasure ) as Israel, and this one ( the Pearl ), as the church. Both become Christ's possession by His purchase on Calvary. He does, however, make a distinction, when he claims that:

"The church, like the pearl, becomes the possession of the merchantman, Christ, by purchase. The church, like the pearl, is to be formulated by gradual accretion; and the church, like the pearl, can only become His adornment by being lifted out of the place in which it was formed. This is to be related to the present age purpose, previously considered."<sup>7</sup>

It may be interesting and of some value for us to learn how a pearl is formed, and Arno Gaebelin helpfully explains it to us:

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<sup>6</sup> Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, Kregel Academic, 2018, pg. 158-159

<sup>7</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, Zondervan/Acadamie Books, 1964, pg. 149

“The pearl is taken out of the sea. Way down on the dark bottom of the ocean is the shell, the house of an animal. And in this animal, by its work, the beautiful pearl is produced. A small grain of sand, we are told, imbeds itself between the animal and the shell and creates by its presence, a wound in the side of the animal. Upon this miserable grain of sand the animal deposits a thin crust of a brilliant material. How often this is repeated no one can tell, one deposit after another is made, till at last in the side of the animal there is found a most beautiful pearl, a pearl of great price, a pearl in which the colours of the rainbow of the heavens are wonderfully blended together. It is taken up and becomes the well nigh precious jewel in the crown of some mighty monarch.

We can see at once why our Lord used the pearl as the type of the church, which He loved and gave Himself for it.”<sup>8</sup>

The pearl is formed, in a real sense, as a by-product of suffering, and out of that suffering is produced great beauty. Isn't that an awesome parallel of Calvary?

In order to even better consider this parable, now that we've basically outlined the general points – let's look at this even closer. Again, no one is more helpful than Arthur Pink looking at the mindset of the merchant. He points out 5 things of importance;

### The Merchant:

- 1) He desired this beautiful pearl ( v. 46 ). He found it and sold all He had to buy it. The pearl represents His church in its entirety and that people His church, the Lord Jesus desired. (5)
- 2) He regarded this pearl as being of “great price” or “value.”
- 3) He sold all that He had to purchase and possess it. What did it mean for Christ to sell all He had? *“He who was rich, for your sakes became poor.”* He was born in a stable and lain in a manger. Note also Phil. 2:5-8
- 4) The merchant sought *this* pearl – cf. Eph. 2:17 – The Jews were close, the Gentiles were far off.
- 5) He bought the pearl – cf. I Pet. 1:18 ( per page 2 above ). It was at the cross He bought the pearl, the price being His own precious blood ( cf. 1 Cor. 6:20 ).<sup>9</sup>

### Support from Ephesians 5:25-27

How does his passage support our thesis? This passage is about the Bride of Christ, and certainly shows another way to ascertain the value that the Pearl has to Christ. I'll quote here William Trotter;

“The Church becomes the bride of Christ by virtue of His having loved her and given Himself for her. The passage before us presents three things as to Christ and the Church. First, it is the object of His affection – an affection He has demonstrated by giving Himself for it. So inestimable was the Church in Christ's eyes, that He would purchase it at the cost, not only of

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<sup>8</sup> Arno Gaebelein, The Gospel of Matthew, Loizeaux Brothers, 1961, pg. 300

<sup>9</sup> A.W. Pink – The Prophetic Parables of Matthew 13, pp. 67-70 ( condensed )

His life, His blood but of “Himself.” “He gave Himself for it.” Secondly, when He has thus purchased the Church, He fashions it by the Word – cleansing, washing, sanctifying it, according to His own heart’s desire. Thirdly, He does this in order that He may, in the end, present the Church to Himself, without one spot or blemish to offend His eye or grieve His heart; arrayed too, in a glory suited to the place she is to fill with Himself, and answering to the depths of His own infinite, ineffable love.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in different, and more particular language, we find in Ephesians 5:25-27 another way to estimate the value of the Pearl to Christ – it is inestimable! In order to acquire it for Himself and then to present it to His Father ( cf. Jude 24; Col. 1:22 ) as His priceless, perfect, righteous Bride, Jesus paid it all! Not with billions of dollars, or scores of good deeds or other ‘works’, but with His own precious blood! ( I Pet. 1:18b-21 ). In this parable, the Pearl represents the Church!

## The Pearl

Pink has 7 points about the importance of the pearl – the church.

