

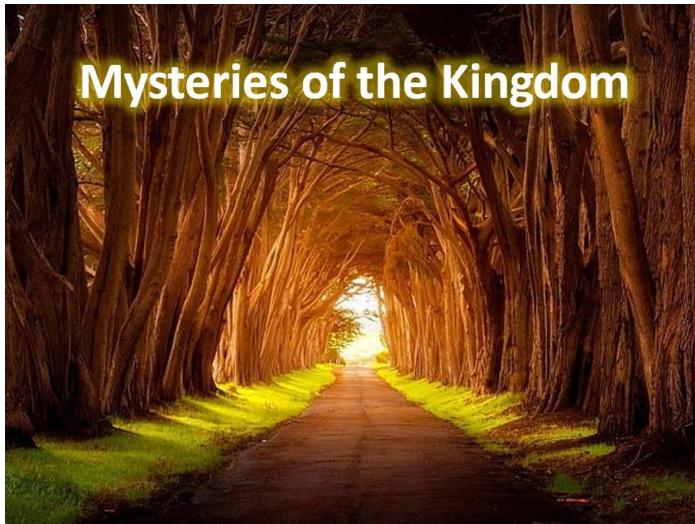
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The Mysteries of the Kingdom

Parables that Tell Secrets!
(Matthew 13:1-51)

Pastor Kelly Sensenig



Years ago the young people used to play the game "Whisper Down the Lane." It's interesting how the story changed. Somebody would tell a secret in the ear of the first person. They could only say it once and then the next person would follow down the line supposedly transferring the same secret message.

However, it's amazing how the message was changed as it passed down from person to person. The message may start like this: "You have nice ears" and by the end of the line it might be "You have wax in your ears" or "You have floppy ears."

This old game of transferring secrets reminds me of the secrets that Christ revealed and passed down through the centuries. However, Christ's secrets have not changed their meaning. And it's these secrets that have special meaning to us who are living in the world today. In this study we are going to learn about the secrets that the Lord reveals to us as His followers. They are called the secrets or "the mysteries of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:11). They are parables that tell secrets by unlocking information to us which was not revealed in the Old Testament revelation concerning certain events and their timing related to the inauguration of God's kingdom program. They are prophetic mysteries that are revealed concerning the events that would transpire on earth in preparation for the Millennial Kingdom. In this study,

we are going to learn what the secrets are as we investigate both prophetic and practical lessons from Matthew 13.

The Movement Away From Israel's Program

Matthew 11-12 are important chapters. Christ's rejection by the religious leaders of Israel (representative of the nation) and their commitment of the unpardonable sin was a pivotal point in His ministry and took place about two years before the crucifixion. The leaders of the nation claimed Jesus was performing His miracles in the power of Satan and that He was a demon-possessed lunatic. This particular sin could only be committed while Christ was personally present on earth and when He was performing miracles to authenticate Himself before the nation (Matt. 12:31-32). Following this warning Christ served notice that the present generation of Jews was now under judgment because of the official rejection of Him and His claims to be their Messiah (Matt. 12:39-42).

The ultimate and climactic rejection of the Messiah took place when the Jews said to Pilate, "Let him be crucified" (Matthew 27:21-23). Even worse, they took full responsibility for their actions: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). God indeed held them responsible for what they had done: "*Him ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain*" (Acts 2:23).

John 1:11 concludes:

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

May I ask you a personal question? Have you ever received Christ and allowed Him to become your Savior (John 1:12)? Have you ever expressed simple faith in Christ's death and resurrection to grant you salvation from Hell and everlasting life in Heaven? A person sends himself to Hell by rejecting God's plan of salvation – choosing not to receive the salvation Christ offers.

I found this true story online. United States v. Wilson, 32 U.S. 150 (1833), was a case in the United States in which the defendant, George Wilson, was convicted of robbing the US Mail in Pennsylvania and sentenced to death.

Due to his friends' influence, Wilson was pardoned by Andrew Jackson. Wilson, however, refused the pardon.

The Supreme Court was thus asked to rule on the case. The decision was that if the prisoner does not accept the pardon, it is not in effect: "A pardon is a deed, to the validity of which delivery is essential, and delivery is not complete without acceptance. It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is tendered; and if it is rejected, we have discovered no power in this court to force it upon him." Therefore, Wilson was hanged.

Here is the point. Because of Israel rejecting Jesus as Messiah and His offer of the kingdom to them, He began to teach the mysteries that revolved around His kingdom program. The mystery teachings that Jesus referenced related to what would occur on earth before His earthly kingdom would be inaugurated and Israel would come into her covenant blessings.

After the official rejection of the nation in chapter 12, which was the straw that broke the camel's back, Christ introduced these mystery parables which became a sign of judgment against the nation for their rejection of Him. This is indicated by the fact that the Jewish masses of people could not understand the parables (Matt. 13:34-35). These parables were spoken on the very same day and become an indication that Jesus was judging His people for rejecting Him. As a result, He was temporarily setting aside national Israel (the Jewish people) and inaugurating a new program that revolves around a different phase of His kingdom program that was hidden and not revealed in the Old Testament which is defined as "The mysteries of the kingdom."

Jesus said in Matthew 21:43:

"Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

These were cutting words! Another "nation" of Jews would be brought into the kingdom blessings when Jesus returns in His Second Coming. But until this happens there would be an intervening time when the mysteries about the kingdom would come to pass on earth. This statement of Jesus is a pivotal dispensational verse that opens wide the door for the salvation of

Gentile humanity. When I say “dispensational” I am referring to how God works with different people at different times and in different ways. Jesus was moving away from His program with Israel to a new program with the Church which would result in the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Because of Israel’s rejection of Christ, we have John 3:16.

Amber Guyger is a former Dallas police officer who has been found guilty of murdering Botham Jean. The case became a national story because of the circumstances surrounding the crime, which included allegations of racism. Guyger is white and was a police officer; Botham Jean was an African American. Guyger shot and killed him in his own home—alleging that she had mistakenly entered the wrong apartment and thought he was a burglar.

Guyger has been sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. Many people outside the courtroom have decried the sentence, insisting that it is far too lenient. But inside the courtroom, another voice was heard, Brandt, the brother of Botham Jean. Brandt gave a statement in which he forgave Amber Guyger and explained that he did not wish her any harm. He instead encouraged her to look to Christ. Brandt looked at Guyger and told her that he loved her. He then asked the Judge if he could approach Guyger and give her a hug.

The weeping in the courtroom is palpable, with even the Judge wiping tears from her eyes. According to CNN, shortly afterwards the Judge, Tammy Kemp, handed Guyger a Bible to take with her, saying, “You can have mine. I have three or four more at home. This is the one I use every day. This is your job for the next month. This is where you start, John 3:16 “For God so loved the world ...”

Have we forgotten that Israel’s fall resulted in John 3:16? Have we lost sight of the fact that Israel’s fall became our riches? This is what the Bible teaches.

Romans 11:12 Is another important dispensation verse that shows how God shifted His program from the Jews to Gentiles: “Now if the fall of them (*the*

Jewish people) be the riches of the world (saving lost humanity), and the diminishing of them (the Jews) the riches of the Gentiles (Gentile salvation); how much more their fulness? (when Israel turns back to God at the Second Coming).

Romans 11:15 repeats the same truth:

“For if the casting away of them (the Jewish people) be the reconciling of the world (lost humanity on a worldwide basis was now able to be reconciled to God through Christ’s sacrificial death), what shall the receiving of them be (the Jews), but life from the dead?” (Israel’s salvation at the Second Coming).

Not only is “salvation of the Jews” (John 4:22) but the “casting away of the Jews” (Rom. 11:15) is salvation! What an amazing plan God devised to save the human race and sinners like you and me.

Romans 11:19 -20 concludes:

Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off (Israel and the Jews), that I might be grafted in (the Gentiles). Well; because of unbelief they were broken off (the Jewish people were removed from the place of blessing) and thou standest by faith (Gentiles are blessed through faith in Christ). Be not highminded, but fear (express reverence to God and not pride when reflecting upon your salvation).

When Israel was set aside the Gentiles were brought into a position and place of privilege with God. This means that God has officially but only in a temporarily sense moved away from the covenant promises given to Israel. It means that His kingdom program with the Jews would be temporarily set aside until King Jesus returns from the far country to rule His people again (Luke 19:12). The kingdom program (the Millennial Kingdom) would be temporarily postponed until a later time and until the Millennium arrives there would be something new about the kingdom of Millennium that would come to pass call “the mysteries of the kingdom.”

Have you ever gone to see the Philadelphia Phillies or to some other ballfield and there was a rain delay? And eventually the game



was postponed because of the rain. This is how we can view God's plan with Israel (the Jewish people). God's plan for Israel is on a rain delay and has been temporarily postponed until a later time.

In other words, there would be a delay or interruption in the fulfillment of God's earthly kingdom program with Israel. Jesus was saying that the kingdom program with His own Jewish people would be temporarily postponed until His Second Coming to earth when another generation of Jews living on earth would receive Him as their Messiah. Christ's return to earth will follow the Church Age and take place "after the tribulation of those days" (Matt. 24:29). Until then Israel would experience a judicial spiritual blindness by God (Rom. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:15). But the Bible prophetically predicts that someday their spiritually blind eyes will see, and Israel as His national people will be saved (Isa. 53:4-6; Zech. 12:10; Rev. 1:7).

No, Israel is not abandoned by God and replaced by the Church as Reformed Theology teaches.

Romans 11:1

"I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid."

Paul ends this chapter in Romans by confirming that Israel has a salvation and restoration date with Christ fixed in the purpose and plan of God at the Second Coming (Romans 11:26). God is not finished working with His ancient Jewish people. Jesus is simply teaching that His plan and purpose for Israel to bless them in the earthly kingdom (Millennium) is temporarily postponed and set aside and a new plan has emerged which involves the Church and the salvation of great multitudes of Gentile people.

The actions of Jesus in Matthew 13:1-3 illustrate His postponement of Israel's program. "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."

The movements of Jesus were important (“The same day went out of the house”). This movement out of the Jewish synagogue indicates the intent of Jesus to temporarily move away from the house of Israel and the kingdom plan and initiate another plan prior to the kingdom’s arrival on planet earth. Many Bible students see the house as picturing the nation of Israel and the sea the Gentiles. This is because the sea is many times used to picture the masses of Gentile humanity (Dan. 7:1-3; Rev. 13:1). Thus, the Lord’s movement symbolizes a break with Israel and a new plan to save the masses in the sea of Gentile humanity “to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14). The plan was now to span the globe with the Gospel message and preach Jesus’ death and resurrection among the Gentile nations.

Jesus is temporarily leaving His kingdom and covenant program with the nation of Israel and turning to the world with a universal plan of grace and salvation. As we will see, Jesus is now speaking of what will take place in the world until He returns as King. So, the parabolic teaching about the mysteries (secrets) of the kingdom was introduced due to the nation’s rejection of Jesus as the Christ.

Matthew 12:46-50 alludes to the new plan that was going to be implanted because of Israel’s rejection of Christ. “While he yet talked to the people, behold, *his* mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. 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.”

Just prior to His teaching on the mysteries about the kingdom program Christ signified that He was changing His kingdom program by reaching out to the entire world (“whosoever” – Matt. 26:50). Something was changing concerning God’s kingdom program. Although the kingdom promises of God remained in place for Israel and would never be abandoned (Rom. 9) the institution of the earthly kingdom (theocracy) was temporarily postponed. There would no longer be an offer of the kingdom to Israel but

a new program and outreach of salvation to the entire world would now be introduced to the masses of the Gentile populace.

The other day I was outside working, and I smelled the most wonderful smell in the world. The neighbor was making what smelled like a beef brisket on his outdoor grill and the smell of that brisket was permeating the air. I was just floating around while smelling that brisket.

Something new was in the air! We know that a physical tie united Christ with His mother and brothers. But in contrast to this, a spiritual tie of faith united Christ with His disciples and all who put faith in Him for salvation. By these words Christ indicted that He was temporarily setting aside Israel who was physically tied to Him and was starting a new program where all people (Gentiles) could be related to Him by faith. Israel was being temporarily set aside and a new relationship was being instituted with people on the basis of faith rather than on the basis of physical decent or lineage.

After the religious leaders said that Jesus performed His miracles by Satan's power the character of Christ's ministry changed. Instead of talking about the kingdom being "at hand" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7) He revealed some new facts about the kingdom in a series of parables. These are called the "mysteries" concerning God's earthly kingdom program.

Matthew 13:11

"He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you (*believers*) to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (*unbelievers*) it is not given."

The mysteries or secrets about the earthly kingdom deal with something not previously revealed in relation to God's earthly kingdom program. More on this later.

The Marked Timing of the Parables

The seven mystery parables represent a specific time period since it is indicated that the events stated in the parables will be finished at the "end

of the age” (Matt. 13:39, 49). Thus, we must have a starting and finishing point. In other words, there will be a specific time frame when all the events stated in these parables will occur.



Matthew 13:30 says, “Let both grow together until the harvest...” The preposition “until” (Matt. 13:30) has reference of a duration of time and the end is referencing the closing of the pre-Messianic age, the ending of the age or time when Messiah was not ruling over the earth in a literal way. The pre-

Messianic Age would include the Church Age in which we live today and the judgments of the Tribulation Period which follow the Church Age. Today we are living in an age or time prior to Christ’s literal rule over the earth but this present age will end when Jesus returns in His Second Coming to rule planet earth. When the end of this age comes the earthly kingdom will be established. So there is a definite time period involved in the outworking and fulfillment of these seven parables of the kingdom.

The parables of Jesus in Matthew 13 were designed to prepare the disciples for Christ’s approaching crucifixion and return to Heaven. The King was going away but He would be back! The parables teach the disciples what would take place on planet earth between the time of Christ’s official rejection by Israel and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. The conditions and events will occur during the period between Israel’s rejection of the Messiah and the return of the Messiah at the end of the Tribulation Period to establish His earthly kingdom. The sowing efforts would occur in the “world” (Matt. 13:38 – “the field is the world”) which would be much more extensive than just the local ministry of Christ during His day. Therefore, the sowing and seed program would take place on a worldwide basis throughout the entire age in which we live today (Church age) up to the end of the “age” (Matt. 13:39) which would include the

seven-year Tribulation Period, the time just prior to Christ's rule over the earth.

Jesus did not intend to teach a gap of time between the beginning and the end of the harvest period and the fulfillment of these parables as some teach. Jesus was simply teaching the events that would occur on earth then (in His own day), now (today), and in the future, up to the kingdom's arrival on planet earth. This is the natural understanding and flow of Christ's thoughts in these parables. To pigeonhole the parables into two segments relating to only Christ's earthly ministry and then the Tribulation Period, bypassing the events of the Church age, seems to miss the obvious point that our Lord was intending to make concerning the seed sowing, harvest, and corruption that would occur throughout the world from His day forward.

Jesus is portraying the way it would begin and end without any hint of a gap of time between the beginning and the ending. The parables of Matthew 13 are designed to teach the course and character of this present age during the King's absence and until He returns to earth. The parables give a prophetic forecast of conditions on earth that would occur during Christ's own day, in our current time, and in the future, right up to the end of the pre-Messianic age before Jesus returns as the King.

In summary, we can then view these parables as covering the period of time between Christ's rejection by Israel (Matt. 12:14, 24; 21:43) and His return to earth as the King (Matt. 23:37-39). Many events and conditions would occur on planet earth between Israel's rejection of the King and the return of the King. Or we could also conclude that these earthly events will occur between Christ's rejection of Israel and His reception of Israel at His second Coming.

Jesus taught this in Matthew 23:38-39:

"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate (*deserted*). For I say unto you (*the Jewish people*), Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (*when they call upon Christ to save them in His Second Coming*).

These parables reveal what would happen on earth between Christ's cross and His crowning as the King. They reveal what would transpire between the postponement and inauguration of the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:1-7). They show how things would develop on earth, during the time of the King's absence. We live in a portion of this period of time known as the mysteries of the kingdom. The secret is out. We are seeing in part what Jesus predicted would happen on earth prior to the commencement of the earthly kingdom or Millennium.

Dr. Paul Van Gorder wrote:

"These parables tell us significant secrets about what we may expect during the exile of the King; while He has, as Luke 19 says, "gone into a far country."



We must remember that the Old Testament saints from their vantage point only knew about two mountains – Mount Calvary (the cross) and Mount of Olives (the kingdom). The revelation and teaching of the Old Testament

spoke of the suffering of the Messiah and the return of Messiah to earth, but it did not reveal the events and conditions of the world between these two earth-shaking events.

There was an unknown valley between the two mountains that could not be seen. Therefore, the mysteries about the kingdom would reveal and enlighten Christ's disciples (and you and me today) concerning what was going to occur in the valley of time between His crucifixion and Second Coming of Christ to earth, during the time while the kingdom was postponed. Jesus was revealing the sacred secrets hidden in the valley between the two mountains (Mount Calvary and Mount of Olives).

Dr. Harry Ironside called this time period "The Great Parenthesis." He meant that a great gap of time would occur between Israel's rejection of the King and kingdom in Jesus' day and when the kingdom would one day be established on earth. This great parenthesis of time was addressed in our Lord's teaching in these mystery parables and would include the time period we are now living (the Church Age) which has lasted for some 2,000 years. The course of the present age (Church Age) is outlined in these parables as well as the timing of the judgments associated with the ending of the age during the seven-year Tribulation Period. Jesus is talking about the era of time that would follow the departure of the King and exist until His return to restore the same kingdom to the same people Israel.

The book The World's Worst Predictions lists some of history's all-time prophetic goofs.

- King George II said in 1773 that the American colonies had little stomach for revolution.
- An official of the White Star Line, speaking of the firm's newly built flagship, the Titanic, launched in 1912, declared that the ship was unsinkable.
- In 1939 The New York Times said the problem of TV was that people had to glue their eyes to a screen, and that the average American wouldn't have time for it.
- An English astronomy professor said in the early 19th century that air travel at high speed would be impossible because passengers would suffocate.

I'm glad the predictions of the Bible have always come true. God's predictions are not happenstance but are precise in their fulfillment. We see this in the prophetic fulfillment of the parables of Matthew 13.

The story is told about a small, country church where the pastor called a special meeting of the congregation to approve the purchase of a brand new chandelier. After some discussion pro and con, an old farmer stood up and said, "Buying a new chandelier may seem like a good idea to you, but I'm against it for three reasons. First of all, it's too expensive and we can't afford one of these things. Second, there isn't anybody around here who knows how to play one of these chandeliers. And third, he said what we really need in this church is a new light fixture."

I guess the understanding he had about chandeliers was a total mystery to him. We are studying the mysteries of the kingdom and we now come to our next point about the mysteries of the kingdom (parables that tell secrets). In this case, the secrets are being revealed to Christ's followers so they might understand them and know what is going to occur on earth before the early kingdom is established.

The Mystery of the Parables

Matthew 13:11

"He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to (*Christ's followers*) know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (*the unsaved*) it is not given."

George Zeller said:

"The term 'mystery,' as defined in the N.T., refers to something which has been hidden, kept secret, and not made known to men in previous ages but has now been made manifest and made known and revealed in the N.T. Scriptures (see for example Eph. 3:4-5; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26; Rom. 16:26)."

There are those who claim the term "mystery" means something mysterious and therefore conclude that these parables portray the kingdom as being present on earth in some kind of new spiritual and mysterious form during the time of the King's absence. However, this is not

the case. The same literal understanding should be applied to the term kingdom in these parables. The kingdom has to do with its relationship to earth and the parables simply highlight what is going to occur before the Millennial Kingdom comes to earth.

The secrets pertain to the revelation of new truths such as the sowing of seed throughout the Church Age, the mixture between the true and the false that will exist on earth, the moral condition occurring on earth, including the unnatural growth of apostasy and wickedness within Christendom, which culminates in the harlot church of the End Times. They also confirm the timing of the Tribulation judgments and the judgment of the living (surviving) nations in relation to the Second Coming. The mystery parable reveal that this judgment is predicted to occur at the end of the age (not during Christ's earthly ministry). The mystery parables sort out all these things and bring new insight and timing regarding events that occur on earth prior to the kingdom's arrival.

There is nothing mysterious about the earthly nature of the kingdom. These mysteries about the kingdom are both prophetic and dispensational in nature (God working His different purposes in the world with different people). They describe events that are going to occur in the future before the kingdom arrives on earth, specific events that would include the dispensational teaching about the Church and events of the Tribulation Period.

To state it succinctly, these parables are called mysteries (Matt. 13:11), which are related to God's earthly kingdom program. They are parables that tell secrets! The secrets have to do with the events and conditions that occur on earth before the earthly kingdom is established. The word "mystery" (Greek - musterion) is often misunderstood. It does not suggest the idea of something that is mysterious and which cannot be known or understood. Rather, the term speaks of something that is hidden as in Colossians 1:26 ("the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations"). This understanding of the word mystery (something hidden but now revealed) is confirmed by our Lord's own interpretation.

Matthew 13:34-35

“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.”

This statement would have caused great interest in the minds and hearts of His disciples. They were hearing those things that no one else had heard in the entire course of earth’s history! And we are also hearing and studying them! What a privilege it was to receive this divine revelation. In the New Testament a mystery is a spiritual truth understood only by divine revelation which was previously hidden or unrevealed in Old Testament revelation. As we are going to see, the mysteries related to the earthly kingdom are sacred secrets now revealed and known only to those who are on the inside or those who learn from the Lord and obey Him.

The mysteries about the kingdom involve something not previously revealed about the messianic earthly kingdom. They speak of hidden things concerning the earthly theocracy that Jesus will one day establish over the earth. The seven parables reveal teachings that are in some way related to the earthly kingdom program but were previously unknown. They are teachings that have been kept secret or hidden to mankind since the foundation of planet earth. This is why I like to call them “sacred secrets” and parables that tell secrets about the earthly kingdom which were never revealed to the Old Testament prophets and saints. The Old Testament revealed many truths regarding the earthly kingdom and the Messiah’s reign.

The character and conditions during the earthly kingdom (the 1,000 years) when Messiah would actually rule and reign on earth was covered in much detail within the pages of the Old Testament revelation and teaching. It was revealed to the Old Testament prophets that the world will experience a social, political, peaceful, and environmental transformation. But there were other aspects concerning the earthly kingdom (the Millennium) that were not revealed. They were hidden truths related to the earthly kingdom that were not revealed in the writings of the Old Testament prophets.

The secrets that were now revealed about the kingdom were the various events and conditions that would take place on earth prior to the kingdom's arrival. It's these hidden secrets concerning the kingdom that became the content of Christ's seven parables – "the mysteries of the kingdom." In essence, Jesus let the secret out in these parables. He unfolded to the disciples and you and me today those events and conditions that would transpire on earth prior to the kingdom's arrival. These are events that were not previously revealed in the Old Testament.

These secrets were about to be unfolded and would become known as the "mysteries of the kingdom." They are sacred secrets that are in some way connected with the kingdom's arrival to earth. They are parables that communicate new truth about the old kingdom, the same kingdom that was prophesied about in the Old Testament. Jesus is not using the term kingdom in some kind of spiritual or altered sense. He is referring to the same kind of kingdom that He spoke about earlier in the day (Matt. 12:28).

Stanley Toussaint remarks:

"The same kingdom is in view in Matthew 13 as the one which was proclaimed as being at hand in Matthew 3:2; 4:17, and 10:7. In chapter thirteen the King is giving additional information concerning the kingdom of heaven, information which has never before been revealed."

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" in its mystery form is not a reference to Heaven where God's saints depart at the time of death nor to an allegorized or new form of the kingdom. It is a reference to God's promised, earthly, covenanted, messianic kingdom. The context of Jesus' earthly ministry revolved around His offer of the earthly kingdom to national Israel. Therefore, the designation "kingdom of heaven" simply means that heaven will one day rule the earth during the Lord's earthly kingdom. It will be a time when God's will occurs on earth even as His will is established in heaven ("thy will be done on earth, *as it is* in heaven" - Matt. 6:10).

But the secrets related to the earthly kingdom ("mysteries of the kingdom") are written in parables to communicate the new facets related to God's earthly kingdom, specifically, what will occur on earth before the Millennial Kingdom is established, the time period between Christ's rejection and

reception of Israel. A summary on the next pages provides an overview of the secret nature of the kingdom parables. Each parable presents the course of events and conditions that occur over the earth before and in preparation for the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. They are secrets not previously revealed about the earthly kingdom or the 1,000-year reign of Christ over the earth.

"Mysteries (Secrets) of the Kingdom" (Matthew 13:11)

Israel would reject the King, The King would return to Heaven,
The Kingdom postponed (Matt. 21:43), During the King's Absence (Luke 19:12)
are the Mysteries of the Kingdom
(Unrevealed Conditions and events that occur on Earth Before Millennium)

PARABLE of the SOWER

The truth of salvation would be sown throughout the earth (Matt. 13:38).

Different responses to the Word of God before Kingdom arrives.

75% are not genuine – only 25% respond favorably

"Go ye into all the world" (Mark 16:15)

PARABLE of the WHEAT and TARES

There would be a mixture of the true and false (saved vs. unsaved).

Christendom, Professing Christianity, Imitation

PARABLE of the MUSTARD SEED

There will be unnatural and alarming growth

Apostasy in the Church, Christendom, and Ecumenical Religion

PARABLE of the LEAVEN IN MEAL

Apostasy will culminate in a leavened (evil) religious monstrosity
that defies God and the truth.

False Doctrine and Apostasy which occurs:

- During Jesus' Day (Pharisees and others who rejected Messiah)
- During the Last Days of Church Age (1 Tim. 4:1)
- During Tribulation Period (Rev. 17-18)
- Ending with Antichrist worship (Rev. 13)

The first four parables represent an influence of evil that is introduced by the devil. The primary emphasis of these parables portray imitation,

corruption, and abnormal religious growth designed by the devil to thwart God's purpose in the world.

PARABLES of the TREASRURE and PEARL

Jesus as the Messiah would die for the entire world - the field.

- He purchases a hidden treasure in this field (Israel)
- He purchases a pearl of great price (the Church).

Church Age and Israel's Salvation at Christ's Second Coming

PARABLE of the NET

Timing of judgment that precedes the formation of the earthly Kingdom

Occurs at the "end of the age" (Second Coming) - not during Christ's day (Acts 1:6).

Judgment of Living Nations at Christ's Second Coming (Matt. 24-25)

The last two parables take us through the Church Age, Tribulation Period, and end with the Second Coming of Christ. The progression of the parables of Matthew 13 reveal that the course or direction of events on earth will become increasingly worse and not better. Apostasy, deception, and sinful depravity will abound as we head toward the end of the age. The bright note is that Christ died for everyone in the world (the field) to bring about His plan and purpose with different groups of people (Jews, Gentiles, and the Church).

Daniel Webster once said: "If religious books are not widely circulated among the masses in this country, I do not know what is going to become of us as a nation. If truth be not diffused, error will be. If the evangelical volume does not reach every community, the pages of a corrupt and licentious literature will. If the power of the Gospel is not felt throughout the length and breadth of the land, anarchy and misrule, degeneration and misery, corruption and darkness, will reign without mitigation or end."

These words that were written more than a century-and-a-half ago have a strange and eerie prophetic ring to them! This is what Jesus taught would occur during the mystery period, before the earthly kingdom arrives, and we see it occurring before our very eyes today. What Jesus said would

happen is happening and what He taught will happen in the future will also happen. Buckle your seatbelts. We may be in for the ride of our lives as we approach the Rapture and the end of the age.

The Meaning of the Kingdom in the Parables



The “mystery” form of the kingdom (Millennial Kingdom) is not referring to a new spiritual or mysterious form of Christ’s reign but secrets (previously hidden and unknown events) that occur on earth before and in preparation for the establishment of the same earthly kingdom.

This point reiterates what we have in some measure confirmed already. Jesus was not introducing a new form of the kingdom (some kind of spiritual or mysterious form of the kingdom) but new truth that was in some way related to the establishment of the same earthly kingdom. The secrets about the earthly

kingdom are those new events that must transpire before the earthly kingdom arrives on planet earth. They are secret things not previously revealed in connection with the arrival of the earthly kingdom.

Let's be more specific. There were certain mysteries (hidden secrets) associated with the timing and arrival of God's kingdom program on earth that needed to be revealed in the New Testament. The secrets pertain to the conditions, programs, and events that transpire on planet earth which are in one sense preparing the world for the kingdom's arrival which is elsewhere termed as "the dispensation of the fulness of times" (Eph. 1:10). Everything is moving toward the earthly theocracy, when God rules the earth through His Son, when earth enters the Golden Age of the Millennium!

A common position expressed by many astrologers and the hippie movement of the 1970's sees the Age of Aquarius as that time when humanity takes control of the earth and its own destiny as its rightful heritage, a time when people will experience enlightenment and the

reclaiming of human goodness, compassion, creativity, brotherhood, peace, and kindness. I can assure you that the earth is not moving toward the Age of Aquarius, but it is headed toward “the dispensation of the fulness of times” (the Millennial Kingdom) when Jesus Christ will rule the earth with a rod of iron and in perfect righteousness. But what would occur on earth prior to the establishment of Christ’s kingdom? The mystery parables give us this answer to this question.

The kingdom’s secrets must run their course before the kingdom can be established. Hence, they are mysteries related to God’s hidden agenda concerning His earthly kingdom program that are unraveled for us in our Lord’s teachings and in the writings of the epistles.

The kingdom parables are not mysteries dealing with a new form of some kind of spiritual kingdom. Matthew never mentions anything that would lead us to this conclusion. Rather, the mysteries are related to the same earthly kingdom. The parables describe new truths about the earthly kingdom that were not previously revealed. The kingdom is not a mystery but the events surrounding the establishment of the kingdom are mysteries. Mike Stallard writes: "However, before that time comes, some other events will take place relative to and in preparation for that kingdom." To state it in another way, the mystery form of the kingdom is not referring to a new type of kingdom but the new teachings related to the earthly kingdom that were not previously revealed by the prophets. Jesus is presenting the same earthly kingdom in all of His parable teachings in the New Testament.

John MacArthur for some reason takes a strange view of the term kingdom in these parables. He states, “This is the kingdom that exists spiritually in the hearts of His people while the King is physically absent from the earth. He is present with believers, but He is not visible or evident to the world, except as revealed through their lives and testimony....Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, now rules in the hearts of His people, although He is physically absent from earth and rules them from His heavenly dwelling through His Spirit—while the usurper Satan temporarily is the spiritual ruler of this world (John 12:31).”

Many interpreters like MacArthur have tried to turn the concept of the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 13:11) into a spiritual kingdom formed in the hearts of people or some new spiritual phase or form related to God’s kingdom program but this is not the case. But the secrets are not related to a new spiritual form of the earthly kingdom designed to take the place of the literal earthly kingdom during an interim period. Nor should we liken the mystery form of the kingdom to only the subject of Christendom (the true and the false together) as so many suggest. This may be part of the mysteries related to the establishment of the earthly kingdom but the teaching about Christendom is not a new spiritual phase or form of the kingdom.

Matthew never speaks of a present spiritual form of the kingdom taking place on earth or a new phase of the kingdom that overrides the literal earthly concept and understanding of the previous kingdom. Nor does the New Testament somehow assign any spiritual meaning to the terms “kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom of God” as some expositors suggest. The fact is that our Lord used these two terms interchangeably when speaking of the earthly kingdom and attached no spiritual meaning to them (Matt. 19:23-24). The idea that there is a new spiritual form of the kingdom established on earth today which in some sense takes the place of the literal kingdom program is fictional. There is no spiritual phase or form of the earthly kingdom being fulfilled today. The term kingdom must consistently refer to the literal earthly kingdom even when the mysteries of the kingdom are being addressed.

Alva McClain has correctly assessed this:

“Now it is true that these parables present certain *conditions* related to the kingdom which are contemporaneous with the present age but nowhere in Matthew 13 is the establishment of the kingdom placed within this age. On the contrary, in two of these parables the setting up of the kingdom is definitely placed at the end of the ‘age’ (vss. 39 and 49, ASV with 41-43). And it is noted that in each of these references, our Lord is speaking as the infallible interpreter of His own parable.”

In other words, he argues that “mysteries of the kingdom” do not mean the kingdom is being fulfilled today in our present age in some spiritual or

mystical manner within the hearts of people. He correctly observes that the literal understanding should be given to the meaning of the word “kingdom” even though there is a present-day fulfillment of the “mysteries” that surround this kingdom in our own day and time. Of course, when Jesus said, “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21) He was not speaking of some kind of mystical or spiritual kingdom that exists inside people but He literally taught, “the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” which means that the King was present offering the literal kingdom to His Jewish brethren. Therefore, the kingdom was among them awaiting to be inaugurated.

Mike Stallard agrees that the literal understanding of the word kingdom in Matthew 13 when stating: “The kingdom must be clearly understood from the context of Matthew’s entire Gospel. John the Baptist had preached it (Mat. 3:2). Jesus had declared that it was at hand (Mt. 4:17). The disciples had been sent out to proclaim its message (Mat. 10:7). The notion of kingdom that prevails throughout Matthew is that which occupied the Old Testament prophets – the literal, political, ethnic, national kingdom promised to the nation of Israel (e.g.’ Dan. 2, 7) This eschatological kingdom is the one anticipated by Christ even after the shift that takes place in Matthew 13. The kingdom in view in all of Matthew, including chapter 13, is the eschatological kingdom of blessing when the nation will be restored. Consequently, what is in view are the responses to the proclamation of that kingdom.”

The expression “kingdom of heaven” (literally – “kingdom of the heavens”) must be understood in a literal sense within in the context of these kingdom parables and Christ’s presentation of the earthly kingdom to Israel throughout the gospel records. It’s clear that the phrase “kingdom of heaven” relates to Christ’s earthly messianic kingdom. Many have tried to assign a spiritual meaning to this term (“kingdom of the heavens”). Others have said that is points to some kind of spiritual phase of God’s kingdom program taking place on earth today before the literal earthly kingdom comes to earth. Some have even concluded that it refers to Heaven where God’s people go after they die. These conclusions are all false and misleading.

I remember hearing a liberal preaching at a funeral say that when everyone dies, they all enter the “kingdom of heaven.” He came out wearing a cape and had a large cross hanging around his neck. It looked like the cross was weighing him down as he walked. This man was suggesting that ultimately everybody goes to Heaven and that the phrase “kingdom of heaven” is referring to Heaven. This is a blatant error.

The great scholar, Merrill F. Unger, defines the kingdom of heaven as follows: “The Phrase ‘Kingdom of Heaven,’ literally, ‘Of the heavens’ is peculiar to Matthew and denotes the messianic rule on the earth of Christ as the Son of David. The designation is appropriate because it is the rule of the heavens over the earth (Matt. 6:10). The phrase is derived from the O.T (Dan. 2:34-36:44; 7:23-27), and it is said that the ‘God of heaven’ will set up this kingdom covenanted to David’s posterity (2 Sam. 7:7-10) after the destruction of Gentile world power by the returning Christ, ‘the Stone cut out without hands.’”

This is an excellent observation and keeps the concept of an earthly kingdom in the expression “kingdom of heaven.” The heavens will rule the earth someday! By the way, this is the only way our world will be straightened out! The point of the phrase is that the kingdom comes from Heaven and will begin on earth when the King returns. There can be no doubt about the nature of the kingdom that Jesus was describing in mystery form. It was the same literal earthly kingdom that the Jews looked forward to because of their covenant program (Acts 1:6). Jesus was simply saying that there were some secrets not previously revealed about this earthly kingdom program that are now being unveiled. The curtain is being drawn back and more truth is being revealed about the earthly kingdom. These secrets of the kingdom deal with the events and spiritual climate of the world prior to the earthly kingdom’s arrival.

The Sunday School movement of the 19th and 20th centuries provided the inspiration for many hymns. William Henry Parker (1845-1929) was the head of an insurance company and a devoted member of Chelsea Street Baptist Church, Nottingham, England, where he was active in Sunday School work. United Methodist Hymnal editor, Carlton Young notes that most of Parker’s hymns were written for Sunday School anniversaries.

Fifteen of these hymns were published in the Sunday School Hymnary, 1905.

But Parker wrote one of his hymns ("Tell Me the Storied of Jesus") in 1885 at the request of the children of his Sunday School class. The children asked, "Teacher, tell us another story." And so, he did. He told them another story of Jesus – the stories that Jesus shared while He was on earth.

"Tell me the stories of Jesus
I love to hear;
Things I would ask him to tell me
If He were here:
Scenes by the wayside,
Tales of the sea,
Stories of Jesus,
Tell them to me."

This hymn first appeared among Methodists in the 1935 Methodist Hymnal under the heading "Hymns for Children."

Parables in Scripture are really stories (stories that Jesus gave) that are given to illustrate truth by means of comparison. The word "parable" means to throw alongside and speaks of a comparison. The parables of the kingdom are no different. The repeated phrase and formula, "the kingdom of heaven is like" (Matt. 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47) means that certain elements in the storyline relate to or illustrate truths that occur on earth before the earthly kingdom arrives. When the Bible texts refer to "the kingdom of heaven" in this chapter it is talking about the kingdom of heaven in mystery form. It refers to those hidden secrets that are associated with the earthly kingdom or those conditions and events that will occur on planet earth before the kingdom arrives. Jesus is saying that the earthly kingdom in mystery form is "like" or comparable to these things which I'm about to describe. Mark 4:30, "And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?"

In other words, Jesus was saying, "The secrets associated with this earthly kingdom program can be expressed in this way. If you want to know about

the secret things concerning the kingdom which were hidden from the Old Testament prophets, then let me express these secret things in this way. They are like this or comparable to this – a sower sowing seed, tares among the wheat, a mustard seed that abnormally grows to great heights, leaven that is added to meal, a hidden treasure, a pearl of great price, and a huge net dragging across the sea of humanity.

Matthew 13:17

“For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous *men* (*living during the Old Testament era of time*) have desired to see *those things* which ye see, and have not seen *them*; and to hear *those things* which ye hear, and have not heard *them*.”

This is amazing. Like the disciples, we are seeing and hearing things which no one else has known about until Jesus spoke about them. What are those things that Jesus revealed in the mystery parables about the kingdom (Matt. 13:11) that the Old Testament prophets, righteous men, and kings desired to see and know? Generally, the key mystery is that there is going to be a delay between the time when the kingdom is offered and the time that it is actually established. But more specifically the “mysteries” (plural) have to do with such things as the moral climate that will be upon earth and the spiritual state of people before the kingdom arrives. The mysteries concerning the kingdom address the spiritual climate, conditions, events, and programs that will occur upon planet earth prior to the kingdom’s arrival. These are the things that were not revealed in the Old Testament in relation to the establishment of the earthly kingdom.

George Peters concurs with this idea when saying:

“... the very outskirts of the subject already force the conclusion that those mysteries refer not to the nature of the kingdom, but to the manner of its establishment, the means employed, the preparation for it, the time for its manifestation, and such related subjects.”

Stanley Toussaint once again remarks:

“The parables of Matthew 13 reveal new truths involving the preparation for the establishment of the kingdom during this time of postponement

which was not predicted in Daniel's seventy weeks or other Old Testament prophecies."

Jesus also reveals that during this time, during the postponement of the kingdom, there would be the mingling of truth and error, the mingling of the true and the false, a sphere of Christian profession (Matt. 13:25) that would appear in the world that we would call "Christendom" (all religious faiths lumped together in one pile). Many people and systems that appear religious during this time, prior to the King's arrival, would profess allegiance to the King and yet contain much that is contrary to the principles of the King.

In the mysteries about the kingdom Jesus is going to reveal the specific events that would occur on earth paving the way for the kingdom to come upon planet earth. The mystery period is a time of preparation. It points to those events that will transpire on earth during the interim time between Christ's rejection of Israel and His reception of Israel prior to the kingdom's arrival. Such things as the temporary setting aside of Israel (God's treasure) and the introduction of God's new program (the formation of the Church) would occur. Between the postponement of the kingdom program and the re-establishment of the kingdom on earth there would be many conditions and events that would transpire heralding the return of the King and the establishment of His millennial reign (Rev. 20:1-3).

Before the King arrives these mystery events and conditions in the world must run their course. The Old Testament prophets wanted to know about all these events that would occur between Mount Calvary (cross) and the Mount of Olives (kingdom). It's these secret things that Jesus revealed to His disciples. They were the sacred secrets concerning those events that would occur on earth prior to the establishment of the earthly kingdom - events which were not made known to those people living in the past generation. They were not revealed to them and therefore the Old Testament prophets wondered what would take place between Messiah's death and Messiah's reign.

1 Peter 1:10-11

"Of which salvation the prophets (*Old Testament prophets*) have enquired and searched diligently (*in the Old Testament Scriptures*), who prophesied

of the grace *that should come unto you* (*Christ's death upon the cross*): Searching what (*what specific time*), or what manner of time (*what kind of time or what the world circumstances will be like at Messiah's return*) the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ (His death on the cross), and the glory that should follow" (*His kingdom glory and reign over the earth*).

A key secret or mystery that the Old Testament prophets did not know was that the King was going to return to Heaven, and during His absence, before He returns to earth to establish His kingdom, the seed of God's Word must be sown in all the world (the field – Matt. 13:38). The truth would not merely extend to the Jews in Palestine but to the entire world of Gentiles. The secret that the Old Testament prophets did not know was that Christ would die on the cross (Acts 2:23), rise from the dead, go back to Heaven, implement a worldwide Gospel plan to save the Gentiles, create His Church, allow conditions on planet earth to deteriorate morally and religiously, and then at a later time come back to earth a second time to establish His kingdom. The timing of Christ's death and Second Coming and the understanding of the mystery events that happen on earth before the Kingdom arrives were unknown to them.

George Zeller comments: "The Old Testament prophets could not really distinguish two comings of Christ. When the Jews read the Scriptures, they could only see one coming. As we read our Bibles today (in this present age) we have the advantage of being better able to see two distinct comings of Christ--one is now history and the other is still prophecy. To show you the difficulty the O.T. prophets must have had in distinguishing the two comings of Christ, read the following passages to see how the two comings of Christ are blended together [Micah 5:2; Isa. 9:6-7; Isa. 61:1-2 (compare Luke 4:18-19); Zech. 9:9-10; Isa. 40:3-5 (compare Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:3); Malachi 3:1-2; 4:5 (compare Mk. 1:2; Matt. 17:3,10-13); Luke 1:31-33]. If you were a Jew living in the year 100 B.C., would you have understood these passages as referring to two separate comings of the Messiah?"

Do you like to put puzzles together? I must confess that I never liked putting them together. I don't have enough patience to search through all

the pieces to find the corners, the same color pieces, and try and fit everything together. Actually, this is what the Old Testament prophets were doing. They were trying to piece together the puzzle of when Christ would die on the cross and when His kingdom would be established on earth since both these events were prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures.



