

Prophetic Parables

Matthew 13

The Parables of the Seashore & the House

Some respected commentators have settled on the plausible view that these seven parables are confined to the Church period and parallel the seven church letters prophetically (bracketed in the table below). Others legitimately see them relating to the entire inter-advent period – that is, applicable to the time between the Lord’s first and second Advents. They correctly acknowledge that, though it is part of the kingdom of heaven (the heavens) the Church is not synonymous with it.

The parables of the kingdom of heaven – now in “mystery”

When we speak here of a “mystery” it is not in the sense of something that needs to be unravelled as in a puzzle. It simply refers to something that is hidden. The manifestation of the kingdom of heaven on *earth* has been postponed and it will remain so well beyond the Church Age. It will only come into being after the Tribulation at the Second Advent of Christ. It will be manifested on earth for all to see in answer to the disciples’ prayer – “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This is why these seven parables must embrace the entire inter-advent period – the Church age *and* the Tribulation, in which God takes up the nation and the people of Israel again. Meanwhile the kingdom of heaven is in “mystery” – hidden from the world at large. It is the purpose of these parables to reveal something of the *character* of the kingdom of heaven now in mystery.

A number of truths taken *together* explain why the kingdom of heaven is now in “mystery.”

1. The withdrawal of the offer of the intended kingdom, that if accepted, would have seen its manifestation on earth. The King was presented; but He was rejected, which led to Israel being set aside and the postponement of the kingdom with its covenant blessings.
2. Associated with the first, we have the coming of the Church and the offer of the kingdom to “all the world” through faith in Christ.
3. Its mystery is defined in its nature and duration in regard to the King. As long as the King – Christ, is physically absent in the world the kingdom will not be manifested on earth and is in mystery. He will be absent over the Church age and the Tribulation. Therefore these seven parables embrace these two dispensations.

Can we not say then that the interpretation of these seven parables is circumscribed by the withdrawal of the intended kingdom; by the rejection and temporary absence of its King; and by the coming of the Church with Christ as its ascended Head? The kingdom of heaven will cease to be in mystery when it is *manifested* universally in the Millennial Age after the Second Advent (the divine theocratic will is then manifested on earth, as it is in heaven). With these things in mind the following interpretation and explanation of the seven parables is suggested for consideration.

The location and audience

These parables were delivered in two locations and in two parts. The first *four* were delivered by the *seaside* and to the *multitude* – Jews and Gentiles.¹ It was not “who hath ears to hear let him *understand*; but “Who hath ears to hear, let him *hear*” – hear by way of

¹ The interpretation of the Sower was however given to the disciples privately.

rebuke in the light of the irretrievably self-hardened hearts of the multitude of that day (Matt 13:9; 43). The last *three* were delivered to the Lord's disciples *privately* in a *house*. On this occasion among others, they were representative of the faithful Jewish remnant – “all Israel” (Rom 11:26).² To *them* an explanation was given as well as a need to understand. “Jesus saith unto them, have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord” (Matt 13:51).

The timing

The events as related by Mark chapters 3-4 and Matthew chapter 12 are telling. The Lord had been accused by the Pharisees of doing the works of Satan when He healed the blind and dumb demoniac. “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, this fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (Matt 12:24). To this the Lord replied, “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men” (Matt 12:31).

Following this heinous and unforgivable slander, His mother and brethren wanted to see Him while He was in the house. His reply has deep prophetic significance. “But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” Clearly, the Lord here in *principle* has cut all national ties with Israel and focuses on the door of blessing to every person – Jew or Gentile. The *nation* was set aside in principle; but the kingdom is still open to the individual – to “whosoever” does the will of the Father. And what is His will? It is that all come to Him through faith in His Son. “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” The Lord had intimated this earlier when He declared those precious and consoling words. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt 11:28).

Then, in order to give physical demonstration to the rejection of Israel in principle and the universal invitation to the individual, the Lord moved out of the house which is symbolic of Israel and sat beside the seaside – symbolic of the nations. It was the mutual rejection that prompted the delivery of these seven parables of the kingdom of heaven. “And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them [the multitudes] in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you [as the representative of the faithful Jewish remnant] to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to **them** in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men [of old] have desired to see those things which ye see, and

² Previously the Lord left the “house” – and on that occasion it also symbolised the nation.

have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Matt 13:10-17).

The seven parables

"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.....**Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.** When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Another parable **put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.** But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then

appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. **Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed,** which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. **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.** All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. **Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house;** and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his

kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. **Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field;** the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. **Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:** Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. **Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea,**

and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord. Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt 13:3-52).

In many commentaries these parables are given to lengthy discussion. In order to simplify the matter we will present the seven parables in tabular format.

Throughout the inter-advent period the King is rejected by the world and absent, and so the kingdom of heaven is in mystery. As we noted, at the start of this parabolic discourse the Lord left the house (symbolizing Israel). He went to the seaside with the multitude (symbolizing the world at large, v 1) and delivered the first four parables. These relate to the spiritual conditions over the inter-advent period - the professing Church (Jew and Gentile) today and intimating the day of the apostate Great Harlot that will arise after it during the Tribulation. He then withdrew to the house with His disciples (representative of remnant Israel, v 36 cf v 11) and delivered the last three parables which relate exclusively to Israel and the nations. These last three parables are *exclusive* to the Gospel of Matthew marking its Jewish and *dispensational* character.

| Parable | Interpretation | Explanation |
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| Sowing of the seed (Ephesus) | The <i>reception</i> of the Kingdom. | Universal sowing of the seed – the Gospel of Christ and of the kingdom and its results (Matt 28:19-20; 24:14). |
| Tares with the Wheat (Smyrna) | The <i>composition</i> of the Kingdom. | The true believers (the wheat) and false professors (the tares) within the kingdom (Acts; Rev 2-3). |
| Mustard Tree (Pergamos) | The <i>imitation</i> of the Kingdom. | The world-wide growth of the institutional Church within which many “birds” (sects and religions) have found a haven (Acts; Rev 2-3; 17). |
| Leaven in the Meal (Thyatira) | The <i>corruption</i> within the Kingdom. | False doctrine (leaven) from within the kingdom leading to apostasy and false professors within it (i.e., Acts 20:28-30; 2 Tim 3:1-5; Rev 2-3; 17). |

These parables now relate specifically to Israel and the nations during the inter-advent period.

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| The Treasure (Sardis) | The nation of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob precious in divine election ; but now hidden in rejection but awaiting restoration . | Israel, once unknown among the nations, was elected by God as His cherished nation. Today, Israel is judicially “hidden” in the world due to its disobedience (Deut 14:2; Rom 9:4, Rom 11; cf Jer 13). “The LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure” (Ps 135:4). |
| A Pearl of Great Price (Philadelphia) | Israel in salvation , as the remnant of Jacob. ³ | The Lord will find a pearl of great price in the faithful remnant – which was purchased through the blood of the New Covenant. Israel is “elect according to the remnant of grace” (Rom 11:5). “All Israel shall be saved” (Rom 11:26). |
| The Net (Laodicea) | The nations (Gentiles) in condemnation or commendation , according to their attitude to Israel (the end of the Tribulation). | The net is cast into the sea (symbolic of the nations). At the 2 nd Advent the Gentiles are gathered and divided into sheep or goats (Matt 25:32-34). |

³ The Church is unlikely to be symbolized as one of a number of pearls. Notwithstanding, some take the pearl of great price to be the Church. This view has merit and, if adopted, it will not affect the interpretation of the seven parables as they relate to the kingdom of heaven in mystery.