- 1) He points out and admires the accuracy, beauty and fulness figure Christ selected to portray His church. He even goes to the extent of saying that Christ created the oyster knowing that a grain of sand would cause a wound and the oyster would cover the sand with a smooth, brilliant beautiful covering which in time would become a pearl. First of all, Pink sees Unity – the merchant sought “fine pearls”, more than just one, but settled on one spectacular pearl – the saints of this present age – cf. Gal. 3:28. He makes an interesting point about pearls vs other gems; ⑥  
“Now, it is a significant fact that a pearl is the only gem whose unity cannot be broken without destroying it. I may take a diamond and cut it into two, then I have two diamonds. I may take a lump of gold and divide it into two, and I have two lumps of gold. But if I take a pearl and cut it into two, I have nothing, I have destroyed it! A pearl significantly stands for the unity of the saints of this present dispensation.”<sup>11</sup>
- 2) The pearl is the product of a living creature – the only gem that is. It is also the result of suffering ( see above for a description of how a pearl is formed ). Pink says, “The very thing that inspired the animal, the little grain of sand that intruded, is ultimately clothed with a beauty that is not its own and is covered with the comeliness of the one that it injured.” He adds, as mentioned above, that God, when He created the oyster, he saw to it that it should furnish an appropriate type and figure of His church.”
- 3) The pearl is formed gradually and slowly, as has been the church – 20 centuries and counting. Pink says, “out of each generation of men on earth God has called a few and added them to that church which He is now building for His Son.”
- 4) The Pearl is formed of lowly origin – that is a type of the church. “By sovereign grace [ we’ve ] been made members of Christ, had by nature our

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<sup>10</sup> W. Trotter, Plain Papers on Prophetic Subjects, Loizeau Brothers, The Bible Press, ND ( but Trotter died in 1865 so it was written before that. ), Pg 125

<sup>11</sup> IBID, Pg. 71

origin in the filth and mire and ruin of the fall.” – cf. Eph. 2:11,12; I Cor. 6:9-11.

- 5) The Pearl, as it is being formed down in the ocean depths, is not seen by the eyes of man. It is a secret formation; none but God witnesses its build-up. We can see the visible church, our church, but God sees who has not yet been added to the church but will surely be added.
- 6) The church is an object of value and beauty – it is being fashioned from a grain of sand into a precious gem. ( cf. Eph. 5:27 ). Jesus will yet one day display His glorified church – cf. Rev. 19:11ff.
- 7) In the figure ( the Pearl of Great Value ) Christ selected, we can anticipate the honourable and exalted future the church will yet enjoy ( cf. Col. 3:4 ).<sup>12</sup>

## Summary

As you can see, these two verses convey a lot of things important to our understanding of the Pearl, the Merchant, and the meaning of the parable. The OT prophets never saw the church in the future. God kept it hidden even from them. They saw and described the Millennial Kingdom, God’s wrath, the Tribulation, the apocalypse, the 70 years of captivity and the return, the end times, the fulfillment of the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants and much more, but not the church. Yet, the church is what comes about during the interregnum, before the second coming of Christ. Abner Chou again comments and I will end this part of the lesson with his comment below;

“Paul is consistent with the gospel writers in seeing the church is a new “addition” to this [ God’s ] plan. The apostle declares that the church is a mystery ( Eph. 1:9; 3:3-9 ), unrevealed to past generations. Jews and Gentiles are fellow partakers of God’s promise ( Eph. 3:5 ). Paul’s concept of mystery affirms that the church is a new development.”<sup>13</sup> ⑦

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

In this appendix, I wanted to address a good question that arises from the fact that the offer of the kingdom to Israel was legitimate and would have been awarded to them if they had accepted Christ as their Messiah and King. This leaves for some, a serious legitimate theological question. If Israel had received the Kingdom, and Christ became King in the First Century, what about the numerous OT prophecies and the key importance of Jesus’ efficacious, substitutionary death on Calvary? We did have a brief class discussion about this last year.

George N.H. Peters lays this out well for us;

“The question, How then would the atonement have been made by the shedding of [ Christ’s ] blood? It has nothing to do with the sincerity of this offer, for, “the manifold wisdom of God” would have been equal to the emergency, either by antedating to some other period, or by

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<sup>12</sup> IBID, Pp 71-75

<sup>13</sup> OP CIT – Abner Chou, pg. 168

providing for it previously; or in some other, to us, unknown way. As it was, God's purposes, His determinate counsel, are shaped by what was a foreseen voluntary choice of the nation. God's mercy was willing to bestow, but the nation's depravity prevented the gift. That the Kingdom would have been established had the nation believed, is evident from Deut. 32; 2 Chronicles 7:12-22; Isa. 48:18; Ps. 81:8-16; Gen. 50:20, etc. Dealing with facts, we are not concerned with contingencies."