But the Old Testament prophets and saints could not find the missing pieces to the puzzle. They could not see the gap of time (valley) that existed between the first and Second Coming of Christ, between the cross and the kingdom. They did not have the puzzle pieces of the Church Age and the specific events that would occur on earth before the Kingdom is established. But Jesus gave us the remaining pieces of the puzzle in the mysteries about the kingdom so we could see the events that happen between Christ's rejection by the Jews during His earthly ministry and His Second Coming.

The prophets saw Christ's suffering in His first coming to earth and the golden age of the kingdom that followed His Second Coming, but they did not see the valley or time period between Christ's two appearances (Christ First advent to earth and the Second Advent to earth). The Old Testament saints wanted to know about the timing of these two events or which event would take place first – His suffering or kingdom. They also wanted to know the amount of time that would elapse and exist between these two events (cross and kingdom).

Also, the Old Testament saints wanted to know what would occur in this gap of time between Christ's death and return to earth. These were the "mysteries" or sacred secrets about the kingdom that they did not know about but which they searched diligently. But now, for the first time Jesus was revealing the mystery concerning the actual timing of His death and kingdom and what was going to take place between His rejection and return to earth, between His suffering and His kingdom, between Israel's

rejection and reception of the King. This is the time known as the mysteries about the kingdom, which nobody could know or previously discover.

In summary, during this period of time between Israel's rejection and His return (while the kingdom is postponed) many will reject the message of the kingdom as the parable of the sower reveals (Matt.13:3-8; 18-23). The world will be a mixture of good and evil as the parable of the wheat and tares unfolds (Matt. 13:24-30). There will also be an unnatural and alarming growth of evil that will seemingly dominate everything as depicted in the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32). In time the evil nature of this intervening time, prior to the kingdom's arrival, will culminate into a leavened or evil monstrosity that defies God and all that is righteous (parable of the leaven in the meal - Matt. 13:33).

During this time period Jesus as the Messiah would die for the entire world, represented by the field (vs. 38), so that He might purchase a hidden treasure in this field (Israel - vs. 44) and a pearl of great price (Church – vs. 45). In the end, just prior to the kingdom's arrival, earth's living population will be gathered to determine who will enter the kingdom (parable of the net – vss. 47-50). These details and the exact timing of these events were hidden secrets unrevealed in the Old Testament as we will see.

Since the nation rejected the Messiah Jesus began to explain the effect of this rejection by introducing these mystery teachings about the kingdom. He was giving them more kingdom insight and more kingdom-related revelation due to the nation's rejection of Him.

Imagine you're floating along enjoying a scuba diving trip when you happen across some gold coins you think are child's play money. Then you realize that they are actually valuable coins—more than 2,000 of them—and they're over 1,000 years old. This is exactly what happened to members of a diving club who found the treasure in the ancient harbor of Caesarea, Israel, in 2015. The collection, the largest gold treasure ever found in that country, was then recovered by the Israel Antiquities Authority. An investigation into the coins' origin and why they were at the bottom of the sea is ongoing. Jesus spoke about treasures in relation to the mystery parables in the language of treasure.

Matthew 13:51-52

“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.”

We will discuss this verse at the close of our seven parables. For now we must recognize that the old treasures refer to those things that the disciples previously heard and knew about the messianic kingdom. The new treasures refer to those teachings that Jesus had just taught about in reference to His kingdom program (the secrets about the kingdom). They would include such teachings as the spiritual climate and condition of the world prior to the establishment of the kingdom and those events that would occur on the planet earth while the kingdom program is temporarily postponed.

“Treasure ... things new and old”



They would also include our Lord’s teachings concerning professing followers, both good and evil people, the creation of His Church, and once again blessing His Jewish brethren at the Second Coming. These are things the disciples know nothing about. The disciples were fully aware through the Old Testament revelation of the righteousness of Messiah’s rule but not the unrighteousness that would pollute the earth before the kingdom arrives in the form of apostasy and false religion. They knew about the Golden Age when Messiah would rule with a rod of iron, but they did not know about the Church Age that would occur before the kingdom arrives.

Through these parables Jesus answered the question, “What happened to the kingdom?” The answer is that God’s kingdom will be established on earth at Jesus’ Second Coming. In the meantime, before the kingdom arrives on planet earth, good and evil will coexist together, and false profession or deception will occur on every hand. A state of confusion and chaos will abound until the kingdom arrives. God will change His plans and

create the Church while keeping His ancient people hidden waiting their future glory and promises. The disciples needed to know what was going to occur before the kingdom arrives. They needed to know the climate of the world and the specific events that would occur in the world prior to the kingdom's arrival.

Acts 1:3 informs us of what Jesus taught in His post-resurrection ministry: "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."

The "things pertaining to the kingdom of God" that Jesus spoke to His disciples about were no doubt many of the same things that Jesus had revealed in the parables of Matthew 13, those events and changes that would transpire on earth before the kingdom would be established, the specific things that would occur in preparation for the earthly kingdom to be established over the earth. Although the earthly kingdom topic was the subject of much of the Lord's teaching and preaching before the cross, He saw fit to discuss it further during His 40 days of post-resurrection ministry. There were probably many things that Jesus wanted to reiterate and talk about concerning the exact timing of the kingdom's arrival and those events that would take place in the world in connection with the coming kingdom.

It would be these teachings about the kingdom (the secret or hidden teachings pertaining to the kingdom of God) presented by Christ during His 40-day post-resurrection ministry, which the Holy Spirit would later use to bring clarification and new understanding to the disciples about the timetable of the kingdom's arrival and those things that would occur on earth before the kingdom arrives.

In Acts 1:6 the disciples then asked this question: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" This tells us that the disciples did not yet fully understand the exact timing of the kingdom's arrival. They needed a crash course in kingdom theology!

The Disciples Needed a Timing Change on the Start of the Kingdom (Millennium)



They needed a timing change regarding the starting point of the earthly kingdom (Millennium). They needed to sit down and study our Lord's teaching concerning what was going to occur on planet earth before the kingdom is established. With the dawn of Pentecost and the formation of the church just around the corner they would begin to understand in a greater way the events that must occur before the kingdom comes to earth and that a later time was assigned for the start of the kingdom.

Acts 1:7 reads: "And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Jesus told His disciples that they could not know at the present time when His kingdom would come to planet earth. This was information that the Spirit's post-Pentecost ministry would clarify to them. The expression "times or the seasons" is used to refer to the timing and events that would transpire before the kingdom arrives on earth.

The Greek word for "times" (*chronos*) basically describes duration of a certain time and no doubt relates to the duration of time that would elapse before the kingdom's arrival. The understanding of a postponement in the Lord's kingdom program would be expressed by this word. The disciples at this time could not fully comprehend about the postponement of God's earthly kingdom program and the exact timing of the arrival of the kingdom which would occur after a long period of delay.

The word for "seasons" (*kairos*) refers to the kinds of times or the state of the times and the things and events of time. In this setting it no doubt expresses the kind of events that would transpire prior to the kingdom's arrival on earth.

1 Thessalonians 5:1

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you."

It's very interesting that in the process of progressive revelation the disciples and you and me today would be able to understand and fully grasp about the "times and the seasons" which would precede the kingdom's arrival on earth. Paul's statement suggests that the later

revelation given to New Testament believers should have brought understanding about these times and seasons. We know by completed revelation and the clear teaching of the Spirit of God that there will be an intervening time period before the kingdom's arrival (Church Age) and we have the exact prophetic details concerning what will occur before the kingdom arrives on planet earth. We have further clarification of the specific prophetic events and the timing when God's judgments would fall on the earth. They would occur in conjunction with the Second Coming and the kingdom's arrival – not with the first coming of Christ (Revelation 6-19). Today we can know the details of the times and the seasons. because of the completed Bible and the great revival of the study of eschatology in our day.

Jesus said in John 16:13:

“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”

It would take the illumination of the Spirit’s ministry to give the disciples a full understanding of the Messiah’s mystery parables, which He shared with them during His earthly ministry. Yes, the disciples responded to Jesus by saying that they understood what Jesus said in these parables, but this certainly was not the case.

Matthew 13:51

“Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.”

I think the disciples were sincere in saying this. But there is almost a sense of humor revealed in the disciple’s response to Christ’s question. They were not in any position to fully grasp all these things at this point of time. The Holy Spirit had not yet come to teach them nor had additional revelation been given to help them to understand the sequence of events that would transpire before the kingdom arrives on earth.



Once again, we must remember that what is going to take place in the valley involves dispensational and prophetic truths. These truths would include those conditions and events that would occur after the disciple's days and into our own day and time. The mystery parables speak of the great dispensational truths that would occur in the valley for it's during this time frame when Israel would be temporarily set aside and the New Testament Church would be born (Acts 2), which has now existed for some 2,000 years. The parables also unveil the mixture of the true and false, the apostasy and departure within the Church, and the timing of the final prophetic judgment that would transpire on earth in conjunction with the Second Coming and the Kingdom's arrival (Daniel's 70th week).

The People of the Parables

It's also interesting to understand that during this present Church Age, this great parenthesis of time between Israel's rejection and the return of the Messiah, that a great portion of people will be born who will inherit the earthly kingdom. They are called "children of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:38). It's interesting and true that only the "word of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:19) produces "children of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:38). During Christ's earthly ministry the children of the kingdom would have a direct reference to those Jews who through repentance and faith in Christ received His message He taught concerning the earthly kingdom and who were spiritually prepared to enter the theocracy (Matt. 4:17).



It's interesting that in the future Tribulation Period where the "gospel of the kingdom" will be preached by the 144,000 Jewish evangelists to both Jews and Gentiles, just prior to the Second Coming, and many will come to faith in Christ and be prepared to enter the coming earthly kingdom (Matt. 24:14). So, the "children of the kingdom" and "word of the kingdom" during the earthly ministry of Christ would have immediate reference to God's

Jewish children awaiting the kingdom's arrival prior to its establishment and these specific terms would also have significance to those who are saved during the coming seven-year Tribulation Period who are spiritually prepared to enter the earthly kingdom (Millennium).

This brings up the question. How do we fit this terminology (word of the kingdom and children of the kingdom) into the time in which we live today? Remember, the mystery parables cover the Church Age and the saints who come to faith in Christ today as the seed is being sown throughout the earth.

To summarize, the terms “children of the kingdom” and “word of the kingdom” would have an *immediate application* to the Jews living during the days Jesus was on earth, who were looking forward to entering the kingdom (Millennium). However, the terms would have a *broader application* to all those who are saved through the Gospel message during the mystery period (interim period) and who become destined to inherit the kingdom (James 2:5; 2 Pet. 1:11; Col. 4:11; Matt. 25:34).

Since the parables also project us into the present dispensation in which we live today, it can be said that in a general or broad sense there will always be a spiritual nucleus of people throughout the entire mystery period (during the King's rejection until the King's return) that is prepared for the future kingdom. This would include even Gentile Church Age saints as the mystery period runs its course (Acts 15:14). Even Church Age saints are promised entrance into the earthly kingdom someday through faith in Christ (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5). In fact, even the Gentile masses outside the Jewish nation will one day “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34).

Again, we must always recognize that there will always be a spiritual nucleus of people who are “children of the kingdom” and “heirs to the kingdom” throughout the mystery period who will eventually inherit the earthly kingdom theocracy in the future. This is true even for Church Age saints who are living during this mystery period. (James 2:5; 2 Pet. 1:11; Col. 4:11; Matt. 25:24). In a general sense, all of God's redeemed can be regarded as God's children awaiting the arrival of God's kingdom. They are

heirs to the kingdom. Some will die or be raptured (Church saints) prior to the kingdom's arrival (1 Thess. 4:13-18) while others (Tribulation saints) will be living when the King returns following the Tribulation Period (Matthew 24-25).

The “children of the kingdom” description was originally given because of the Jewish and kingdom setting. The Jews who did receive Christ as their Messiah during His first coming were destined to be “children of the kingdom” and the same would be true for all people who come to faith during the mystery period – even Gentiles. The general teaching is that from the beginning to the ending of the mystery period there will always be a nucleus of children that God will be working with and preparing to someday inherit the kingdom. They are God’s children who are destined for the kingdom - to rule and reign at the end of earth’s climatic history (Rev. 5:10; 19:11-16). Those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah (John 20:30-31) will some day inherit a place in the restored theocracy (James 2:5) while the unsaved throughout this interim period will not inherit any place in the kingdom (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:9; Matt. 8:12; 25:46).

In conclusion, the Parable of the Sower with its emphasis on the message of “word of the kingdom” and “children of the kingdom” (specifically Jews) merely starts the mystery period. However, it does not become inclusive of the mystery period for the Gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection during the Church Age, without the emphasis on the coming earthly kingdom (1 Cor. 15:3-4), would also be part of the mystery period of the kingdom.

The descriptive terminology of the “children of the kingdom” means that God will always have a faith-based nucleus of people prepared to enter the kingdom throughout the mystery period of time. Our Lord simply began the mystery period of the kingdom by explaining how those “children of the kingdom” (the Jews) living during in His own day were given the message that the kingdom was at hand. He obviously spoke in these descriptive terms since they were immediately applicable to His time and the Jewish setting of the covenant promises given to Israel. Hence, these Jewish-related terms (word of the kingdom and children of the kingdom) have a particular understanding and application to the beginning of the period of time encompassing the mysteries of the kingdom (the days of Christ’s

earthly ministry), but this does not overrule the fact that other saints (Gentiles) outside of Christ's Jewish heritage would come to faith and salvation and would also become God's children (John 1:12) and heirs of the kingdom through the preaching of the Gospel message (Acts 1:8; 15:14).

"My Father is rich in houses and land,
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands!
Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold,
His coffers are full, He has riches untold.

I'm a child of the King,
A child of the King,
With Jesus my Savior,
I'm a child of the King."

Jonathan Whitfield was preaching to coal miners in England. He asked one man, "What do you believe?" "Well, I believe the same as the church." "And what does the church believe?" "Well, they believe the same as me." Seeing he was getting nowhere, Whitfield said, "And what is it that you both believe?" "Well, I suppose we believe the same thing."

It's hard getting the truth out of some people. It's like pulling teeth! As we come to our next point in our introductory remarks on the parables of Matthew 13, we are going to see why Jesus spoke in parables. He wanted to convey truth only to His disciples.

The Purposes for the Parables

There are three major purposes related to the mystery parables.

Remember that these are parables that tell new secrets about the earthly kingdom which were not revealed by the Old Testament prophets (Matt. 13:11-14).

a. The Purpose of Illustrating Truth

Matthew 13:3

"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow."

These parables and the parabolic teaching of Christ were illustrating truth to the disciples which they were to know and learn. This is the purpose of a parable. The word parable literally means “beside” or “along side.” In other words, a story is thrown alongside the truth to illustrate the truth. A parable is a story or illustration with an underlying spiritual message that is designed to teach truth in an illustrative way. It is the use of figurative language designed to teach literal and spiritual truth. Parables do not mean nothing is true within the story that is being presented to the listeners. In fact, just the opposite is true. In the case of the prophetic parables of Matthew 13 the lessons and truths being presented are designed to teach literal occurrences and events that will transpire with real people on earth for thousands of years of earth’s history.

b. The purpose of hiding truth

The second purpose was to hide truth from the unsaved or unbelievers.

Matthew 13:11-12

“He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you (*Christ’s disciples or followers*) to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them (*the unsaved who have rejected Christ*) 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.”

In this verse Jesus states that the disciples would have more light and truth since they already has accepted the light of the revelation of His own person and works as being true. The disciples had received Jesus as the Messiah and because of this they would “have more abundance.” They would be given additional light which means they would be given the interpretation and understanding of these parables. It’s interesting that when Jesus was alone with His disciples, He explained the meaning of the parables to them (Mark 4:33-34). This tells us that the parables which Jesus taught illustrated some important spiritual truths that were only explained to the disciples. Jesus explained and expounded the meaning of these parables to those who were His own and through them illustrated important truth for the future generations of His disciples or followers.

To the one group (saved disciples) the parables revealed truth. To the other group (unsaved Jewish masses) the parables concealed truth. This is why Jesus spoke in parables. It was to hide truth to those who had already rejected great light. Matthew 13:12 reveals that the disciples would be given additional light. Once again, the majority of the nation had rejected the light that they had (Jesus' words and works) and because of this rejection of Jesus as their Messiah no additional revelation or light would be given to them ("but whosoever hath not from him shall be taken away even that he that").

In other words, since the nation rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the light they were previously given about the Messiah would no longer shine upon them. This is because when a person does not act upon truth, he eventually loses the truth.

John 12:36

"While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them."

In other words, if a person has or possesses truth it's because He has acted upon it. If he fails to act upon it, he never really had the truth as part of his heart and life and will end up losing the opportunity to believe the truth that was before him. Furthermore, he will also lose the very capacity to receive more truth. It's clear that Jesus was talking about unbelieving Jews in this context. The disciples had accepted the light; therefore, they would receive more light. However, the Jewish nation on a large scale had rejected the Light of the World (John 8:12). Therefore, they were not only prevented from receiving more revelation, they would lose what little light they had. Light rejected is light lost! What we do not use we lose!

If we stop using a certain muscle in our body that muscle weakens and goes limp, and we can no longer properly use the muscle. In a similar way if we do not respond to the light of truth, we can lose the truth and no longer understand it. Truth can become lost to us that God wants us to know. To some degree, this can be true even in relation to the Christian life.

During my many years in the pastorate, I have watched those who heard the truth and obeyed it and others who heard the same truth and refused to act upon the truth that they had been given. I have watched the spiritual growth in the lives of many people and in every instance those who grew were diligent students of the Bible obeying its commands and precepts. The others who did not grow in the truth of God's Word willingly and ignorantly rejected the light that was given to them. Please note that Jesus said it was "given" unto them (Matt. 13:11) to know these sacred secrets. Let us always remember that divine revelation is always a matter of giving on God's part.

The point of this section of Scripture is this. Since the nation rejected Jesus as their Messiah it has therefore rejected the light they had. And how great was the light! Since the Jewish nation rejected the revelation of Christ that it had the people would not be given no more revelation or light. This is why Jesus spoke in parables to His true followers. Instead of teaching the nation in terms they could clearly understand Jesus reverted to teaching by parables which was a new form of teaching. Again, this was done because the Jewish multitudes refused to receive Him as their Messiah and Savior.

Matthew 13:10 says: "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" In this verse the disciples asked the question why Jesus spoke to the multitudes of Jewish brethren ("them") using parables. Jesus responds in Matthew 13:11 by saying: "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." In this verse Jesus made clear "but to them it is not given."

Mark 4:11 puts it this way: "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these *things* are done in parables." Jesus spoke in parables to hide truth from the unbelieving Jewish people.

The unbelieving masses could not understand these parables because of the Jewish rejection of His personal claims. Therefore, they were not given more truth to trample underfoot and make a mockery out of the truths about the kingdom. Jesus warned we should not "cast ye your pearls before

swine” (Matt. 7:6). There comes a time when sacred truth should not be shared with Christ rejecting vagabonds who want to only make a mockery out of the truth. Sometimes we must know when to stop speaking the truth!

Jesus then says in Matthew 13:13:

“Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.”

The conjunction “Therefore” indicates why the Lord spoke in parables to the unsaved. He did so because they were willfully spiritually blind and unbelieving; therefore, Christ did not want them to receive these secret truths. The Jewish people through their own willful ignorance and unbelief became spiritually blind to the truth that was already given to them concerning the Messiah (“they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not” – Matt. 13:13). Because of their rejection they could not understand any more truth. Here Matthew seems to suggest that their own unbelief is the cause of their spiritual blindness.

H. C. Woodring put it this way:

“Because they did not have the love of the truth, they would not get the light of the truth.”

Truth was right under their nose and they could not see it! They professed to hear God’s Word, but the living Word of God (Christ in the flesh) was in their midst, and they would not hear and obey what He said about Himself (“hearing they hear not” – Matt. 13:13). They were unwilling to understand (“neither do they understand” – Matt. 13:13) the wonderful fact of the Incarnation or that Jesus was their Messiah and Savior.

Sadly as a result of their willful rejection and ignorance, their capacity to understand truth was taken away from them and the light they were given concerning the Messiah would no longer shine. Their rejection was willful ignorance. They did not understand because they would not understand! As a result of their willful rejection of Christ the Jews received judicial blindness.

Romans 11:25 says “that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.” So were these parables given to produce even greater blindness due to Israel’s deliberate departure from truth and her own willful blindness. Jesus said in Luke 19:42: “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things *which belong* unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

Sadly, truth that is rejected can become lost! Dispensationally this is what has happened to the nation of Israel.

2 Corinthians 3:14-15

“But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which *vail* is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.”

Those who are involved in Jewish missions today know that this is true. There is a veil over the eyes of the Jewish people. They are still looking for the Messiah, but Messiah has already died on the cross for them as outlined in the messianic portion of Old Testament revelation (Isaiah 53; Ps. 22). Yes, to this day the veil of unbelief is still on the hearts of Jewish people because of their rejection of Christ during His earthly ministry. There is a double blindness that exists today on every Jew – Satanic and judicial. Of course, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). For this reason, there is still “a remnant (of Jews) according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:5). Despite the veil that overshadows the Jewish nation there are those who are coming to faith through the Gospel witness.

Let’s change gears for a moment and move from prophetic and dispensational truth to the practical. Jesus said in Matthew 13:9: “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Only the disciples were in the position of hearing and learning what Jesus was teaching since they were rightly related to Him. At the same time, we learn a practical lesson from what Jesus said. Listening with open ears and an open heart is essential to learning the Bible and growing. We must have our ears and hearts open to

the truth if we are ever going to learn it and apply it to our lives today.
“Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

I’m convinced that most people today are not good listeners and because of this we remain in the dark about many things. If we would become careful listeners of God’s Word, we would be more discerning.

One preacher told this story. While he was preaching a paper airplane came flying toward him from the balcony area. Wouldn’t you know it? The paper plane hit him square in the face and caused everybody to jump and become startled. Of course, someone was not listening to the preacher, they were trying to fly airplanes instead of focusing on the truth of God’s Word.

Another preacher said that brother Hawkins was sitting on the side of the church snoring away. All of a sudden the lights went out and everything was pitch black. The pastor said we might as well pray silently until the lights might come back on. Meanwhile brother Hawkins woke up and thought that church had been dismissed. Without even thinking He said out loud, “Well, everybody has gone home and left me hear.”

How many times have we gone to God’s house unprepared to listen or hear His Word? And when we leave, we get very little to nothing out of the message. Our return home is worse than when we left, and we probably blamed it on the pastor or some other person. We must prepare ourselves to hear and listen to God’s truth. Getting up and watching the news (politics) on Sunday morning will not prepare us for church! Watching a recap of Saturday sports won’t prepare us for listening to God’s Word. Preparation is essential for good listening.

When we fail to come to church spiritually prepared, we will leave church with an empty bucket. Many distractions and detours keep us from listening to God’s Word. The first big test after church is not how I feel but how I act! If I change my living in some way, I know I’ve listened well. When we come to church prepared to listen, we will depend on God to teach us new truth and change our lives.

When a congregation is walking in the Spirit the Word of God comes to them with power and penetration. It affects their lives and really changes them! God can say more to your heart than the preacher can say with his lips. The message is not limited by the preacher's outlines when we are good listeners and applicators of the truth to our lives. Let us become good listeners and remind ourselves that the Word of God is a light to guide us, water to wash us, a mirror to show us our blemishes, and medicine to heal our hurts.

So in the Parable of the Sower Jesus is speaking about how people hear the Word of God - "Who hath ears to hear. Let him hear" (Matt. 13:9). Luke adds the words, "Take heed therefore how ye hear" (Luke 8:18). The disciples had spiritual ears and would be receptive to the truth that Jesus taught but those who had already rejected truth would not be interested in what He had to say. They did not have the same spiritual radar like the disciples. They were not receptive to the truth due to their spiritual rejection of the truth and light already given to them. Therefore, Jesus spoke in parables to them (the unsaved) so they would not receive any additional light or revelation.

"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." Jesus often said this in his letters to the seven churches: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 2:7,11, 17, 20; 3:6,13, 22). Let me share something else from a practical standpoint. If a person listens to the Word of God long enough, he will do one of two things. Either he will trust Christ and be saved or reject Christ and go to hell. Jesus concluded in Matthew 13:16 by saying these words: "But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear." We must remember that we will be blessed only when we open our eyes and ears to God's Word! We miss God's will and purpose for our lives when we ignore truth. Our ears need to be tuned to His Word!

Matthew 13:34

"All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them."

Jesus spoke in parables to the unsaved Jewish multitudes. This verse reemphasizes and restates the purpose of hiding truth from Jewish unbelievers who did not want to hear what He had to say. This was not true before Israel's rejection but only after Israel's official rejection of the Messiah. Jesus began to speak in parables and hide or conceal truth to His national people after their rejection of Him as their Messiah and King.

c. The purpose of fulfilling prophecy

Matthew 13:14-16

"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."

A third purpose for these parables was to fulfill prophecy. Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9-10. As Isaiah began his ministry, God told him that people would not comprehend his message of judgment to them. Jesus experienced the same kind of response to His message about the kingdom. He preached the Word of God and many people saw but they did not truly perceive. They heard but did not understand. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in a comparative way (not literal sense) in Jesus' day. What happened in Isaiah's day was similar to what happened in Jesus' own time. Truthfully, it's also similar to what is happening in our own day and time. People hear God's truth but do not understand it! They are like a cow standing in a field chewing on its cud. They don't perceive or understand what God is saying to them.

1 Corinthians 2:14 states:

"But the natural (*soulish – the life that animates the body*) man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned" (*cannot properly assess, judge, and therefore understand the relevance of spiritual truth for their lives*).

The unsaved or unregenerate person lacks spiritual discernment and cannot make sense out of spiritual truth. He cannot relate to it or understand how it relates or applies to his life.

Vance Havner used to say:

“The natural man who does not perceive truth is like a wooden Indian statue standing outside a cigar store.”

Why don't they understand the truth? Why are people blinded today? Why did God judicially blind Israel? It's because people deliberately stop listening to the truth and close their eyes to the truth! There is personal responsibility and accountability in what Jesus is teaching.

Matthew 13:15

“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.”

➤ **People are insensitive to the truth.**

The word “gross” means “to make thick or fat.” Isaiah said, “Make the heart of this people fat” (Isa. 6:10). You have heard of the expression “thick headed?” Metaphorically, this word means to be stupid which results in a person being dull or calloused to truth. What a picture this is of our own today. Obesity is a physical epidemic in our country, but spiritual obesity (possessing a fat head) is a greater epidemic. The great masses are fat headed and spiritually stupid, calloused, and insensitive to truth. They have become insensitive to spiritual realities. They want their way and their answers, but they don't want God's way or God's answers!

➤ **People shut their ears to the truth.**

Jesus continues to say that “their ears are dull of hearing” (Matt. 13:15). Isaiah said that they “make their ears heavy” (Isa. 6:10). This is also true today. People turn a deaf ear to the truth. They don't want to hear God's

truth. They have heavy ears! In fact, today many in the church would rather hear sweet platitudes and feel-good sermons.

2 Timothy 4:4 says,

“And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

Furthermore, when you witness to people about the truth it will many times fall on deaf ears. This is because people have willfully rejected the truth. They have put stoppers in their ears and are not willing to listen to the truth.

Years ago, I was walking on the beach one morning with my wife and children in Brigantine, New Jersey. I began witnessing to a fisherman along the shore. The truth seemed to be falling on deaf ears for a while. However, at one point I told him that God could bury His sins in the deepest depths of the sea. When I said this, he turned around and looked at me and said, “That is pretty deep. Nobody will ever find them there!”

➤ **People close their eyes to the truth.**

Jesus finally states: “*their eyes they have closed.*” This speaks of spiritual blindness. When a person closes their eyes to the truth the lights eventually go out. The veil is put over his eyes. Note the downward progression – they stop their brains from thinking, shut their ears, and then close their eyes! Be sure of one thing. This ignorance, deafness, and blindness is their own fault. God did not judicially blind the nation without their own willful ignorance and turning from the truth. God does not stop the light of revelation unless people willingly, voluntarily, ignorantly, and deliberately reject truth. When this happens, the lights go off! It is keeping with the nature of God to judge people for their willful unbelief (Rom. 1:21, 24, 26, 28). God gives people over to their own sinful choices and willful blindness.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-11 teaches this same thing: “*Even him* (the Antichrist), whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be

saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie."

Once again, light rejected is light lost. When the unsaved repeatedly reject the light, the lights eventually go off. When the lights in a room are turned off it gets very dark. We begin to stumble around and can't see where we are going. I have tripped over the grandchildren's toy cars and stepped on other toys with my bare feet while trying to walk in the dark. The same is true from a spiritual perspective. When the lights go off people can't see where they are going from a spiritual perspective, and they are lost in the darkness of sin and unbelief.

Is there any hope for those who are insensitive, who cannot hear and who cannot see? Yes! Read the second half of the verse – "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" (Matt. 13:15b). Jesus is talking about converting lost people and healing them spiritually as they come to repentance and faith in Him as their Messiah. This is the wonder of grace!

Truth can be discoverable to any among the multitudes of lost people if they repent of their sins and seek the truth. When God opens the eyes of the lost to truth, they can openly face the truth. There is both a human and divine side to discovering truth. The divine side is that God opens the eyes of lost people. But man has a choice to make in the matter of his eternal destiny. A person's faith is an act of their will made possible by the work of God on the human heart. Both God and man's volition enter the picture of a person's salvation.

Don't become lopsided in your theology. We must learn not to pit one Biblical author or doctrine against another. For example, if Scripture plainly teaches that God is sovereign and that people are responsible, we must teach both. Both the sovereignty of God and free will of man are true. Charles Spurgeon said that they are friends! Man does not have to remain in his stubborn state of deafness and blindness if he will but choose to hear and see what God is impressing upon His heart. Man remains ignorant and blind because of His own choice! You can't blame God for your continued

ignorance and rejection of the truth. You cannot blame God when you wind up in hell.

Jesus taught in John 5:24:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

In short, these parables would give light to those with trusting, searching hearts. But they would bring darkness to the unconcerned and unrepentant person.

As I think of people lacking repentance and refusing to embrace Christ as Savior by simple faith, I remember the classic story of poor Jack who was out jogging. As he passed a cliff, he got a little too close to the edge, and suddenly found himself falling. On the way down, he managed to grab a branch, nearly yanking it out of the cliff. When he caught his breath, he realized what a terrible jam he was in. He couldn't get up and letting go certainly seemed to be a poor option. He began to scream, “Hello up there! Can anyone hear me?”

In a moment, a voice returned. “Jack, Can you hear me?” “Yes, Yes, I can hear you I’m down here.” “I can see you, Jack, are you alright?” “Yes, but, who are you, and where are you?” “I am the Lord Jack, I am everywhere.” “The Lord? You mean God?” “That’s me.” “God, help me, I promise that if you get me down from here, I’ll stop sinning. I’ll be a really good person and serve you for the rest of my life.” “Easy on the promises, Jack. First let’s get you down, then we can discuss those.”

“I’ll do anything, Lord, just tell me what to do, okay?” “Okay, let go of the branch.” “What?” “I said, let go of the branch. Just trust me, let go.” There was a long pause, as Jack thought of the offer. In a moment, however, Jack let out a loud yell. “Hello, Hello – is there anybody else up there?!” Although a funny story, the truth is this. Many people today do not want to repent and put their trust in Jesus Christ to be their Savior.

Another verse that proves that Jesus spoke in parables to fulfill prophecy is found in Matthew 13:34-35. “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.”

Here Christ quotes Psalm 78:2. This teaching method by the Lord prophetically fulfilled Asaph’s prophecy in Psalm 78:2 which concluded that the Messiah would speak in parables, uttering things kept secret from the foundation of the world. Again, we see that Jesus spoke in parables to fulfill prophecy. Matthew explains that Jesus’ speaking in parables was not an afterthought but had been prophesied in God’s Word hundreds of years earlier. The Bible prophesied that Messiah would speak to the Jewish people in a parabolic way so that they would not be able to understand unless they accept Him as their Messiah and have their eyes open to the truth.

If you want to know the truth it is found in the Bible and the Spirit will testify to this truth (John 16:8-9). Open your ears and eyes and you can be saved today when discovering that you are sinner before God and that Christ died on the cross bearing your judgment and sin and rose again the third day to give you eternal life. Matthew 13:9 once again says, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

A professor said he recently visited a mission’s school at a large church in Waco, Texas, and decided to try a test in a class. “Tell me,” I said to the group, “what is the gospel?” A young lady raised her hand. “The free gift of God.” “Good,” I said. I went to the chalkboard and wrote gift from God. “Somebody else?”

“Freedom from sin,” a man near the back called out. “Eternal life,” said another. “Keep going,” I said. I stayed busy at the chalkboard, listing the items as they came in. Freedom. Righteousness. Moral purity. Grace. Unconditional love. Healing and deliverance. Redemption. New life.

After five minutes or so, we had filled the chalkboard with a list of things that we believed were the gospel. “Excellent,” I said. “Did we miss

anything?" The room was silent for a minute. I could see heads turning. I could hear pages rustling. Everybody seemed to think there was something significant missing, but nobody wanted to volunteer to name the missing item. Finally, after the second minute of silence, a girl near the front raised her hand. "How come none of us mentioned Jesus?" "Exactly," I said. We closed the session and went to a break. Point made. And the point is this, people cannot hear if they don't hear the right message!

The Peculiar Facts of the Parables

One interesting fact concerning the parables of Matthew 13 is that only Matthew records all the parables. Mark revealed the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:1–9, 13–20, 30–32). Luke speaks about the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:5–15). The Parable of the Leaven is not found in Mark, but it is revealed at a later time in Luke 13:20–21. A study of Matthew will help us focus on all the parables in a consecutive fashion just as our Lord gave them and see His full progression of thought.

Another fact of the parables is that the first four parables were spoken to the multitude whereas the last three were spoken only to the disciples after reentering the house with Jesus (Matt. 13:36). Also, we must note that the Lord interpreted the parables only to the disciples in response to their personal question of the first parable (Luke 8:9) and following their departure from the crowds (Matt. 13:36). In addition, the first two parables are interpreted by our Lord and give an understanding of the other five. This is important to understand. The symbols used and interpreted in the first two parables will enable us to learn what the other parables are teaching.

In Mark 4:13 we read: "And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" Mark then tells us that the understanding of the first parable is the key to the subsequent understanding of the rest of the parables. The rest of the parables are actually built upon the first parable. The Parable of the Sower is an introductory parable to the rest. It becomes the foundation and key to understanding or unlocking the others. What the symbols mean in one

parable will be reflected in the other parables. Many expositors miss this as they interpret the later parables.

If you watch the evening news you can probably relate to the wife who said to her husband, “Shall we watch the six o’clock news and get indigestion or wait for the eleven o’clock news and have insomnia?” It often seems that the world is out of control. In that vein, someone wrote:

“But man spoiled his chances by sinning,
We trust that the story
Will end in God’s glory,
But at present the other side’s winning.”

When it seems that the other side is winning, whether it’s in the world at large or in your own personal world, it’s important to remember that God has a certain purpose for both world history and for your history and that nothing can thwart His purpose. This is seen in the unveiling and coming to pass of the “mysteries of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:11) that Jesus spoke about while He was here on earth.

A man asked his neighbor to “take care” of his cat while he was away on vacation. The neighbor agreed. When the man returned home his cat was nowhere to be found. He ran next door to his neighbor and said, “Where’s my cat.” He received a puzzled look from the neighbor and this response, “I shot him.” The cat owner said, “What do you mean – you shot him?” The neighbor said, “I thought you said, ‘Take care of him.’”

Apparently the lines of communication broke down somewhere along the way. This was a serious misunderstanding. I think the same can be said concerning the parables of Matthew 13 and other parables that Jesus presented. People can misunderstand the central teachings of a parable and try and hijack a parable and make it say things it does not say like conditional salvation (salvation by works) and miss the central teaching and understanding of the parable.

Before beginning the first parable let us reiterate once again that all the parables deal with conditions and events that would occur between Israel’s

rejection of the Messiah (the time when the kingdom was postponed) and the return of the Messiah in His Second Coming (the time the kingdom is established). They encompass the time when the King has gone into a far country (Luke 19:12). In these parables we see a chronological outline of the conditions and events that are going to occur on earth while the King is absent and what occurs on earth to pave the way for commencement of the earthly theocracy (the Millennium).



There is a valley (great parenthesis or gap of time) between these two events and in this valley the “mysteries” or sacred secrets (hidden truths) concerning the kingdom are now unveiled to us. As we have already discovered, these are truths concerning the earthly kingdom that the Old Testament saints and prophets could not know about (Matt. 13:17). These truths deal with the climatic changes and conditions of the world and the specific events that would transpire on earth prior to the kingdom’s arrival. The mysteries about the kingdom (Matt. 13:11) is not a new form of the kingdom but gives further explanation about the same earthly kingdom taught in the Old Testament. Hence, they are parables that tell secrets.

Benjamin Franklin said:

"Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead."

Well, Jesus Christ is alive, and He has revealed the kingdom secrets to us. We can "know" these "mysteries of the kingdom" which were once hidden truths (Matt. 13:11). This is because we have the completed picture in the New Testament of what is going to happen before the King returns to establish His earthly kingdom or the 1,000-year Millennium (Rev. 20:1-7). Jesus is going to reveal the secrets to us that occur prior to the establishment of the kingdom, and this is why He states: "blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (Matt. 13:16). It's now time to look at these seven parables which unlock the hidden truths related to the establishment of the earthly kingdom. Again, we can view them as parables which tell secrets!

As we have seen, these are secrets (parables that tell secrets) about the earthly kingdom which were previously hidden and not revealed during Old Testament revelation. They refer to the course, conditions, and character of the age from the time of Israel's rejection of Christ which resulted in the postponement of the kingdom program until the time when Israel's receives Christ as His Second Coming (Rom. 11:26) resulting in the reinstatement or restoration of her kingdom promises during the Millennium. The mystery parables encompass the time of Christ's earthly ministry, they also represent the time frame of the Church Age and Tribulation Period and end with the establishment of Christ's kingdom (the Millennium). The parables which tell secrets refer to those specific events which are associated with the kingdom's arrival on earth.

The Prophetic Teaching of the Parables

We have finished the introductory comments on the parables and are now ready to consider the parables themselves.

I. The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23)

Jesus presents the parable in Matthew 13:1-8: "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 (*immediately*) 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."



Jesus explains the parable in Matthew 13:18-23:

"Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom (*the truth that Jesus is the Messiah and is going to establish His 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 (*immediately*) 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.

A. It's timing.

The divine interpreter (Christ) tells us what the interpretation of the parable is but even so there is some disagreement concerning the scope or specific time period of this parable (and the other six parables) even among dispensational and literal interpreters of the Bible. Some good Bible teachers have tried to dismiss the parables of Matthew 13 from portraying any events or conditions that would occur in the world throughout the Church age in which we live today. In other words, they claim this parable focuses only on the early ministry of Christ and the disciples of Israel claiming that the same message and ministry will once again be picked up during the Tribulation Period and winding down following the seven years ("the end of the age").

Their conclusion is that between these two time periods (Christ's earthly ministry and the Tribulation Period) the parables have no specific fulfillment. The time slots for the parables have to do with Christ's past earthly ministry and the prophetic future of the Tribulation Period but have no present-day application to our world today and the times in which we live. In other words, they skip over the Church Age.

According to some expositors the parables were merely presenting two separate time periods that would occur in relation to God's work with Israel (Christ's earthly ministry and the Tribulation Period). In addition, many arrive at the conclusion that the treasure (Matt. 13:44) would refer to the Jewish nation (we agree) whereas the pearl of great price would reference the Jewish remnant during the Tribulation (we disagree). These conclusions and other various interpretations have the purpose of separating the parables from Church truth and the Church Age in which we live today claiming the seven parables are only focusing on Jewish truth, the truth related to Israel and the End Times of the Tribulation Period.

I disagree with the conclusion that the parables only include a past and future time period that are distinctively Jewish in nature. Let me give you several reasons why.

First, the emphasis of the parables encompasses a much wider range than merely Christ's earthly ministry and the disciple's initial outreach to preach to Israel in Palestine. The context of the entire earth in the second parable ("field"— Matt. 13:38) would seem to dismiss the idea that this would be a mixture of the true and false occurring only during Christ's earthly local ministry in Palestine (Matt. 13:24-30). Furthermore, to assume that the reference to the world is only applicable to the future Tribulation Period is assuming too much in the parable. The field is stated to be the world and has no restrictive sense or time factor attached to it when Christ gave it.

Second, there is nothing in these parables that reveal a decisive interruption or gap or time between the initial sowing and the end of the age presented in the parables. In other words, Jesus was not skipping the Church Age in these parables. The initial mixture between God's people and Satan's people (the counter sowing) that occurred in Christ's day would simply continue to exist until the "end of the age" as the text clearly says (Matt. 13:39, 49). In other words, Jesus was teaching His disciples that the way it begins in our time is the way it would be in the End Time. Until that time comes "Let both grow together until the harvest" which occurs at the end of the Tribulation Period (vs. 30).

This does not sound like an interruption to God's mystery period of time or a gap that would exist until the Tribulation Period begins. Rather it appears to be a constant and consistent flow of events that would occur until the end finally arrives at the close of the Tribulation Period. Is not Satan counter sowing his people in the world today? Consider some verses in the epistles (1 John 2:19; Gal. 2:4; 2 Pet. 2:1). Satan's sowing, along with many other world conditions mentioned in the parables, the sowing of God's message, the mixture of the true and false together throughout the world, and worldwide apostasy or leavening and corruption, would have specific application to the world at large as time continues to tick away and God's mystery program runs its course.

These ongoing conditions and accumulative events would eventually produce the final judgment blow at the close of the mystery period of time known as "the end of the age" (vv. 49-50) when the King returns. Jesus did not intend to teach a gap of time between the beginning and the end of the

harvest period. Jesus was simply teaching what would occur in the world then, now, and up to the kingdom's arrival.

Mike Stallard has rightly observed: "In light of the ongoing sowing that takes place in the following parable of the tares (vv. 24ff), a sowing that seemingly take place unto the 'end of the age' (vv. 40, 41), it may be best to see direct application of the sowing in the present age unto, and including, the events which mark the end-time tribulation events." Elsewhere Stallard writes: "However, in light of the scope of the entire parable, which extends to the end of the age, it is unlikely that this sowing should be limited to something that only Jesus has done. More likely, the message of Jesus, the word of the kingdom in the previous parable, produces followers who also sow the message. They in return would produce followers who would continue the chain throughout the entire age as an extension of Christ's work ... In the end, many kingdom citizens will be produced, who the Jews were not expecting."

Third, the sower is the Son of man (Matt. 13:37). If the first parable strictly deals with the time frame of the Lord's earthly ministry, as some suggest, then one must wonder how the Sower has any connection with the Tribulation Period and to those who will be saved during this future period of time. It's easier to view the sowing program without any interval or gap of time existing between the seed-sowing ministry which began while Jesus was on earth and which will end after the Tribulation Period. The Sower continues to sow truth in the hearts of people through the work of the Spirit as His followers present the Gospel (John 16:7-8).