He continues:

"In the program of unbelief it asserted...that "the disbelief of the Jews in Jesus was indispensable to the scheme of the atonement" – language even incautiously used by some believers. This is disproven by this tender of the Kingdom, by the prevailing tenor of the Word and by the guilt of the nation not being compromised or lessened through such a fiction. It is unauthorized assumption. Paul's argument in Romans proceeds on the supposition that the nation had the power of choice, that it willfully chose the evil, and that God in mercy overruled its fall for the salvation of the Gentiles. They stumbled and fell, not through necessity, and not because God's purpose required it, but solely through their own unbelief; and God's plan, as the Omniscient, embraced the same as a foreknown result, and made provision accordingly. This feature also meets a Jewish objection..."They ( Christian Apologists ) cannot produce one single, clear, unequivocal prophecy of the OT, which foretells a twofold coming of one and the same person as the Messiah," etc. This arises simply from the fact that, as this offer, was to be made at the First Advent, the prophecies are guardedly...given, and at the same time sufficiently distinctive to show that at the First Advent, as occurred, the Messiah would be despised and rejected."<sup>14</sup>

Chafer adds his opinion to this;

"[ O.T. ] Aliss and other Covenant Theologians claim that the value of the cross is minimized if the kingdom was offered before the death of Christ. Chafer finds such criticism, coming from Calvinists, as being rather odd and inconsistent on their part because this whole issue is only another example of the "conflict between divine sovereignty and human will." Chafer provides some other examples in which a predicted event, which made it sure, was still offered as a choice. One such example has to do with the fall of Adam. It is a teaching of Scripture "that Jehovah's Lamb was in the redeeming purpose slain from the foundation of the world." It was decreed in the plan of God that the Messiah would die for human sin even before Adam was created. So when Adam was created, it was certain he would sin and that his sin would be an act of his own free will. Yet, Adam was commanded not to sin. Chafer asks, "What would have become of the redemptive purpose had Adam obeyed God?" A Calvinist answers that because of the decree of God, although Adam was commanded not to sin, there was no question that he would. The offer of eternal life to Adam for not sinning did not minimize the redemptive program of God. By the same token, when the kingdom was offered to Israel, it was already known that the offer would be rejected. This offer, however, did not minimize the cross since the rejection of the offer was clearly anticipated. "The precross offer of the earthly Messianic Kingdom to Israel by her Messiah...was also made sure by prediction." It was "equally made sure by prediction that Christ would be crucified which was Israel's official rejection of their King." In the same way, other things were made sure such as resurrection, ascension, the present session at the right hand of God the Father, and His

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<sup>14</sup> George N.H. Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom, Volume 1; pg. 378, Kregel 1884, 1972 reprint.

future reign “on David’s earthly throne and...over the house of Jacob forever.” Chafer concludes that it was predicted that Israel would reject her Messiah and this rejection could not possibly be “the personal rejection of a crucified and risen Savior” since these events had not yet happened when He was rejected. Jesus came to Israel as a nation and offered Himself to them as the Messiah-King” and it is this that Israel rejected.”<sup>15</sup>

I think it’s important to recognize that throughout the Bible, the decisions that people make often are said to have advanced God’s purposes and accomplish what He intended all along. Two excellent examples are found in Acts 2:22-23, and Acts 4:27-28. Others worth noting are: I Peter 1:17-21 ( esp. v. 20 ); I Samuel 2:22-25; Isaiah 10:5-16, and there are many others.

The theological name for this phenomenon of seeing human responsibility and God’s sovereignty connected is “compatibilism.” This term is well described by D.A. Carson;

“The Bible as a whole, and sometimes in specified texts, presupposes or teaches that both of the following propositions are true;

1. God is absolutely sovereign, but His sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is curtailed, minimized or mitigated.
2. Human beings are morally responsible creatures – they significantly choose, rebel, obey, believe, defy, make decisions and so forth, and are rightly held accountable for such actions, but this characteristic never functions so as to make God absolutely contingent.”<sup>16</sup>

Other Scriptural examples of “providential” events are: Ephesians 1:11; Jeremiah 10:23; Lam. 3:37-38; 2 Thess. 2:11; and II Sam. 24:1.

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The upshot of all this is that the prophecies of Christ’s death and resurrection were fulfilled exactly as prophesied. The Kingdom prophecies will be fulfilled exactly as predicted too. What were not part of the OT prophecies is the gap between these 2 events, and the Church.

However, the offer to Israel in the first century ( in the gospels ) was legitimate and had that Israelite generation accepted Christ as their Messiah and King, God would have awarded them the Kingdom at that point. God, we must then understand, would have worked out the atonement and resurrection of Christ in details matching the prophecies in some way known only to Him.

But the inescapable reality of all this is that Israel did reject Christ as Messiah and as King, and so the Kingdom was withdrawn and postponed. So, the prophecies of the Kingdom will be fulfilled exactly as the OT predicts them to occur. We have the Kingdom parables to help us ‘see’ the gap we are now living within.

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<sup>15</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, cited in Israelology, Arnold Fruchtenbaum; Ariel Ministries, 2022; Pp. 348-349

<sup>16</sup> D.A. Carson, How Long O Lord?; Baker Academic, 1990, 2006, pg. 179

The gap allows for the Church and the Gentiles to receive the blessings of salvation. Jesus could have been crucified, rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, then returned immediately to set up His Kingdom, instead of centuries later, but that is not the way God planned it. These parables help us understand that. Note Romans 11:11-25.