Fourth, as we have already studied, the phrases "word of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:19) and "children of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:38) would have a specific meaning to the Jews living in the days of Jesus and people living during the Tribulation Period when the Gospel of the kingdom is once again being preached throughout the earth (Matt. 24:14). The "word of the kingdom" has a special reference to the saving message of Christ in relation to the establishment of His earthly kingdom over the earth. Jesus initially taught in Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

SUMMARY: The “**gospel**” (Mark 1:15) presented in Matthew and during the days of Jesus’ earthly ministry was the good news that Messiah had come to save Israel from her sins (Matt. 1:21) and prepare her to enter the earthly kingdom through repentance from sin (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). If Jews living during the days of Jesus would hear the “**word of the kingdom**” (Matt. 13:19) and believe in the Messiah, they would become a “**children of the kingdom**” (Matt. 13:38) which means they would be spiritually prepared to enter the promised earthly kingdom which was directly related to Israel’s covenant program. But there is a **secondary sense** where this would be true throughout the mystery period (2,000 years and counting). Every time a person is born again, they are prepared to enter the earthly kingdom (John 3:3) and become heirs to the future earthly kingdom (Matt. 25:34; James 2:5; Rom. 8:17; Rev. 2:26-27; 8:17; Rev. 5:10).

SUMMARY: The “**word of the Kingdom**” (Matt. 13:19) and “**children of the kingdom**” (Matt. 13:38) were phrases related to God’s message to the Jews during the initial phase of the outreach in the mystery time period (2,000 years and counting!). Jesus was relating His covenant promises to the Jews about the earthly kingdom (2 Sam. 7:16). Dispensationally, there would no longer be an emphasis placed on the coming kingdom message and covenant promises to Israel in the sharing of the Gospel message during the present Church Age. It would no longer be the “**word of the kingdom**” but only the “**gospel of the grace of God**” (Acts 20:24). The “**gospel of the kingdom**” would be reintroduced during the seven-year Tribulation Period (Matt. 24:14) with the earthly kingdom ready to be inaugurated at the Second Coming. Throughout the entire mystery period people are called to repentance and faith in Christ who is the Lamb of God (John 1:29).

Although the nation had rejected the Messiah at this point, when Jesus was presenting the parables, the message was still being given to the Jews to be saved in view of the coming kingdom that would one day be established over the earth (Acts 3:19). Jesus was emphasizing the covenant promises given to the Israel when presenting word about the earthly kingdom (2 Sam. 7:16) This phrase (“word of the kingdom”) would be relevant during the *initial phase* of the seed sowing when Jesus was on earth and when the message about the kingdom was familiar to the Jewish people. During this time Christ was still emphasizing His covenant promise and relationship with the Jewish people.

In essence, those Jews who received “the word of the kingdom” became “children of the kingdom” during the days of Jesus. However, these phrases do not limit the mystery period to the days of Jesus but are used to simply introduce this period of time to the disciples with the prospect that all peoples throughout the future generations would be saved through “the word” (Matt. 13:21). As a result, they (even Gentiles) would become heirs to the future kingdom or Millennium (Matt. 25:34; Rev. 2:26-27; 8:17; Rev. 5:10; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; Heb. 12:28; 2 Pet. 1:11) while unbelievers will not inherit the earthly kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5). In essence, there will always be a remnant of God’s children awaiting entrance into the future earthly kingdom.

In other words, the message of salvation would continue to be preached through the entire mystery period whether it would be through the word of the kingdom (the initial phase), the Gospel of grace (1 Cor. 15:3-4) during the Church Age, or the Gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 24:14) during the Tribulation Period. This is because all of these gospel presentations emphasize the message of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone as the Lamb of God.

The good news about the kingdom would only be part of the initial and later phases of the mystery period during the Tribulation Period. These are the specific and unique times when the message about the earthly kingdom will be preached, prior to and after the Church Age has expired. As already mentioned, during the seven-year Tribulation Period the establishment of the earthly kingdom will be impending or ready to be established with the

Second Coming of Christ and for this reason it will be specially preached as the “gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 24:14).

It must be understood that today we are not preaching the Gospel of the kingdom to others since the earthly kingdom is not the next event on God’s prophetic calendar. Nevertheless, in each phase or time period related to the mystery period of the kingdom, there would be a Gospel outreach to people who were unsaved. First to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. The central message of this Gospel message throughout the mystery period (from Christ’s earthly ministry until His Second Coming) was the sacrificial death of Christ.

In John 1:29 John the Baptizer was calling Israel to repentance and salvation and proclaimed: “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

One day Charles Spurgeon was practicing the acoustics in his great auditorium. He began to repeat: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” A worker was on scaffold working on the ceiling. Spurgeon kept repeating this Gospel phrase and eventually the worker came under conviction and was saved. Yes, he was saved while working on the ceiling of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. The point is this. From the days of the earthly ministry of Jesus to the Church Age and into the Tribulation Period people will be saved through the good news of Christ’s sacrificial death upon the cross.

When the California gold fever broke out, a man went there, leaving his wife in New England with his boy. As soon as he got on and was successful he was to send for them. It was a long time before he succeeded, but at last he got money enough to send for them. The wife’s heart leaped for joy. She took her boy to New York, got on board a Pacific steamer, and sailed away to San Francisco.

They had not been long at sea before the cry of “Fire! fire!” rang through the ship, and rapidly it gained on them. There was gun powder on board, and the captain knew the moment the fire reached the powder, every man, woman, and child must perish. They got out the life-boats, but they were

too small! In a minute they were overcrowded. The last one was just pushing away, when the mother pled with them to take her and her boy. "No," they said, "we have got as many as we can hold." She entreated them so earnestly, that at last they said they would take one more. Do you think she leaped into that boat and left her boy to die? No! She seized her boy, gave him one last hug, kissed him, and dropped him over into the boat. "My boy," she said, "if you live to see your father, tell him that I died in your place."

This is but a faint picture of what Christ has done for us. He laid down his life for us. He died that we might live. So the same message of Christ's sacrificial death is part of the entire mystery period which has now lasted for over two thousand years.

In summary, my conclusion is that the "word of the kingdom" is definitely Jewish in nature and should be understood in the context of the offer of the kingdom to Israel (Matt. 3:2; 4:17). It is not a general reference that can be associated with the grace gospel if we consider the dispensational character and offer of the earthly kingdom during Jesus' earthly ministry ("thy kingdom come" – Matt. 6:10 and "the kingdom of Israel" – Acts 1:6). There is no reason to allegorize the kingdom's meaning. That it's a "mystery" does not mean there is a new form of the original covenanted kingdom. This same message about the earthly kingdom will be picked up during the Tribulation Period in "the gospel of the kingdom" with the kingdom impending before the Second Coming (Matt. 24:14).

Yes, the kingdom is postponed (Matt. 21:43) but the "mysteries of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:11) have to do with the course of events that will transpire between Israel's rejection of the Messiah and the return of the Messiah (while the kingdom is postponed, and the King has gone into a far country – Luke 19:12). The "mysteries" (prophetic mysteries revealed) are events that revolve around the preparation and establishment of the earthly kingdom which were not revealed by the OT prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc.). The course, conditions, and character of the time period between Israel's rejection and reception at the Second Coming are what is termed the "mysteries about the kingdom" which are specific events that lead up to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom.

To be sure, there is no such thing as “the gospel of the grace of God’s kingdom” in our message today or “the word of the kingdom.” Kingdom truth is not Church truth. It can be clearly substantiated that the two phrases “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” are used interchangeably in the gospels (Matt. 4:17 with Mark 1:14-15; Matt. 19:23-24). Jesus did not reference a spiritualized or allegorized form of the kingdom during His earthly ministry. There is coming a time when the “kingdom of God” will be established on the earth which is further explained as the time of “the kingdom of heaven” (when Heaven itself rules over the earth - Matt. 6:10). To spiritualize the kingdom in the gospels breeds dispensational confusion.

Although the grace of Messiah’s saving deliverance was in the kingdom message (Matt. 1:21; 10:6; 15:24; John 1:29) during Christ’s earthly ministry (the initial phase of the mystery period) the feature of the earthly kingdom (theocracy) was dropped during the Church Age since the Rapture is the next event on God’s calendar. But the basic redemptive message of the Gospel seed continues to be sown throughout the Church Age and up the end of the pre-Messianic age (Matt. 13:39-40, 49) by the Divine Sower - the Holy Spirit who now represents Christ (John 14:14-16). So the “mystery period” of the kingdom covers Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Church Age, and the Tribulation Period and those previously unknown revelatory events and conditions that would transpire in preparation for the earthly kingdom; hence, mysteries of the kingdom. Once again, there will always be a remnant of God’s children awaiting entrance into the future earthly kingdom.

It is no mistake to say when a person is born again, they will enter the earthly kingdom (John 3:3, 5). Nicodemus understood the kingdom in only one sense – the earthly kingdom (not in a spiritual sense). Again, Jesus never spoke about a spiritual kingdom while He was on earth but only the literal Jewish kingdom. The epistles clearly teach that unsaved people will not inherit the earthly kingdom of God, but the saved will enter it, and there is no logical interpretive reason to not view this as the same earthly kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5).

All of God’s saints who are born again become “heirs to the kingdom” (James 2:5) and of “the world to come” (Heb. 2:5; 6:5). We are “joint heirs”

with Christ (Rom. 8:17) and are promised to rule with Christ (Rom. 5:10; Rev. 2:24-26). Thus, we are bound for the kingdom and are part of that group of born-again saints to one day enter the earthly kingdom as a result of the ministry of the Divine Sower. All the events of today are moving us closer to the “dispensation of the fulness of times” (Eph. 1:10) which is the time when the mystery period ends in the post-Messianic Age.

In conclusion, the phrases “word of the kingdom” and “children of the kingdom” are of Jewish character in the gospel records and cannot be forced into the Church Age. Nevertheless, today we are children of God (John 1:12) who are heirs to the kingdom (James 2:5; 2 Pet. 1:11; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; Col. 4:11; Acts 14:22) because we have responded to the Gospel seed and salvation message in the present era of the mystery period. The seed is still being sown today as the mysteries (secrets) about the kingdom are being unfolded in preparation for the glorious Golden Age. Each parable in Matthew 13 reveals a specific secret that is related to the establishment of the earthly kingdom which was unknown by the prophets of old but is revealed to us today. (“I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world” – Matt. 13:35).

Back to our main point. There is no gap of time in the outworking of the mystery period of the kingdom. It does not skip over the Church Age and the time in which we live today. However, it's assumed by some expositors that there must be a gap of time missing (the Church Age) in the parables but no definitive Scripture in the context or elsewhere would lead us to this conclusion. Likewise, some have tried to dismiss the first parable from the mystery period because the expression “the kingdom of heaven is like” (comparable to this) is not used to introduce this first parable. However, it seems better to understand that the first parable was introductory to the rest (Mark 4:13) and that it would naturally be understood to include the time reference of these parables between Israel's rejection and the return of the Messiah. This is because in Matthew 13:11 Jesus immediately speaks of the mystery period following the Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:11).

To assume that the first parable does not include the mystery time period because the familiar expression is not used seems to dismiss the whole thought of what Jesus said concerning “knowing the mysteries of the

kingdom” (Matt. 13:11). The parable of the sower introduces the mystery period of time and then special mention is made to the fact that “the kingdom of heaven is like” (comparable to) in the remaining parables in order reiterate and recap that all the parables are referencing the same mystery period of time which was introduced with the sowing of the seed.

The time period begins with the sowing and continues on in a worldwide fashion along with an abundance of corruption and counter sowing of the enemy (Matt. 13:38). This seems to be the only logical conclusion of the parables. Just as Christ used the parable of the household (Matt. 13:52) for application to the rest of the seven parables, so He uses the introductory parable of the sower to give a basic understanding of the rest which deal with the entire mystery period.

Arno C. Gaebelein captures this idea well when stating this concerning the Parable of the sower: “We would, however, take this parable in the first sense to apply to the days of our Lord in the earth. In a wider sense it must be taken as typical of the entire age, in which He is absent from the earth and the Kingdom is in the hands of men. The sowing He began continues still, and the result of sowing is likewise the same.”

John Phillips also concurs with this view:

“The mystery parables show how things are developing now, during the time of the King’s absence.”

Lehman Strauss also confirms:

“Here then we have the King’s prophetic program for His own followers during the present dispensation ... Our Lord was speaking prophetically of the entire period during His absence.”

Thomas Figart concluded the same thing concerning the mystery period of time: “As noted, it includes some time before His death, plus the Church Age and the seven years of Tribulation, after which the Kingdom begins.”

B. Its secret

Since these are the “mysteries of the kingdom” (plural) each parable will contain a mystery that is being revealed (Mat. 13:11) which was not

revealed during the Old Testament revelation by the prophets (Matt. 13:17). In the first parable we are going to discover the specific mystery (hidden secret) concerning a worldwide proclamation of the Gospel truth. The sowing of the truth will last for thousands of years and result in various human responses to this message until Christ returns in His Second Coming. It's in this parable that we will discover how people respond to the truth which is presented to them and what kind of fruit they will bear after responding to the truth.

The Parable of Sower (Matthew 13:3-9)

Conditions and Events that occur on Earth before the Kingdom (Millennium) arrives.

The MYSTERY (revealed secret) is that before the kingdom (Millennium) comes to earth there would be an increasing unhealthy and negative response toward the message of the Gospel of salvation (75% rejection).

Christ the original Sower sows the salvation message through His people (evangelism).

The Gospel sowing would primarily be rejected and not received (25% reception). Matthew 7:13-14

The mystery or sacred secret of this first parable is that there would be an increasing unhealthy and negative response toward the message of salvation and entering the kingdom (Luke 13:28). Only a small minority would receive the message by faith (John 3:3), become heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5), and bring forth lasting fruit in their lives. This unhealthy and negative response to the salvation message began during the Lord's earthly ministry, would continue into the Church age, and extend into the Tribulation Period right up to when the King returns (Matthew 24-25). Those who keep witnessing allow the divine Sower (Christ) to continue His sowing work in the hearts of lost humanity. However, the overall

response to the message of salvation will be rejection and not reception of the Gospel truth being presented.

C. Its interpretation.

1. The Sower.

It is written that “a sower went out to sow” (Matt. 13:3). This expression depicts the beginning and ongoing ministry of sowing the seed of God’s truth, which began in our Lord’s day, and what would continue to take place while the King is absent (Luke 19:12). Who is the sower in this first parable? In the second parable (the Parable of the Tares) the Son of Man is seen as the sower who owns a field. Matthew 13:37 reveals who the sower is in the first parable: “He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.”

Schuylar English made a worthy comment at this point:

“The key to the interpretation of all of the parables is our Lord’s own unfolding of the first two; if the man who sowed the seed in the second parable is the Son of Man, the man of the first, fifth, and sixth parables is also the Son of Man. If in the second parable the field is the world, then surely the field in the third and fifth parables is also the world.”

Realizing the extended period of time within the mystery period, Schuylar English also makes this next observation: “The Word continues to be sown by The Sower, The Son of Man, Who by the Holy Spirit scatters the Word through believers, and as it was not received by all who heard it in our Lord’s day, at the beginning of the new age, so it is not universally received today.”

This is a good Scriptural point of interpretive logic. God is not sending us confusing illustrations throughout these parables but comparable illustrations whose descriptive terms have a similar meaning such as the sower, man, field, or birds.

Gaebelein said this concerning the parables:

“The key for their right interpretation is in themselves as well as in the scripture.”

One of the basic laws in reading the Bible is that Scripture never uses a symbol in two conflicting ways. They are used consistently, and this is certainly true within the contextual setting of the parables. So Jesus is the Sower and the sowing ministry of Jesus Christ began when He announced the arrival of the kingdom (Matt. 4:17). But after the Son's death He continues to remain the Sower through the presence of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18) which Jesus promised would come to represent Him on earth. The divine sower (the Holy Spirit) would eventually work through His disciple's sowing ministry and drive home the verbal message of the Word in the hearts and lives of unregenerate people, a ministry which extends to this day.

Dear friend, do you want to see and hear? Do you want to open your eyes to truth? Then look at God's eternal Word and the Spirit will teach you the truth about salvation through Jesus Christ and your need to believe on Him. John 16:8 says: "And when he is come, he will reprove (convict) the world of sin (*the sin of unbelief*), and of righteousness (*self-righteousness*), and of judgment" (*God's wrath coming upon us because of our sins*). John 16:9 goes on to say, "Of sin (*the particular sin of unbelief*), because they believe not on me." The Holy Spirit in a specific way convicts the lost about their sin of unbelief or their failure to believe only in the death and resurrection of Christ for salvation. Failure to believe on Jesus is the great damning sin (John 3:18, 36). A court can convict a man of murder but only the Holy Spirit can convict him of unbelief.

This was the promise that the Sower (Jesus Christ) gave to His disciples and you and me today. The Holy Spirit would come and convict the world ("the field") of mankind as His followers share the Gospel message to the lost. Thus, as the mystery age runs its course the original Sower (Christ) would die but He promises to return in the person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-18) and continue His sovereign sowing ministry through the sowing efforts of His disciples as they share the message of the Gospel with the lost (Acts 1:8). But the Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum - He works through people who sow the seed of the good news among the lost. So the original sower (Christ) would continue to sow the seed in the hearts of people through the vessels of His disciples as they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit in the present age. The original disciples of Christ would continue the sowing

ministry, but it would expand to millions of disciples sowing the Gospel seed today who evangelize and tell others about the good news of the Gospel.

Romans 10:14

“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”

In other words, the Sower (the Holy Spirit of Christ – Rom. 8:9) works through His followers as they sow the truth. Christ’s disciples do the outward work of sowing truth (evangelism), but the divine Sower (the Holy Spirit) does the inward work. Their faithfulness in sowing the truth becomes the starting point for the divine Sower to do His saving work in the hearts and lives of people. So the original Sower is Jesus Christ in this parable but as the mystery period progresses Jesus Christ would continue to do His sowing work through the committed lives of His followers.

The Sower of the parable would naturally refer to Christ and match the next parable where Christ is expressly called the sower (Matt. 13:37). However, only as the Lord’s followers continue to sow the Gospel seed will the Sower continue to work throughout the mystery period (Acts 2:41; Mark 16:15). God’s representatives who share His message of salvation throughout the mystery period (from His earthly ministry to the establishment of His kingdom), the time frame represented in these parables, would be responsible for sowing the truth so that the divine Sower would work through them and continue to save souls.

Although Christ committed Himself to a sowing ministry in His day there would be many who would follow in His steps throughout the ages bringing multitudes to Christ (John 14:12). The sowing in the story would then represent the constant sowing (evangelistic outreach) of the Gospel seed from Christ’s day to ours as the original Sower (Christ) works through His representatives who share His Word.

Ray Stedman picks up on this idea when stating:

“That wonderful, attractive, powerful seed is being dropped into human hearts everywhere. And the sowing started with Jesus. He was the first

Sower who went out with this word, but millions have followed him since, sowing this seed wherever they go. It may be in the form of a simple Christian testimony. It may be in an elaborate sermon or in a book that someone reads. It may be just a word, a single phrase dropped into a conversation, which takes root and changes that whole life. ... The seed is powerful."

It's the seed that springs forth life in the souls of lost humanity. As we will see, all of God's representatives are to be sowers that sow the Gospel seed among lost humanity (Acts 8:4). God works through His people. The Sower works through His followers as they sow the truth. Not one of us is left out of the sowing ministry. We are all to be spiritual farmers doing the work that the Son of Man began while He was here on earth and wants to continue to do through us. Have we been doing the most important ministry of the ages? Jesus always possessed a tremendous love and compassion for lost people and this is why He began the sowing ministry while He was on earth (Matt. 9:35-38). Have we lost our heart for doing God's farming work which consists of sowing the Gospel seed?

"Give me a passion for souls dear Lord,
A passion to save the lost;
O that Thy love were by all adored,
And welcomed at any cost.
Jesus I long. I long to be winning.
Men who are lost but constantly sinning;
O may this hour be one of beginning.
The story of pardon to tell."

2. The Seed

The seed illustration of the parable refers to the sowing of truth in the hearts of people (Matt. 13:19 – “that which was sown in his heart”). The message or truth that included the initial Gospel outreach to the nation of Israel was likened to a “seed by the way side” which in its initial phase was “the word of the kingdom.” As a seed, it had the potential to generate life in lost people. Luke simply records that the “seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). How beautiful this is to contemplate. God’s Word is the instrument

that generates spiritual life in the hearts of lost people. It opens the hearts of people to their need for salvation through Christ.

Romans 10:17

“So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Why is the Word of God likened to a seed? It’s because the Word of God is living and becomes alive in the hearts of lost mankind (Heb. 4:12) and causes regeneration to occur. James tells us that “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth” (James 1:18). 1 Peter 1:23 says, “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” The seed of the Word of God is that which generates life. It’s the seed that saves souls. It’s not flashing lights, smoke coming from the back of the stage, or organ music playing in the background when someone is preaching.

The truth about the message of the Gospel shows people that they are lost sinners and points them to the only Savior. The Gospel seed is the spiritual dynamic used by the Spirit to convict people of their need for Christ. Yes, the Word of God is a life germinating seed. It’s “the engrafted (implanted word), which is able so save your souls” (James 1:23). It’s wonderful to realize that once the seed is sown it can begin to do its work in the heart.

There is an imprinted genetic law of life in every seed that begins to go to work once it’s planted in the right kind of soil. In a similar way the Word of God and the Gospel message carries within it the genetic code of eternal life so that when it is planted in the right soil of a person’s heart the Gospel becomes “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). It’s the Lord, the original Sower, who does the real work in the hearts and lives of people (“God that giveth the increase” – 1 Cor. 3:7) through the powerful and living message (Heb. 4:12) of the Gospel. Our part is to keep sowing the seed and sooner or later it will fall on fertile soil and souls will be saved. What a glorious prospect. Let us keep sowing! God will do a great work if we do our part. We must simply keep sowing the seed here, there, and everywhere.

Matthew 13:19 once again identifies the original seed as the word that is related to the kingdom. “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."

Once again, the "word of the kingdom" was God's seed or message to the Jews during the *initial phase* of the outreach in the mystery time period for Jesus was relating His covenant promises to them about the earthly kingdom. Jesus and the disciples had previously offered the message about the kingdom to the nation but on a whole scale they had rejected this message. This original kingdom message to the nation highlighted several things which can be outlined as followed: Jesus was the Kingly Messiah, He has come to set up His earthly kingdom, the nation needs to repent of her sins and be saved from the judgment related to her sins (Matt. 1:21) by believing in the salvation of the Messiah or Deliverer (John 1:29; Matt. 11:28-29).

The original kingdom message to the Jews was also related to salvation (Luke 8:12 – "lest they should believe and be saved"). It was given in view of the coming judgment of the King and kingdom (Matt. 3:11-12). The "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6) needed a Messiah who was first a Savior of their soul before He could become a political Savior of the nation. The problem with the Jews was that their expectation of their Messiah was one-sided. They only anticipated the political side of Messiah's reign or that Jesus would redeem them from their enemies. The Jews did not realize that the coming King and kingdom would also relate to the people's spiritual need of salvation and deliverance from sin. They did not need a new start *politically* but a new start *spiritually*. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus that He had to be born again to see the earthly messianic kingdom (John 3:3). Jesus also taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) that His true followers would live lives of spirituality before the King who was now present on earth.

As previously mentioned, we must conclude that the "word of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:19) and "children of the kingdom" (Matt. 8:12; 13:38) were special phrases related specifically to the Jews, but the message during Christ's earthly ministry was still intended to bring Jewish people to faith in Christ who was their spiritually Messiah or Deliverer.

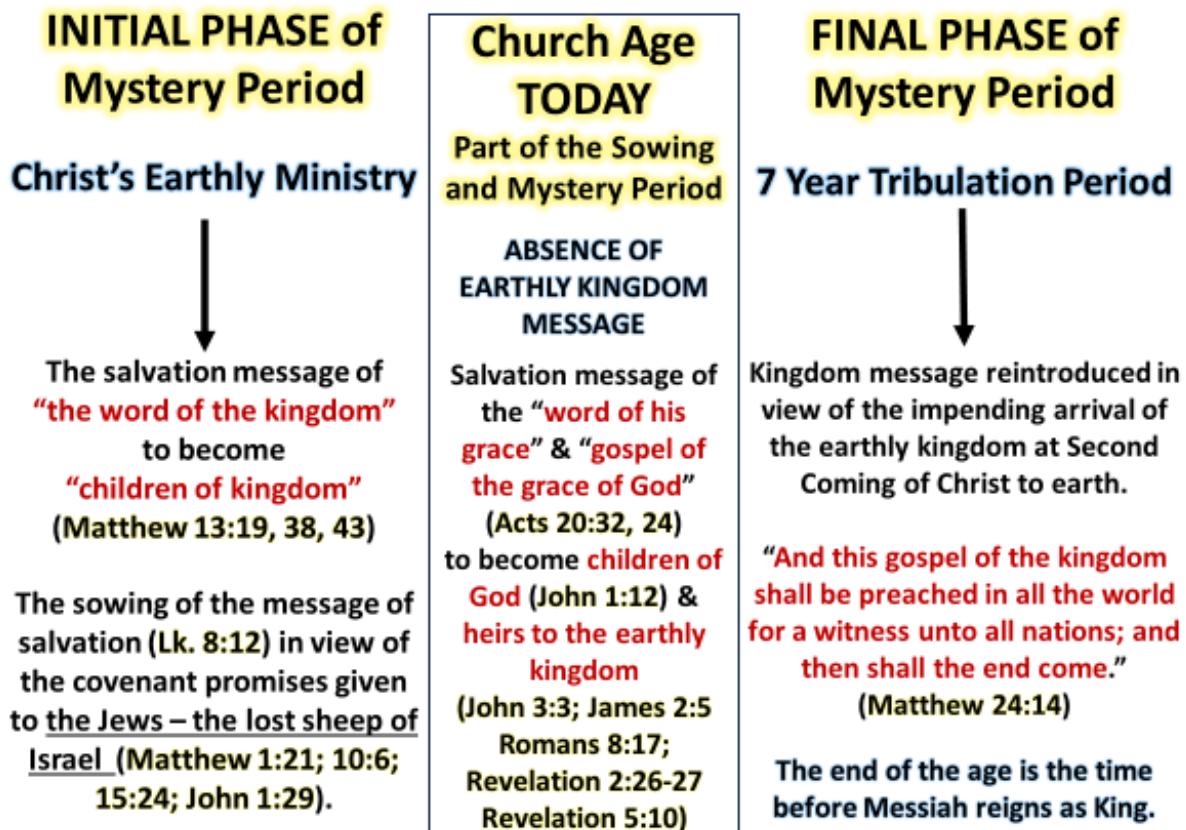
Matthew 1:21

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins."

This same message concerning salvation in view of the coming kingdom will be preached throughout the entire world in the future Tribulation Period "before the end comes" or the end of the Tribulation Period occurs, and the mystery period runs its course (Matt. 24:14).

A chart once again gives an overview of the progress of the spreading of the Gospel seed throughout the mystery period emphasizing appropriate changes in terms.

Parables of Matthew 13 – The Spreading of Gospel Seed



Eventually the dispensation would change from law to grace (Rom. 6:14; Eph. 3:2) and the death of Christ and the Grace Dispensation would promote the new emphasis on the gracious outpouring of God's grace to the Gentiles (Acts 15:14). For this reason, it was needful for God's message

about the earthly kingdom to also change. God would change from the specific “word of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19) to “the word of his grace” (Acts 20:32). This does not mean there was no grace presented to the Jews during His earthly ministry (John 1:14, 29) but that the emphasis would change from kingdom truth to Church truth.

This means that the sowing of the seed would no longer emphasize the coming kingdom message and covenant promises to Israel, as one shares the Gospel message during the present Church Age, which is also part of the mystery period. Today the message would no longer be the “word of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19) but only the “gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). In other words, the kingdom would no longer be “at hand” or impending (Matt. 3:2) because the offer and covenant promises that Jesus made to Israel during His earthly ministry concerning God’s kingdom would be temporarily postponed and put on hold.

In fact, even during Christ’s day He stopped emphasizing this feature of the kingdom due to Israel’s national rejection. Instead of the earthly kingdom being “at hand” it became likened to something else in the seven parables (Matt. 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52) denoting a change in His kingdom program to Israel. Today God’s kingdom program is postponed (Matt. 21:43) and the message is simply repent and believe the Gospel so that Christ can become your personal Savior (Luke 24:47).

Nevertheless, God’s saving message of the Gospel (the good news of Christ’s redemptive and sacrificial death) would continue to be proclaimed throughout the entire earth (“the field” – Matt. 13:38) after Pentecost (Acts 2) and into the Church age with the command of the Great Commission (Mark 16:15 – “go ye into all the world”) and God’s children reaching into the “uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8) with the John 3:16 message (“God so loved the world”). The Gospel outreach will also continue into the Tribulation Period right up to the end of the age when the King returns to rule and reign in this world (Rev. 14:6).

Although the kingdom emphasis related to this message changes it seems that the central understanding of the message remains the same in every dispensation – salvation through blood sacrifice (Gen. 3:21; Lev. 1:5; John

1:29; 8:56; Heb. 9:22; Rev. 7:14). Thus, the Parable of the Sower with its emphasis on the saving message of “word of the kingdom” merely starts the mystery period with the emphasis on Israel’s covenant program but it does not become inclusive of the mystery period. God’s message of salvation understandably begins with the “word of the kingdom” during Christ’s earthly ministry which in return results in the salvation of people (John 7:31; 8:30). But the message changes in relation to Israel and her kingdom covenant promises by removing the kingdom emphasis and only emphasizing the grace aspect of this message.

So, the seed which in a generic way is also termed “the word of God” (Luke 8:11) will continue to have an impact during the present dispensation (Church Age) that results in multitudes of Gentiles being saved (Acts 11:18; 13:46; 15:15; 28:28). During the coming seven years of the Tribulation Period the salvation message will once again reemphasize the “gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 24:14) and continue to bring many to salvation which no man can number (Rev. 7:9-10) until the final harvest or gathering time (Matt. 13:30). Thus, the Parable of the Sower reveals that throughout these successive ages of the mystery period (Christ’s earthly ministry, Church age, Tribulation Period) there will be varying responses to God’s message of salvation but there will always be some good seed that will be sown and produce productive life (Matt. 13:23).

We have then learned that the sower represents Christ who throughout the mystery period promises to do a saving work through His disciples or followers as they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. As God’s representatives and children sow the Gospel message of salvation through evangelism the divine Sower (the Holy Spirit) will continue to work through His follower’s efforts and save souls. We are all responsible for sowing the Gospel seed as Christ’s servants so that the Sower can work through us and accomplish His saving purpose in the lives of people. We do the outward work, but God does the inward work as only the original Sower can do.

Someone has said:

“A child can drop a seed as effectively as the most experienced farmer.”

This means we don't need to be an evangelist to witness to the unsaved and lost who are headed toward hell. In one sense, we should all to be farmers spreading the seed of the Gospel.

Probably all of us have heard the story of Johnny Apple Seed. He sowed seeds (apple seeds) and grew apple trees all over the place. Well, today we are God's representatives and are to be like a spiritual Johnny Apple Seed sowing the seed of the Gospel to those who are lost. None of us are to be left out of the sowing process.



1 Corinthians 3:5-8

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."

The Bible teaches that every person who has ever been saved came to faith in Christ through the witness of someone else. It may be through a tract handed out, a verbal witness, or through some other indirect means. We are all "ministers" (diakonos – human servants) that Christ uses to bring people to faith in Christ.

Please note that we work together in the process of sowing and reaping the harvest. We don't always reap when and where we sow the original seed. Others may come along and water where we have planted the seed and still others may reap where we have sown but together, we all have a part in bringing in the spiritual harvest of lost souls. But let us never forget who the true Sower and Savior is ("God that giveth the increase"). It is actually God that sows the truth in the hearts of people and brings in the harvest. He is Lord of the harvest (Matt. 9:38). It's God who is the real Savior for He does the convicting, drawing, and saving work in the hearts of lost sinners.

Ultimately, it's the Lord who is the divine Sower and Savior who does the inner work on the human heart (Acts 16:14). The disciples give out the seed, but the divine Sower is the one who actually causes the seed to take root and germinate into life. Nevertheless, God wants all of us to become farmers or sowers who plant seed by sharing the Gospel message. It's exciting to contemplate. As we share the message with others it can take seed in their heart where God can begin to do His wondrous sovereign and saving work. All the human instruments (servants) God uses to produce the spiritual harvest are equally considered to be valuable and will be rewarded for their willingness to be used by God in this way. Each of us will be rewarded for the labor that we do in the work of evangelism at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:8; 2 Cor. 5:10). In the end, Jesus will sort it out.

You will notice that it's not how many souls are saved under our church ministries and personal outreach. The real question is this. Have we done our part in sowing the seed? Have we been faithful in sharing the Gospel with others?

- ✓ How much sowing have we been doing through our own personal witness?
- ✓ Have we been speaking to people about Christ and handing out Gospel tracts to those who need salvation?
- ✓ What kind of farming have we been doing?
- ✓ When was the last time you sowed a seed that would have the potential to germinate into the salvation of a poor lost soul?

Gary Dull said:

"Evangelism is a ministry for every believer. It is not just for the pastor, the evangelist, or the missionary. It is for everyone who personally knows Christ, and indeed those who fulfill the ministry of evangelism are greatly blessed."

2 Corinthian 5:20 states:

"Now then we are ambassadors (*representatives*) for Christ, as though God did beseech you (plead and beg you) by us (the apostles): we pray you in

Christ's stead (*on Christ's behalf – what Jesus would say and proclaim*), be ye reconciled to God."

Is Paul making an evangelistic plea to the unsaved in the city of Corinth? Yes. He may be even making an evangelistic plea to the unsaved in the Corinthian Church. But how does this appeal relate to those who are already saved? He may be looking back to his original visit to Corinth and the time these pagan people came to faith in Christ. What Paul is teaching is based on memories of his first visit to their city and he could be once again imagining himself in the marketplace of Corinth or the synagogue at Corinth, preaching the message of Christ to lost sinners in Corinth. The reason for sharing this Gospel invitation to the lost is to fuel the same desire in the hearts of the saints to reach out to the unsaved.

The word "reconciled" and the message of reconciliation means that an unsaved person needs to change or exchange a relationship of enmity with God for a relationship of favor and acceptance before God. In reconciliation God and sinful human beings are brought together through the saving work of Christ who brings us into a peaceful standing before God (2 Cor. 5:18; Col. 1:21).

Taking the message of the original Sower we are called to share the Gospel message. The Bible teaches that we are Christ's representatives here on earth who are to share His compassion and love by reaching out to the lost with the Gospel message. This is what the word "ambassadors" (official representatives) means. We are speaking on the behalf of Christ who began the sowing ministry. We are sharing the good news with others and representing Him and His compassion toward the lost.

Our message to others is that they would be reconciled to God. Amazingly and graciously God is begging the lost to come to faith in His Son by believing in the Gospel through the message ("God did beseech you by us"). This begging of people to be reconciled makes it clear that the sinner is never delivered from wrath and judgment to blessing and reward without personal response to the truth of the Gospel. God begging sinners to come to Him! Here is His cry:

"Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,
 Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
 Jesus ready stands to save you,
 Full of pity, love, and pow'r.
 Come, ye thirsty, come, and welcome,
 God's free bounty glorify;
 True belief and true repentance,
 Every grace that brings you nigh.
 Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
 Lost and ruined by the fall;
 If you tarry till you're better,
 You will never come at all."

- ✓ How have you been doing as Christ's representative?
- ✓ Would Jesus have taken opportunities to witness to the last week that you ignored or never were concerned about?
- ✓ Are we representing Christ's loving compassion before a lost and dying world by inviting them to the salvation they so desperately need?

Remember that together we enter each other's service and labor!

Jesus possessed a deep burden for souls and said in John 4:35-38:

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."

D.L. Moody told the story of his conversion this way: "When I was in Boston I used to attend a Sunday school class, and one day I recollect my teacher came around behind the counter of the shop I was at work in, and put his hand upon my shoulder, and talked to me about Christ and my soul. I had not felt that I had a soul till then. I said to myself, 'This is a very strange thing. Here is a man who never saw me till lately, and he is weeping over my

sins, and I never shed a tear about them.' But I understand it now, and know what it is to have a passion for men's souls and weep over their sins. I don't remember what he said, but I can still feel the power of that man's hand on my shoulder tonight."

Dear friend, since the Savior has come it is now the day of opportunity for many to be saved. The original sower (Christ) began the ministry of evangelism during the mystery period. What we need today is spiritual vision to continue the task as He works through us. The Samaritans in their white traditional garments coming from the village (John 4:35) may have visually suggested a wheat field ripe for harvest.

"Tonight a man is somewhere proclaiming the good news
Winning families to Jesus all around his neighborhood.
He tells them that God is able to make their house a home
He wants to win his world for Christ, but he can't do it alone.
But each one can reach one
As we follow after Christ we all can lead one.
We can lead one to the Savior
And together we can tell the world that Jesus is the way."

This is what the Bible teaches. We are in this together! When will we realize that people everywhere need the Lord? Are we sowing the seed and becoming partners in the work of evangelism in this present hour and as we become closer to the end of the age? Jesus taught that "the field is the world" (Matt. 13:38) and the world is lost and going to hell. But Jesus died for the entire world of mankind (John 3:16) and offers a universal invitation to all who will receive His message of grace and mercy. We need to take part in gathering the crop so people will be prepared for eternity. We need to gather "fruit unto eternal life" and bring the harvest which is comparable to the "fruit of souls" (Col. 1:5-6; Rom. 1:13). People are comparable to a crop that is ready to be harvested and when we reap the harvest souls are saved for eternity.

"Sowing in the morning,
Sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve.
Waiting for the harvest and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing bringing in the sheaves."

3. The soils

When interpreting the soils we must remember again that the seed represents God's Word (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:11) and the sower is the Son of Man as revealed in the second parable (Matt. 13:37). Today the original Sower continues to accomplish His inward work of sowing the Gospel seed in the hearts of lost people through the Holy Spirit as Christ's disciples sow the seed among the great masses of unsaved people. Our responsibility is to simply to sow the seed along the way and then God will do the rest.

In this parable the human heart is compared to soil that must be prepared to receive the seed before that seed can take root and produce a harvest of lasting fruit. The parable refers to the sowing of the seed in the hearts of people and then likens the heart to the different types of soils represented in the parables (Matt. 13:19 – "that which was sown in his heart" – see also Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12, 15). So when one reads about the soils in this parable they must think about the hearts of lost humanity for this is what the parable is portraying. The different kinds of soil show the different kinds of hearts people possess. There are four kinds of soil and four conditions of the human heart. As we will see there are three problem soils and one productive soil.



Of course, the person is also represented by the type of heart that he possesses since Matt. 13:19 says, “This is he which received seed by the way side.” So the focus of the soil is on the human heart but the heart will reflect the kind of person they really are in everyday living. This is because your heart reflects who you really are (Prov. 23:7).

Proverbs 4:23 declares:

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it *are* the issues of life.”

The soil reflects the condition of the human heart. Furthermore, the type of heart that a person has will identify the spiritual condition of their life and place a specific label on them. An individual might be considered a hard person, an emotional person, a worldly person, or a fruitful person. So there are four types of listeners and hearts that the sowers of the word (Gospel seed) will encounter throughout the mystery period.

Two key questions are answered in this first parable. What is the human reaction to the seed coming into the heart and what are the results that occur after the seed is sown? In other words, what happens to the Word of God (Gospel) as it enters the human heart or control center of a person’s existence and what kind of affect does this have on a person’s life?

As we study the soils in this parable, we will discover the human reaction to truth and the results of the seed sowing efforts throughout the mystery period. We will discover what takes place in the hearts of humanity when you present the saving truth of the Gospel to them and what the results in their lives will be after receiving the truth in their hearts. This will help us to understand what is occurring in the human hearts of people as we witness to them.

This part of our study on the soils will help us in our evangelistic efforts and outreach. It will give us a better understanding of what is going to take place in the hearts and lives of people as we witness to them. There should be no surprises when we contemplate or understand what our Lord said in this parable. In a general way we should know how people will respond to truth and what kind of results will occur in their lives.

Let's begin to look at the soils which are representative of human hearts and the results that take place in the lives of people today as we sow the seed. Remember that Jesus was speaking prophetically of the entire period during His absence. As we will see, many who hear will not receive the word and be saved. But others will respond. However, the ratio is one out of four in this study of the Parable of the Sower.

This first parable foreshadows what will happen during the last days. The world is not going to become a better Christian place to live. It will not become a place of the universal acceptance of the Gospel as postmillennialists teach. We are doomed to disappointment if we possess the grandiose thoughts that the world is getting better, and that Christians will take dominion over the earth by converting people and christianizing the earth (2 Tim. 3:1-5; Matt. 24:1-31).

Fanny Crosby loved sharing the Gospel with anyone who would listen. In 1869 she penned the words to "Rescue the Perishing." When asked about the song, she explained, "It was written following a personal experience at the New York City Bowery Mission." She went on to explain that she would go one night a week to talk to "her boys."

One night while speaking to them, she kept having the thought that there was a boy present who had wandered away from his mother and must be rescued that night, or he would be eternally lost. She made a plea to each boy that was there that night. At the end of the service, one of the young men came forward and said, "Did you mean me, Miss Crosby? I promised my mother to meet her in Heaven, but as I am now living that will be impossible." She prayed with him and led him to Christ. As they finished, he said, "Now I am ready to meet my mother in Heaven, for I have found God."

In this first parable we have discovered the Sower who is Christ and today He continues the work of sowing through the Holy Spirit and the vessels He works with which are God's saints. We have also talked about the seed of the Gospel that is sown. But now we must consider the soils which represent the hearts upon which the seed falls.

Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower highlights four different responses to the Gospel. Again, the *soils* in the parable, four in number, represent four classes of hearers, each with a different response to the God's Word (the Gospel seed).

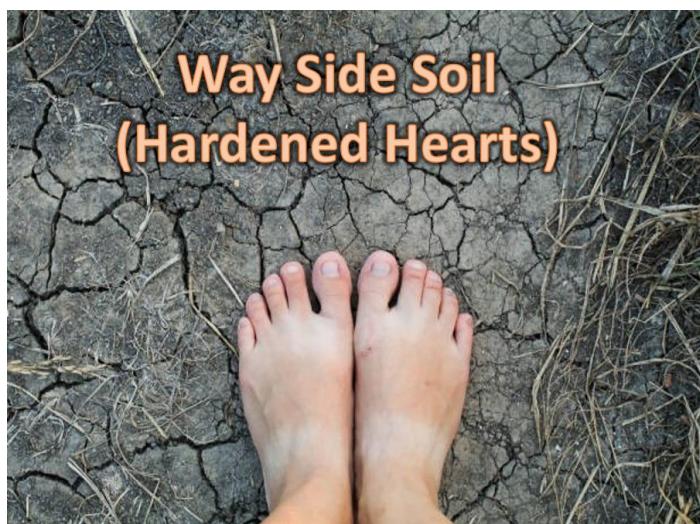
1. The hard soil (unresponsive hearer)

Matthew 13:4

"And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up."

Matthew 13:18-19 Jesus gives the interpretation of the hard soil:

"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."



a. The hardness of the hearers

The wayside soil is comparable to the human heart that is hardened or totally insensitive and unresponsive to the truth of the Gospel. This is pictured as wayside soil which in Palestine was the soil that was trodden down and hardened due to heavy traffic.

During Christ's earthly ministry Palestine was literally crisscrossed with fields. The fields were usually long narrow strips or paths that separated the fields. The paths between the fields were narrow – about three feet wide. They were used by the farmer to get to whatever fields he wanted to reach. They were also used by the travelers who were going from one part of the country to another. In Matthew 12:1 we read about the Lord Jesus and disciples walking through the fields of grain.

No doubt they were walking on these little paths called the wayside soil. There were no fences or walls around the fields, just those narrow little paths for travelers and for the farmer to get around in his area. The dirt in these paths was packed down, uncultivated, and never loosened. The continual pounding of the dirt by men's feet and the dryness of this part of the world would compact the dirt to the point that it was like a road. It became hard as pavement. For this reason, if the farmer threw some seed and it went beyond the furrow onto the hard surface, it would not have the opportunity to penetrate the ground, germinate, and grow due to the hardness of the soil.

Also, the birds would take the opportunity to immediately devour the seed which was lying on the exposed surface. As the farmer was sowing the seeds there would be birds hovering above him, waiting for the opportunity to eat any seed that landed on the hard path. The birds were always ready to devour the seed on the wayside or hardened soil.

Jesus interprets the wayside or hard soil by comparing it to a person's heart that is hardened or insensitive toward the truth. The analogy is this. A hardened heart that is unbelieving and Christ-rejecting does not allow the seed of the Gospel to penetrate it and have any saving and spiritual impact upon the life. The hardened heart corresponds to what Jesus had just said about unbelieving Israel who hears but refuses to see and accept the truth (Matt. 13:13-15). Notice that the fault did not lie in the seed or the sower, but in the soil of the human heart – "he which received seed by the way side" (Matt. 13:19).

The Bible teaches that people develop hard hearts when they refuse to accept truth and close their ears and eyes to truth ("their ears are dull of hearing" and "their eyes they have closed" – Matt. 13:15). This is personal responsibility. When the light of revelation is given, they choose to not hear and see.

In Matthew 13:19 Jesus says the person represented by the wayside or hardened soil hears the truth but "understandeth it not" (Matt. 13:19). Why don't people understand truth? Ultimately, it's because they don't want to understand it! They close their ears and eyes to the truth as we

have seen and Satan therefore keeps them in blindness and darkness, confirming their choice.

Jesus said, “hearing they hear not” (Matt. 13:13), that they are “dull of hearing” (Matt. 13:15), and “their eyes they have closed” (Matt. 13:15). In other words, they could hear and receive the truth, but they chose to not hear it and believe it. In a similar way, Satan can only blind the minds of those people who choose to not believe the revelation of the Gospel (2 Cor. 4:4). We see here an element of human freedom and volition in the matter of people receiving or rejecting the light of the Gospel. God turns on the lights, but unsaved people can turn off the lights by rejecting the message of the Gospel for whatever reason and remain bound to satanic blindness.

As we sow the seed of the Gospel through evangelism, we must remember the tremendous spiritual warfare that is occurring in the minds and hearts of people. Light is seeking to penetrate the darkness (“The people which sat in darkness saw great light” – Matt. 4:16). Only when they see it can they believe it. The Holy Spirit is sowing the seed through conviction and convincing people of their need of the Gospel while Satan is trying to steal the seed from their minds to keep them from believing. A tremendous battle is occurring between light and darkness in the hearts of the unsaved as the seed tries to germinate itself in the hearts of mankind.

Once again, Jesus taught in John 12:36:

“While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.”

We see the sovereignty of God working and free will of man in this verse. First, we see God in His sovereignty allows the light to shine at specific times in the hearts of people (“While ye have the light”). God does the shining and when the revelation of the Gospel is known to the people they were to respond to the light.



The wind or movement of the Holy Spirit (the divine Sower) is invisible, mysterious, and unpredictable like the wind (John 3:8).

This reminds me of what Jesus said in John 3:8 about the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people to bring about the new birth: “The wind bloweth where it listeth (*purposes*), and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh (*where it comes from*), and whither it goeth (*where it is going*): so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is invisible but powerful; and like the wind you cannot explain or predict the movements of the Holy Spirit in opening the hearts and eyes of people to the Gospel. The timing, place, and way of the Spirit’s movement cannot be predicted. The sowing work of the Spirit (pneuma) is invisible and mysterious like the blowing of the wind (pneuma). There is a play on words here. The seed planting work of God upon the human soul is both a marvel and mysterious work. Like the wind, the work of the Spirit in bringing about spiritual birth is unpredictable (we cannot state when and where it will take place), invisible (it works on the inside of the human heart), and yet visible in its effects (changes the lives of people through the New Birth)

The new birth is also like the wind because it is God-directed or empowered (it’s not a power man has in his own hands). God alone can bring a person to salvation by working on his heart (John 1:13). So through the Spirit’s ministry the original Sower (Christ) continues to sow the Gospel seed in the hearts of lost humanity. But the Spirit does the inner work of sowing in His own timing, way, and we have nothing to do with turning on the lights!

Second, we also see human responsibility in John 12:36 for Jesus taught the people: “While ye have light, believe in the light.” This means they could

express their own personal faith in Christ because of the light that was before them and working in their hearts. When the lights come on man can respond to that light of God's revelation through simple belief or faith. So once again, we see the sovereignty of God and free will of man intertwined together in people coming to faith in Christ.

John 6:37

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

Believe while ye have the light and before the devil steals the seed from your heart. Come while the light is still shining.

"Come to the light, 'tis shining for thee;
Sweetly the light has dawned upon me;
Once I was blind, but now I can see;
The light of the world is Jesus."

What happens when you share Jesus Christ with lost sinners? The light begins to shine! It's what people do with the light that will make the difference in their eternal destiny.

But Jesus warned in John 3:19:

"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness (*they are without repentance*) rather than light (*that man is a sinner in need of a Savior*), because their deeds were evil."

One preacher said: "Some years ago I heard a conversation between two women in which one asked the other, 'Why is America in such a declining moral state?' Her friend replied, 'Because the people love sin.' I cannot think of anything more profound than this."

Yes, God opens the eyes of people who are lost while at the same time Satan is trying to steal away the seed that is being sown in their hearts (Matt. 13:19). But it's during this time of revelation and light that people can respond favorably to the Gospel presentation, or they can on their own

free volition reject the light of revelation given to them by not repenting of their sinfulness before God.

Jesus also said in John 5:25:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”

Jesus taught that a spiritually dead person could hear and believe when the light of revelation is upon their hearts which again speaks of a volitional response to the Gospel message. The expressions of not hearing, closing the eyes, and not understanding (Matt. 13:15, 19) and “them which believe not” (2 Cor. 4:4) reveals that people by their own choice develop a hardened or insensitive response toward the Gospel message. The soil of the human heart is hard and insensitive due to the stubborn rejection or the hearer. The sad reality is this. When a person refuses to hear the truth they develop a hard or insensitive heart and eventually become desensitized to truth. This results in no longer understanding the truth (“understandeth it not” – Matt. 13:19). They remain blind-sighted and do not receive the truth.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:23:

“But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness!”

Darkness refers to a very intense form of spiritual blindness. Truth rejected eventually becomes truth that is lost. The truth being taught in these verses is not that people could not understand but that they chose to not understand due to their own heart condition. As a result, they turned off the lights and remained in darkness. A person can understand the Gospel when God illuminates them but many times they ignore the illumination and choose to remain in the darkness. This the wayside or hard soil that Jesus was talking about in the parable. It represents a person whose heart is hard and insensitive to the Gospel.

It’s like the man who was walking through the park one day and came upon a young boy seated on a bench. Lying at the boy’s feet was a beautiful Great Dane. “Does your dog bite?” asked the man. The boy replied, “Nope.”

So the man leaned down to pat the magnificent animal on his head. The dog took one look at the protruding hand, growled, and lunged at the man, taking a healthy chomp on his arm. “Hey, I thought you said your dog didn’t bite.” The boy said, “He doesn’t. This isn’t my dog!”

Here is the point. the man chose to remain in the dark about the biting dog and therefore paid for it! Many people are like this today when the divine Sower plants the seed of the Gospel in their hearts. They refuse to see it, hear it, and believe it and remain in the darkness. In the end, eternity will bite them! They will be judged for their rejection of the light of the Gospel.

Jesus condemned the self-righteous religious people in John 5:40 when He states: “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” Jesus did not say, Ye cannot come unto me” but “ye will not come to me.” There was a point and place in time where these people could come to Christ, expressing faith in His saving provision, but they stubbornly refused the light given to them and went back into the darkness of their unbelief and lostness.

Pastor Steven Cole remarked:

“I know a man who used to profess to believe the gospel. He was a good Bible teacher. He went on to earn a Ph.D. at Harvard. He is a far more brilliant and accomplished scholar than I am. He is now a professor of New Testament at a liberal graduate school of theology. But in reading the descriptions of his three scholarly books on Amazon.com, I seriously question whether he knows Jesus in a saving way. Like these Jews in John 5:40, he has studied the Scriptures, but he missed coming to Christ so that he may have life.”

Jesus said in Matthew 23:37:

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!”

“Ye will not” (John 5:40) and “Ye would not” (Matt. 23:37) are clear statements of human responsibility in believing or expressing faith in Christ.

Their refusal to believe results in continual blindness and darkness. When a person no longer understands the truth it's because they have become totally blind to the truth or the message of the Gospel ("they seeing see not" – Matt. 13:13). They become like a spiritual dunce. As a result of their hardness, unresponsiveness, or rejection of truth they remained in their spiritual darkness or blindness. They no longer understand because they choose to not understand. This is because their heart has become like wayside soil that is beaten down, uncultivated, and has little chance of germinating seed.

Have you ever witnessed to someone whose heart seemed very hard and calloused to the Gospel message? If so, you have encountered wayside soil, the soil of a hardened heart. Sometimes you can tell if people have crossed over a line and no longer want anything to do with truth. Their hearts are hardened to the truth to the point that they do not understand or grasp the saving significance that the Gospel message has for their life. They do not understand because they have become blind to the truth due to their own repeated rejection and hardened heart.

This was true of Israel during the earthly ministry of Jesus.

Acts 7:51 depicts the hardened soil of the human heart:

"Ye stiffnecked (*stubborn, headstrong, obstinate*) and uncircumcised in heart and ears (*metaphorically – those whose soul and senses are closed to divine communication*), ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye."

The hardened hearts of the Jewish leaders (representative of the nation) had rejected Messiah's word concerning His person and work and because of this Satan had taken the word out of their hearts keeping them in blindness (Matt. 13:19). As a result, Israel failed to yield fruit and could not yield fruit for the simple reason that she had no spiritual life. The seed of God's Word fell on deaf ears (insensitive or unresponsive hearts) and when this happens no spiritual life can germinate. Hardened hearts are like hardened soil which keeps life from springing forth.

What was true in Israel's day while Jesus was upon earth is true today in the later mystery period. How often have we witnessed to someone, and the Word of God made no impression upon their soul? Talking to them was like evangelizing a cow standing in a meadow. Truth seems to make no impact upon them whatsoever because of their hardened condition. This is the wayside hearer.

For many the truth goes in one ear and out the other ("hearing they hear not" – Matt. 13:13). Jesus is teaching because of the hardness of people's hearts the Gospel seed does not germinate. We might say the right or correct words but see "no results" with this type of soil. There is no life or fruit that springs forth due to the hardened condition of a person's heart. The hard and unconcerned heart of people today is a common barrier to seeing souls saved.

We sometimes wonder how people can sit in church and listen to the facts of the Gospel repeatedly and continually get up and walk away. Their hearts have become hardened and insensitive to truth. They sometimes are very arrogant in their rejection of your witness when they say, "I don't believe that line of phony baloney. I don't agree with what you say. I never heard such nonsense."

So people have their philosophies, religions, and ideas but they remain ignorant and stubborn in regards to the truth. They can in time become "past feeling" (Eph. 4:19). The Pharisees were hard-soil hearers and many today have followed in their train.

We have our humanists, atheists, and liberals who simply do not want to consider the truth and validity of the Gospel message and they say to us, "Leave me alone." But let us also remember that a man does not necessarily have to reject the claims of Christ to be a wayside hearer. He may simply reject the Gospel invitation and over a period of time develop hardness of heart. The Sunday church-going individual may actually develop a wayside heart after years of rejecting the Gospel message.

One pastor shared this:

"There is a woman in New York City that I counseled during a particularly difficult time in her life. When the tragedy happened that she had hoped to

ward off with prayer, she decided there was no God. Of course, she was unsaved. However, I occasionally hear from a mutual friend that she wants me to know that she still doesn't believe in God. The fact that it still bothers her enough to keep sending me that message makes me think that maybe she isn't really a hard-hearted listener."

Ultimately, we don't know the exact hardness of a person's heart. We must remember that people in general have varying degrees of hardness existing in their hearts. Sharing the Gospel with the unsaved reveals that the hardness, callousness, or insensitivity to Gospel truth can vary from person to person. But one thing is certain, any person who repeatedly rejects the message and offer of the glorious Gospel has in some degree hardened their hearts to the Gospel and Satan knows how to catch away the seed, so it does not take root ("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.").

This is why people cannot see the grace of God and His goodness. We will talk about this in our next point.

A missionary to Africa told the story of an elderly woman who was reached with the Gospel. Though she was blind and could neither read nor write, she wanted to share her newfound faith with others. She went to the missionary and asked for a copy of the Bible in French. When she got it, she asked the missionary to underline John 3:16 in red and mark the page it was on so she could find it. The missionary wanted to see what she would do, so one day he followed her.

In the afternoon, just before school let out, she made her way to the front door. As the boys came out when school was dismissed, she would stop one and ask if he knew how to read French. When he said "Yes" she would ask him to read the verse that was marked in red. Then she would ask, "Do you know what this means?" and then tell him about Christ.

The missionary said that twenty-four of the schoolboys that lady led to the Lord became pastors. Why? It's because she was spreading the Gospel seed.

a. The deception of the hearers

There is a tremendous spiritual battle occurring in the hearts of unsaved people when sharing the Gospel with them. We know that evil and sinister spiritual forces are at work to keep the Gospel seed from germinating in the hearts of the lost.

Jesus goes on to explain what happens in wayside hearts – hearts that are already insensitive to truth and past feeling. He goes on to say in Matthew 13:19, “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not (*because of their own stubbornness and rejection of the truth as revealed in Matthew 13:15*), then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away (*harpazo*) that which was sown in his heart (*a person's control center*). This is he which received seed by the way side.”

The word “harpazo” in the Greek language means to take suddenly, with speed and without warning. What a picture of the seed of the Gospel which can be "gone in a flash" if it is not laid hold of by one's mind!

Notice that the Lord says after one chooses to hear but stubbornly rejects truth and remains in the darkness, “then” (and only then) the birds come and catch away the seed that was sown in the heart to keep it from generating life. This tells us that those who already possess a hardened heart are easy pickings for the birds! They are easy prey for the devil.

What do the birds or fowls represent in this parable? They represent the devil and his coworkers (fallen angels) who do his evil bidding. Luke clearly reveals this to us. Luke 8:12, “Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” Mark calls the fowls by another name – Satan. Mark 4:15, “And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.” In our passage before us Matthew refers to the birds as “the wicked *one*” (Matt. 13:19). This is a descriptive term for the devil. The devil is the old bird that has been flying around in the church deceiving people about their salvation and flying

around keeping the Gospel seed from germinating in the hearts of lost people as you witness to them.

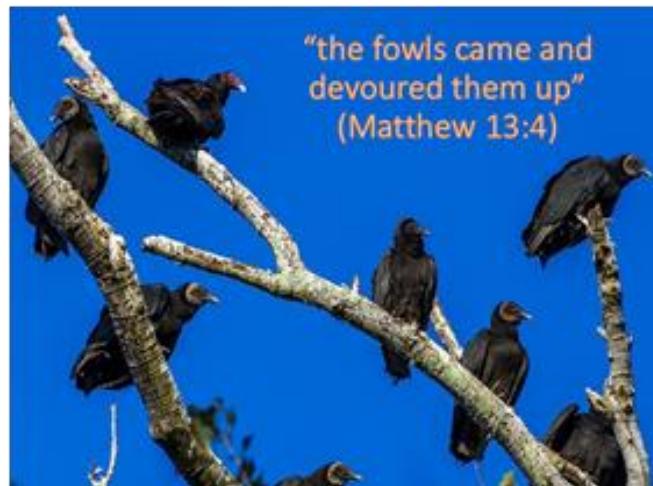
In another parable Satan and his followers are also identified as birds. Remember that the symbols are the same in all the parables.

Matthew 13:31-32

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven (*in its mystery form*) 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.”

This parable portrays birds as Satan and his fallen angels (demons) as roosting in the tree of ecumenical Christendom, an evil monstrosity of false religion that will arise during the last days and End Times (Tribulation Period). But in the present parable Satan is represented as stealing the Gospel seed from the hearts of the unsaved to keep them from believing and being saved.

My wife and I took some time off and went to the mountains. We stayed at a cabin for several days. Not far from the cabin was an old dead tree. There was no growth on the tree whatsoever. It was totally dead. The funny thing is that the entire time we were at the cabin the buzzards were roosting in this tree. Sometimes they would take off and fly away to catch some prey, but they would end up coming back. These buzzards remind of the birds in the Parable of the Sower. Satan and his emissaries (fallen angels) who represent him are constantly flying around trying to remove the seed that has fallen on the soil of the wayside soil (hardened hearts).



1 John 5:19

"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness"

The Greek word used for "wicked" (Matt. 13:19) and for "wickedness" (1 John 5:19) is *poneros* and is likely a specific reference and description of the devil. Some have summarized the verse in this way: "The whole world lieth in the lap of the devil." This word literally means to be "full of labors, annoyances, and pains in working mischief," and this is a good way to describe our enemy. In short, the devil is a pain in the neck! Metaphorically, the word means someone who is "evil, wicked, bad" and this is why they are bringing hardships against others. The devil is the prime candidate who is making the lives of people hard, who is annoying people, since he is a wicked, evil, and sinister, seeking to damn souls to hell for all eternity.

All these names describe the archenemy of mankind who seeks to destroy lost people in their sins. In these parables we discover that the devil is constantly at work performing his evil agenda throughout the ages.

In Matthew 13:39, the next parable, Jesus exclaims:

"The enemy that sowed them (*unbelievers among true believers*) is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels."

The point Jesus was making is that when people turn a deaf ear to the truth the devil is always ready and waiting to confirm people in their choice by blinding them and keeping the seed from having another opportunity to germinate spiritual life.

The devil cooperates with them in their self-chosen path. Like birds eating seed, Satan steals the seed of truth that was sown in their hearts. When truth hits a hard or insensitive heart the devil, the old bird, comes along and immediately steals the seed from the realm of that person's heart to keep them in their blindness and hardened condition. The hard and unconcerned heart is easy prey for Satan. He makes a bad situation worse by stealing any seed of truth that falls upon the human heart and in doing so keeps people in their spiritual blindness, so they do not see the true saving value of the Gospel message.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 speaks to the same issue of blindness:

“But if our gospel be hid (*veiled*), it is hid (*veiled*) to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world (*age*) hath blinded the minds (*the mental faculties, the inability to reason or think properly about spiritual things*) of them which believe not (*personal choice to reject the light of revelation and not believe*), lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them”(*possible chance for people to be saved*).

Scripture reveals that Satan is the god of this world and age (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 2:2). Of course, we know that Satan also works on the heart and the emotions of the lost, but his main battleground is the mind. Satan aims at keeping out the light of the Gospel from penetrating the minds of people and this occurs or is accomplished when people persist in unbelief.

Plummer is correct in his understanding of this verse: “It was because they [i.e., unbelievers] refused to believe that Satan had power to blind them. They resisted the influence of light until they lost the power of appreciating it.”

Morgan similar concludes:

“The god of this world is able only to blind the minds of the unbelieving ... Refusal to believe is the secret and reason of the blindness that happens to men.”

The common saying is true:

“There are none so blind as those who will not see.”

In our physical universe, the sun is always shining. We do not always see it, but the reason for that is that something has come between the sun and us. So it is with the Gospel. The light of the Gospel is always shining. God is always seeking to shine into the hearts of men. But Satan puts various barriers between unbelievers and God. It may be the cloud of pride, or of rebellion, or of self-righteousness, religion, or any one of a hundred other things. But all of these can effectively hinder the light of the Gospel from shining in. Satan simply does not want men to be saved. Demonic influence

is blinding people and keeping them in the realm of spiritual death (Eph. 2:1-2).

Therefore, the unsaved are unable and unwilling to accept the Gospel truth (1 Cor. 1:18). This is why they need light to penetrate the darkness of sin, Satan, and spiritual blindness. The Gospel is still the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16) which can penetrate through satanic blindness and sin. When the light of revelation does break through and enlightens people to their need for salvation, they can say yes or no to the message of the Gospel and salvation. They can refuse to hear the truth and turn a deaf ear to the Gospel message that is being presented to them. It's then that Satan confirms them once again in their spiritual blindness. Satan keeps lost sinners in the dark.

A Christian man shares this testimony. "Have you ever been hard hearted toward God? This spiritual madness has been spreading like wildfire over the last few decades. And I know something about this, because from the time I was about 16 until the age of 22, I was very hard-hearted toward God. I was very skeptical, extremely liberal, and an atheist.

I was a card-carrying member of the ACLU, and I was cynical. Mostly I was cynical about God. I thought that Jesus was just an ordinary man or a myth like Zeus or Apollo. I was convinced that Christianity was just a man-made crutch for weak people to lean on in life.

Then in 1973, God led me out to Louisiana in a miraculous way, and in 1975, by the grace of God, my co-worker invited me to church, and I got saved! God had been patiently at work on my heart for several years, and I gladly trusted in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. But I had been very hard hearted toward the Lord. I sadly remember inviting Christian witnesses into our home, just so I could ask them questions I knew they couldn't answer.

This man's testimony reminds me that God can break through hard hearts. In fact, He can make a brand-new heart!

As we have seen in this part of our study, the wayside ground represents the hardened heart of an unsaved person. It's a person who has many times rejected the Gospel message and therefore the seed fails to germinate. But God and Satan both know that if the seed of the Gospel remains long enough on a hardened heart that it can germinate. This is why the BIRDS or FOWLS of the air (Satan and his demons) in a flash catch away the seed that is sown on the stoney soil heart.

Matthew 13:19 interprets the wayside or hard soil:

"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."

If the seed of the Gospel remains in the heart long enough, even in the heart (control center) of a hardened atheist, it can begin to take root and germinate life. So, Satan does not take any chances. Therefore, in a flash he attempts to catch away (Greek – harpadzo - suddenly and quickly) the seed at it is sown in the heart.

Spurgeon wrote:

"Ah, my hearers, how anxious Satan is to secure your destruction, since, rather than that you should see the saving light, he takes the trouble to blind your eyes! God grant that no man here may die under this dreadful deprivation of light, which is caused by Satanic influence upon the minds of men who have not believed in Jesus!"

Understanding Satan's seed stealing and blinding strategy with unbelievers should affect how we pray for the lost. We should ask God to shine His light to stop the blinding work of Satan, so that the unsaved can express faith to overcome Satan's attempt to keep them in darkness and unbelief.

Satan knows he must steal or catch away the seed sown in the hearts of lost humanity or else the light of the Gospel will be seen, and the seed will germinate and bring forth spiritual life.

Once again, this is what Jesus taught in Matthew 13:15:

"For this people's heart is waxed gross (*thickheaded, stupid, and therefore calloused and hard to the truth*), 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."

The good news about the good news is that if the seed remains in a person's heart long enough it can have a chance to germinate. This is why Satan is seen stealing the seed from the hearts of lost humanity when the Gospel has been sown in their hearts.

It's interesting to contemplate that the devil cannot prevent the Word from being sown in the heart by the divine Sower (the Holy Spirit) but he can take it away from the heart. This is an important point to ponder. The Word of God will always do its work and can never return unto God void (Isa. 55:11). God's Word always accomplishes its purpose which in this case is to fall upon the hardened soil of the heart. However, the devil tries to stop the seed of truth from eventually taking root by immediately interfering and intercepting the message. He does this in many ways.

One question we need to answer is this. "How does the devil catch away the seed of the Gospel in the hardened hearts of humanity and keep them blind?" There are some specific ways Satan does this today through false teachers and worldly philosophies which produce ignorance in people for "many shall follow their pernicious (*destructive*) ways" (2 Pet. 2:2). He also steals the seed of truth from the hearts of people by causing them to fear. When contemplating salvation people sometimes fear losing their reputation, being rejected by their friends, or being considered a religious fanatic ("The fear of man bringeth a snare" - Prov. 29:25).

Sometimes Satan uses pride (Prov. 16:18). This is the sin which brought him down. Pride not only occurs before a fall but before blindness! These are people who simply don't want to admit that they need help. Satan will also use doubt, prejudice, stubbornness, cynicism, and a person's love for sin (John 3:19). A love for sin hardens the hearts of people. Satan might also use procrastination or a combination of the ways stated above to snatch away the Gospel seed from the hearts of people. He will use whatever way or combination of ways to make a person forget that he ever heard the Gospel message and ignore it.

Most times Satan snatches away the Gospel seed by distraction. As the truth comes rushing into the human heart of a person he may be challenged for a moment to think about God, life, and salvation. And for a moment he wonders, "Maybe there is something to this." He receives a passing impression. But it's then that the devil immediately (like the blinking of an eye or flash of lightning) comes to snatch away the thought from his mind and heart so it does not find root or return again. What does the old bird do? He distracts people with a healthy dose of what appears to be real life to them in order to grab their attention and get them away from spiritual realties.

Ray Stedman said this concerning those who are distracted by real life: "They have settled for a world bounded on the north by their work, on the south by their family, on the east by taxes, and on the west by death. That is the whole of life to them."

They have been described in the little jingle that goes like this:

"Into this world to eat and to sleep,
And to know no reason why he was born
Save to consume the corn,
Devour the cattle, flock, and fish,
And leave behind an empty dish."

Satan sends lies into the minds of people who are hearing the Gospel. He says, "The Bible is just a bunch of made-up stories" or "Jesus was not a real person" or "Jesus never claimed to be God" or "We are all products of evolution, there is no God who created everything" (THANK YOU CHARLES DARWIN!). When a person has swallowed some of these lies, it's easy for them to just blow off the Gospel and when they hear that God loved them so much that He gave His Son to die for them.

When the truth falls on the heart it might cause a momentary impression awaking the possibility of an entire world that a person has never thought of before. But it does not last long. This is because the devil comes along and takes the seed away selling the idea that a person is comfortable where they are at in life, content to let the world go by, and too busy in real life to

consider about spiritual things which can't possibly make any sense in real living. The message is dismissed from their minds as soon as they hear a joke, a piece of gossip, the latest football score, or a crying baby. So, the wayside (hardened) heart shrugs it off and man goes on brainwashed in his persistent hardness and blindness.

So why does the devil "catch away" the seed? For the simple reason that the devil does not want the seed to germinate. Again, we might think that this is an impossibility when it comes to hardened soil, but this is not the case. These people chose to remain committed to callousness and refused to hear the truth as it was being sown. However, as we have seen, Jesus recognized the reality that their hardened hearts could be softened ("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" - Matthew 13:15). This is like what Paul taught after speaking of Satan's blindness: "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4). There is hope for hardened hearts.

May I suggest that the devil knows more about the seed of the Gospel and soil of the heart than we do. The Evil One knows that when the seed of God's truth is left in the heart long enough it can once again become softened and sensitive truth. God's seed has a way of penetrating even the hardest of soils or hearts so that "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ" can "shine" or illuminate the human mind to eternal truth and salvation (2 Cor. 4:4).

When light comes into the mind and heart of the sinner, the light can germinate the seed which is sown in the dark soul of the sinner. Thank the Lord that He has "commanded the light to shine out of darkness" and we can say one day the light "shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). This is likely reminiscent of Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. If a person is ever going to be saved, they must see Jesus as the One who displays or reflects God's glory (John 1:18) and who brings them the only hope of salvation from hell. This is the revelation and seed of the Gospel that they must respond to so they can be saved.

Paul is comparing the conversion of a sinner to the entrance of light at the dawn of creation. Originally God commanded light to shine out of darkness in creation of the world. He said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). Now Paul is saying here that the same God who originally commanded *physical* light or illumination to shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to bring *spiritual* light in the realm of our hearts and produce life and a new creation (New Birth – 2 Cor. 5:17). This is very beautiful to contemplate. In the first creation God commanded the light to shine. But in the new creation God Himself shines into our hearts. This is very personable! God’s Himself works in the soil of human hearts of to provide light and germinate life.

The events in the original creation of Genesis 1 are a picture of what takes place in the new creation. As the Gospel is preached, the Spirit of God (the Sower) moves on the heart of a person, just as He moved on the face of the deep after the original creation. Then God shines into the heart of this person, showing him that he is a guilty sinner and needs a Savior, and it’s only then that spiritual life can begin.

So when the seed of God’s truth is sown in the heart by the Sower the light of illumination is turned on and it’s only then that the hardness and spiritual veil of the heart can be removed.

2 Corinthains 3:16

“Nevertheless when it (*the heart*) shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.”

Dear friend, when the human heart is hoed, worked over, or plowed by the conviction of the divine Sower (the Spirit of God), then at “any time” (Matt. 13:15) the human heart can be softened and respond to the Gospel message. So the message still stands true today. “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 13:9).

Yes, spiritually dead people can hear and believe when God shines the light of revelation upon their minds and hearts (“lest at any time ... they should hear with their ears” – Matt. 13:15). Again, this is human responsibility. Of course, Reformed Theology and higher Calvinism concludes that

regeneration occurs before someone can place personal belief in Christ, but this is not the teaching of the Bible. Spiritually dead people can believe and be saved when they receive the light or illumination of His revelation.

John 5:25 is worth repeating:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead (*the spiritually dead*) shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.”

When the Sower plants the seed of conviction upon the human soil of the heart the spiritually dead man can understand the Gospel and respond to the message of truth in order to be converted (“and should be converted” – Matt. 13:15). Jesus verified that spiritually dead people can hear the message of truth and respond to this message Deaf ears can become hearing ears. Blind eyes can become seeing eyes. Hardened hearts can become softened hearts once again. But it takes the work of the divine Sower upon the human heart.

Luke 8:12 once again reads, “Those by the way side (the hard soil) are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

There is illuminating power in the seed of God’s Word that causes the devil to work immediately in the heart when the seed is sown. You will notice that God does not believe for people. They believe (Luke 8:12; John 3:16; Rev. 22:17) when the light of the Gospel revelation is upon their hearts and then the seed germinates from within bringing forth spiritual life. Personal belief comes first and then salvation and life follows. God has not bypassed the human will when it comes to believing and receiving the wonderful gifts of salvation and regeneration.

John Bunyan was an example of wayside (hardened) soil but God saved him in spite of the hardness of his heart. He was a blasphemer and the most godless man in his village. He was regarded as so hardhearted and committed to godlessness that no Christian had any hope for him at all. But one day he heard the story of the sower, and these very words seized upon his heart, “then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their

hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.” And Bunyan said to himself, “Even the devil knows that if a man believes the Word he’ll be saved!”

So he believed it and he was saved. He became the author of Pilgrim’s Progress and a tremendous testimony for God in his age. God’s seed can germinate in any soil – even hard soil over a period of time. This is why the devil immediately comes to catch away the seed from the human heart. The devil knows all too well that the divine Sower can break through the hardest of hearts with the truth of His Word (Rom. 10:17).

John Newton was another example of wayside soil (a hardened heart of a sinner). When John Newton composed the words to what has perhaps become the most widely recognized hymn of our day—“Amazing Grace”—he was the pastor of a growing congregation in Olney, England. Newton loved the country setting. He had a loving wife, a thriving ministry, and pleasant surroundings. Life was good. But 25 years earlier, John Newton’s life had been a wreck.

Newton was born in London on July 24, 1725. John’s mother was attentive and nurturing. She taught him Scripture—entire chapters at a time—along with hymns and poems. Unfortunately, John’s mother died two weeks before his seventh birthday, and his father remarried shortly afterward.

When the new couple had a son of their own, they centered their affections more on him than on John, and John drifted into the company of nefarious boys and learned their nasty ways. At age 11, he took the first of five sea voyages with his father, learning quickly to swear and curse with the best of sailors.

Over the next five years, however, John occasionally was forced to reflect seriously on the condition of his soul. Once he barely missed boarding a warship carrying a friend, only to learn later that the ship had overturned, and his friend and several others had drowned.

About this time, Newton also had a disturbing dream in which he threw away a ring representing all of the mercy God had in store for him. These experiences greatly convicted Newton’s conscience, prompting him

temporarily to take spiritual matters more seriously. But after a few days, he quickly forgot what had caused his sobriety, and he continued his downward spiral into wickedness. Newton said, “I often saw the necessity of religion, as a means of escaping hell; but I loved sin, and was unwilling to forsake it.”

At 19 Newton was forced to enlist as a midshipman on the HMS Harwich. He later deserted and was caught, placed in irons, publicly stripped on board the ship, whipped with a cat-o'-nine-tails, and demoted. Newton then fell into dark depression and despair, wanting at times to throw himself overboard and scheming of ways to murder the captain who had humiliated him. His situation soon changed, however, when his captain swapped him for sailors from a ship bound for West Africa to procure slaves.

The slave trade was a lucrative business in the mid-1700s. More than 100,000 slaves came to the New World on English ships. Approximately 15,000 Africans died at sea as slaves on English ships during this time.

On a return voyage to England on the Greyhound, Newton proved to be the most profane, debauched man on the ship. One night Newton got so drunk that when his hat blew overboard, he would have dived in after it had not another sailor grabbed hold of his clothing.

Later on the voyage, Newton leafed through one of the few books on board—*Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. Newton read it as pure fancy but then began to question what would happen to him if it were true. It scared him, and he closed the book.

That night, on March 21, 1748, a fierce storm overtook the ship, almost swamping it. Men, animals, and provisions were swept overboard. Newton prayed for the first time in years. He feared he was going to die, and if the Christian faith were true, then he surely would not be forgiven. He reflected on all he had done over the past few years, including mocking the historical facts of the gospel; and it disturbed him.

After four days the storm abated. In God's providence, the beeswax in the ship's hold helped to keep the boat afloat. Newton attributed the deliverance to God. He began to read the New Testament with more interest. When he came to Luke 15, he observed remarkable parallels between his life and that of the prodigal son.

The ship drifted for a month. Provisions were running out. The captain blamed Newton's blasphemy for the problems and considered throwing Newton overboard, like Jonah. The crippled ship finally made its way to Northern Ireland just in time before another great wind began to blow.

In 1749 Newton sailed as first mate on another slave-trade ship. By this time, Newton had forgotten his vows and slipped back into his old, sinful ways. While collecting slaves along the west coast of Africa, Newton came down with malaria again, which caused him to reflect once more on his life. In light of the mercies God had shown him, he felt great conviction over his recent failures. Half delirious, Newton dragged himself off his bed and trudged his way to a remote part of the island. There, realizing the futility of making more self-reliant resolutions, "he cast himself upon the Lord" and God's amazing grace preciously appeared the hour John Newton first believed. This is why he wrote:

"Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed."

Before experiencing God's saving grace, John Newton had no qualms about swearing up a blue streak, blaspheming the God of heaven, jeering the Bible, scoffing at piety, engaging in vile practices, and buying and selling human beings like chattel. After his conversion John Newton changed completely. He later pastored for 23 years, constantly punctuating his sermons with the theme of God's grace. He wrote and published hundreds of hymns, including "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" (a marked contrast from his earlier blasphemous days) and displayed unending hospitality in his home. He fellowshipped with such revival notables as George Whitefield and John Wesley; taught and strengthened such

influential people as the great missionary William Carey, the poet William Cowper, and the abolitionist William Wilberforce; and became one of Britain's great antislavery advocates.

How do we explain such a difference in one man's life? Old and frail, Newton explained it this way weeks before he died: "My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour."

Newton's story of salvation reminds us that God can break through even the wayside soil (hardened soil) of a person's heart. This is why Satan tries to "catch away the seed" (Matt. 13:19) before it can germinate in the hard soil of the human heart.

Herbert Lockyer wrote:

"When once the Word is understood and received in faith, it is beyond Satan's reach."

In other words, Satan cannot take it away anymore. How wonderful this is! What a joy to know that the seed can do its work in the hearts of lost people, even those who seemingly we think have no hope of being saved.

So what are the lessons of the wayside soil? First, we have learned that Satan strongly opposes the sowing of God's Gospel seed. Second, the devil cannot prevent the Word from being sown in the heart by the Sower but he can take it away from the heart through his clever tricks and distractions of life. Third, people choose to remain in their blindness, callousness, and antagonism toward the Gospel. Fourth, people need the Lord. There is a world that is lost and going to hell and the wicked one is trying to keep people on their spiritual course of destruction and keep them from salvation ("lest they should believe and be saved" - Luke 8:12).

"We are called to take His light
To a world where wrong seems right.
What could be too great a cost
For sharing life with one who's lost?
Through His love our hearts can feel
All the grief they bear.

They must hear the words of life
Only we can share.
People need the Lord, people need the Lord
At the end of broken dreams, He's the open door
People need the Lord, people need the Lord
When will we realize people need the Lord?"

May each one of us develop a new heart for lost people so that we might allow the Sower to work through us in the Gospel to a world in desperate need of salvation.

Ezekiel 36:26 gives this promise:

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."

Only God can make a wayside or hardened heart into a soft heart. Praise the Lord. He can make a brand-new heart!

Charles Peace, a notorious criminal in England, was executed on February 25, 1879. Just before his execution, an Anglican minister halfheartedly read to him from *The Consolations of Religion*: "Those who die without Christ experience hell, which is the pain of forever dying without the release which death itself can bring."

Charles stopped the minister and said, "Sir, if I believed what you and the church of God say that you believe, even if England were covered with broken glass from coast to coast, I would walk over it, if need be, on hands and knees and think it worthwhile, just to save one soul from an eternal hell like that!"

Once again, the soils in this parable represent the hearts and hearers of people and how they respond to the sowing of the Gospel seed.

2. The stony soil (shallow hearer)

Jesus now pictures a person who hears the message of the Gospel and seemingly responds to it but this person lacks the deeper root system of

repentance which is necessary for a genuine conversion to happen. The shallow root system in this second soil reveals there was no repentance or faith that occurred in this individual's heart since repentance paves the way for a person to express faith in Christ.

Matthew 13:3-6

"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 (*immediately*) they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth" (*only a shallow layer of soil*). And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root (only a shallow root system without depth), they withered away."

This picture that Jesus gives of rocky soil is not what we do when we rake through soil and remove the rocks. However, since the farmer cultivated would seek to remove the rocks from his field, Jesus was not referring to tiny stones mixed in with the soil. Rather, the rocky soil in the land of Israel referred to strains of limestone bedrock running through it. In many places this bedrock or lower shelf of rock would come up within inches of the soil surface. The soil depth was actually shallow and could not sustain growth that would last.



Farmers sometimes were unaware of the rocky shelf that was underneath the soil. As a result, they would sow their seed in those areas that contained very shallow soil since the soil was resting on stone. If the seed landed on the soil that rested on the surface of the bedrock it would germinate and try to send its roots downward, but there was no place for the roots to go. Initially these seeds would spring up higher than the other grain. This occurred because the seeds could only grow up and would not

use their energy sending roots downward like the other seeds. The plant that emerged was a shoot without any underlying root.

The little surface moisture that was received by the seed caused initial quick growth. Eventually the promised harvest died from the heat of the summer because the bedrock hindered the seed from finding any moisture. No moisture could be retained in the soil without a deeper root system and the early promise of grain or fruit would wither away since it had no chance to develop completely.

Jesus gives the interpretation of this soil in Matthew 13:20-21:

*"But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon (*immediately*) with joy receiveth it (*seemingly making a profession of faith in the Gospel*); Yet hath he not root in himself (*meaning he is without repentance*), but dureth for a while (*bringing forth what appears to be fruit*): for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended" (*skandalizo - he becomes displeased, angry, and abandons Christ, apostatizing, leaving the truth*).*

Jesus uses the stony soil illustration to once again speak about a person's heart. This heart is different than the first soil which pictured a hardened and unreceptive response to the truth or message of salvation. In the first soil description no seed could penetrate the human heart and no fruit was produced. In this instance (stony soil) the seed of God's truth does penetrate the heart ("he that received the seed" and "with joy receiveth it" – Matt. 13:20).

The seed falls on the human heart and is received bringing about what seems to be a sign of positive life that will continue to grow and produce a promised harvest. However, due to the shallow root system the stony ground hearer cannot produce any grain or fruit that lasts for there is no depth to the root system. This means there will be no harvest of fruit or grain in his life that is useable for the Sower (Jesus Christ).

This brings up the question. How can the Sower use something that has not reached the stage of harvest and which is now dead? This reveals that the interpretation of the stony soil refers to the heart and person who is

unsaved or unregenerate who has not produced any lasting fruit or genuine transformation of living. Everything about them was temporary and not real.

Think of it this way. In each of these pictures the fruit or grain is not the person. The ground or soil is reflective of the person and his heart. But the fruit or grain is reflective of the real nature and life of the individual. From this second type of soil fruit apparently comes forth from the plant or grain that springs out of the ground, and it appears to be good fruit taking on the visible appearance that God's Word (the Gospel seed) has germinated and positively affected the individual's life. But by and by the fruit does not last and cannot be harvested by the Sower. Therefore, the fruit is of no value to the Sower.

This reveals that the fruit seen in the life of this person is not fruit generated from the new life. Rather, it is fruit (good works) generated from the flesh for even the flesh (old nature) is capable of producing notable acts of good deeds and reformation. The flesh is very deceptive and can at times manipulate the workings of the new life. But at last, it will be proven that the fruit exhibited by this stony-soil hearer was not God's fruit, but sham or counterfeit fruit (good works) generated from the old nature which would not stand the test of time.

This type of fleshly fruit (works) is rooted in the self-righteous acts of unsaved people who seek the approval of others and Jesus through legalism (a works religion).

Matthew 7:21-23 provides an illustration of stony soil hearers:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven (FALSE PROFESSION). Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? (FRAUDULANT WORKS - *these are self-righteous and legalistic good works*) And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (FINAL VERDICT).

The fleshly works of human achievement are not the fruits of godly living. Fleshly fruit can at times be confused with the fresh fruit of God's new life. However, time eventually reveals the true nature of the fruit and the person who displayed the fruit. Earlier Jesus spoke of how the religious people of His day attempted to clean up their lives and live outwardly righteous and pious lives. They tried to improve their life in some way by refusing to worship idols as their former ancestors did prior to the Jewish captivity. In a similar way, Israel after the time of captivity had outwardly appeared to be religious and reformed in their manner of living by refusing idolatrous worship. Jesus said they were like a house that was "empty, swept, and garnished" (Matt. 12:44).

Man does not need reformation – He needs regeneration! Mere religion and reformation is never effective in actually changing a person's life. So Jesus pictures this person and the nation of Israel as lacking a supernatural conversion. The religious people were like a house that is empty, swept, and put in order but a house that lacks spiritual life. However, the empty house speaks of spiritual vacuum which is a dangerous condition that allows people to be open targets for Satan to do even greater works of idolatry as represented by the returning seven demons (Matt. 12:45).

Israel represents the reformed and religious man, somewhat like the enthusiastic and reformed man in Matthew 13, who outwardly attempted to change his life but lacked a supernatural conversion. Jesus reminded the people that a man could try by natural means to clean up his life and set things in order without having right relationship with Him. Let us never forget that there is a fleshly attempt by man to manipulate the new life, but mere "religion" and religious acts of reformation are never defined as genuine fruit for God. They are not real or lasting fruit. God does not accept fleshly acts of reformation as fruit for His honor and glory (Luke 18:11- 14; Matt. 5:20).

Isaiah 64:6

"But we are all as an unclean [thing], and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

Satan constantly uses pride to blind people to their sinful condition and need of salvation. He makes them believe they are not really so bad, or that, if they do need improvement, they can improve themselves through reformation. In the end, the Sower (farmer) never harvests the early crop due to its premature death. We must remember the principle of “that which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). In other words, the sin nature can do good things in reforming people, but these acts of reformation are still fleshly, stimulated by self-righteous and prideful attitudes, which reveals a lack of genuine repentance in the heart of the individual. Furthermore, reformation is not regeneration which results from a repentant heart and produces a lifelong transformation in the hearts and lives of people.

Paul Van Gorder sums it up well when stating:

“Further, there are two kinds of conversion: in one a man says he is going to turn over a new leaf and do better, in the other he sincerely turns ‘to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and wait for his Son from heaven’ (1 Thess. 1:9, 10).”

Some have suggested that this type of rocky soil refers to carnal Christians who get caught up in the world after they are saved and fail to produce fruitful living as they should. But this is an erroneous interpretation for Jesus is talking about how a person responds to the Gospel seed – not how he lives the Christian life. Furthermore, this interpretation defies the simple fact that in the end there was no mature fruit that the Sower could harvest from the rocky soil hearer. Thus, the response of this person was shallow or superficial and no true fruit was ever produced by this individual that the Sower could use for His glory and service. It was only fruit that “dureth for a while” (Matt. 13:21) but in the end withers away without any signs of regenerating life.

When we contemplate what the second and third soils represent in this parable, we must avoid the common error of making a parable say more than it wants to say. Many times the meaning of a parable is stretched to fit into some later revelation found in the epistles. Do not commit the error of reading every detail of the epistles into the parables! Let a parable stand on

its own two feet without introducing a foreign interpretation from unrelated Bible passages.

Again, this is why some find carnal or uncommitted Christians in the parable of the Sower, but the context does not warrant any such interpretation and conclusion. But Jesus was teaching a clear dichotomy between the saved and unsaved when presenting the different soils which relate to human hearts. He is teaching how people respond to the Gospel message – not how they respond in their Christian lives. Christ is not teaching about various types of Christians but different types of responses that come from the unsaved as they hear the Gospel message and the adverse results that take place in their lives.

The first soil (way side or hard soil) never produced fruit while the next two soils (stony and thorny souls) produced a type of fruit that would not last indicating it was not genuine fruit (good works) which originate from the new nature and regeneration. The fruit died and withered away and never returned which means the stony soil hearer was not a genuine believer. None of the other soils (except the last soil) was said to produce fruit that could be harvested! Only the final soil produces lasting fruit which was harvested and accounted as lasting and genuine fruit.

Jesus said in Matthew 13:23:

“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.”

Since all Christians will produce some genuine fruit and lasting signs of transformation in and throughout their lives as a new creation of God (2 Cor. 5:17; 1 John 3:10), this means that only the fourth productive soil represents a true conversion and believer. The fact this was fruit that endured becomes an indicator that the seed of God’s truth (the Gospel seed) had correctly germinated in the heart and grew genuine and lasting fruit. This is important to realize as we study the parable of the Sower. In the final analysis, the first three soils were all unproductive since the Sower could harvest any fruit.

The first three responses were unproductive whereas the last response was productive. Therefore, it is only the last soil (the final person) where the seed correctly germinates in the heart which in return produces genuine and lasting fruit that the Sower can harvest for His glory. This reveals to us that only the last individual represents someone who possessed genuine life and salvation for where there is no fruit to harvest there can be no spiritual life existing The Bible is very clear on this.

1 John 3:8

“He that committeth sin (*continually practices sin*) is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.”

1 John 3:10

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness (*as a pattern or way of life*) is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

Salvation is not by works (Eph. 2:8-9) but works do follow salvation (Eph. 2:10) as proof of one’s salvation and regeneration. Faith alone saves but the faith that saves is not alone!

James 2:26

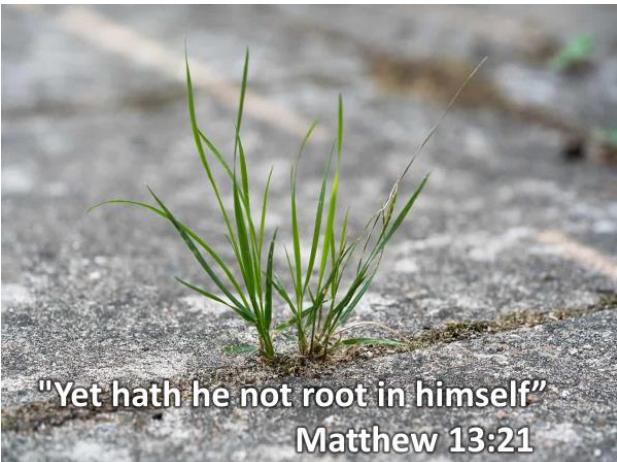
“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

A dead faith that is fruitless and barren, not producing any genuine and lasting fruit, is a counterfeit and disingenuousness faith that was never placed in Christ. We can therefore conclude that the first three soils clearly represent those people who are unregenerate and possess no real life or salvation. This is because the seed never germinated in the heart to produce lasting fruit. To come to any other conclusion about the first three soils would defy the clear meaning and understanding concerning the human responses to the Gospel message.

I recall talking to a man who said he was recently saved. He shared with me what a good feeling it was and how it seems to make things better in his life and home. But not long after this, he divorced his wife and went back into

the same patterns of living without possessing any signs of fruit and regenerating life. A person can have a “good feeling” and show signs of some reformation but not truly be saved. This is the stony hearer. There was no repentance over sin and regeneration that occurred in this person’s heart.

In the case of the stony soil the seed of God’s truth is heard and seemingly embraced but it does not become properly rooted in the heart to save the individual and therefore it does not produce any real and lasting change. This is why the Bible identifies this person as possessing a shallow heart by the analogy of the shallow root system. The seed of God’s truth could not correctly germinate in the heart of this person and therefore they possessed a shallow conversion experience that was not real or genuine (“yet hath he not root in himself – Matt. 13:21).



"Yet hath he not root in himself"
Matthew 13:21

We have all seen weeds growing up through the cracks of sidewalks and blacktop, but the root system of these weeds is very shallow and not firmly rooted like a plant in the ground. When the Bible says “yet hath he not root in himself” it is referring to the shallow depth of the root system.

I have large bark pieces of mulch around my pine trees and underneath I placed a barrier that keeps weeds from growing. But over time weeds still find a way! But I noticed when pulling the weeds that they have a very small root system attached to them. Their roots are very shallow and they can easily be pulled out of the soil and bark. This is the picture that Jesus is giving of the stony hearer.

The shallow soil with the underlying bedrock lacked a root system and portrays a religiously reformed type of person in this parable. The root of God’s truth could not make it into the deep earth or soil of this human heart where inward repentance of change could occur due to the bedrock

of resistance underneath the soil of this human heart. This resistance is an unrepentant heart that is not willing to be broken over its sinful life. There was a shallow or surface reception of the truth, a profession of faith and new life, but in the end no root system of inner conviction and brokenness over sin was developed in the heart of this person.

The seed of God's truth was not allowed to take root in the heart and because of this no inner conviction and contrition was sent downward into the human heart. We might write the words "shallow roots" over this type of heart due to the rocky or underling bedrock soil (Matt. 13:21). This is because the roots cannot be properly formed and penetrate downward into the inward depths of the human heart to produce the true inward change that is needed to bring forth the fruit of lasting outward change. So in this second hearer, there is not an open denial or rejection of the Gospel facts but an inward refusal, a bedrock like resistance to commit oneself to the Gospel seed. The seed of God's truth is not allowed to root itself in the depths of the human heart through inner conviction and repentance over sin. This was an unrepentant or shallow response to the Gospel message.

Jesus declared to the religious and shallow soil people of His day that they need to repent in order to be saved and escape the eternal damnation of hell.

Luke 13:3

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

Luke 13:5

I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

The word "repent" (metanoeo – metanoayo) means literally "to change one's mind" which involves an abhorrence of one's past sins. This stony soil hearer did not come to the place of repentance where he desired to be released from the enslavement of his sins. He never saw a real need for the Savior and salvation.

Don't be like the preacher who said, "I think, or I suppose, that maybe if you would repent, to some extent, that you might not go to hell, I think."

This is a watered-down message. The message of Jesus is repent or go to hell. This is the bottom line.

Peter Cartwright, an American evangelist in the early 19th century, was about to start preaching in Nashville, Tennessee. Someone came and told Cartwright that President Andrew Jackson was in the service and warned the evangelist that he should be "discreet" in what he said. Cartwright responded: "I have great respect for the President, but all men need to be restored, and unless our good President repents of his sin, he will be judged by God."

Note again that there is nothing wrong with the seed. It's the nature of the ground that prevents the seed from taking root. There was no repentance in this heart. This means without a change of mind there is no follow-up of a genuine change of life. Repentance occurs in the heart (its and inward change of mind and heart), but it eventually results in outward change – not a life that returns to habitual rebellion and sin.

At an open-air Gospel meeting the preacher asked for testimonies. While this was going on a skeptic was passing by who was eager to stop and listen. The testimony of a saved drunkard was being given. The former drunkard was telling how Jesus had wrought a miracle and saved his poor soul, after he repented of his sin before God, and expressed faith in Christ.

The skeptic scoffingly made a few remarks to those standing near him. He said, "It was nothing more than a dream, religion saving a man who repents; it's just a mere dream, and nothing more." No adults answered or challenged him; but God had His way of dealing with him.

Among the listeners was a little girl about ten years old. She had known the misery of a drunkard's home. She heard the remark of the skeptic and, going up to him, she said: "Please, sir, if it is only a dream, please don't wake him—that is my daddy!"

Several points can be developed about the shallow stony-heart person. They will help us to further understand what Jesus was referring to when talking about this individual.

1. This person has an emotional response to the Gospel message.

When Jesus says that “anon” (at once, immediately) with joy receiveth it” (Matt. 13:20), He is stating how this person initially embraced the message of truth with a quick response and enthusiastic reception. There is not a lot of thought involved but a quick human response filled with emotional excitement and thrill. A chill probably ran down his back. Of course, an experience does not save anyone – only repentance and faith in Christ saves a person. This person receives the Gospel message with smiles and cheers but not with repentance.

Mark 4:16 reads this way:

“And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness.”

Again, there are no signs of repentance and remorse over one’s sins.

James 4:9 describes repentance in this way:

“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness.”

So the joy and gladness associated with this hearer is not a sign of true repentance but a shallow acceptance of the Gospel message. The gladness of this individual’s stony heart depicts a person who has an emotional response and flare when hearing the Gospel and their heart seems to appear receptive and genuine when responding to the Gospel message. Here is the type of person who makes an immediate and enthusiastic profession of faith in Christ. Perhaps the profession occurs in times of emotional distress or when they are facing bad times in their life. They see Jesus as a way out of their troubles and to somehow get what they want (John 6:26). They are looking for some new and exciting experience. They want to get their miracle in life (John 2:23-25; Acts 8:13).

Many people today who are dealing with deep problems in life, created by their own sinful living, or who may be experiencing health problems reach out to Christianity in an attempt to find an instant solution for their problems in life. They want to “try Jesus” and change or reform their life in some way and they become excited about their new way of life.

Sometimes, in times of great distress, people push the panic button and say, “I need to get God on my side so I can fix or reform my life.” Many people want a savior to fix their problems but not to fix their soul! Many people want a savior for their needs but not a savior for their soul! These types of people want to make resolutions to fix up their lives instead of actually repenting and receiving Christ as their Savior (John 1:12). So the stony soil hearer with no depth of root has superficially made a profession to be saved for what he thought he would get in the way of personal benefit, but when confronted with the high cost of living the Christian life, he will not pay the price and prove his true nature. He is not born again.

Matthew 13:21

“Yet hath he not root in himself (*no genuine repentance*), but dureth for a while (*temporarily*): for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (*skandalizo – he becomes indignant or angry, falls away from the Gospel truth, and ends up deserting Christ*).

I want to give some more examples of the stoney soil hearer. There are unsaved people today who sometimes seem to embrace Christ in order to get married to a Christian man or woman but their reason for turning to Christ was wrong and their profession of faith many times is not genuine. They possess a stony heart that lacked repentance and true salvation. Others are told that if they believe on Christ everything will become better in their life. In fact, they can expect to become prosperous, healthy and even wealthy. It’s these kinds of people who immediately embrace Christ with gladness or joy of heart knowing that Jesus will make things right and give them the health, happiness, and home that they need in life.

There is also the self-seeking person who makes a profession simply desiring to find something new and exciting in life (“some new thing” - Acts 17:21). They want some new twist or start on life and make a profession of faith as if they were about to discover some new and exciting thrill and adventure in life. As previously mentioned, they want to “try Jesus” like they would try a new car or product on the market. This is the experience seeker who wants to try something new in life to see if it will make improvement in his life.

Then too, there is the thrill seeker who wants to make a profession of faith in Christ to experience a certain euphoric feeling. This is especially popular today. Some people think that becoming a Christian is like taking drugs. There is an emotional high of gladness and ecstasy associated with being saved and they want the experience, but they really don't want Christ. They might think that falling backward in the church aisle, experiencing some other kind of happy experience, that they will possess real faith in Christ. This type of person wants to receive Christ to experience something that he sees others doing. After the experience he seeks other similar experiences to demonstrate and prove that he has now "got Jesus."

There is a lot of emotional pizzazz and fizz that is attached to this type of profession of faith but in the end the fizz fizzes out and there is nothing left but fruitless living.

I view the stony soil faith as a freshly poured can of Pepsi. When you first pour the Pepsi into the glass there is a lot of fizz. It comes up over the top of the glass and runs down the side. There is no mistake about it. There is a lot of fizz going on and you can easily see it. However, if you allow the glass of Pepsi to sit on the counter for several hours all the fizz will go out of it. All you will have left is a flat glass of Pepsi. *What has happened?* The pop has gone out of the pop! That is exactly what happens to an individual who has all kinds of joy and happiness when they supposedly come to Christ. They are all fizz for a short time but then end up without any pop at all. They are Alka-Seltzer people who start with a lot of fizz but end up with no fizz.

Vance Havner used to say:

"They go up like a rocket and come down like a rock!"

Many people like this seem to immediately embrace the Gospel message but do so for fleshly reasons and their profession of faith in Christ is a surface or shallow reception of the truth (Gospel) without the root of repentance reaching their inner heart. They never desire true freedom or release from sin like the religious people of Jesus' day (John 8:33; 36-37).

We must stop and consider the hard facts that not everyone who claims to make a profession of faith in Christ does so for the right reason. I'm afraid that there are many professions that are quickly made and with great fanfare which have no depth to them or no deepness of root of inner conviction and repentance over sin. Their shallowness is soon evident for they eventually wither away and disappear from the Christian scene altogether. When a person loses their desire to pray, when a person's ship capsizes and they completely lose their hunger for the Word of God, when they have no compassion for the things of God, it's then that they give evidence of their empty profession.

But initially, this person's response of gladness and excitement over God's truth would seemingly place them in the Christian camp. It would appear that they have jumped on the Jesus bandwagon. They have identified themselves with the man from Galilee. There is an initial thrill and spin that occurs in their life which gets everybody believing that something wonderful has taken place on this inside of this person which is real and genuine.

In general, the stony-soil hearer of the Gospel message is that person who claims to receive the message of the Gospel and tells everybody that he is now a Christian. Their initial response, not only in their so-called conversion experience, but also in their life, is one of instant enthusiasm and interest in God's work and house. When they hear the Gospel message they are immediately stirred, enthusiastic, and overjoyed by what it says and make an immediate profession of faith.

Everything is bright with promise. This person is quick to tell you that they are going to do a great work for God and change their life completely and forever live for the Lord. There is a sense of euphoria, zeal, and initial newness and change to this person's life that is witnessed by everybody. Everybody has great expectations for this person. As a self-professed new convert, he makes far-reaching goals for his life and appears to be determined to make new spiritual commitments in his life. He is going to take his life to another level but then somewhere along the way everything changes. His bubble pops and he is no longer on the spiritual bandwagon. Three months later he is gone. He stalls out as quickly as he starts up. He

was present for a season but then drops off the end of the world when it comes to Christ and living the Christian life.

When we were digging the basement for the church, we hit some rock or stone. It was a layer of shale stone in the corner that had to be removed so we could square off and finish the basement. So, we had to dynamite the layer of stone to be able to finish the job. We had to inform the neighbors that they would feel some movement in the earth and hear some booming for a day or so until the stone was broken up. I remember the shaking and noise in removing the stone layer. However, the result of removing the stone was a church building!

The stone that needed to be blasted reminds me of the stony-soil hearer of the Gospel message who does not allow the root of repentance to occur in his heart. In order for this person to be saved he must allow the Gospel truth to break through the rocky soil of his heart so he might be softened, repent of his sins, and be saved. Again, this is person who claims to receive the message of the Gospel. When they hear the Gospel message they are immediately stirred, enthusiastic, and overjoyed by what it says and make an immediate profession of faith. But there was no genuine repentance in this person's life as illustrated by the underlying rock which would not allow a deep root system and lasting fruit.

I was watching one of those old Bugs Bunny cartoons the other day. Bugs was flying an airplane, and it began to sputter and then fall from the sky, plummeting thousands of feet to what appears to be the end of Bugs Bunney. Of course, just before the airplane hits the ground it stops. Why? It's because it ran out of gas! Well, this is a picture of what happens to the stony hearer. Their enthusiasm for the Lord quickly dwindles and they begin to fall and eventually run out of gas completely.

The reason for this sudden change is obvious. There was only a shallow or surface response (false profession without repentance) toward the Gospel message as indicated by the depth of the soil and the lack of root system (a shallow root system). It was reformation without regeneration. It was zeal without knowledge.

Romans 10:2-3

“For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God (a certain amount of enthusiasm like the stony soil hearer), but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.”

All the initial hype and excitement ended in disappointment since the human heart was never rooted with the inner conviction and repentance over sin. This person's feelings were changed but not his soul. All the change is on the surface rather than in the depths of his heart. There is no root in his life – no genuine repentance of his sins, unrighteous ways, or his legalistic efforts to justify himself before God.

Sometimes a shallow acceptance of the Gospel is encouraged by shallow evangelism, which holds out the blessings of salvation, but hides the need for genuine repentance of sin and a willingness to turn from the old life.

Someone described the superficial and euphoric response of the stony soil to the Gospel message in this way: “In any case, the superficial convert accepts the message of salvation with open arms and is overcome with joy and enthusiasm. He cannot say enough good about the gospel, the preacher, the church, and the Lord. He is on an emotional high, in a state of grand euphoria. He is certain he has found the answer to his felt needs. He has been accepted with those who believe and cannot wait to tell everyone of the new meaning, purpose, and happiness in his life.”

This is a good way to describe the person that is representative of the stony ground. Please note that this heart does not allow the devil to steal away the seed like the wayside soil (Matt. 13:19). However, in this case the fleshly nature of self-seeking and self-reformation keeps the truth of God's seed from germinating correctly in the human heart. The flesh causes a person to seek Christ for other reasons than salvation. The flesh interferes by keeping a person from exhibiting the deep roots of true repentance and faith in Christ for salvation. As a result, there can be no lasting change in this person's lifestyle. This is because where there is no root there can be no true or lasting fruit.

So the first response of the wayside heart was affected by satanic interaction whereas the second response was affected primarily by fleshly manipulation.

Gaebelein spoke of this person in this way:

“Only here is the brightest side of the flesh, if one can speak of it in such a way. But behind that little earth is the solid rock, which no plow has broken and where no life is present. How great is this class? It is the class of professing Christians.”

Let's consider some other thoughts when contemplating how the flesh works to interfere and keep a person away from their true need for repentance, faith, and salvation in Christ. The flesh in every person is capable of responding enthusiastically to an appeal, especially an appeal to the emotions. I believe the surface reaction of false profession can be easily generated in several types of contemporary settings.

First, let's consider contemporary pragmatic evangelism and how it can produce stony soil hearers. It is not a stretch of the imagination that pragmatic evangelism is a breeding ground to produce stony-soil hearers who lack the root and fruit of genuine repentance. The reality and likelihood of a shallow fleshly response is especially true when the Gospel is presented through the glamour of rock music, pragmatic worldly programs, stage lights, and the showbiz and showmanship of Hollywood. These theatrical types of manmade atmospheres resemble more of a hockey or football game than God's House and often are conducive to this type of shallow stony-heart response to the Gospel message.

Gospel entertainment and Christian Rock Music becomes a breeding ground for stony-ground hearers. Worldly music creates a worldly mindset instead of a repentant heart over sin. The message of Christianity is to save people “from their sins” (the penalty and power of sin) – not to entertain them in their sins (Matt. 1:21). We must also remember that truth was never to be communicated through the medium or agency of worldly pragmatic entertainment for in doing so a person's faith can be rooted in man's wisdom and not the powerful message of the cross of Christ (“that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”

- 1 Cor. 2:1-5; 15:11; 2 Tim. 4:2; Neh. 8:8-9). Entertaining concerts and churches who push the idiom of rock music have the potential to also water down the truth which results to skewed results in the hearts of the lost.

Presenting the Gospel message through entertainment can often blur, distort, and dilute the Gospel message causing emotional responses that have no root in them (the root of repentance). Furthermore, so-called Gospel entertainment can very easily result in man-produced emotional feelings within the realm of a person's heart that falls way short of genuine repentance over sin (Luke 24:47) and faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26). Such is the case of the shallow stony soil which is representative of a person that receives the Gospel message with much euphoria and fanfare ("joy" and "gladness") but in the end does not pan out as a true believer in Jesus Christ.

I am overjoyed whenever a person hears a clear Gospel presentation and is genuinely saved through repentance and faith in Christ. In fact, Heaven rejoices for Jesus said, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repented" (Luke 15:10). Some people are saved despite a worldly atmosphere if the Gospel is clearly presented and people see themselves as sinners and in need of Christ. But we must beware of mixing the righteous message of the Gospel with unrighteousness methods of man for this can cause confusion and mixed results (2 Cor. 6:14-17). The hearers can have emotional experiences and responses that result from the world of religious entertainment which are not wrought by Holy Spirit conviction and repentance over sin (John 16:8).

A.W. Tozer also states:

"People have been over stimulated to the place where their nerves are jaded and their tastes corrupted. Natural things have been rejected to make room for things artificial. The sacred has been secularized, the holy vulgarized and worship converted into a form of entertainment."

These experiences are representative of the stony-soil hearer who has a shallow or surface response to the Gospel message but lacks the root of depth of repentance. They want to embrace Christianity without true repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Pagan music and a carnal atmosphere

can send confusing messages to the hearts of the lost so that they become like the stony soil person in this parable.

The Lord's prophecy of the stony-ground hearer is in some sense being fulfilled before our very eyes today in the contemporary movement of pragmatic evangelism. Many are supposedly converting to Christ or trying Jesus through emotional persuasion and for a time they appear to light up but all too soon they crawl back into the dark hole from where they came from. Let us remember that the world of theatrics, tear-jerking stories, religious comedians, and entertainment may stimulate certain human and shallow responses such as emotional highs, intellectual pleasures, artificial behavior, human potential, dulled spiritual senses, corrupted tastes, non-confrontational comfort zones, secular commitments and distorted decisions, but these responses are generated from the power of visual effects and sounds instead of from the Holy Spirit. Like Simon, the stony soil heart "is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:21). This is because there is no repentance over sin.

Many people today are products of pragmatism or converts of the productions of man. Again, this type of person experiences a kind of pseudo-revival without repentance and reformation without regeneration. Such is the case with the stony-soil hearer. The Gospel is presented like candy which a person can enjoy. It's not presented as the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross for sinners and His resurrection from the dead. The person who reacts emotionally to some kind of Gospel plea, which is glamorized and hidden behind the world of entertainment, may often respond superficially to something that is being offered to them.

By this I mean that they do not experience true repentance and faith in the heart but rather make a superficial identification with Christ because they are caught up in the fanfare of the moment. They identify their relationship with Christ with some kind of outward emotional experience that they had in response to gyrating music or some kind of performance. They talk about their euphoric experience and the fuzzy feeling when they tried Jesus or when they were allegedly converted to Christ. They talk about how they were full of joy, ecstasy, and gladness but never mention how they were full of conviction over sin!

Matthew 13:20 again reminds us:

“But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it.”

Mark 4:16 adds:

“And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness.”

As previously stated, joy and gladness are not associated with repentance. Mourning and brokenness over sin are associated with all true repentance (James 4:9). In these cases, the seed does not germinate in the heart due to a person’s emotional response to a program or entertaining picture instead of a saving response of “repentance toward God” and “faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). We must learn to do God’s work in God’s way so that we can get God’s results and not man’s results – stony-soil hearers.

Second, I would like to also consider the efforts of pressure evangelism and how it too can produce stony hearers. Some of the brethren are responsible for producing stony-soil hearers by a type of high-pressure evangelism being done today. This type of evangelism which pressures people into making a decision for Jesus Christ without the root of repentance occurring in their hearts results in stony hearers. People who respond to pressure evangelism find themselves jettisoning the faith they supposedly embraced when they were confronted by a would-be evangelist at their door who was pushing them to make an immediate decision for Christ.

We often chide the Pharisees for making converts “twofold more the child of hell” (Matt. 23:15) but the professing church can do the same thing by forcing people to believe on Christ before they are convicted that they have sinned against God, that they are in need of salvation, and ready to repent. Some even brag about their converts and strike another notch on their belt. But the sad reality is that many can respond to an emotional appeal without ever moving their will to repent of their sin and place faith in Jesus Christ.

There are many converts of man who could be placed in the category of stony soil hearers. I once asked a man if he had ever personally believed on Jesus Christ. His response to me was this, “I did that.” I asked him, “Did what?” I wonder what “that” was. When talking to him I knew that he had no understanding of his own sinfulness before God and his need to place faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. To him embracing Christianity was simply doing something instead of believing in Someone – Jesus Christ. Converts of high-pressure evangelism do not last. They eventually move back into the old way of life realizing that the Christianity thing and fling is not all what it’s cracked up to be.

2. This person possesses no repentance in his heart.

We have touched on this already, but we will add some important thoughts on repentance to drive home the truth that there are many people who possess a surface response and a type of bedrock resistance to the Gospel message that lacks genuine repentance.

Matthew 13:21 again states:

“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.”

The lack of a deep root system developing underneath the plant is because of the rocky shelf bed that exists just below the soil preventing the roots from forming and penetrating deep into the soil. The analogy to the human heart is easy to see. The Gospel seed cannot make its way to the human heart when the roots of inner conviction and contrition over sin do not exist. Without the root of repentance, the water of life cannot reach the human heart (John 4:14). The lack of genuine repentance over sin keeps the Gospel seed from reaching down into the deep recesses of the human heart.

So this person is said to have “not root in himself” meaning that he lacked repentance over sin which caused spurious growth and development that did not last. The idea is that the root system of inward repentance never developed to provide the proper type of life (genuine regeneration) that is

needed for spiritual survival. The surface growth in the stony soil provided no lasting life or stability. They have never committed themselves to the saving message of Christ through inner repentance and faith. Like soil existing on top of a rocky surface, this person's change was only on the surface, rather than in the depths of his heart. His feelings were changed but not his soul. He was filled with joy and gladness on the surface but lacked the depth of inward repentance and remorse over sin.

When there is no repentance, no remorse over sin, no recognition of lostness, no contrition, no brokenness, humility, and desire to be delivered from sin's power, then a person is not ready to be saved nor can they be saved. If a person is going to be truly saved, he will have to develop the deep roots of inner conviction over sin and repent before God. Repentance is when a person inwardly changes their mind about their sin. The Bible teaches that unsaved people must become truly broken over their sins, see themselves as dreadfully terrible sinners who have offended God's holiness, and who inwardly turn to God from the wickedness of their past lives, desiring deliverance and freedom from their sin.

1 Thessalonians 1:9

"For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols (*the root of repentance - inward turning of the heart to God and away from sin which occurs before salvation*) to serve the living and true God" (*the fruit of repentance – transformation of living which occurs after salvation*).

When a person repents the roots of deep conviction and contrition over sin occur that leads to salvation. 2 Corinthians 7:10 states: "for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" – not gladness and joy like when the stony soil hearer responds to the Gospel. Acts 17:30 reminds us that God "commandeth all men every where to repent." When a person fails to repent or change his mind about their sinfulness before God, when they do not possess any desire to be freed from their sinful lifestyle, when they still want to live in rebellion against God, then it's very obvious that this person is not ready to place their faith or belief in Christ for salvation.

Repentance precedes faith and without repentance faith cannot be real or genuine. The stony soil person is like the man who has built his house on the sand (Matt. 7:26-27). He has a superficial and shaky foundation that will not last. In the case of the stony hearer his foundation is unstable because there is no root underneath him – no genuine repentance that leads to salvation. For this reason, the stony soil hearer immediately renounces his profession of faith as immediately as he had received it. This is because he has come to Christ for what he thought he would get in the way of personal benefit. But as previously mentioned, when he becomes confronted with the high cost of living the Christian life, he is not willing to pay the price.

Someone wrote:

"He has built his religious house on the sand of emotional experience, and when the storms of affliction or persecution beat on his house, it crumbles and washes away."

Adrian Rogers says of this soil: "what you have is a false profession. And it is all emotionalism. Oh, there are these people. You can give an invitation and get people to get emotional and to give their heart to Jesus, but they don't really mean business with God. There is no root. It is all emotion ... Now let me tell you something, friend, about these emotional, candy-legged soldiers. They say, 'Yes, I'm going for Christ.' They'll join anything if you give them a badge and a button. But listen. As soon as persecution and affliction comes, they fall away.

There are some people who would give up membership in this church before they would give up getting a new car. There are some people, if it gets tough and if it gets tight, they will fall away. They won't lose their salvation. They never had it. They are about a half-inch deep. Listen. Salvation is the deepest work of God. Your emotions are the shallowest part of your life. God doesn't do His deepest work in the shallowest part. I'm not against emotions, but you've got to be more than just a half-inch deep. Do you mean business with God?"

Churches across America have many of these stony-soil hearts and hearers. They come and go. The text says that they "dureth for a while" (Matt. 13:21) or endure for a time or season but then fall back into the same old

sinful patterns of life never giving evidence of any lasting fruit or change. This is because there is no spiritual life existing in this person.

I like to call these types of people “seasonal people.” In fact, they may only attend church at two seasons of the year – Thanksgiving and Christmas. What causes them to fall back into the old way of life? The text in Matthew 13:21 says it’s because of the “tribulation” and “persecution” that comes from being identified “with the word.” Mark makes it even clearer when he says the persecution comes “for the word’s sake” (Mark 4:17). In other words, when a person appears to belong to Christ, they are seen to be a follower of His word, and this is something the unsaved world despises (2 Cor. 2:16). Followers of Christ and His Word become a reminder to the unsaved of the fate that awaits them if they fail to repent of their sins and place their faith and trust in Christ.

Because of their alleged relationship to Christ and Christianity the stony hearer will eventually experience pressure from the unsaved people of the world. This is because the world’s expectation of believers is that they should live differently when embracing the Christian life. The stony hearer becomes overwhelmed when people criticize him for being a Christian and identifying with the truth of the Gospel and God’s Word.

In response to such pressure the stony hearer becomes “offended” (Gk. - scandalizo). This is the Greek word from which we derive our English word scandal. It literally means “to entrap” or “to trip up” or “stumble” and has the figurative or metaphorical meaning to commit apostasy. In other words, the pressure of the unsaved causes this person to stumble and commit apostasy. When the stony hearer becomes pressured by the persecution and tribulation of the world, he ends up falling away. This person cannot take the “tribulation” and “persecution” (Matt. 13:21) that comes from being identified with the truth, Christians, and Christianity.

Addressing a national seminar of Southern Baptist leaders, George Gallup said, "We find there is very little difference in ethical behavior between churchgoers and those who are not active religiously...The levels of lying, cheating, and stealing are remarkable similar in both groups. Eight out of ten Americans consider themselves Christians, Gallup said, yet only about

half of them could identify the person who gave the Sermon on the Mount, and fewer still could recall five of the Ten Commandments. Only two in ten said they would be willing to suffer for their faith. Why? In large part it's because they are stony soul hearers.

The idea behind the word ("offended") means that when pressure hits the rocky soil heart this person commits a spiritual scandal or disgraceful act of apostasy that demonstrates what kind of person he really is – unregenerate and without life. When unsaved friends, family, fellow students, coworkers, or employers begin to criticize him for his faith, or pressure him to compromise, he cannot resist and becomes overtaken by the worldly pressure. This person eventually becomes ashamed and repudiates the Gospel and Christ Himself whom he had previously and so joyously proclaimed as His Savior. In the first hear response there was *immediate resistance* to the Gospel message (Matt. 13:19) but in the second response there was *delayed resistance* to the message. But the rejection eventually came, and the second hearer ends up apostatizing from the truth (Matt. 13:21).

So why does this person apostatize? It's because his profession of faith had no personal conviction and repentance. It's because he never experienced the new birth or the new life that Christ gives. In short, he possessed only a sham faith that soon would wither away and become nonexistent due to worldly pressure. Let us remember that surface impressions are transitory and when temptations and persecution arise, this person quickly defects. The stony soil hearer wants nothing to do with living the Christian life of discipleship, surrender, and counting the cost (Luke 14:27-28). This person wants the gladness of Christianity without the cross of Christianity (Matt. 16:24).

For this reason, people defect and no longer identify with Christ and Christianity in any real way. Sometimes you cannot sort out the superficiality of someone's profession of faith until the rubber meets the road, until tribulation or persecution comes along for identifying with Christ and His Word. You will note that the affliction and persecution Jesus is talking about does not have to do with the ordinary hardships and troubles of life, but specifically with problems that result because of the Word of

God. When people associate with truth, they set themselves up for hardship and persecution (2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 5:10). To update this, in the end this person leaves their association with God, Jesus Christ, and Christianity proving they are not genuinely saved.

You will remember that Gideon's army first numbered 32,000 but eventually 22,000 of the men went back home. Out of the remainder of men 9,700 were at ease and only 300 were real (Judges 7).

A man shared this true story:

"A few years ago I was in my backyard with my lawnmower tipped on its side. I was trying to get the blade off so I could sharpen it. I had my biggest wrench attached to the nut but couldn't budge it. I got a four-foot length of pipe and slipped it over the wrench handle to give me leverage, and I leaned on that—still unsuccessfully.

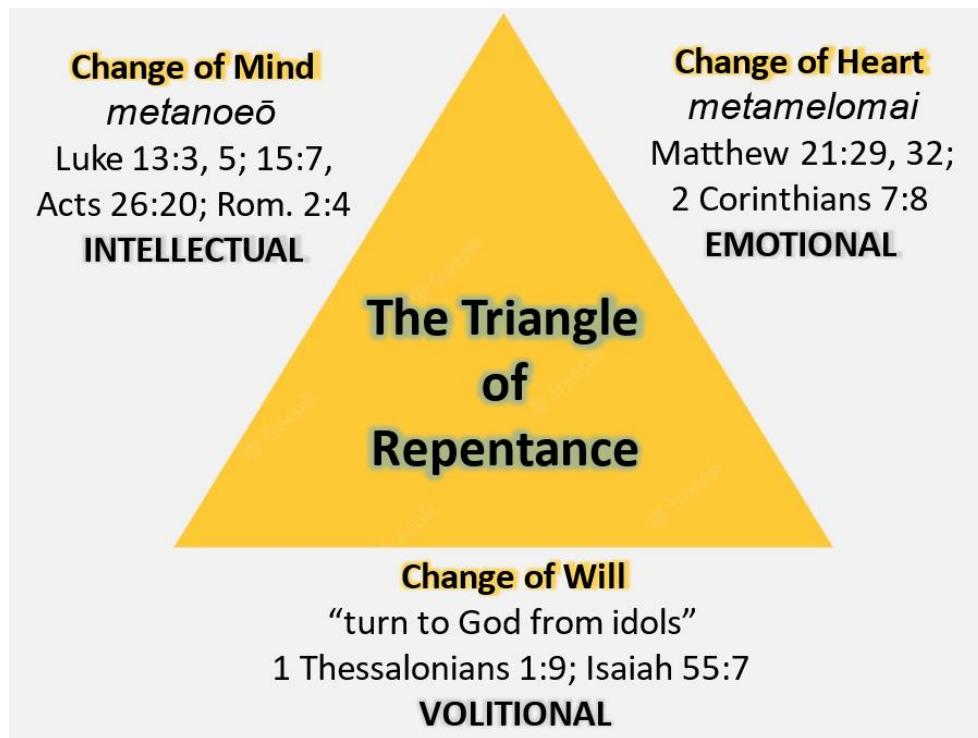
"Next I took a large rock and banged on the pipe. By this time I was beginning to get emotionally involved with my lawnmower. Then my neighbor walked over and said that he had a lawnmower like mine once and that, if he remembered correctly, the threads on the bolt went the other way. I reversed my exertions and, sure enough, the nut turned easily.

"I was glad to find out I was wrong. I was saved from frustration and failure. I would never have gotten the job done, no matter how hard I tried, doing it my way."

Well, this man's mower experience illustrates repentance. We must realize that we are wrong and going down a sinful path of destruction. We must realize that we have been living our way but now must repent of our sins and desire to go another way in life no longer living in open rebellion against God. Without repentance, without the root of repentance, a person cannot be saved.

Repentance is like a triangle that has three sides. True repentance involves the mind (a change of thinking), the emotions (a change of heart), and the will (a choice to change direction). All three sides of the triangle are part of what it means to repent. There must be a change in one's thinking about

sin, an inner disturbance about sin, and the renunciation of sin, or a decision to change the direction of one's life.



Repentance is part of the Great Commission passage of Luke 24:47:
“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”
This tells me that a person must repent to receive forgiveness of sins and be saved. People must understand that they need to change their mind and heart regarding their sinfulness before God and need for the Savior (Jesus Christ). They must realize they are lost and in need of salvation and desire to be released from their sins – inwardly turning to God and away from their sins.

How can a person every be saved unless they repent:

- ✓ Admitting they are a sinner before God?
- ✓ Admitting they are lost and going to hell?
- ✓ Admitting they are in rebellion against God?
- ✓ Admitting they are seeking to earn their salvation (legalism)?
- ✓ Admitting they have been living in unbelief and have rejected Christ’s offer of free salvation?

- ✓ Admitting they have rejected Christ's deity (the cults)?
- ✓ Admitting they were an atheist who rejected the existence of God?
- ✓ Admitting they must change their belief system and turn away from whatever has been keeping them from coming to faith in Christ?

I heard about an evangelist who started to preach. At the end he gave the invitation and a medical doctor who had been convicted by the life-giving power of the Word of God said to the man that was sitting next to him, "I don't know about you, but I'm going forward to give my heart to Christ." And that man sitting next to him said, "And I'll go with you. By the way, here's your billfold: I'm a pickpocket." In going forward to be saved this man repented of his sin of pickpocketing and became a Christian.

Gipsy Smity shared this story. When I was in South Africa, a fine, handsome Dutchman came into my service, and God laid His hand on him and convicted him of sin. The next morning he went to the beautiful home of another Dutchman and said to him, "Do you recognize that old watch?" "Why, yes," answered the other. "Those are my initials; that is my watch. I lost it eight years ago. How did you get it, and how long have you had it?" "I stole it," was the reply. "What made you bring it back now?" "I repented of my sin and was converted last night," was the answer, "and I have brought it back first thing this morning. If you had been up, I would have brought it last night."

You know, repentance changes a person and without repentance a person will not change his life. This is what we have seen in the study of the stony soil hearer of Matthew 13.

I've read how the Romans sometimes compelled a captive to be joined face-to-face with a dead body, and to bear it about until the horrible decaying body (its smell and fluids) actually destroyed the life of the living victim joined to the dead body. It was a horrible and gruesome way to die.

Virgil describes this cruel punishment: 'The living and the dead at his command were coupled face to face, and hand to hand; till choked with stench, in loathed embraces tied, the lingering wretches pined away and died.'"

I was thinking about this awful practice and how it relates to repentance. Without Christ, we are in one sense shackled to a spiritually dead corpse -- our own sinfulness and depravity in our bodies. Only repentance can free us from certain death (separation from God in hell) and free us from the corpse we used to be without Christ - His life and deliverance from sin.

It should not surprise us that when we pray with someone to receive Christ, they might not be genuine on the inside facing the terrible nature of their sins. We must keep in mind that they still might be rocky soil. Time will tell or reveal this. There may never have been any established root system or sense of brokenness over their sin and desire to be delivered from their old ways of living. We should not be surprised today when we see many professing Christ and salvation and then defecting (apostatizing) from anything that is related to Christ and salvation.

Again, the concept behind the word “offended” (Matt. 13:21) means that when the pressure for allegedly being a Christian and identified with Christianity hits the rocky soil heart this person commits a spiritual scandal or disgraceful act of apostasy that demonstrates what kind of person he really is – unregenerate and without life. Jesus taught that this would take place throughout the mystery period or time represented in the parable. People would defect from Him and the Christian faith demonstrating they never repented of their sins and were changed from their former belief systems.

The old saying is true:

“There are many professors but few possessors.”

Again, we must ask why this person apostatizes? It’s because his profession of faith had no personal conviction and repentance.

Titus 1:16 puts it like this:

“They profess that they know God (*like the stony soil hearer*); but in works (*transformation of living*) they deny him (*as Savior and Lord over their lives by their actions and words*), being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (*unfit and unapproved by God*).

When people are encouraged to walk down the aisle, raise their hand, or sign a card without coming to grips with the full claims of Christ and their need for repentance, they are in great danger of becoming further from Christ than they were before they heard the message. They may become insulated from true salvation by a false profession of faith. Jesus warned about the danger of false profession (Matt. 7:21-23)

The word “reprobate” (adokimos) means “to not stand the test, to not be approved, unfit, spurious.” It was a word used to prove the trustworthiness of metals and coins and to expose the disingenuous nature of those which were fakes. Here is the point. Their practice did not match their profession. These professors of salvation, the shallow or stony soil hearers, are those people who manifest “a form of godliness” but at the same time they are “denying the power thereof” to release them from sin’s bondage or enslavement (2 Tim. 3:5). In other words, they have never experienced true regeneration or the implantation of God’s life and nature. Therefore, they only have the outward form and reformation of godly living but lack the true reality of God’s life indwelling them. In short, they “deny the power” that is needed for living the Christian life and this is why they eventually end up defecting from Christ and Christianity.

These stony hearer people have a form of religion but not the force or power to live differently. This is because they never repented as sinners and received God’s life and nature to live differently. In the end, there is no fruit to identify them as Christians for it withers away and they are a complete flop and another statistic of drifters who never came to personal faith in Christ. They are still on the broad road that leads to destruction – a super highway of sinners doomed to hell (Matt. 7:13-14).

The stony hearers sometimes will tell you, “I have lost my faith.” But this is not the case; they never had genuine faith. This is because true faith that brings a person into the Christian life does not defect from Christ and abandon Christianity (Heb. 3:12; 14).

Luke 8:13 describes this stony hearer in this way:

“They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.”

Did you catch the statement “which for a while believe.” This tells us that this person’s faith was shallow or superficial. How can a believer in Christ (Acts 5:14; 1 Tim. 4:12) not believe in Christ? This is an oxymoron. Unlike the stony ground hearer, genuine believers in Jesus Christ do not stop believing in the Gospel, Christ, salvation, and become apostates who bear no fruit for the harvest. So we must understand that when we witness to the lost and lead people to Jesus Christ that only time will tell whether or not a person’s profession of faith was based on repentance and therefore genuine. We don’t want to count our chickens before they hatch.

Dr. Paul Van Gorder made a very wise point when stating:

“I have never been in favor of getting a sinner up from his knees and showing him off in front of a crowd. Irreparable harm has been done to the cause of Christ by parading noted figures of the entertainment, sports, and political world across the evangelical platform before sufficient time has elapsed to indicate whether the seed of the Word of God has penetrated and really taken root.”

Now remember that the stony soil hearer starts enthusiastically but they never finish! This is because an emotional or religious experience that merely touches the sinner on the surface of the soil can only result in apostasy from the Christian faith and living. The shallow stony-soil hearer is reminiscent of those that John spoke of in his epistle.

1 John 2:19 illustrates the stony soil hearer:

“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.”

This is not talking about leaving one church to attend another. It’s talking about leaving God, Jesus Christ, Christianity, and the Christian faith. Jesus spoke of these types of followers. In John 6:66 He records the ending of the shallow or stony-soil hearted person who is a self-professed follower of Christ. The sad words read like this: “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” This is a permanent departure from Christ. They essentially abandoned Christ. Why did they no longer

follow Christ? It's because they did not repent of their sins and were following Him temporarily for the wrong reasons.

John Phillips speaks of the stony soil hearer:

"Preachers know this kind of soil as well. They are familiar with people who are stirred, enthusiastic, and overjoyed by a message and make immediate professions of faith. There is an initial response; everything is bright with promise. But then hard times come; as soon as these shallow people discover what it is going to cost to maintain a testimony for Christ, they give up...The opposition that confronts them is solid, real, adamant, and unyielding. At once, they abandon their profession of faith, thereby proving it to have been worthless. The opposition, moreover, is directed specifically toward the Word that they profess to have believed. The world soon shows itself to be the enemy of God's Word. The test invariably comes soon after a profession of faith is made."

So the person mentioned in the Parable of the Sower which receives the Word with great gladness and fanfare and then drops off is an apostate who never had any real life germinating in his heart. The seed of God's truth did not find the deepness of root in his heart producing genuine repentance, spiritual life, and lasting change. Jesus taught that believers in Christ will continue to manifest a general change of life and behavior (John 8:31-32).

Charles Spurgeon wrote:

"If the man does not live differently from what he did before, both at home and abroad, his repentance needs to be repented of, and his conversion is a fiction."

The implication is that when a person has truly repented and been freed from the power of sin that he will not fully, finally, and forever abandon Christ. They will never abandon their faith in Christ, the faith (the basis truths that all Christians embrace), Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and return to their old ways of living to never again bear any resemblance of a Christian and identification with Christianity.

Every believer is on the ship of faith sailing along life's sea. We may fall down on the deck, and we may fall very hard, but we will never fall

overboard. Our faith will never fail in a final way because we have the blessed intercessory ministry of our Saviour on our behalf, as did Peter (Luke 22:31-32). The Lord prays for us, as He did for Peter, that our faith will not fail! True faith, even our faith that we place in Christ continues to sail on the sea of life.

Hebrews 10:39 declares:

“But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition (*the stony soil hearer*); but of them that believe (*continue to believe*) to the saving of the soul.”

The newspapers in Florida reported the arrest in Lakeland, Florida, of a man named Joseph Paul Franklin. He was wanted for questioning concerning a year-long series of shootings in Salt Lake City, Johnstown (Pennsylvania), Fort Wayne, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, and Oklahoma City. He had grown up in a bad home, dropped out of school at seventeen, and begun getting into trouble, with several arrests for carrying concealed weapons and disorderly conduct. But then, as one magazine went on to say in tracing his early life, “he became an Evangelical Christian.” After that he became a Nazi and then a Ku Klux Klansman. This sounds like a stony hearer who quickly appeared on the Christian scene and then quickly passed off the Christian scene. He possessed an unrepentant heart or shallow response to the Gospel message. This showed up in his denial of the Christian faith.

Many evangelicals hold Charles Finney in high regard but what Finney actually taught should be questioned. Like Pelagius, he denied original sin which does not align with what Scripture says (Rom. 5:12). He also believed the whole notion of original sin is “anti-scriptural and nonsensical dogma” and taught that we are all born in a state of moral neutrality. He denied the total depravity of mankind which contradicts Scripture (Rom. 3:10-12) and he rejected Christ’s death as a *payment* for sin in his lectures on theology (“that the atonement was a literal payment of a debt, which we have seen does not consist with the nature of the atonement ... It is true, that the atonement, of itself, does not secure the salvation of any one” (p.217).

Finney also rejected the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone. Finney made human choices and emotions the center of the

church's ministry, ridiculed certain aspects of theology (denying the supernatural nature of the New Birth), and replaced the preaching of Christ with the preaching of conversion and a kind of self-salvation and works-salvation. He claimed that repentance is not something brought about by God in the heart of the sinner but is only a volitional response of the sinner. In other words, he rejected that repentance was a work of God in a spiritually dead sinner, since God calls him to repent this means he must be able to do so without God's initiative. He taught that repentance is "a change in moral character." So he possessed a faulty view of repentance.

Thus, in Finney's theology, God is not sovereign, man is not a sinner by nature, the atonement is not a true payment for sin, justification by imputation is insulting to reason and morality, the new birth is simply the effect of successful techniques, and revival is a natural result of clever campaigns and intense emotionalism.

In addition, he also taught cultlike perfectionism and other related errors. In short, Finney's chief legacy was confusion and doctrinal compromise. It's interesting that evangelical Christianity virtually disappeared from western New York during Finney's own lifetime. The Western half of New York became known as "the burnt-over district" because of the negative effects of the revivalist movement that culminated in Finney's work there. Despite Finney's accounts of glorious "revivals" most of the vast region of New England where he held his revival campaigns fell into a permanent spiritual coldness during Finney's lifetime and more than a hundred years later still has not emerged from this state.

One of Finney's contemporaries gave a similar assessment, but more bluntly: "During ten years, hundreds, and perhaps thousands, were annually reported to be converted on all hands; but now it is admitted, that real converts are comparatively few. It is declared, even by [Finney] himself, that "the great body of them are a disgrace to religion" [cited in Warfield, 2:23; from A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing]

Why was this true regarding some of those who were allegedly saved under Finney's revivals? It's because they were stony soil hearers. The root of genuine repentance was missing from their lives, and they ended up

committing apostasy from the faith they seemingly howbeit temporarily embraced.

3. The thorny soil (worldly hearer)

A man bought a new hunting dog. Eager to see how he would perform; he took him out to track a bear. No sooner had they gotten into the woods than the dog picked up the trail. Suddenly he stopped, sniffed the ground, and headed in a new direction. He had caught the scent of a deer that had crossed the bear's path.

A few moments later he halted again, this time smelling a rabbit that had crossed the path of the deer. And so, on and on it went until finally the breathless hunter caught up with his dog, only to find him barking triumphantly down the hole of a field mouse. This dog was distracted by other animals and missed what was most important – the bear. I think this is a good way to introduce the next soil type of Matthew 13. The thorny soil of the distractions of the world keeps people from true repentance and coming to faith in Christ.

Jesus says in Matthew 13:7:

“And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them.”

He then interprets this soil in Matthew 13:22:

“He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world (*age*), and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (*having no real interest in spiritual things*).

Thorny Soil (Worldly Hearer)



When Jesus talks about the seed that falls among the “thorns” (brush or briars – thorny plants) He is referring to those seeds sown by the farmer that fell into the weed patch, which was filled with a dense growth of bushes and shrubs. It was a thicket where

prickly plants would grow and other kinds of brush reminiscent of the curse (Gen. 3:18).

These types of thorny plants have snagged me from time to time. They tend to come up in a thicket area beside my property and overtake the whole area choking out the smaller growth on my property line. Those thorny bushes are also waiting to put one of their thorny fangs into your leg or arm when you are passing by them with the lawn mower!

The thorny soil hearer depicts the worldliness of some people and how the world system keeps them from receiving spiritual life in their human heart. You might write “worldliness” over this soil. The English word for “world” translates “age” (aion) in the Greek language which refers to a period of time which is marked by certain characteristics and conditions. Jesus uses the term “world or “age” in relation to this hearer’s response to the Gospel seed which gives us the key that the characteristic of a worldly age wins out over the Gospel message taking root in this person’s heart.

J. Vernon McGee correctly concludes:

“The Devil got the wayside folk, and the flesh took care of the rocky-ground folk, but the world chokes out the Word for this class of hearers. These three types of soil do not represent three types of believers—they are not believers at all! They have heard the Word and have only professed to receive it.”

So the thorny soil pictures a person who seemingly has a divided heart because they want Jesus and the things of the world at the same time. They want the Savior and the system of the world at the same time. But in the end a worldly heart wins out due to a person’s love and connection with the present world system (1 John 2:15-17). This person eventually discovers that his love of the world and his identification with Christ’s word cannot coexist. So like the stony soil hearer the thorny soil hearer has a delayed rejection to the Gospel message but in the end he also totally rejects it loving the world more than the truth or salvation and deliverance from the power of sin (John 3:19).

In summary, the first hearer response there was *immediate* resistance to the Gospel message (Matt. 13:19) but in the second and third responses there was *delayed* resistance to the message. But the rejection eventually came, and the second and third hearers end up apostatizing from the truth (Matt. 13:21-22). Only the last soil (representative of the hearts of people) was a *genuine* response to the Gospel seed for it produced genuine and lasting fruit (Matt. 13:23).

We observe again that no lasting fruit can be used by the Sower in the second type of soil. The fruit and promised harvest once again prematurely die before the divine Sower can harvest it ("becometh unfruitful"). Once again, we see that this third soil type does not bring forth true and lasting fruit for the Sower. The second and third soils manifest artificial fruit which does not last which is generated by superficial believers who are not rightly related to Christ (John 15:2, 6). There is no such thing as a fruitless Christian for they will bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Matt. 3:8; Matt. 7:17-20).

So the heart analogy that Jesus draws from this type of soil is that there are those people who also receive the Gospel seed of truth into the realm of their heart ("He also that received seed among the thorns" – vs. 22) and the seed germinates giving both the impression and appearance that there is life existing in this person's heart. The early signs of fruit that are evidenced give the outward demonstration that a genuine conversion has occurred. However, something happens to this plant among the thorns. The thorns spring up and choke the new shoots that gave promise of a future harvest.

In this third class of hearers (the thorny soil) the hindrances to keeping this person from genuine spiritual life, development, and growth come from worldly external causes. The premature death of this crop comes from those things that are happening in the world around this person. In other words, the things in the world keep this person from possessing spiritual life and genuine fruit that lasts. This individual never could produce a harvest or crop of genuine fruit for the Sower. Instead, they die off when the world takes over their lives, proving once and for all that the kind of pseudo life they possessed was never intended to be part of the harvest.

Think about this. What farmer walks through a weed or thorn patch to hunt for a spurious crop? They don't since this growth is not part of the field or primary harvest. So the crop is left to be destroyed by the thorns. Furthermore, no crop can survive amid thorns that want to destroy its presence. The whole analogy tells the story that the worldly heart wins out in this person's life as they are exposed to the Gospel message. In the end, the life and fruit which grew among the thorns was unusable to the Sower. This overwhelming evidence proves that the thorny hearer pictures an unregenerate person who fails to repent of his worldly love and place faith in the Gospel message.

We must once again realize that the difference in these first three results was not in the seed but in the soil on which the seed fell. Interestingly, the enemy of genuine fruitfulness in the first instance is the devil (wayside or hard soil), in the second instance it is the flesh (stony soil), and in the third instance it is the world. This third hearer is not hardhearted like the first, nor softhearted like the second, but he does possess a divided heart.

This third hearer (the person with a worldly heart) must repent of their sins of worldliness before they are ready to put their faith or trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. They will say:

“Take the world, but give me Jesus;
In his cross my trust shall be
Till with clearer, brighter vision
Face to face my Lord I see.”

1 Kings 18:21 gives us this principle of choosing Christ over the world: “And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? (*pass between two choices or skipping over making a decision*) if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word.”

You either believe on Christ or you don't. You are for Christ are not. But this thorny soil person has a heart that receives the Gospel seed or message with a divided opinion and heart. He wants the Gospel message of salvation and the message of the world at the same time. So there is no genuine

repentance in this individual's heart concerning his sin. There appears to be genuine growth as in the second kind of soil (stony soil) but once again the growth is spurious growth that does not last due to the outward pressures that come from the world. The divided heart of this person between Christ and the world is illustrated by the thorns that eventually grow and choke out the life of the plant proving that this individual was not a genuine child of God that was intended to be used by the Sower.

Someone might say, "Well, I tried this thing called Christianity for a while, and it didn't work for me. I gave my heart to the Lord. I trusted Christ to save me, and now I'm back just like I was. It didn't work for me." I can tell why it did not work for this person. It's because he did not repent of his worldly sins. He loved his sins more than Christ's offer of salvation and a new way of life.

Jesus describes three kinds of thorns that eventually destroy and make this person's life unusable. They are all related to the world in some way.

➤ **The cares of the world**

First, there is what Jesus calls "the care of the world" (Matt. 13:22). The world refers to many things that can occupy our hearts, not just sinful things, but it includes the cares or anxieties that are part of life that can overtake people's hearts and keep them from focusing on the Gospel message, which is the most important matter to deal with. The "care" refers to the problems of life. The cares or anxieties that are generated in the lives of people are part of the world or age in which live today. The pace of life, the schedules of life, careers, striving for success, making money, and the workload of life in general all have a way of keeping the Gospel seed from penetrating the heart and producing true and genuine life. Worldly professors of faith soon wither when choked by the cares and burdens associated with life. They think God has let them down, that there's nothing to Christianity after all.

This person's worry and preoccupation with the things of this world blinds him to the importance of the Gospel and that which is spiritual and eternal. These kinds of people become preoccupied with the lesser things of life and

miss the most important thing in life which is salvation through Jesus Christ. Along with the cares mentioned above we might add bills, lawsuits, theft, accidents, family problems, poverty, and ill health. There are a host of other things we could mention that creates anxiety in the hearts of unsaved people and which keeps them from making a clear profession of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Their cares and woes burden them down in life, they often develop a bad attitude toward God, and certainly are not interested in Christ and His offer of salvation. In general, the worries of life keep people from contemplating their need for repentance, faith in Christ, and salvation.

I remember witnessing to an elderly woman one time about her need to place faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Her response to me was that she had many problems in her life over the years and that life in general was unfair to her. What she really meant was that God was unfair to her. She kept talking about the hardships that she passed through with her husband and her many health problems. I sensed that she was simply overwhelmed with the cares of this present age. It's interesting how the worldly cares can capture the hearts of people instead of the Gospel message. When witnessing with the Gospel many people surface their past hardships and their present worries and end up overlooking and bypassing the message of the Gospel.

The worldly cares of life have the tendency to keep the hearts of people away from their need for Jesus Christ. The cares of this life can occupy the mind and time of people to such an extent that they keep them from placing faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. When people are overburdened with life, they only care about one thing. Making their life easier. They are not concerned about the burden of their sins and need for salvation. They are only concerned about the betterment of their circumstances. They are more concerned about getting rid of their problems than getting rid of their sin.

So the cares and problems related to life are things in this present age that trigger anxiety and emotional distress. Problems knock at the door of every person. For true believers these problems can become a means of spiritual growth and grace (2 Pet. 3:18). However, it's these types of problems that

have a way of choking out the work of the Gospel seed in the human hearts of unsaved people. The Devil uses worry to focus the attention of people on themselves (their worldly cares of life) and not on salvation. Therefore the Gospel seed cannot produce life that will last due to the pressures of the world that overtake a person's heart and time. The anxieties of the present life prevent regenerating life, true growth, and genuine fruit from occurring in this person's life.

➤ **The riches of the world**

Next, there is what Jesus calls “the deceitfulness of riches” (Matt. 13:22). Remember that when a person is deceived, by definition they do not even know they are deceived! This tells us how worldly riches or wealth (material things) in life have a way of keeping people away from true faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, a person's faith can actually rest in the riches that the world has to offer. When people are wealthy and have many possessions, they often see no need for salvation in Christ. This is because they are placing all their confidence in the wealth and riches that the world has to offer.

There are those people today who do not feel their need for Christ and His salvation because they seem to think that they have everything that money can buy – everything but salvation (Isaiah 55:1). Many today possess the wealth of the world and this wealth becomes a barrier to them from believing on Christ. The things of this world have a way of stealing away the hearts of people from true saving faith in Christ.

Paul says to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:17:

“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.”

Although this is addressed to wealthy saints, we can conclude that trusting in riches is the downfall of many unsaved people as well. Those with an overabundance of wealth can place all their confidence in riches and possessions to solve their problems. When a man seems to have everything, he sometimes is deceived into thinking that he has no need for Christ. He trusts in riches and not Christ to meet all his needs and solve all

of his problems. it seems that riches and the cares that this world has to offer can “choke (out) the word” (Matt. 13:22) or keep the Gospel seed from generating true and lasting life. Concern for spiritual things is crowded out by material things.

Jesus said in Mark 10:24-25:

“And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Years ago I heard and interview with Donald Trump. This particular verse (Mark 10:25) was quoted to Mr. Trump by a secular newscaster who didn’t know beans about the Bible. However, the reply from Mr. Trump was very honest. He said, “I really believe what Jesus said is true!”

Why did Jesus say this? It’s because many people have faith in their own bank account and material possessions. They find a certain sense of security in their own wealth and position in life and see no need to place saving faith in Christ. If their wealth has got them this far, then surely it can take them the whole way to Heaven. What a sad day and rude awakening awaits those who are trusting in their earthly wealth instead of the wealth they can have in Christ! The temptations that come to those who are rich are a false sense of security, a desire to control others, and personal pride.

Jesus said in Luke 16:22-23 that “the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” The rich man did not go to hell because he was rich but because riches kept him from repentance and faith in Christ. James 5:1 echoes the same words of condemnation: “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.” Only the miseries of an everlasting hell await those rich people who die without saving faith in the Lord. Many people die with faith in their material gain and somehow hope that their wealth will provide the answer for life after death. Jesus identifies these people as fools who are “not rich toward God” (Luke 12:16-21).

One man who had more money than brains actually froze his body hoping that science will someday learn how to fix his body and bring him back to life. The problem with this theory is that you cannot freeze the soul! The soul lives on after death in the place of its choosing (Heb. 9:27). If a person has an unrepentant worldly heart that produces only faith in their wealth and riches which are consumed in this lifetime, they will eventually discover that judgment will come upon them in the next life.

Jesus said in Mark 8:36:

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

This question that Jesus asked has a way of stopping everybody in their tracks! It stuns every person and sends a clear message to all those who have a heart that is captivated by the wealth of the world and who possess a type of worldly faith in riches. They will come to the realization that wealth will mean absolutely nothing in the next life. What they have today will be gone for eternity and have no bearing upon their salvation and eternal destiny. You cannot buy eternal life!

Worry, wealth, and worldliness in general are all enemies of the Gospel. This is because they keep people from repentance and faith in Christ. So the thorns of wealth and riches have a way of keeping people from trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. The world of success, luxury, and wealth has a way of choking out the Gospel seed. The thorny soil produced a life and fruit that could not be used by the Sower because this person's faith did not rest in Jesus Christ. It was a heart and life resting in riches and everything that wealth and prosperity could seemingly give. The person being portrayed here is not only the Donald Trumps but the typical person who lives for wealth, possessions, and luxury, and success without giving any thought about eternity. They may not necessarily be filthy rich but the riches and wealth they do have keeps them from seeing the cross of Christ and their need for salvation.

What is the trouble with most people? They are too busy making money and keeping up with the Joneses. Their hearts are wrapped up in earthly things to such an extent that they don't have time to care for their soul.

They are too busy obtaining and enjoying the riches, possessions, and the so-called finer things of life that the Gospel and salvation are meaningless to them. They are basically controlled by cash and not Christ. They live for worldly accumulation but not a heavenly future. Concern for spiritual things is crowded out by material things.

From a Christian standpoint, John Chrysostom wrote:

“There is a way, if thou wilt, to check this evil growth, and to make the right use of our wealth. Therefore he said not ‘the world,’ but ‘the care of the world’; nor ‘riches,’ but ‘the deceitfulness of riches.’ Let us not, then, blame the things, but the corrupt mind. For it is possible to be rich and not to be deceived; and to be in the world, and not to be choked with its cares.”

This is true. God’s people don’t need to allow worry and riches (material things) to overtake their lives. They can remain Christ-centered and Christ-controlled as they pass through life and not allow the world to overcome them.

➤ **The lusts of the world**

My daughter Judy was dealing with two younger girls who raised their hands for salvation during an evangelistic meeting. They always want to confirm that the young people understand about their sinfulness and need for salvation. They don’t want to give them a false sense of security. So when asking the girls why they raised their hands the answer they gave was rather interesting. “We raised our hands for the prizes.” In other words, they wanted the prizes that were being offered to the children, but they did not understand they were sinners in need of salvation through Christ. I think this is the case with many grown-ups as well. They want Christ and Christianity for some other personal reason, but they lack true repentance of heart concerning their sin and need for a Savior. Their desire for other things overtakes their heart and they lack true Biblical repentance.

The next thorn that gets in the way of people repenting is their love for the world and other things. Mark actually adds another worldly thorn that keeps people from responding to Christ in faith. “And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts or cravings of other

things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4:19). Luke calls them "the pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14). The "lusts" (evil cravings) and "pleasures" (sensual desires) that the gospel writers are referring to are those fleshly pursuits in life that keep a person from coming to faith in Christ.

These are the carnal cravings and hedonistic enjoyments of life which lead a person away from Christ and salvation. The "lusts of the flesh" (1 John 2:17) or love for carnal living keeps people from repenting of their sin and coming to faith in Christ (Rev. 9:20-21; 16:9, 11). The occupation with sex and many other worldly vices keeps a person's heart from Jesus Christ. Lustful or carnal living occupies the interests of a person's life which in turn keeps them from repentance and faith in Christ.

A Christian man said. "The Parrotfeather is an attractive aquatic plant that looks like a forest of small fir trees growing on top of the water. In the springtime it produces a blanket of small, white flowers. But it's a noxious weed. It forms a dense mat of vegetation that covers the surface of lakes and ponds, crowding out native plants and destroying fish and wildlife habitat.

"Recently I was hiking by a small lake in Washington State that was choked with Parrotfeather plants. It occurred to me that, like that weed, 'the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful,' as Jesus taught in Mark 4:13-20."

A person cannot possess a worldly heart and a repentant heart at the same time. The soul that is going to produce true life and lasting fruit must be cleansed of worldliness. This is why true salvation only occurs when there is a willingness to deal with sin in one's life. In other words, a person must face their sins, be willing to repent of their sins, and desire cleansing and deliverance from their sinful pattern of living. Without an inward change of heart toward worldly sinful living no person can be saved. There must be brokenness or conviction over sin (Luke 7:37-38, 47-48; 18:3) and a desire for deliverance from sin's power (John 8:32) if one is going to turn to God from sin (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

Unsaved people should not be forced to give up their sins in order to be saved since this would be a form of works (Eph. 2:8-9) and frontloading the Gospel presentation with works. It would be wrong to tell an unsaved sinner that he must give up all his sins and make Jesus Lord of every area of his life in order to be saved. This is impossible for a sinner to do who does not have God's life. The fact of the matter is this, if a person truly is repentant about his sin before God, he will possess an inward brokenness over sin and at the same time an inward desire for deliverance and change. There is no need to present a works/surrender type of Gospel presentation. We simply must get out of the way and allow a person to repent of his sinful and worldly life and when he does, he is ready to express faith in Christ and be saved.

A man shared this story. "I live in a small rural community. There are lots of cattle ranches around here, and, every once in a while, a cow wanders off and gets lost . . . Ask a rancher how a cow gets lost, and chances are he will reply, 'Well, the cow starts nibbling on a tuft of green grass, and when it finishes, it looks ahead to the next tuft of green grass and starts nibbling on that one, and then it nibbles on a tuft of grass right next to a hole in the fence. It then sees another tuft of green grass on the other side of the fence, so it nibbles on that one and then goes on to the next tuft. The next thing you know, the cow has nibbled itself into being lost.'"

In a similar way, the third soil type (the worldly hearer) loves the world system and is lost. He loves and feeds off the tufts of the world system and needs to repent of his worldly sin to be saved and have fruit to offer to the Sower (Jesus Christ).

Worldliness is characteristic to the heart just like thorns or weeds are to the soil. The two simply do not mix. Just as thorns choke out the young life of the plant so a love for worldliness chokes out true repentance and keeps salvation from occurring in a person's life. The thorny soil person wants both. They want salvation while at the same time they want everything that the world has to offer. But God will never settle on these terms!

God wants a repentant heart toward worldly sin that is seeking deliverance from the old way of life. Some people never respond to Jesus Christ in faith

because they never desire freedom from their sinful way of living. Pleasure seekers of the world may profess to be saved but their lives betray them. Their profession of faith in Christ is not real because there is no evidence of spiritual life or fruit in their lives. This is why their life is seen to die and incapable of producing fruit or harvesting for the Sower.

Matthew 13:22 states that “he becometh unfruitful.” Mark also teaches that the thorny soil hearer “becometh unfruitful” (Mark 4:19) after the things of the world choke out the truth of the Word of God (the Gospel seed) that was sown in the heart. Luke adds that this person does not “bring no fruit unto perfection” (Luke 8:14). This means that the fruit dies before it has a chance to become ripe and harvested by the farmer. This pictures the person who in the end has no fruit to offer to God because of a life that has been choked to death by worldliness. It’s the life of a person who has nothing that the Sower can use for His glory and service. Jude says that unbelievers are “without fear,” “without water,” and “without fruit” (Jude vs. 12). This is what Jesus is teaching in the Parable of the Sower.

The thorny soil hearer pictures a counterfeit believer with a love for worldliness and carnality. For this reason, he cannot yield fruit that remains, and he will one day suffer the vengeance of God as an unbeliever. The Bible teaches that when the genuine fruit of transformation and change are never manifested in the life of a person who claims to be a Christian, then this person has never been saved and will one day face God’s wrath and judgment.

Jesus warns in John 15:2:

“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

He interprets the meaning of this in John 15:6:

“If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered (*bearing no fruit*); and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.”

Jesus revealed that when a person bears no fruit that God can use, he is taken away to judgment. This is because the person was never saved. The fruit proves there is root. This fire imagery presented here is not the

judgment Seat of Christ for Christians (2 Cor. 5:10) but the apocalyptic judgment of God's wrath which is repeated by Jesus in the gospel accounts (Luke 3:17; Matt. 3:12).

So the young plant among the thorns in Matthew 13 points to an illegitimate life (Heb. 12:8) since this person tries to hold on to Christ with one hand and the world with the other hand. It's the type of person who makes an outward response to Christ while not wanting deliverance or freedom from sin's power. They want an escape from hell without an escape from their sin. They don't want to face the ugly nature of their sin and repent before God. This person wants to walk the "broad way" and the "narrow way" at the same time (Matt. 7:13–14) but it cannot be done.

It's interesting that the last four verses which deal with the first three soils present a clear pattern that all Bible believers will recognize. There have been three archenemies down through the centuries of time that have sought to hinder a lasting germination of the Gospel seed in the hearts of people. They originated in the Garden of Eden. These verses talk about the three enemies of mankind – the world (Matt. 13:22), the flesh (Matt. 13:20-21), and the devil (Matt. 13:19). The world system operating in the hearts of people choke out the truth of God's Word, the fleshly and self-righteous acts of reformation in others also keep the seed from taking proper root, and the devil is always there trying to catch the seed away from the human heart. These three enemies keep people from repenting of their sins and believing in Christ.

Gaebelein put it this way:

"The Devil snatches up and devours, the Flesh attempts and fails, the World surrounds and chokes."

With these three great barriers against lost humanity, one must wonder how people can be saved. The answer is very simple. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). The Holy Spirit uses the Gospel to impress upon the human heart a man's need for salvation. In short, "salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). This is why people can be saved despite these three archenemies of the

soul. It's the work of the Sower upon the heart that makes the difference (Acts 16:14).

As we have reflected upon the first three soils, we can see there is great opposition against the Gospel seed. In fact, only one out of four of the seed sowings properly germinate which produces lasting fruit that the Sower can use. All the others die off. This reminds me that we are living in a world that is hostile to the Gospel and things are not forecast to get better and people are not necessarily going to be more receptive to the Gospel and Christianity as we approach the end of the age. There are those who teach that the world is slowly getting better, and many people will be saved to advance the cause of Christ, they will convert the world, and then bring in the kingdom. This is the old teaching of postmillennialism. The newer adopted term is Dominion Theology which is nothing more than postmillennialism in disguise.

One of the issues concerning our world and the course of this age which has been debated for centuries is the question: Is the world getting better or is it getting worse? And from time to time, depending on when you asked that question, you could find a majority of voices raised on one side or the other. In fact, people have been saying all along that the world is getting worse – not better. The other day I ran across a rather humorous statement about this.

My granddad, viewing earth's worn cogs,
Said, "Things were going to the dogs."
His granddad, in his house of logs,
Said, "Things were going to the dogs."
And his grandad, in the Flemish bogs,
Said, "Things were going to the dogs."
And his grandad, in his old skin togs,
Said, "Things were going to the dogs."
There's one thing I have to state:
The dogs have had a good long wait.

Well, this is rather funny but in reality the world is not getting better. It's becoming worse as the Bible predicts (2 Tim. 3:1, 13). These parables of the soils inform us that there will not be a universal reception of the truth as

postmillenarians teach and Dominion Theology concludes. Only one out of the four soil types yield life and fruit. Seventy five percent of the seed produced no favorable results. The Bible does teach that things are getting worse and not better as we approach the end of the age and before King Jesus returns. It does not teach that there will be an overwhelming response to the Gospel that will repopulate the earth with believers and bring in the earthly kingdom.

The whole idea of a converted and restored world occurring before the Jesus returns in His Second Coming is a dream that has no reality attached to it. Jesus did not teach that there would be a universal response to the Gospel where the entire world would be saved and ready to meet the King at His return. This does not square with the teaching of the parables of Matthew 13 for when the King returns, He will judge many unbelievers who are living in the world and who are His enemies (Matt. 13:30, 47-50).

Instead of a universal reception of the Gospel just the opposite is true. The majority, three out of four soils, would not be productive. Many would fail to accept the Gospel seed. This is evident in our evangelism efforts today. Great multitudes turn away from the Gospel. They want nothing to do with what Christ has to offer them due to their hardened heart, shallow heart, and worldly heart.

Lehman Strauss said this concerning the parable of the sower:
“The parable foreshadows the end times, warning us that we are doomed to bitter disappointment if we cherish romantic expectations that through the preaching of God’s Word the world will get better and better through the universal acceptance of the gospel of Christ.”

John Walvoord adds another good point:

“This Parable of the Sower also does not correspond to amillennial interpretation that the millennial kingdom is being fulfilled now. Rather, there is emphasis on the rejection of the Gospel in a way that would not be true in fulfilling the prophecies of the kingdom on earth.”

Don’t expect the Gospel to convert the world. In Matthew 7:14 Jesus taught that there would be “few that find it” (the narrow road of salvation).

This tells me that we should not expect a world conversion to Christ before the Second Coming occurs. The parables and Scriptures teach the opposite. Overall, there will be a decline in the salvation of souls throughout the mystery period.

The main point of Christ's teaching in these parables is very evident. The disciples should not expect the kingdom to be established immediately since the Messiah has been rejected and the kingdom promise was temporarily postponed (Matt. 21:43). Instead, there would be an intervening time between Israel's rejection and the return of the King when the seed would be sown throughout the earth. Sadly, during this time many would continue to reject the Gospel seed. Things would not get better in the world and there definitely would not be a universal reception of the Gospel. The Parable of the Soils and other parables of Matthew 13 teach the opposite of universal acceptance of the Gospel. However, when we study the final soil type, Christ does give to us the promise that there will be people who are saved throughout the mystery period.

The Gospel seed will fall on some good ground and germinate in the salvation of people who will bear lasting fruit (change) and become followers of Christ. In our final soil which we are about to study, we discover that Christ gives the promise that good soil will produce the salvation of souls. He is saying that "a remnant shall be saved" (Rom. 9:27) which is "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). What is true of Israel is also true of mankind in general. God will always have a remnant of people that will be saved and produce good fruit that the Sower can use for His service. Today God is calling out a people for his name (Acts 15:14). This means there will always be good ground that produces genuine believers. This leads us to our final soil.

Another preacher shared this story: "I was in another city a few weeks ago. I received a note from a man. He said, 'You do not know me, but,' he said, 'I'm a preacher in this city.' He said, 'When I was a teenage boy, I was walking down the street. You stopped your car, and you talked to me about the Lord Jesus Christ, and,' he said, 'I refused Christ then.' And he said, 'I know it's been so many years ago that you probably will never even remember the incident that took place, but,' he said, 'I want you to know I

never did get that out of my heart until God broke my heart. And God has saved me. And God has called me to preach. And I'm pastoring in this city.”

It's wonderful to know that some of the Gospel seed we sow will germinate and spring forth into life. We will see this in the next soil type. Oh, how powerful is the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). This is why we need to share the life-giving message of the Gospel.

Psalm 68:11 says:

“The Lord gave the word: great *was* the company of those that published it” (*announced its good news*).

This Old Testament verse is like Romans 10:14:

“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”

I was researching something called trace minerals which came from dirt and other sources. There was a liquid which contained all the trace minerals, and you need to take a small amount every day. However, the problem with the minerals, according to reviews, was that they tasted like dirt! One reviewer remarked something like this, “It was like mixing dirt in water and drinking it.” Needles to say, I did not purchase it! As we reflect on dirt once again, I’m amazed how Jesus can take dirt (soil) and use it as an illustration of people’s hearts in relation to how they respond to the Gospel seed. We now have investigated the hard soil (unresponsive hearer), the stony soil (shallow hearer), and the thorny Soil (worldly hearer). But there is one more soil type that Jesus talks about in this parable.

4. The productive soil (receptive hearer)

As we consider the 4 soils represented in the Parable of the Sower, let’s just pretend there are 4 containers which represent these 4 different soil types (the hearts and lives of people). All the jars are filled with baking soda but with varying amounts of other ingredients.



The 1st container is filled with no water and a whole lot of baking soda and represents the hard or wayside soil (Matt. 13:19). With no water added to the baking soda there can be no reaction to the Gospel seed. This is the type of person that you try to talk to about Jesus and all they do is turn a deaf ear to you (Acts 7:51; Eph. 4:19). They don't want to hear about it. They want nothing to do with the Gospel seed. They may be polite, but their hearts are hardened. As a result, no fruit is generated in their lives proving they are without regeneration. Of course, you never know when this type of person's heart may be softened and turn to repentance and faith in Christ (Matt. 13:15).

The 2nd container is filled with 1/3 water + a little vinegar and a measured amount of baking soda. The reaction would be some good fizz which represents the rocky soil (Matt. 13:20-21). This person seems to react positively to the Gospel seed and like the created fizz that results from combining water, vinegar, and baking soda there is a lot of fanfare about their alleged conversion to Christ.

But because there's not much topsoil the seed dies out as quickly as it sprung up. This type of person is the one that will listen to what you have to say. It's the person who seemingly has made a profession of faith in Christ and gets all excited about Jesus and will even come to church. But this is as

much as you'll see from this person and eventually all their fizz is lost when they are persecuted for their association with Christ. As a result, they retreat back into their old ways of life bearing no signs of lasting and genuine fruit which can be used for the harvest (Heb. 10:39). This is because there was no genuine repentance in their life (no root). However, you never know when this type of person will express real repentance and faith in Christ and be saved (Rom. 1:16).

This 3rd container is filled with 1/3 of vinegar (only vinegar and no water) along with a measured amount of baking soda. The result is that the vinegar will fizz up almost to the top of the jar and then die down which represents the thorny or weedy soil (Matt. 13:22). They too seem to react positively to the Gospel seed and make a profession of faith in Christ that seems very promising, but eventually their alleged and superficial attachment to Christ and Christianity is choked out for they are distracted by worldly loves. Jesus is choked out of their lives and all their fizz and attachment to Him has gone out of their lives (John 6:66; 15:2). Again, this is because they never repented of their worldly sins and as a result they were not saved, and no genuine or lasting fruit was left for the harvest.

The 4th container is filled with ½ of vinegar (no water) and a goodly amount of baking soda. The results in the vinegar continually fizzing over the top of the jar and illustrates the good soil (Matt. 13:23). It pictures the individual who is truly saved and brings forth lasting fruit which is related to genuine repentance (Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20). This is the productive soil which is the only soil type that produces genuine fruit. It pictures the individual who places real faith in Christ for his faith is authenticated by the lasting fruit that is generated in his life (James 2:14-26).

Jesus goes on to explain the beneficial soil of Matthew 13:8: "But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold." Jesus then interprets this final soil type it in Matthew 13:23: "But he that received seed into the good ground is he that



Productive Soil (Receptive Hearer)

heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Although the second and third soils (representative of the hearts of people) seem to have a receptive response to the Gospel seed, in the end they prove that their profession was not real for they die and wither away and have no fruit to offer to the Sower. It's only the fourth that has a genuine reception of the truth in their hearts and this is proven by the manifold fruit that is available for the harvest. This final soil pictures the true believer who has God's life.

Three things are said of this person that are not said of the other soils. First, this person is likened to "good ground" (Matt. 13:23) where the others are said to be hard, shallow, and weedy soil. Second, this person is said to "understand" (Matt. 13:23) where the others never understand the truth or seed that is sown. Third, this person manifests a harvest of fruit that can be used by the Sower (Matt. 13:23) where the other three people have no lasting or enduring fruit to offer to Christ. Only the last person manifests fruit or a changed pattern of living which becomes the evidence of true regeneration and salvation.

So we can conclude that the first three soils represent people who have never been born again. However, the final soil ("good soil") represents the heart of a person who genuinely receives the seed, and his life begins to manifest change (transformation) as he brings forth true and lasting fruit. You might write over this soil the word "productive."

A. The promise of harvest is given.

The first three types of soil that the Gospel seed fell upon did not produce any lasting fruit. This helped the disciples understand why Jesus was not impressed by the large crowds that followed Him. He knew that most of them would never produce fruit or changed lives because the word He was teaching them was like seed falling into poor soil. But the final soil that Jesus spoke about was good soil and this picture gave the disciples a wonderful promise of a future harvest. It provides them with hope and

encouragement knowing that there would be true life and fruit that would be brought forth in the lives of people.

We too can take courage as we study this last soil type because it reminds us that there will always be those who are genuinely converted and transformed by God's power. Even though seventy five percent of the seed sown produced no favorable results we can take courage knowing that some of God's Word will fall on good soil and produce a spiritual harvest. Overall the Gospel seed during this present dispensation will not be received but there is always the promise of some harvest even though percentage is not large. There will always be those who are saved when they receive and believe the word. God asks us to be faithful today in presenting the Gospel seed to the lost. As we faithfully proclaim the truth there will be those who are saved.

Psalm 126:6 gives us this promise:

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves *with him*."

The spiritual application of this verse to our present study is encouraging. We know that as we weep and pray over the lost souls of humanity that there will be those who are saved and bring forth fruit unto everlasting life (Rom. 6:22). What a joy it is to see people saved and manifesting new life and change since God has intervened in their life. Jesus calls this the "good ground" (Matt. 13:8, 23) because it's within this soil that true life is born which brings forth a harvest of fruit that will go on and be used by the Sower.

Only good soil can produce good fruit. Christ singles out the "good ground" because this type of soil stands in distinct contrast to the other soils. None of the other soils were termed as good ground which tells us that the other hearts, represented by the previous soils, were unconverted hearts, whereas this good soil becomes the picture of a converted heart. There is no hardness to this soil and there are no rocks or thorns hindering the sowing and development of the seed. How wonderful it is when the seed falls on good ground! This provides us with the encouragement that there is fertile ground waiting if we will only keep sowing the seed. The divine

Sower wants us to keep sharing the truth and as we do people will be saved. The good ground has been plowed by the conviction of the Spirit and is ready for the seed to be planted. There is good soil out there. We simply need to keep sowing the seed and the Sower will produce a harvest.

“Sowing the seed by the wayside high,
Sowing the seed on the rocks to die,
Sowing the seed where the thorns will spoil,
Sowing the seed in the fertile soil;
Oh, what shall the harvest be?
Oh, what shall the harvest be?

Sowing the seed with an aching heart.
Sowing the seed while the teardrops start,
Sowing the seed in hope till the reapers come.
Gladly to gather the harvest home;
Oh, what shall the harvest be?
Oh, what shall the harvest be?”

We need to remind ourselves that we do not have to see all the harvest today. The important thing is that we keep sowing the seed so the divine Sower (Son of God) can do the work in the hearts of lost humanity. As we go, we need to remember that the majority will not receive the Word of God, but a good harvest is certain to follow the sowing of the seed. So the King has told us what to expect during His absence. Let us get on with the job and intensify our efforts to witness to the lost. There will be a harvest! This is God’s promise. “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). This is true in relation with everything that we do for the Lord – our giving, serving, and witnessing. There is an eternal harvest that will result from our efforts. Let us not become weary of the work that we do but remember the great eternal value of serving and witnessing for the Lord.

In Saint Paul’s Cathedral in London there is a stained-glass window depicting a man sowing seed. It was presented as a memorial to a man named Samuel A. Burnett. Mr. Burnett devoted his entire lifetime spreading the Word of God in the wicked East End of London. Beneath the

painting there is plaque that reads, “Dedicated to Samuel A, Burnett, who served in East London for fifty years, and who feared not to sow despite the birds.” Dear friend, let us keep sowing in spite of the birds! The devil will continue to do His work (Matt. 13:19) but God will continue to do His work of saving souls.

Please note that this person represented by the good soil “heareth the word” (Matt. 13:23) which in return produces saving faith in his heart. It is a hearing that results in faith and the salvation of this person (Acts 4:4; John 5:24) unlike the other people (Matt. 13:19, 20, 22) who heard but did not respond in genuine faith. There is a hearing that results in faith (Rom. 10:17) and a hearing that bears genuine results. Many are like those that the Lord described earlier as “hearing they hear not” (Matt. 13:13). This is a picture of the first three soil types. Their “hearing” did not result in faith – it was not “mixed with faith” (Heb. 4:2).

In other words, they hear the message, but it has no saving impact upon their heart and life because “there ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed” (Matt. 13:15). Luke interprets the good soil as “an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15). In other words, this person has a heart that is both commendable and beneficial as opposed to the other hearts represented by the previous soils. The believing heart is seen to be genuine and therefore spiritually productive. This is because only the last heart genuinely receives and responds in faith to the clear message of the Gospel seed. The last heart is representative of a person that hears the Gospel, who then opens their ears and eyes to the truth, and finally makes a choice to commit to the truth in a saving way. Thus, the hearing represented in the final person (Matt. 13:23) is the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2, 5) that results in the salvation of the hearer.

We should also note that the person represented by the good soil not only received the Gospel seed (“he that received seed” – vs. 23) but also understands what is received (“and understandeth it”). This parallels to what Jesus said concerning the person who could “understand with their heart” and become “converted” (Matt. 13:15).

When people “come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 4:2) they receive or embrace the truth with understanding and they are ready to be

saved. The first person represented by the hard soil did not understand the truth (“understandeth it not” – vs. 19) which parallels to what Jesus said earlier (“neither do they understand” – Matt. 13:13).

The second person, represented by the rocky soil, superficially received the truth (“But he that received the seed into stony places”) but no mention is made of them understanding it (vss. 20-21).

The third person that is represented by the weedy or thorny soil is said to also hear the truth (“he also that received seed among the thorns” – Matt. 13:23) but again no understanding was attributed to them. It’s only the last person who actually understands the truth in a saving way. This means that only the final person is brought to the place of spiritual understanding and therefore responds in faith to receive new life. The Bible says, “there is none that understandeth” (Rom. 3:10); therefore, it takes the work of God in the human heart to bring a person to a place of understanding about his sinfulness and need for Christ so that a person can make a valid decision to trust in Christ to be his Savior.

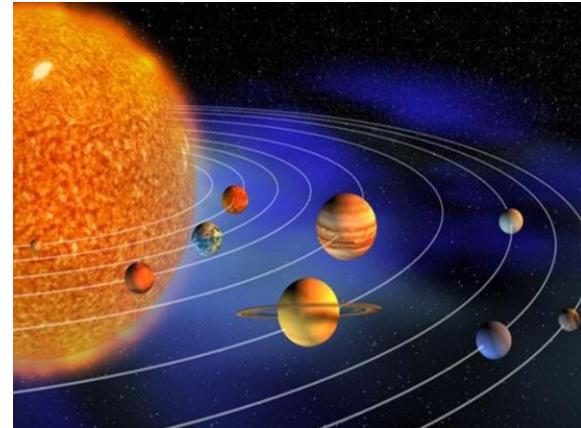
Let us never forget that the ability to see the light and understand the truth and simplicity of salvation comes about because of the work of God upon the human heart (Heb. 10:32 – “after ye were illuminated”). There is an illuminating light and understanding that must be produced in the heart of an individual to free them from the blindness of Satan (“lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ ... should shine unto them” - 2 Cor. 4:3-4). When a person truly sees the light, understanding the truth of their separation from God and desperate need for salvation through Christ, it’s only then that they are ready to respond to this light of reasoning and understanding and be saved.

So the last hearer understands the truth (“and understandeth it” – Matt. 13:23) due to God’s illumination upon the heart while at the same time they can possess a willingness to see, hear, and understand (Matt. 13:15 – “lest they should see ... hear ... understand”). We once again see that there is a balance between the sovereignty of God and free will of man. It is God who brings in the light of illumination, revelation, and understanding to the human mind (Eph. 4:18) that is alienated from Him (Col. 1:21). However, at

the same time it is the person who chooses to reject this light ("their eyes have they closed" – Matt. 13:15) or respond to the light of truth ("lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart" – Matt. 13:15).

Who can forget the soul-cutting words of Jesus who said in John 5:40, "And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." There is both a divine movement and human response that occurs in the hearts of lost humanity. It is a mysterious work that we can't fully explain but one that we must accept. To emphasize one over the other, the divine work over human freedom, or human freedom over the divine work is to wreck God's sovereign plan of salvation.

In astronomy there is something called a centripetal force, which is a force that has a tendency to pull all things together and down toward the center. At the same time there is a centrifugal force, a force that has the tendency to fling everything out to the circumference, which is outside the centrifugal. These two forces actually synchronize the orbiting of our planets around the sun and provide a perfect working balance in our solar system.



The same is true regarding the Biblical teachings of election and the free will of man. They are like the centripetal and centrifugal forces which seem to oppose one another. However, these two Biblical truths are perfectly synchronized and work together to bring about God's amazing, orchestrated plan of salvation. There is a Biblical balance between the centripetal (representing the sovereignty of God) and centrifugal (representing the free will of man). Both are part of the plan of God.

Jesus said, "While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light ..." (John 12:36). A man chooses to either accept the light or remain in darkness. John 3:19, "And this is the condemnation, that light

is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

When a person refuses the light "from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. 13:12). However, when a person responds to the light of Christ's person and work which is being impressed upon their heart by the Sower, they can eventually say with confidence and assurance, "I need Jesus." In the end, what a person chooses to do with the light they receive will determine their eternal destiny. They must respond favorably to the light or revelation of the Gospel which God is impressing upon their hearts and when they do, they will come to faith and salvation.

The person represented by the good soil is that person who sees the light of salvation and responds to this light with genuine repentance and faith. In doing so they actually "come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4) and are saved. Many never come to the knowledge or understanding of the truth for they are "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 3:7). However, the good soil speaks of someone who does respond to the truth by committing themselves to Christ and the Gospel through simple faith. Thus, the good soil is the person who understands and receives the truth by making it a part of his life. The productive soil hearer will conclude with the words of Isaac Watts:

"Thus might I hide my blushing face
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt my eyes to tears.
But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give my self away
'Tis all that I can do."

This is why the fourth soil becomes fruitful and productive. This person can do nothing else but live for Jesus Christ and bear fruit for His glory and praise. Luke adds that they "keep it" (Luke 8:15). Unlike the other human responses to the truth, this person actually hangs on to the truth and makes it a saving and working (transforming) part of his life. He does not

abandon the truth and end up in apostasy (Heb. 3:6; 14). God's true children do not stop believing in Christ and apostatize from Him (Heb. 10:39). Rather, they continue to manifest confidence in the saving work of Jesus Christ and never forsake the basic tenants of Christianity. So there is a positive and saving response to the truth (the Gospel seed) that regenerates this person represented by the good soil, giving him new life. And this new life is manifested in what is produced in their life – lasting fruit.

Adrian Rogers was evangelizing one day, and he shared an interesting story. "I remember going out soul-winning one time in Tallahassee, Florida, going to see a man named Mr. Forshay. And I went to Mr. Forshay's house, and he came out (a bald man with a beard) and sat down on the couch. I started to share with Mr. Forshay. Somebody had given me his name. We sat there, and his mother came into the room. And his mother was one of the most wicked-looking women I've ever seen. I mean, she was vile-looking. If she would have casting for the Wicked Witch of the West, she would have gotten the part. Oh, she was something, and she came into that room. And if I ever saw a woman that I thought had a look of evil on her face—if I ever saw a woman that I thought hated God, and hated me, and hated everybody—it was this woman.

"And I thought, 'O dear Lord, I wish that woman had not come in here while I'm trying to witness to her son.' Her son, I suppose, was in his thirties; but she came in and sat down there, and she fixed her eyes on me, and they burned like coals. And she had a pot of snap beans, and she came in there, and the whole time I was talking, she was snapping those beans—just like that—and looking at me and snapping those beans.

"I could just feel my neck breaking every time she'd snap one of those beans! I said, "Mr. Forshay, I want you to know that God loves you"—snap—"has a wonderful"—snap—"plan for your life." And I just thought, 'Dear Lord, I'll never get through this testimony. God, help me, please.' And I just steeled (mentally prepared) myself, and I said, 'God, I'm not going to pay any attention to her. I'm going to ignore her, and I'm going to present the gospel to Mr. Forshay.' And I went on to present the gospel to this man.

"Finally, I got down and I said, 'Mr. Forshay, would you like to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and be saved?' And his chin started to quiver. He said, 'I would.' Wonderful! And I just didn't even dare look at her. I didn't know what she was going to do when that happened. I said, 'All right, bow your head, and let's pray.' And he bowed his head and prayed, and he prayed and asked Christ to come into his heart. And I said, 'Now, Mr. Forshay, if you meant that with all your heart, with all of your soul, as best you know how; if today, now, right now, you received Christ as your Lord and Savior, give me your hand.' And he put his hand in mine.

"And when he did that, she stood up and she started for me, and I said, 'Well, at least I can go out having won a soul to Jesus Christ.' She came across that room, and with the tears streaming down her cheeks she stuck out her hand, and put her hand in mine, too. She had prayed and asked Christ to come into her heart. I had so misread that woman. She might have been ugly; but she wanted Jesus. And it was just her nervousness that was causing her to break the snap peas, but it was her heart that was broken.

"I got so excited I said, 'Is there anybody else in the house that might need to be saved?' And there was. They went in the back room and fetched two more out, and they got saved right there. And God taught me a lesson, a lesson that I needed to know, dear friend: that sometimes you cannot tell what kind of soil you're sowing on. I mean, it may turn out to be rocky soil, and it may turn out to be shallow soil, and it may turn out to be hard soil; but you don't know. And in the story, the sower just scattered the seed. And the field is the world. And that's what we're called to do. We're not called to prejudge people. You do not know who's going to be saved."

B. The product of fruitful living is confirmed.

The product that comes forth from the good ground is good or usable fruit. None of the other foliage and fruit was usable in the other soil types. In the life of the regenerated individual, it is fruitful living or a changed manner of life that is manifested. This fruitfulness would be manifested in the varying amounts of lasting change that occurs in a person's life ("hundred, sixty, thirty fold" – Matt. 13:23). Note how in Mark 4:20 the order is reversed. The point is this. A person who is truly born again will manifest varying

amount of fruit that the Sower can use. Luke calls it the “fruit with patience” (Luke 8:15) or endurance meaning that it is genuine fruitful living that lasts through the tests of time and fruit which the Sower can use for the harvest period. It is not mere outward reformation that does not last (Matt. 13:20-21) but fruitful manifestation that comes from God’s life and nature which continues to manifest itself (“which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth” – Matt. 13:23).

In other words, this final plant within the good soil continues to bear fruit that lasts. It does not die off like the other spurious plants with their foliage and fruit (Matt. 13:5-6, 21-22; Luke 8:14). To bring forth fruit is the mark of a believing heart and life. Those who don’t bring forth any genuine and lasting fruit are unbelievers.

The Bible teaches that our *primary confirmation* is our belief in Jesus Christ and His promise of eternal life (John 6:47; 1 John 5:10-13).

1 John 5:13

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”

“An elderly man said to H.A. Ironside, ‘I will not go on unless I know I'm saved, or else know it's hopeless to seek to be sure of it. I want a definite witness, something I can't be mistaken about!’ Ironside replied, ‘Suppose you had a vision of an angel who told you your sins were forgiven. Would that be enough to rest on?’ ‘Yes, I think it would. An angel should be right.’

Ironside continued, ‘But suppose on your deathbed Satan came and said, 'I was that angel, transformed to deceive you.' What would you say?’ The man was speechless. Ironside then told him that God has given us something more dependable than the voice of an angel. He has given His Son, who died for our sins, and He has testified in His own Word that if we trust Him all our sins are gone. Ironside read 1 John 5:13, "You may know that you have eternal life." Then he said, "Is that not enough to rest on? It is a letter from heaven expressly to you." God's Spirit used that to bring assurance to the man's heart.

Again, our primary assurance of salvation is based upon our faith in the promise of God's Word – we have eternal life! However, because God is now working in our lives and we are not what we used to be, we can also possess a *secondary confirmation* of our salvation (2 Pet. 1:10). Our changed life is an added bonus to know that we are saved for Christ lives within us (Gal. 2:20) and He's still working on us! I keep coming back to the kid's song.

"He's still working on me
To make me what I need to be
It took him just a week to make the moon and stars
The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars
How loving and patient He must be
'Cause He's still workin' on me."

We can be absolutely sure of our salvation based upon our faith in God's promise of eternal life. The secondary assurance we receive from God's changing our lives is only an added bonus.

Charles Spurgeon once said: "I am so certain of my salvation I could grab a corn stalk swing over the flames of hell, look the devil in the eyes and sing blessed assurance Jesus is mine."

That's the kind of assurance God wants us to have! And we can have it when we only look to Christ for our salvation and the free gift of eternal life that He gave to us (John 3:15-16).

After John Wesley had been preaching for some time, some one said to him, "Are you sure, Mr. Wesley, of your salvation?" "Well," he answered, "Jesus Christ died for the whole world." "Yes, we all believe that; but are you sure that you are saved?" Wesley replied that he was sure that provision had been made for his salvation.

"But are you sure, Wesley, that you are saved?" It went like an arrow to his heart, and he had no rest or power until that question was settled. Many men and many women go on month after month, and year after year, without power, because they do not know their standing in Christ; they are not sure of their own footing for eternity.

Latimer wrote Ridley once that when he was settled and steadfast about his own salvation he was as bold as a lion, but if that hope became eclipsed, he was fearful and afraid and was disqualified for service. Many are disqualified for service because they are continually doubting their own salvation.

Our faith alone in Christ is what saves us and gives us the assurance of eternal life (1 John 5:13). However, the overall snapshot or picture of our lives will give us added evidence (a secondary confirmation and assurance) that God has saved us by His grace and is now doing a continuing work of transforming grace in our lives (Phil. 2:12-13).

We need to remember that there are four basic categories of people.

- ✓ Those who think they are saved but aren't (Matthew 7:21-23).
- ✓ Those we think are saved but aren't (1 John 2:18-19).
- ✓ Those who are saved but don't act like it (1 Cor. 3:1-3).
- ✓ Those who are saved, and they act like it (Matt. 13:23).

Jesus is teaching that a genuine believer will always in some measure bear fruit or transformation of living. There is no such thing as a total fruitless Christian. You will remember that the second stony soil represented the enthusiastic and joyful person who received the word without blinking an eyelash but the immediate results of change and reformation in his life were not an indicator of salvation. Like a firecracker, a person can flare up as a super saint overnight and appear to be a Christian but in the end, it will be discovered that their foliage and fruit were not genuine. It was merely the fruits of reformation and their own self-production and self-righteous works that they manifested (Prov. 14:12; 14:14; James 1:11).

The point is this. Salvation cannot truly be confirmed until lasting fruit appears, and regenerated life is detected. A person is saved by grace (Eph. 2:8-9) but his Christian life is eventually proven by the marks of fruitful change and behavior (Eph. 2:8-10; 2 Pet. 1:10). Christians have a desire to be productive in life and allow God to produce and remain at work in their life. This is not Calvinism; it's Biblicism. A person does not persevere to be saved but perseveres because he is saved. True Christians do not totally

abandon God and stop producing evidence of life and fruit. They do not forsake God, truth, and never again bear fruit or any transformation of living.

Without a change in living there is evidence that there was no change of heart (2 Cor. 5:17). A new creation does not live like the old creation. How can a believer never believe? How can a saved person always live as an unsaved person? A person's life will eventually give evidence of their salvation and new life. The kind of fruit that they produce will tell the true story (Matt. 7:15-19). With only ungodly fruit being manifested in a person's life it can be proven that they are outside of God's family (Titus 1:16).

George Zeller comments on the fruit bearing aspect of the last soil:

"Notice what we are told about fruit. In a true believer, we ought to look for fruit. Some believers are more fruitful than others (there is a big difference between 30 bushels of apples and 100 bushels), but there should be some fruit. Matthew 13:23 does not say, "...who also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty and some zero." If someone claims to be an apple tree, I would have every right to say, "Then let me see your apples!" If the Spirit of God truly lives in us, then where is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)? Should not His working be evident?"

The ultimate mark of salvation is fruitfulness. What is fruit? It is evidence of divine life. The fruit of righteous behavior (Phil. 1:11; Heb. 12:11), holy living and obedience (Rom. 6:22), and new godly character traits (Gal. 5:22-23). This fruit eventually gives evidence that conversion has taken place in a person's life. Fruitful living is an important confirmation of a person's salvation (John 15:2, 6). Fruit is always the mark of genuine faith. Matthew 13:23 teaches that genuine fruit that lasts for the harvest becomes fruit that the Sower can use for His service and glory.

Please note that the amount of fruit among God's people varies ("some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" – vs. 23). This sounds similar to what our Lord said concerning fruit bearing among his followers. There would be those who bear "fruit" (John 15:2), "more fruit" (John 15:2) and "much fruit" (John 15:5). Not all true believers are equally as productive but from

every genuine Christian life there will be some evidence of spiritual life and fruit. The point is this, not all Christians are as fruitful as they can be. When a Christian is disobedient, he restricts the fruitfulness of his life (1 Cor. 3:1-3).



I did some quick research on dirt since Jesus in the Parable of the Soils has been talking about dirt and plant growth. At some point, all gardeners wonder “What is dirt made of?” It’s one of those things we take for granted until we stop and think about it. Where does dirt come from? What chemical elements is it made from? What is dirt made of? Actually, dirt is a mix of tiny rocks, decayed organisms, living organisms, air, and water. The rocks/mineral grains in soil have a variety of different chemical elements in their makeup, including Oxygen, Silicon, Aluminum, Iron, Calcium, and Sodium.

If you walked outside and dug up a handful of soil from the forest floor, you would immediately see a few things. You might get some of the top leaf litter from the floor above. But with a microscope, there is so much more to be seen. Under magnification, you would discover anywhere from 3 million to 50 billion bacteria up to 1.0 micron in size in just one handful of dirt! These bacteria live in the liquid parts of the soil and are aerobic, meaning that they require air to live. These organisms are essential to soil as they convert nitrogen into ammonium (among various other chemical tasks), which is usable to plants in producing proteins.

Someone suggested this. “Find a medium size glass jar (one gallon works well), go out into any wooded area and fill one third of the jar with dirt from a shaded area. Trickle about six tablespoons of water from a pond or stream into the jar and seal it. Within weeks you’ll have a mini ecosystem of plants and animals that you never knew were lurking within your soil.”

As we finish this study on the soils (dirt), plant growth, and fruitfulness, we cannot help but see the emphasis that Jesus put on the matter of bearing fruit that lasts.

Jesus once again states in Matthew 13:23:

“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.”

It is interesting that our Lord begins with the number thirty-fold, which indicates that a person who has God’s life will bear some fruit that is obvious. Their fruitful living is eventually multiplied, and you won’t have to scrounge around looking behind the leaves to find a piece of fruit hanging somewhere. Allow me to illustrate this using apple trees.

I remember seeing an old apple tree that only had one apple growing on it. You had to look long and hard to find the apple. There was one apple, but it was difficult to detect. God’s people should not be like this apple tree although this can be the case at certain times in their lives (2 Pet. 1:8). Christians can pass through a season where they don’t bear fruit but eventually fruit will once again reemerge in their lives. The spiring season comes again! In every Christian there will be evidence of fruit in their life which can at some point in their lives can be easily detected. But there will be varying amounts of fruit among God’s people as depicted by the one hundred, sixty, and thirty-fold.



Let’s try and explain this. Some Christian lives are represented by the hundred-fold fruitfulness. This is not referring to sinless perfection but those children of God who have a much development and maturity in their Christian life (Col. 1:10-12; 2:7).

These Christians go all the way with God! They are generally or more consistently Spirit-filled, Christlike, and soul winning Christians. The fruit of

the Spirit is evidenced in their lives on a regular basis. When people are around them, they can see and experience God's fruit operating in their lives in a marvelous way. This type of believer never slows down in their Christian living. They have a fiery zeal for the work of God and the things of God. There is no real lack of fruit in their life. Numbers 32:12 reminds us that "Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD."

Other Christian lives are represented by the sixty-fold fruitfulness. This Christian has a marked development in his life and living. They might become the backbone of the local church. They are helpful, cooperative with church leadership, and maintain an interest in missions. They teach in Sunday School, sing in the church choir, witness to others about Christ, and give faithfully to God's work. They too love the Lord and the Bible and are seeking to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). They are actively interested in the things of God but there are various things in their life that they need to clean up and get right. However, their overall living and commitment to Christ is very noticeable and commendable.



Other Christian lives are represented by the thirty-fold fruitfulness. These believers have moderate development in their Christian living. They love the Lord, the Bible, and God's people but are not as committed as they should be. They are genuinely saved and take the initial steps toward fruitfulness. However, certain areas of their lives somehow remain

untouched by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. They have some real issues that need to be dealt with in their Christian walk (1 Cor. 3:1-3). They are not committed to the local church and Christ as they should be and somehow never sell out for God. There is fruit but there is also a lack of fruitfulness. They are nominal Christians.

Of course, the fruitfulness and spirituality of Christians is not to be compared among one another (2 Cor. 10:12) nor can one put a Christian into an exact category. But there are marked differences of fruit bearing among believers and always will be. The spirituality and fruitfulness among God's people vary. Their love and commitment to the Lord varies. Their desire to serve the Lord varies. Believers differ in fruitbearing because they differ in their level of commitment and obedience to God, but all are fruitful in varying amounts and ways.

You might ask, "Is there a forty-five-fold or a seventy-fold?" Well, who knows, but I'm sure it was not our Lord's point to pigeonhole someone into an exact mold or category. However, there are general and noticeable differences between God's children and the devil's children. Christ is certainly telling us this much. So "let a man examine himself" (1 Cor. 11:28). What kind of fruit are you bearing for the Lord these days? In what category would you place yourself?

It's time to take inventory. It's time to search our own hearts as God's people. We need to take a good long look at our lives. How much fruit is on our tree? What kind of improvements can we make? In what areas do we need to grow and be more fruitful? The Lord wants to produce fruit in our lives that will count for eternity (Matt. 6:19-20). We want to receive a full reward when we stand before Him and not lose the reward which we otherwise could have received had we been more fruitful (2 John vs. 8).

Again, it is rather shocking to realize that three fourths of the seed did not bear any lasting fruit. This first parable teaches that the rejection of God's Word will be greater than its reception. But the encouragement Jesus gives to His followers is that the Gospel seed will fall on to some good soil and germinate into the salvation of souls.

It's interesting that some writers (Toussaint) view the fruit aspect of the parable as referring to a person's greater understanding of the Lord's revelation about the earthly kingdom. In other words, there would be varying responses to God's revelation concerning the mystery kingdom teaching and the various responses of fruit (vs. 23) are seen as the fruit of spiritual understanding and comprehension of truth. The fruit is not seen to be changes in a person's lifestyle or behavior but changes in their understanding about the kingdom revelation. A fuller comprehension concerning God's kingdom program would be seen as more fruit – some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. It just depends on the spiritual comprehension of the individual.

Although there is some merit to this interpretation, I personally do not espouse this view for several reasons. First, the introductory material which leads into the parable has to do with an understanding that leads to conversion (Matt. 13:15 – "and should understand with their heart, and should be converted"). It is not referring to a Christian's understanding after conversion. The parable does not stress piecemeal understanding following conversion. It stresses understanding for salvation "lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12).

Second, if fruitfulness deals with understanding, then the Scripture should say that the third hearer became less understanding, but it actually states that he became unfruitful (Matt. 13:22). The fruit in this context has to do with how the unsaved person faced the tribulation and persecution of life - not how a saved person failed to understand truth. It does not say he lost the understanding he had but the temporary outward flare and false display of fruitful living. Luke records that the second person would "fall away" (Luke 8:13) in relation to his living or lifestyle (not knowledge) and produce no lasting fruit. With this same thought of fruitless living in mind, Luke adds how the third person would "bring no fruit to perfection" (Luke 8:14) which means that there would be no enduring fruit for the harvest period that the Sower could use. In other words, both people end up with no fruit.

Third, in view of what Jesus said about the third person who becomes unfruitful in relationship to his living, it can be concluded that the fourth

person would do just the opposite. He would become fruitful in living following his conversion and preparation for the kingdom (vs. 23). This fruitfulness would be manifested in the varying amounts of lasting change that occurs in a person's life.

Once again Luke calls it the "fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15) or endurance meaning that it is genuine fruitful living that lasts through the tests of time and fruit which the Sower can use for the harvest period. The fruit that endures is contrasted to the fruit that did not endure in the previous people because they fell away in their manner of living (not knowledge) and became unfruitful in their living due to worldly loves and pressures. This conclusion about fruit seems to make better sense out of the parable. The fruit has to do with behavior of living and not necessarily better understanding.

Today as we share the Gospel with the lost, we must understand that some people will reject our message outright. Because certain people have a hard heart (way side soil) they want nothing to do with God and Satan will not allow the Gospel seed to have any impact on them whatsoever. He will steal away the seed. Others will seem to accept the Gospel gladly but will soon fall away because they only had a superficial religious experience (stony soil) and were not born again. These are the people who only have a fleshly response allowing their lives to be controlled by emotion and feeling.

Others will seem to accept the Gospel while holding on to their old worldly ways and lifestyle (thorny soil). In time their lack of repentance over their sinful ways will show up. They eventually disappear from the Christian scene altogether. In fact, the lack of genuine repentance in those who have a surface profession of faith (rocky soil) and a worldly response (thorny soil) will be evidenced when they permanently fall away from their initial commitment.

But others will truly believe and produce genuine and lasting fruit (the good and fruitful soil). In humility they will repent of their sins, place their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, and be given new life. You will know that these

people are true believers from the rest by the evidence of change in their overall pattern of living (1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 5:21)

Some have suggested that because three out of the four plants have some kind of root system that the true Gospel seed must have taken root in the heart. But this is a misunderstanding of what Jesus was teaching. Having a root system does not portray genuine faith. Later in Matthew's gospel the imagery of trees being rooted in the ground did not convey the thought of genuineness. In Matthew 15:13 Jesus said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up."

Jesus also compared unbelieving Israel to trees that were rooted in the ground but did not bring forth good fruit. He warns how the axe would be laid to the root of the tree and how the tree would be hewn down (Matt. 3:10). Not all root systems are healthy and yield fruit. Matthew also compares false prophets to trees that are rooted but which do not bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:17-19). The issue is not just the root but also the fruit since the fruit will tell the story of the root system - whether it's healthy or unhealthy ("Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" - Matt. 7:20).

As we will see, Jesus also mentioned about the tares who were growing but which were not producing the genuine crop or fruit (Matt. 13:25). They had a root system, but it was not functioning as God intended. Thinking Biblically and contextually we can conclude that within the same book Matthew portrays unsaved people as trees that have a root system, but which can only bear corrupt fruit. He compares them to tares that cannot produce grain.

In a similar way the Lord compares people as having "not root" (Matt. 13:11) or a shallow and surface root system and other people as having their root system intertwined with thorns (Matt. 13:22). The result is that these people produce no fruit that can be used by the farmer. Jesus is making an obvious point that something is drastically wrong with their root system. The implication is that although they possessed a root system it was not functioning properly as God intended.

The improper functioning of the root system demonstrates the people's lack of repentance. The Gospel seed cannot make its way to the human heart when the roots of inner conviction and contrition over sin do not exist. Repentance is lost in shallow conversion experiences and when a person fails to repent of his worldly sin (Luke 24:47). In the cases presented in the first three soils no true root of inner conviction and repentance occurred. As we have seen, in Matthew 13 even the stony and thorny soils portray plants growing in soils (representative of the human heart) that do not have a proper root system which can produce lasting fruit for the harvest.

There was no "fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8). This would lead to the Biblical conclusion that the first three soils are representative of unregenerate people. Why? It's because all believers do bear fruit (fruit that lasts) and this is clearly indicated by the final soil in Matthew 13:23 (the only soil that bears lasting fruit) and by many other Bible verses (John 15; Eph. 2:10; James 2:17).

So we can conclude that the first three soils in Matthew 13 represent people who never allow the truth to correctly take root in their hearts which would indicate that there was no genuine repentance, spiritual life, and lasting change in their lives. You will search in vain to find fruit that the farmer can reap in the time of harvest for the first three soils. In the final analysis there is no fruit because there was not a healthy root system or no genuine repentance that had occurred in their hearts. Both John the Baptizer and Jesus spoke of the need of individual repentance (Matt. 3:1-2; 4:17) or else the axe would be laid to their faulty root system (Matt. 3:10). The first three plants with their corresponding soils had no deep roots (portrayed in the hard soil) or bad roots (portrayed in the stony and thorny soils) which could not bring forth fruit.

Isaiah 5:24 says:

"Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel."

As previously mentioned, the secret or mystery of the Parable of the Sower reveals a hidden secret concerning the rejection and reception of God's Word during the time of the King's absence.

Mark adds some additional thoughts to the Parable of the Sower.

Mark 4:26-29

"And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

Although some view this as a separate parable it seems better to see this as *additional information* that fits into the story and illustration of the first Parable of the Sower and picks up with the thought of fruitfulness to encourage the disciples. In keeping with the illustration of fruitful ground this additional information is designed to teach that there will be a positive response toward God's message throughout the mystery period and that people will be saved.

Despite great rejection there will be those who are gloriously saved and transformed. This parable is recorded only by Mark and complements the Parable of the Sower in many ways. In the first parable Jesus did emphasize how there would be a positive response to God's message (Mark 4:20). Now in Mark 4:26-29 He once again reiterates the fact that there will be a harvest of people (salvation of souls) that would occur during the mystery period (during the King's absence). This extended teaching and passage concerning the sowing efforts of God's people is talking about the fruit of souls (Rom. 1:13) instead of the fruitful living of those who are already saved (Mark 4:20).

Nevertheless, this additional information closely resembles the Parable of the Sower and was given to remind and encourage the disciples, and all those who would follow in their footsteps could be reassured that their seed sowing efforts would not be in vain. The passage is gives additional

information that people would be saved through Gospel witness while the King is absent. A harvest of souls would occur during the interim period between Christ's rejection of Israel and His return to earth.

The best interpretation of this adjoining parable pictures how the Gospel seed works in the hearts of people. The fact that Mark 4:28 says the seed "bringeth forth fruit of herself" (automatically, spontaneously) indicates that the seed that is sown, the Word of God (Luke 8:12), will create life on its own accord. The seed has an inner energy and power so that it results in regeneration (Heb. 4:12). The message of the Gospel, by its very nature, when sown in men's hearts produces spontaneously spiritual life, which is here represented as fruit (the fruit of the salvation of souls). We know that "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16).

After the Gospel is presented, the Word of God works in the individual heart, sometimes slowly and mysteriously, until the time when God reaps the harvest in that individual and saves them. Sooner or later "the harvest is come." God gets all the glory for He wins the poor lost soul "by the word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). The harvest represented by the fruit in this parable explains how God saves the sinner through the truth of His Word. Satan is doing his work in the world today, but the work of God will continue to go on and bring forth astonishing fruitfulness, the "greater works" of the salvation of souls (John 14:12), which will glorify God and "that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 4:1).

Again, in this parable the fruit is not referring to fruitful living but the fruit of souls (converted people). Jesus promises that there will be a harvest that follows our Gospel outreach as people are converted (Acts 3:19). You will remember that an obscure Sunday school teacher invested in the life of Dwight L. Moody and Mr. Moody won thousands to Christ. These converts in turn won many others. The Sunday school teacher started a chain reaction that will never stop. A promised harvest is given to encourage His disciples throughout the mystery period. Jesus promises that there will be a spiritual harvest that will last for eternity.

“Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve;
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.”

II. The Parable of the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30)

All of us have probably at one time or another had crab grass growing in our lawns. It tries to mix with the true grass and overtake it. Crabgrass is an unattractive, clumpy type of weed that will quickly take over your lawn. Crabgrass will take over your turf, preventing your lawn from receiving nutrients it needs to in order to grow healthy grass. At one point it can in some ways resemble grass with its green appearance but later in fall or winter when it quickly dies and shows its true nature. In our present parable, we are looking at the Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Weeds). It too speaks of a look-alike weed that appears as the true wheat.



In the next parable Jesus reveals once again that the world is not going to get better. In the second Parable of the Tares (weeds) Jesus is teaching that the world will keep producing a harvest of both good and evil. He never mentions that the good will win over the evil. In this parable of the wheat and weeds (tares) Jesus gives us

another key why the world is getting increasingly bad and spiraling in a direction that is downward. It's because Satan's children are being sown among God's children throughout the earth. The wheat is representative of God's children whereas the tares or weeds are representative of the devil's children.

In this parable Christ helps us understand the age in which we live. It's called "another" (Matt. 13:24) parable which means another parable of the

same kind as the first parable. In this parable we will see a similar moral and evil calamity that takes place in the world and not the conversion of the world. Like the first parable there is no promise given of a converted or transformed society while the King is absent. Just the opposite is true. There will be an evil mixture among the good and deception that occurs throughout the world. Satan is actively engaged in causing corruption among the true people of God. No, things are not getting better. Deception from the devil's children continues to spread at alarming rates over the earth.

Matthew 13:24-30

"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven (*in its mystery form*) 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."

A brief review is now in order before we proceed with investigating this parable. You will remember that contextually the "kingdom of heaven" (Matt.13:24) has reference to the mystery period of the kingdom that Jesus introduced earlier (Matt. 13:11 – "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"). It deals with new added revelation concerning Christ's earthly kingdom program. It cannot be speaking about Heaven since in heaven there can be no tares or evil present (Rev. 21:27). The kingdom of heaven has reference to God's earthly program or when heaven will rule this earth. It speaks of a time when God's will on earth occurs even as His will is established in heaven (Matt. 6:10).

In any event, Jesus came into the world offering an earthly kingdom to the Jews which was repeatedly prophesied and spoken about in the Old Testament Scriptures. But the mysteries or hidden secrets about the earthly kingdom program are dealing with those truths that were not revealed and known to the Old Testament Jews concerning the messianic kingdom (Matt. 13:17). The mysteries deal with hidden secrets about God's kingdom program that were not previously revealed and known. They are new truths that are being revealed about in relation to God's earthly kingdom program.

What are the mysteries or hidden truths about the kingdom? They are secrets dealing with the various events and conditions that would take place on earth prior to the kingdom's arrival. It's these hidden secrets concerning the kingdom that became the content of Christ's seven parables. As previously confirmed in the introductory remarks, Jesus was not introducing a new form of the literal earthly kingdom, but new truth that was in some way related to the establishment of the kingdom. He was speaking about those things that must transpire before the earthly kingdom arrives on planet earth.



Since these events and conditions are secret things that were not previously revealed about the kingdom they are called "mysteries of the kingdom." The kingdom is not a mystery but the events surrounding the establishment of the kingdom are mysteries. It's these events that Jesus unfolds to us in the parables when he uses the repeated phrase "the kingdom of heaven."

The time when these conditions and events will occur during the period between Israel's rejection of the Messiah and the return of the Messiah at the end of the Tribulation Period to establish His earthly kingdom. Between the postponement of the kingdom program and the re-establishment of the kingdom on earth there would be many conditions and events that would take place heralding the return of the King and the establishment of His

kingdom. Before the King and His kingdom arrives in the world these events and conditions must run their course.

Timing of the Parables of the Mysteries of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:11)



**The Millennial Kingdom is
Temporarily Postponed Until
the Second Coming
(Matthew 21:43)**

We can be sure that everything that is taking place in the world today is moving toward God's earthly kingdom program. Ephesians 1:10 declares, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times (culmination of all the ages) he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even in him.*" Earth's events are moving toward the great and final dispensation when Jesus returns as the King. All the previous ages will culminate in the glorious kingdom reign of Jesus Christ over the earth.

What God allows to take place on earth prior to the kingdom is the outworking of His hidden or mysterious program concerning the earthly kingdom. The conditions and events that transpire on planet earth are preparing the world for the kingdom's arrival and are termed as sacred secrets which must run their course before the kingdom is established. In other words, they are the mysteries about the kingdom or God's hidden agenda concerning His earthly kingdom program. Be reassured that everything is moving according to God's schedule and ordained program.

Again, the repeated phrase in Matthew 13 which says, “the kingdom of heaven is like” (Matt. 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47) means that the teaching in the parables explain what things are going to be like on earth before the earthly kingdom arrives. Jesus is saying that the secret events and conditions surrounding God’s earthly kingdom program are “like” or comparable to what I’m about to describe. In our present parable Jesus is going to describe a harvest that will produce a mixture of both good and evil. If you like suspense and mystery, you might call this parable “The Case of the Mysterious Harvest.”

Matthew reveals that Jesus would speak two more parables before giving the official interpretation of the parable of the tares among the wheat. In the interpretation of this parable Jesus explains that the sower or farmer is the Son of man. “He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man” (Matt. 13:37). The sower in this parable and previous parable was the “Son of man” which was the earthly designation or title given to Christ. This title identified Christ with humanity through incarnation (John 1:14) and spoke of His humanness.

The title “Son of man” is also a Messianic title that Jesus applied to Himself. Luke 22:69, “Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.” Jesus is the Son of man who is coming back to rule this world someday. It is the Lord Jesus who is portrayed as sowing the seed of the Word of God (Matt. 13:19) and sowing His own children (Matt. 13:38) among humanity. The Divine Sower working in the hearts of humanity is the Son of man who is sowing a harvest of people, His own children, who will one day be taken into the glorious kingdom reign at His Second Coming (Rev. 19:11-21).

A. The setting

The setting where all the sowing is said to occur is the “field” (Matt. 13: 27) which our Lord interprets as the “world” (“The field is the world” – Matt. 13:38). This reminds us that the setting for the seed sowing efforts occurs on earth. It will be across the entire

**The Field is the World
(Matt. 13:27)**



earth (not just Palestine) that this mysterious mixture and harvest is going to occur. This reminds us that Christ is moving the events of this world according to His sovereign plan. His sowing efforts in the world are coming to pass. People are coming to Jesus Christ for salvation and becoming part of the spiritual harvest that is prepared to enter the earthly kingdom someday.

The setting and stage for this parabolic scene is the world. It's a worldwide phenomenon. The earth is on God's center stage for it's on earth that God's redemptive program for mankind is being carried out. Also, it's the place where the King is someday going to rule and reign (Rev. 11:15; Luke 1:33). No other planet has God's interest more than this little planet which is spinning away in one of the millions of galaxies within the universe. This is because God has placed people on this planet and has an eternal destiny for mankind.

Please notice that the world is described as "his field" (Matt. 13:24, 31) which tells us that Jesus Christ owns the earth and oversees the flow of events that are occurring in the world today. He is not borrowing it. It's His field. Jesus has the title deed to the world because He created it. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth *is* the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." Colossians 1:16, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him."

Jesus Christ is the absolute Creator and Sovereign Ruler of the world. He is the King. It's true that Satan is the prince of the world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) for he has usurped the world from Adam's race, but Jesus is the King! Someday the King is going to return and officially reclaim "his field" which is rightfully His. He is coming back to claim Adam's lost domain and establish a theocracy (the rule of God) over the earth during the Millennium. What a day this will be when the King returns and takes control over the earth.

Zechariah 14:9 prophetically declares:

"And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one."

B. The sowing

You will notice that this too is a parable of sowing, but it is quite different than the first parable. The emphasis in the first parable was sowing the Gospel seed in human hearts whereas the emphasis in this parable is the sowing of both good and evil people in the world. In the first parable the seed that was sown was the Word of God (Matt. 13:19). It was sown in the hearts of lost people. But in this parable the seed is called “the children of the kingdom” who are representative by the wheat and “children of the wicked one” which are representative by the tares or weeds (Matt. 13:38). The seed refers to people. The mysterious harvest consists of two different kinds of people in the same field. There is a divine sowing of children who are God’s children and a diabolical sowing of evil children which are the devil’s children. This is the mysterious harvest that is presented in these verses.

The children or sons of the kingdom are actually people who are spiritually prepared to enter the earthly kingdom. The main intent and teaching of the parables is that God will always have a remnant of people who are His children throughout the period of time represented in the parables. The general teaching is that from the beginning to the ending of the mystery period of the kingdom there will always be a nucleus of children that God will be working with and preparing to someday inherit the kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Matt. 25:34). However, the “children of the kingdom” (the wheat) would have a special reference to Christ’s earthly ministry when He was offering the messianic kingdom to the Jews. The “children of the kingdom” description is given because of the Jewish and kingdom setting when the mystery period of the kingdom began.

During the days of Jesus on earth the children of the kingdom would have a direct reference to those Jews who received His message concerning the earthly kingdom and who were spiritually prepared to enter the theocracy (Matt. 4:17). The same will be true in the future Tribulation Period when Jews will come to faith in Christ and be prepared to enter the coming earthly kingdom (Matt. 24:14). The Jews were given the promise of a literal earthly kingdom through their covenant programs (Luke 1:33). Those Jews who would receive Him as their personal Messiah and Savior would

become children of the kingdom who would one day enter the kingdom or earthly theocracy. We must remember that the “word of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:19) only produces “children of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:38). It takes God’s Word to save souls! The gimmicks of modern-day evangelism cannot save souls.

Since our Lord gave no distinct time divisions for the sowing and seed program, we must conclude that the parables also project us into the present dispensation in which we live today and extend right up to the end of the Tribulation Period (Matt. 13: 39). The sowing would occur in the entire world which would be much more extensive than just the local ministry of Christ during His day. Therefore, the sowing and seed program would take place on a worldwide basis throughout the entire age in which we live today (Church age) up to the end of the age (Tribulation age).

So how should we understand the designation children of the kingdom? Remember that in a strict dispensational sense Church age saints cannot be called “children of the kingdom” since this was a term given to Jews who were promised the kingdom through God’s covenant program. They were awaiting the immediate arrival of the kingdom while Jesus was on earth. So, the descriptive reference (“children of the kingdom”) in a specific way applies to the Jews of Jesus’ day when the mystery period of the kingdom first began and to those Jews are saved at His Second coming and enter the earthly kingdom (Matt. 25). However, it can be said that in a general or broad sense there will always be a spiritual nucleus of people throughout the entire mystery period (the King's rejection until the King's return) who are prepared for the future kingdom. There will always be a remnant of God’s children awaiting entrance into the future earthly kingdom. Even Church age saints of today are children who are going to take part in God’s kingdom program (Rev. 2:26-28; 19:11-16).

Church-age saints who also possess the prospect of entering the kingdom (1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5) and they would be included in the mystery period of time as it runs its course. New Testament saints are also guaranteed entrance into the kingdom through resurrection (1 Cor. 15:50). In fact, Jesus taught that even the Gentile masses outside the Jewish nation and Church will one day “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the

foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). The point is that all people who are God's children are destined for the kingdom rule and reign at the end of earth's climatic history. The Jewish people possess the special title "children of the kingdom" but all God's children up to the time of His Second Coming to earth are His children and they too will share in the Millennial reign of Christ over the earth. So those who believe that Jesus Christ (John 20:30-31) will some day inherit a place in the restored theocracy as "heirs of the kingdom" (James 2:5) while the unsaved will not inherit any place in the kingdom (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Cor. 6:9; Matt. 8:12; 25:46).

Like a moving roller coaster, earth's history is moving toward the earthly theocracy and Golden Age of history. Church Age saints will be raptured prior to the kingdom's arrival (1 Thess. 4:13-18) while others (Tribulation saints) will be living when the King returns following the Tribulation Period (Matthew 24-25). But the main intent and teaching of this parable is that God will always have a remnant of people who are His children throughout the time period represented in this parable who will one day inherit the earthly kingdom.

The mysterious nature about this harvest is that there would be a counter sowing of people that would occur and mingle with the "children of the kingdom" (a remnant of godly people) and those who are counter sowed are termed as the "children of the wicked one" (an offspring of ungodly people). The "children of the wicked one" are actually children of the devil. The expression "wicked one" was already interpreted as referencing the devil. Matthew 13:19 says, "then cometh the wicked one." Luke 8:12 says it in even a clearer fashion: "Then cometh the devil." In this parable we are told that the "enemy that sowed them (the tares) is the devil" (Matthew 13:39). This means that the children of the wicked one are children of the devil. The parable reveals these children as "tares" or weeds (Matt. 13:25) which are sown or planted among God's true children and take on the appearance that they are God's children. More on this later.

Illust. - Dr. Harry Ironside once described a rather stern and austere pastor who went to see a woman. She was showing him her baby, holding the infant up so he could see how beautiful it was. This pastor drew a long face

and said to her, "Madam, what a pity that this little one should be a child of the devil." Of course, this is hardly the way to make a hit with a mother and new visitor at church! And yet it is true that we are born into this world as a sinner (Ps. 51:5; Rom. 3:23) and no one needed to teach us how to be dishonest, cheat, and lie. We are all born into this world tainted with Adam's sin and bent on doing evil. We are born as someone who needs to be rescued from the seed line of the serpent (Gen. 3:15) and brought into the family of God by becoming God's offspring (John 1:13) through faith in the Savior (Gal. 3:26).

The fact that people are children of the devil stuns the modernistic teachings that are still being propagated in the apostate church. The liberals are still talking about everybody being the children of God. During a funeral, they will put a man in Heaven who was a drunkard and who beat his wife for thirty years, who cursed God all his life, and who has never stepped inside a Gospel preaching church.

I was watching the presidential debates one time and the liberal Democrat made the statement, "We are all the children of God." How absurd to make such a statement as this. This mentality is false, misleading, and has sent millions of people to hell. Not everybody is God's child. Jesus spoke of those who were of the serpent's seed. In John 8:44 Jesus said to the religious people of his day: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of *your* father ye will do..." The religious scribes and the Pharisees were said to be of the devil's seed. John also says the "whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19) meaning that the world of lost mankind is under the influence, sway, grip, and dominion of the devil. Peter talks about the religious apostates of his day as "cursed children" (2 Pet. 2:14). It's certain that these people are of the devil's seed – not the spiritual seed representative of God's children who have placed faith in God's Son to be their Savior.

The bottom line is this. Every person in this world today is either a child of God or a child of the Satan. There is no person who is half and half. You are either absolutely saved or absolutely unsaved.

1 John 3:10

"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

There are only two types of people that coexist in the world according to Jesus and John: children of God and children of devil. But in this mysterious harvest of the tares and wheat there is some deceptive resemblance between the children of God and Satan that will occur. A mixing of the true and false will take place throughout the ages.

C. The secret

The Parable of Tares (Matthew 13:24-30)

Conditions and Events that occur on Earth before the Kingdom (Millennium) arrives.

The MYSTERY (revealed secret) is that before the kingdom (Millennium) comes to earth Satan would counterfeit God's true children with the devil's children bringing infiltration, deception, and corruption to the work of God.

There would be a counter sowing of the unsaved (degenerate wheat) among the saved (good wheat).

Infiltration through Imitation (syncretism).

Corrupt Christendom among true Christianity

We have mentioned this already but let's in a direct manner address the mystery of this parable. Since this parable is part of the mysteries about the kingdom (Matt. 13:11) then what is the specific secret that was not previously known until Christ revealed it? The new revelation and mystery or sacred secret about the kingdom in this second parable is that during the interim time period between Israel's rejection and Israel's reception of Christ at the Second Coming, prior to the Millennial kingdom's arrival on

earth (the 1,000 years), Satan would counterfeit God's true children bringing deception and corruption to the work of God.

Satan would be at work during the days prior to the King's return and the establishment of the messianic kingdom. His specific work would be one of infiltration and deception as he attempts to destroy the work of God throughout the earth. There would be a mysterious harvest, and religious amalgamation of both the true and false within the world of religion. Many would have the appearance of being Christ's followers (religiosity), but they are not part of the true Church or people of God (regeneration). This brings us to our next point.

D. The Sabotage

Satan's primary work that is presented in this parable is infiltration through imitation (sowing the counterfeit among Christians).

Jesus states in Matthew 13:25-26:

"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."

Every farmer in Palestine knew that one way their crop could be hindered and even destroyed was by someone coming along in the night and oversowing the field with seeds so that it would produce weeds or darnel which are representative of the devil's children (Matt. 13:25-26). The Roman government actually had laws and punishments against this type of action. There were those who wanted to ruin the wheat supply of others to bring greater gain to their own crops and trade. So laws were made that brought legal actions against those who would sow tares in the field of another person.

TARES Look IDENTICAL To WHEAT



The spiritual analogy that Christ draws from this counter sowing is eye-opening. Satan's plan is to sabotage the work of God by mixing the devil's seed with God's seed. In fact, in this case, the seed or initial harvest of the tares (the devil's children) looks identical to the wheat in

the field which means that many within Christendom (apostate religion among true Christianity) have the outward appearance of being religious and they wear the trappings and tapestry of religious disguise while at the same time use the same words as Christianity, but their teachings are not in sync with the truth.

They have a “form of godliness” within the professing church (2 Tim. 3:5) and appear to be part of the genuine wheat field but they are actually degenerate wheat (weeds). They are not the real thing. The cults and false religions in the world (Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Shintoism, etc.), corrupt denominationalism, and the entire religious global landscape of today are part of the mysterious harvest of the true among the false. Satan tries to imitate Christianity and religious ways to deceive people and destroy the true work of God.

The Bible says, “his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat” (Matt. 13:25). As we have already mentioned, Jesus interprets the tares as “children of the wicked one” (Matt. 13:38) and “The enemy that sowed them is the devil” (Matt. 13:38). There can be no misunderstanding of this parable. The wicked one wants to undermine God’s work. He wants to interfere with the God’s work and deliberately damage the work of God by mixing his offspring with God’s offspring. Satan as the farmer plays the role of the imitator. The devil has always used imitation as an effective tool in his attempt to sabotage God’s people and purpose in the world. His plan to mix God’s people with the devil’s people was seen in the Genesis record (Gen. 6:1-5) and the days of the Judges.

Judges 3:5-7

“And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.”

God’s word is “separate” whereas the devil’s word is “syncretism.” The apostate and liberal of today’s ecclesiastical organizations who are of the serpent’s seed will say, “Let us meet together in the house of God...” (Neh.

6:10). “Let us build with you” (Ezra 4:2). But God says, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate...” (2 Cor. 6:17). The devil has always tried to strategically mix his offspring with God’s offspring. Satan seeks to bring his seed into an alliance with God’s seed in order to corrupt them spiritually.

This sabotage or mixing would occur within the mystery period before the kingdom is established over the earth. Satan seeks to mix his seed with God’s seed in the political, corporate, business, and ecclesiastical (church) arena of life throughout this world to bring spiritual contamination to the lives of God’s true seed. Wherever God’s seed is sown the devil’s seed is oversown. There is a general sowing of the devil’s children that occurs everywhere in the world but a specific sowing of the Satan’s children in church life and affiliation which is directly related to God’s people. Satan’s children are dwelling among God’s children to contaminate their lives and sabotage God’s purpose and work in the world of spreading the Gospel and bringing true converts into Christianity.

My wife and I turned on our motel TV on Sunday while we were on vacation. We briefly tuned into a church service of a liberal denomination. I wanted to see what was happening in the world of ecclesiastical Christendom. The man was wearing a robe and supposedly was teaching people from the Bible. The problem is that I did not hear one Bible reference during his sermon. He began talking about Mary Poppins and kept drawing lessons from the movie Mary Poppins. He left everyone in the dark regarding salvation, sanctification, and service to the Lord. But he knew a lot about Mary Poppins. Listen, Satan is sowing ministers of deception among God’s people today. They are tares among the wheat.

Many years ago, a chaplain at Water Street Rescue Mission taught me an important lesson from this parable. I played my trumpet and spoke at the mission. Some of the people responded to the Gospel message. Afterward I was talking to the chaplain. I asked him if some of these people respond all the time to the messages and have you found them to be genuine? He responded to me, “Well, all I can tell you is what Jesus said. There will be tares among the wheat.” He was right.

In this parable Jesus speaks about the sowing of the tares, the growing of the tares, the knowledge about the tares, and the judgment of the tares. The parable explains that Satan's counter sowing produces an initial crop that looks just like the true crop (Matt. 13: 25-26). The devil's children are called "tares" which are a spurious poisonous crop that resembles wheat in the initial stages of growth. Tares were known as darnel, which was a common weedy type of grass. The Jews called it degenerate wheat. The text simply says, "But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also" (Matt. 13:26) signifying that it originally appeared to be the same kind of fruit as the wheat which was sown by the original farmer. But it was not true wheat.

Unger concludes that the most common tare found in grainfields in the Holy Land is bearded darnel, "a poisonous grass, almost indistinguishable from wheat while the two are growing into blade. But when they come into ear, they can be separated without difficulty." This is because when the heads of the crop become mature, the darnels take on a slate gray color and become distinguishable from the wheat. In time the tares are eventually spotted as degenerate wheat by their slight change in color.

Eventually the true nature of the tares is seen. But in the beginning the weeds cannot be differentiated from the wheat. Botanists tell us that even the experts cannot distinguish it from the wheat in the early stages of growth. Herein lies the devil's deception. He tries to imitate God's people. He sends his own seed "among" (Matt. 13:25) God's seed. The enemy had sown the darnel all throughout the wheat crop. In a similar way, the devil attempts to sow his own seed among God's seed and in so doing attempts to religiously imitate and then undermine the work of God through false teachers, doctrinal impurity, and the spiritual and worldly contamination of God's people.

The tares in this parable do not represent drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, thieves, and murderers. Briars, thorns, and thistles would be easily detected but a similar crop would go unnoticed. The tares are a crop that appear similar to God's people and how much better can this similarity be seen than through the paraphernalia and procedures of religiosity and religious disguise. When Jesus was talking about the tares, He no doubt had

the scribes and Pharisees in mind and all the other Jews who were religiously connected with His people in that day but who were really imitators. They were not true followers of the Messiah and had no intention of committing themselves to Him in a saving way.

Satan loves when his own children dwell among God's true children to infect them and stagnate their service and work for the Lord. He loves to have the degenerate wheat growing among the pure wheat. Satan sows the counterfeit among the true. Because Satan cannot uproot the wheat (true Christians) he plants counterfeit Christians in their midst. This has been the devil's practice during Christ's earthly ministry, and it will continue to be the devil's ploy in the future.

Historically, during the days of Jesus, when the mystery period began, there were tares that identified as being disciples (John 2:23-25). Within the Church there were men similar Jannes and Jambres of old were tares (weeds) among the wheat. Jannes and Jambres were counterfeits attempting to do the same miraculous work of God (Exodus 7:9-12; 2 Timothy 3:8). Paul spoke in his day of the pseudo-Christians ("false brethren" - 2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4) and false teachers or seducers (Gal. 1:7-8; 2 Tim. 3:13; 2 Jn. 1:7) that were hindering and corrupting God's work. The same type of thing has been occurring today during the last days. 2 Timothy 3:5 once again explains the tares (the devil's children) among God's people in this way: "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." Many people today are associated with corrupt denominationalism, religion, and other forms of outward religiosity which takes on the appearance of godliness and that which is good and yet they have rejected the true Gospel message and power of God to transform their lives and sanctify them.

Edmond Hiebert warns:

"It is the fearful portrayal of an apostate Christendom, a new paganism masquerading under the name of Christianity."

Christendom speaks of all religions and faiths lumped together in one pie. However, there is a vast number of corrupt religions, apostate denominations, and unsaved people attached to true Christianity which

masquerade as true Christians. Much of Christendom is apostate in nature and practice. There have always been tares among the wheat and Jesus taught this would continue to occur to the end of the age at His Second Coming.

Prophetically, Jesus taught that there would be many false Christ's and prophets appearing in the Tribulation Period, which also envisions the time period of this parable, and they will attempt to deceive God's elect (chosen people who are saved).

Matthew 24:24

"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect."

The greatest counterfeit individual that is yet to come on this world scene is the Antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18).

2 Thessalonians 2:4 speaks of him in this way:

"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

2 Thessalonians 2:9 adds:

"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders."

Antichrist will mask himself as the only true God that has ever lived. He will put on a religious disguise and become a tare among the wheat. Satan will always have his counterfeits among God's true children. The mixing was true during Christ's earthly ministry, during today (the last days), and the mixture will continue to occur right up to the time when the kingdom commences on planet earth (Matt. 25:1-13).

Have you ever mixed dark chocolate covered raisins with dark chocolate covered almonds? It's hard to tell the difference between them if they are in the same bowl. Sometimes this can be true when contemplating those

who are genuinely saved and those who are only religiously disguised but who identify with Christianity. Sometimes it's easy to unmask them but other times it's hard to see through the mask and deception for they are "transforming (masquerading or disguising) themselves into the apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:13).



Of course, the parable before us is not telling us that we can never spot the weeds among the wheat for the Scriptures teach otherwise (Matt. 7:16-19; Rom. 16:17; 2 Cor. 6:17; 1 John 2:19). In fact, at one point the tares could be detected in the growth process of the harvest (Matt. 13:27-29). The parable is simply concluding that these people (the devil's children) will attempt to identify with Christianity (Acts 20:29; Gal. 2:4). This is a Satanic sabotage of counterfeit religious imitation, which can lead to deception among God's true people and corruption to God's work. This deception can only occur when Satan mixes his children among God's children throughout the earth. The point is this. Wherever the mixture occurs the devil wants much of his seed to appear as God's children.

To some extent we have already witnessed this in the first parable where the danger of false profession was addressed by Christ. There were those among God's children who attempted to take Christ as Savior and hang on to the world at the same time (Matt. 13:20-22). The devil's seed attempted to create deception among God's followers. Satan often wants his own seed to take on the appearance that his followers are religiously and spiritually tied to God's children and purpose when in reality they want nothing to do with God's cause.

This might be illustrated by those who run in the political arena of life who mention God, quote Bible verses, and then turn around and promote same-sex marriages, abortion, and many other wicked practices. This can also be seen in the everyday world where we live. Satan places his seed among God's children and many times the devil's seed are seen performing good acts of humanity. They support hunger drives, help hurting people in the world, donate to the Salvation Army, offer to help rebuild the homes of

hurricane victims, offer their services to help a neighbor who is in need, and call themselves conservative Republicans.

Satan's children do not always appear outwardly evil for the simple reason that the old nature is not always as bad as it can be and can also manipulate the actions of the new nature. In fact, many times the devil's seed or children take on an appearance that they are connected with Christianity and God because of the good things they do and practice. Many of the devil's children do not commit adultery, they do not cheat on their marriage partner, they teach their children moral principles, they might even oppose abortion and other sins. They might practice abstinence before marriage and attend church on somewhat a regular basis. They don't take drugs, smoke tobacco, gamble their money away, and in many ways live an exemplary life.

Herbert Lockyer has said:

"Many who are not the Lord's yet resemble those who are: they go to church, pray, read the Bible like Christians, but are, alas, Christless."

I remember listening to Oprah Winfrey who was telling everyone that she was a spiritual Christian. On her talk show, she pushed "The Secret" which was a best-selling New Age self-help book that argued that if you put out the energy you want to receive, you can create the life you want. Like many, she believes there is good in Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Atheism and more. We must embrace everything. But this is syncretism – not salvation and sanctification. Oprah is a tare (weed) among the wheat. Her ideologies give her away as being a child of the devil – not a child of God.

How about the Norman Vincent Peal and Robert Schuler types of preachers of bygone hears (there are still many with us today!) with their warped theology of positive thinking and redefining salvation, hell, and faith? They use Bible terms but have a different dictionary when it comes to defining these terms. Christians believe in the power of Christlike living (Phil. 1:21; 3:10; Gal. 2:20) and not the self-focused, self-produced, and secular humanistic thoughts of simply being positive. As a philosophy of life, positive thinking is focused on our own personal selfish gain is not a godly

way of life at all. There is no innate power in positive thinking, and to say that Christianity supports this philosophy is crazy. It is heretical. It is totally unjustified. Positive thinking about our sin will not solve the problem of sin. We need negative thinking about sin and we need to stop sinning through repentance.

Schuler himself stated that at some time after he took his position at the Garden Grove, he was overtaken by a fear of failure for about two years. Finally he prayed, "Dear Jesus Christ, if you're alive, and I can't even prove you are, I pray that you'll reach into my mind and take out this horrible fear. Save me," after which he felt a pressure in his head, then release and peace. Hebrews 11:6 teaches "for he that cometh to God must believe that he is..." Schuler taught, "A person is in hell when he has lost his self-esteem." Schuler like so many today taught the liberal false doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. These types of religious leaders are tares among wheat. What about the prosperity preachers of today in the Word of Faith movement? There are more tares than you can count!

We must remember that religious imitation and deception is being addressed in this parable. Satan has a counterfeit for every divine reality. He sows within the world those who look like, talk like, and, to some extent walk like disciples. But they are not genuine followers of the King. We must never forget that there is a difference between God's people manifesting fruit produced by the new nature and the work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) and the devil's people manifesting self-produced works by their own efforts and acts of reformation.

The devil's children may produce outstanding works but no real fruit for God's glory. In fact, things like singing, preaching, teaching, speaking about Jesus, giving to the poor, and helping the hurting can be all works generated by the flesh. By contrast these same things become fruit generated and motivated by the Holy Spirit. In addition, God's people have a true deep-seated inner joy, the peace of God, and manifest true actions of righteousness and holiness.

Let us never forget that the devil plants his followers or offspring as God's offspring to bring them into a spiritual corruption. He tries to undermine

the work of God in the world by planting his children among God's children and making them appear as God's children. Satan is not an innovator; He is an imitator. Satan today fashions his imitators "as ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:15). They have the ability to transform or disguise themselves into someone other than who they really are. They masquerade themselves as God's seed, but they are actually of the seed of Satan.

So the devil's agenda in this world is to imitate God's sowing work by introducing his own seed among God's true seed. The devil has his own lucrative farming business! Satan grows and counterfeits God's true seed today among the ecumenical movement or religions, in placing his children among God's true children, and in doing so he tries to undermine or destroy the true work of God in the world. Satan tries to reproduce God's people and therefore produces a counterfeit religious imitation among God's true children which can bring deception and corruption into the God's work.

The Catholic Church is a masterpiece of deception with its popes, cardinals, priests, worship of Mary and saints, rosaries, Mass, Purgatory, and its works-religion which denies justification by faith alone and centers justification on a person's good works. The entire Romanish system is filled with tares among the wheat (the true children of God).

Canon 14 concludes: "If anyone says that man is absolved from his sins and justified because he firmly believes that he is absolved and justified, or that no one is truly justified except him who believes himself justified, and that by this faith alone absolution and justification are effected, let him be anathema" (cursed or damned to hell). In other words, the canon is saying that if you believe that by faith alone you are justified, then you are deceived and damned. If all you must do is believe on Christ, then you are going to hell.

Again, Satan was mixing his offspring with God's true offspring in Christ's day when Jesus taught that the Pharisees were "Ye are of *your* father the devil" (John 8:44). The mixing will continue to occur right through the Tribulation Period when the pressure to worship the Antichrist and the state religion is all-compelling and will divide families.

Mark 13:12

“Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against *their* parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.”

The battle between the two seeds (wheat and tares) is apparent today and it will be obvious during the Tribulation Period. So the beginning and ending days of the mystery period are seen to include this Satanic mixing. All throughout the mystery period represented in these parables there will be this mixing of the true and false together. It's not exclusively applied to today and the time of the Church. However, the mixing would certainly escalate during the Church age as Satan attempts to thwart the purpose of God in the world.



If you order a plate of salad in a restaurant you will often have mixed greens. The greens can in many respects look alike. I like a little pizzazz in my salad. I like some bitter pieces of lettuce mixed in with my salad to give it some flavor. My wife does not like the bitter taste of any greens. However, sometimes you might get a

salad and not be able to detect the bitter greens for they look similar to the rest of the green salad. The two have been mixed together and in some ways look alike. This is what Jesus is teaching in the Parable of the Wheat and Tares.

Matthew 13:24-25

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven (*in its mystery form*) 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.”

Again in this parable the wheat is representative of God's children and the tares (degenerate wheat that looks like the wheat initially) are representative of the devil's children.

In Matthew 13:37-38 Jesus once again gives the interpretation:
“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.”

Satan has counter sown his own children and followers in the “field” or world and they exist and function among God’s children and often they have some kind of religious associations and trappings to make people think they are part of Christianity and followers of that which is good and right.

As we have seen, these tares have a “form of godliness” within the professing church (2 Tim. 3:5) and appear to be part of the genuine wheat field but they are actually degenerate wheat (weeds). They are not the real thing. They are imitators to Christianity. Those involved in the cults, apostate religions, liberal denominationalism, and even those who are members of fundamental local churches can be tares (weeds among the wheat). They might appear to be religious, saved, part of God’s family, and yet they are actually tares (weeds) and not part of God’s redeemed family. They might in specific ways associate with religion, churches, and God but at the same time they might be the devil’s children.

The good news that we must remember that God has also sown His own children throughout the world for Matthew 13:24 talks about “a man which sowed good seed in his field” which refers to the sowing of Christ’s children among the world to accomplish His purpose and plan for their lives on earth (Col. 4:12; Phil. 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:2). This is the positive point in this parable. God has His own redeemed seed in this world so that there would be fruit for His glory. It’s wonderful to be part of God’s purpose and plan that is being accomplished throughout the earth. We can know that we are where God wants us to be and doing His bidding and service. So God’s children are strategically planted or placed all over the world to accomplish His holy and redemptive plan among humanity. But the devil’s children are oversown with them. Both exist together in this mysterious harvest until the Second Coming.

One preacher made this application of the wheat and tares coexisting together: "They grow together. They go to Sunday School together, they go to Training Union together, they do church work together. The Devil puts tares in good churches. he often makes them pray in public, he sometimes makes Sunday school teachers of them. This may sound a little peculiar, but I am persuaded to believe that this chapter teaches that the tares look just about like the wheat. They grow together. They go to church together, may be apparently some of the best members we have, yet the Bible says that they are tares. The Lord said to just let them grow together."

Think about this. We breath the same air, eat the same food, drive the same highways, live in the same neighborhoods, work at the same factories, go to the same schools, shop at the same stores, play at the same playgrounds, and even live in the same homes (Matt. 5:45). Satan knows how to mingle satanic seed with godly seed in an attempt to cause God's people to overstep the boundary of His will and purpose for their lives and thwart God's work in the world. The devil's mixture of the true among the false all over the earth has an evil purpose. It's to override God's work from being accomplished and hinder the children of God from serving and living for the Lord. This has always been true (1 Kings 11:2).

Today the devil allows His children to appear on the television screen and computer to lead people astray and deceive even God's true children away from God's purpose for their lives. He allows his tares to appear in the political world and in the neighborhood where you live so that you might rub shoulders with them and eventually become corrupted. He knows how to mix the two seeds in order to get God's seed away from the will of God. Of course, Satan alsomingles his seed in the marriage and home life.

Deuteronomy 7:3-4

"Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly."

How often has a child of God wanted to marry a child of the devil and reaped a harvest of misery in their life? The tried-and-true mother's saying is still applicable for today:

“Don’t marry a man to reform him.
To God and thine own self be true.
Don’t marry a man to reform him,
You’ll ruin it, dear girl, if you do!”

If we would obey God’s Word, we would save our lives from much heartache and misery (2 Cor. 6:14-17). Satan works by infiltration and deception. This is the primary lesson of the tares among the wheat. This mixing and mysterious harvest has occurred for some 2,000 years and continues to run its course during the mystery period up to the Second Coming of Christ.

Once again, the degenerate wheat or tares is sown “among the wheat” (Matt. 13:25) and the wheat is a reference to genuine Christians and children of God. The devil sows the wicked among God’s children in the arena of church life and the two together constitute what we have called Christendom (the worldwide body of everything and everyone that supposedly represents Christ). Christendom is a hodgepodge of religious beliefs, practices, and people who identify with Christianity. It would include corrupt and liberal denominations and Romanism (Roman Catholicism) which supposedly represents Christianity.

Satan counterfeits God’s true children in the arena of Christendom and church life bringing deception and corruption to the work of God. Satan is running a religious racket. The devil’s biggest operation is religion. His tares show up in the church today. Through false teachers the devil sows deception within the work of God and among the true seed of God’s people (2 Pet. 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1-3). The Evil One infiltrates God’s true children with his own children who pose as Christians, but who are spurious, false, and counterfeit tares.

Yes, Satan is in the business of religion, and he has his own imitation church and people (“the synagogue of Satan” - Rev. 2:9) who hold aberrant views

to Scripture (Rev. 2:15). To reiterate, Satan's seed or children "have a form of godliness" (2 Tim. 3:5) and they are "transforming (masquerading or disguising) themselves into the apostles of Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). In fact, they may even preach "another Jesus" and "another gospel" (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:7). But they appear to be like the wheat (true Christians) by their religious rhetoric and appearance. They appear to be religious, but they are actually wearing a religious mask and peddling Christianity for "they with feigned words make merchandise of you" (2 Pet. 2:3).

We should also be discerning of anyone who comes to your door and preaches another Jesus, like cultists from the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons, both of which are very active and very aggressive at evangelizing their "counterfeit Jesus." These are sons of the Evil One who desires to deceive you with their claim "Why yes, I believe in Jesus just like you do." No they don't. Their Jesus is "another Jesus" and they have "another gospel" which is not the true Gospel. Beware. They are tares among the wheat.

Some preachers who publicly teach the health and wealth gospel are Kenneth Copeland, Creflo, Dollar, and Benny Hinn. They claim Christians can get whatever they pray for with enough faith. They teach that people should pray positive confessions (name it and claim it) to acquire possessions such as houses, cars, clothes, and money. Of course, many times they want you to give to their ministries (make vows) to get back from the Lord. This is the gospel of greed. Prosperity theology has poisoned the church and undermines the ability of Christians to deal with evil and suffering. It's these types of people who may very well be tares among the wheat.

There are many Biblical examples of tares that could be given. Simon Magus was able to deceive Philip in a time of revival. People were being saved and baptized. The city of Samaria was aflame with joy. Simon came to be baptized but Peter saw right through him. Acts 8:21-23 records Peter's words: "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I

perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and *in the bond of iniquity.*" Simon was a tare among God's wheat.

Paul encountered a tare when meeting Elymas for in Acts 13:10 he calls him "full of all subtilty and all mischief, *thou child of the devil.*" This man was also tare among God's wheat. Judas was a tare among God's wheat. Jesus had a tare (degenerate wheat) as a follower! He was a child of the devil mingling with God's true disciples. John 6:70, "Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" Judas stands out in Scripture as an example of how deceptive the devil's seed or tares can be among God's people. For nearly three years Judas passed himself off as a true child of God and could not be distinguished by Christ's disciples (John 13:18-30). There are many like Judas today who wear the correct garb, say the right things, and even do many good things. But they are imposters. They are tares among the wheat.

False prophets and teachers are also tares among the wheat (Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:28-31). You will notice that the tares do not come in howling like a wolf and pouncing on God's sheep but come in secretly and without notice. Paul, Peter, and Jude warn of these false teachers who secretly come in to deceive (Gal. 2:4; 2 Pet. 2:1; Jude vs. 3-4). False brethren ("false brethren unawares" – Gal. 2:4) are tares among the wheat. Many appear to be part of Christianity, but they are not. There are many tares who are generically mimicking Christianity. They wear the cloak of Christianity but are not part of genuine Christianity.

We need to be discerning today. We can often spot them for they are not properly representing Christ and Christianity by what they say and how they live. But in this parable Jesus is teaching that there would be an intermingling and amalgamation of the true and the false (wheat and tares) together in the world. The tares would in deceptive and manipulative ways try and mimic Christianity and cause confusion and delusion among many people.

Many years ago, I was listening to Dr. Lehman Strauss speak on this particular parable of the tares among the wheat. He shared how one day he was in a bookroom of a particular school signing his name on the inside

covers of some of his commentaries. He was doing this for the college students. At one point a man came into the bookstore and said, "I am Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Everybody seemed to be stunned. He repeated himself, "I am Jesus Christ of Nazareth."

Dr. Strauss, seizing the opportunity immediately asked the man to show his hands to the students. He said, "Sir, let everyone see your hands." When putting forth his hands Dr. Strauss quickly informed the man that he was not Jesus Christ. He said, "Sir, you are an imposter. You have no wounds on your hands. The Jesus I know has the nail scars still in His hands. I ask that you leave this campus at once." This man was a tare among the wheat. Although not all tares are this dramatic Satan has his tares among God's wheat in the church today. Some of them sing, preach, and even talk about the Lord but in the end, many times they are found to be only tares and not true Christians.

May I ask you a question? Are you wheat, or are you a weed? How do I know that I am wheat? The Bible says when we express faith in Jesus Christ, we become God's children and part of God's harvest of wheat (Gal. 3:26). This is good news when harvest time comes!

E. The Sleeping

Matthew 13:25 goes on to say:

"But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way."

This is a night scene in the Bible ("while men slept") which suggests that Satan's activities are many times not performed in the open. He works best under the cover of darkness and secrecy. The scene depicts how the workers were sleeping in the evening after a long and hard day's work. This is when the enemy did his diabolical sowing. Of course, the sowing was inevitable for everyone must sleep after a tiring day of work. So the parable is really portraying the inevitable and unstoppable work of Satan that is going to occur throughout this world today. This sowing has happened and will continue to take place right up to the inauguration of the Millennial

kingdom (Matt. 24-25). Nothing will stop the work of the devil from taking place until Christ returns in the Second Coming.

Satan's work is inevitable but at the same time I think there is a practical application and lesson we can learn from this statement. Sometimes we allow Satan to work when we are spiritually lethargic in our Christian life. The enemy makes inroads into the lives of God's people when they are sleeping from a spiritual perspective. This is why Paul exhorts us in 1 Thessalonians 5:5-6, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

Jesus said, "Watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41). The practical lesson is when we become spiritually lethargic we become open to the devil's working and deception. We must live on our spiritual tiptoes and raise our spiritual eyebrows of discernment, realizing the devilish deception is all around. We don't want to be caught off guard and overcome with the devil's deceptive ways.

There is a good Old Testament illustration that portrays the need to stay spiritually alert to the enemy's movements and attacks. It's found in Judges 7:5-6. Gideon was instructed by the Lord to send home those soldiers who bowed down and drank water like a dog (carelessly). He was then instructed to keep those soldiers who drank while remaining on their knees and cupping water in their hand (watchfulness). The practical lesson is this. We need to remain spiritual alert at all times to the enemy's tactics and surprise attacks. We must always remember that the devil is an imitator who attempts to fool us by deception. We can't afford to close our eyes to his deceptive workings. Stay spiritually alert. Beware of an unguarded hour! Don't become spiritually negligent. 2 Corinthians 2:11 says, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices."

Well, the syncretism or merging together of the devil's seed with God's seed is seen in the words, "Let both grow together until the harvest" (Matt. 13:30). At this point, the farmer was giving important instructions.

Matthew 13:26 says:

“But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.”

Initially the tares among the wheat could not be distinguished but at one point in the growth process the tares could be seen to be degenerate wheat. However, it would be too late to pull them out since they would be so intermingled and intertwined with the true harvest.

The servants asked the farmer if they should go out into the field and gather up the tares.

Matthew 13:28

“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.”

Apparently the tares (weeds) could at one point in the growth process be seen for what they really are and the servants thought it would be good to pluck them out of the field. When the heads of the crop become mature, they take on a slight grey color which eventually shows they are degenerate wheat. But since the tares intertwined their roots with the roots of the wheat harvest it was better that both grow together until the harvest time. So the servants of the farmer wanted to uproot the tares but the farmer’s response to his servants is the same response that Jesus gives to His followers today. Jesus said in Matthew 13:29, “Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.”

In other words, to attempt to separate one from the other would prove to be futile or impossible. This statement of not gathering the tares out of the field (vs. 29) is primarily made because God’s seed cannot possibly isolate itself from the devil’s seed in the everyday world of living, human interaction, and day-to-day activity. We are in some sense thoroughly meshed together in an unbelieving world filled with children of the devil. It’s impossible to isolate ourselves from the great multitudes of tares (the devil’s children) in this world. In 1 Corinthians 5:10 told us to separate from the ungodly and not promote their sinful lifestyles. But he qualifies it: “Yet

not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

In addition, it's equally true and understood by this refusal to uproot the tares that God's people should never try to become a political power that wants to uproot or overthrow the present world order by the violence or Christian anarchy (Dominion Theology). The tares are to be part of the world. The true Church is never commissioned to rise up and destroy the tares by building up a Christian empire and army that is designed to do away with all unloyal followers.

Historically, whenever the *professing* church sought to become a political power, it committed sinful atrocities by destroying the lives of people and all those who did not fit into its concept of Christianity. The Foxes Book of Martyrs tells of many who were slaughtered by people claiming to be Christians. During the Crusades in Europe and the Middle East (1095-1291) the so-called Christians planned to take the holy places of Israel back from the Moslems and Turks. In the process they massacred people all across Europe claiming to be God's servants on a holy crusade or pilgrimage. Then too, who can forget the Romanish Inquisition against unrepentant heretics? Thousands upon thousands were murdered for the so-called cause of Christianity.

The point is this. Whenever a *form* of Christianity has become the state religion horrible atrocities have occurred. In any event, Jesus said that it is not the mandate of His followers to overthrow and destroy the tares through political anarchy and power. They were expected to live among the tares and become a witness of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. We are not to begin a holy religious war to destroy the darnel (degenerate wheat) but become a witness to them of Christ's love and salvation. Jesus was a friend of sinners – not an enemy of sinners (Luke 7:34). Also, we should remember that we too were at one time tares or weeds (the devil's children) and it was only by God's grace that we were saved through the faithful witness of God's wheat (God's children).

Let's summarize what we have learned. First, we must understand that eventually the tares (devil's children) will show the true nature of

themselves (“then appeared the tares also” – vs. 26). The devil’s children may disguise themselves for a time but sooner or later their true character will be seen (Matt. 13:21-22). They will follow a pattern of living that will eventually unveil the true nature of themselves.

Second, we must also understand that the Son of God, who is the farmer, has not given the Church the mandate to uproot the tares or separate from them in a complete and final sense throughout this mystery period. This means the Church should not try and distance herself from the unsaved in this world. Rather, the Church should rub shoulders with the unsaved out in the real world – the “field.” There is no reason to isolate ourselves from the tares that are in the world by becoming some type of spiritual hermit or monk. This is important to understand. We live in a world full of tares (weeds). God has allowed this to be so according to His own sovereign plan.

This text reveals that God has not instructed His people to go off and live in some kind of monastery where they can isolate themselves from unsaved people. Again, this would be an impossibility (1 Cor. 5:10). We are not called to hide or isolate ourselves from the unsaved who are living out in the highways and byways of life. Instead, we are to go into the entire world and witness to the lost (Mark 16:15) and demonstrate Christ’s love to them (Gal. 6:10). We are to influence the tares with the Gospel.

Luke 10:2

“Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly [is] great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.”

“For God so loved the world ...” (John 3:16). We too should love the world of lost mankind and be always ready to witness to the tares. People need the Lord. We are sown together with the tares, and we need to make good use of the “field” where God has planted us.

There is an old saying that says: “We are in the world but not of the world.” Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:15 and said, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” The devil’s children cannot be uprooted from God’s children.

According to God's sovereign design and plan both are to dwell together in this world – "let both grow together until the harvest" (Matt. 13:30). The devil's plan is to destroy God's work by mixing his seed with God's seed. But behind the devil's plan is God's sovereign plan.

God says that both will grow together until the harvest time but in the meantime God's children must go to them and share the Gospel message of salvation. Why? So that the devil's children might become God's children. So the weeds might be transformed into wheat. God's reasoning for allowing both to grow together is obvious. His sovereign plan to save a company of people from among the devil's seed or the devil's darnel. This can only come to pass as the church goes into the "uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

God has not called us to sit in our ivory towers but to be an effective witness for Him where He has strategically placed us in the field or world. We all have our space in the world to be an effective witness to the tares. So for this reason both are to grow together. God's children and the devil's children grow together in the world to fulfill God's plan and purpose of saving a company of people, which He will later identify as His "pearl of great price" (Matt.13:46). God's purpose is to call out a people for His name in the midst of the field (Acts 15:14).

Some have erroneously attempted to use this expression ("Let both grow together until the harvest" – vs. 30) as a proof text to support ecumenicalism in the Church today. They reason that both the wheat and the tares are to grow together in the Church today. Therefore, there is no reason to try and separate from ecumenical practices that harbor the unsaved within liberal denominations and Christ rejecting religions. Of course, this conclusion ignores the interpretation of the parable. The field is not said to be the Church but the world ("the field is the world" - vs. 38). What a difference this makes! Jesus means what He says and says what He means. If Jesus had wanted to use the term Church, then He would have. But Jesus would never contradict what the New Testament epistles teach about the local Church.

When it comes to the Church, we have every right to pull out the darnel (degenerate wheat) and separate from unbelievers who are promoting

paganism and a false doctrine and religion (2 Cor. 6:14-17). The local Church is commanded to cut herself off from the religious tares of Satan's seed and all apostasy (1 Tim. 6:5 – "from such withdraw thyself"). We have every right to mark the unsaved false teachers (Rom. 16:15), expose heretics (Titus 3:10), false teachers (Matt. 7:15-16), and refuse fellowship with the apostate practices of unbelievers in the context of a local Church setting (Eph. 5:11). God has never told us to allow the tares to spiritually pollute local Church life and ministry.

There are times we must uproot the darnel. In other words, we are not to allow the tares to integrate with God's redeemed and push their religious apostasy and worldly agenda on God's true Church. We must deal with sin in the local Church setting. This often involves dealing with the tares that are attempting to promote their apostate religious cause and false agenda in the local church. So the field is the world and not the local church. This means we can grow together in the world but not in the Church.



Harvest is normally a time of rejoicing for the farmer. He is harvesting a crop that will not only help feed his own family but also others. In selling His crop he can make provisions for next year's crop and continue the cycle. In Matthew 13 Jesus spoke about a crop that will be harvested at the end of the age, a time following the completion

of the seven-year Tribulation Period, just prior to the beginning of the Millennium (the 1,000 years).

Jesus once again reminds us in Matthew 13:30:

"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."

In Matthew 13:39 Jesus gives us the interpretation:

"The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world (age); and the reapers are the angels."

Before getting into the harvest at the end of the age, I would like to briefly mention several other harvest scenes in the Bible that occur before the end of the age. They will lead up to the final harvest at the end of the age when Christ returns in His Second Coming. So we will look at the practical part of the harvest today and then the prophetic nature of the harvest during the End Times.

➤ **The natural harvest that God provides.**

Genesis 8:22

"While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

The common grace and goodness of God gives us the seasons which align with planting seed and harvesting. Without God's blessing of the seasons and harvest mankind could not survive on earth. The earth remains supplied by God's provision in blessing us with seasons and crops.

"Come, ye thankful people, come,
Raise the song of harvest home!
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin;
God, our Maker, doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come;
Raise the song of harvest home!"

➤ **The sinful harvest that God requires.**

"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). This is a harvest that relates to all of us in some way. This statement is actually placed in the context of supporting Christian teachers of the Word of God (Gal. 6:6). Although others may not notice our neglect of God's servants, He

sees it, and gives a harvest accordingly. We reap what we sow, and we reap in greater quantities than we sow. When the farmer sows wheat, he reaps wheat, sometimes thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold.

God will not be “mocked” (snubbed, sneered at, to turn one’s nose up at God) when it comes to the law of reaping and sowing. God will not overlook what we are sowing. We will get what is coming to us. Galatians 6:8 reminds us that if a person sows to please his sinful nature, that is, if he spends his money to indulge the flesh, he will reap a harvest that will fade into oblivion. On the other hand, if he uses his funds to support the Lord’s work, which is indicated by sowing to please the Spirit, he will reap a harvest that will last forever.

Paul was dealing primarily with the question of financial support of Christian workers in the Galatian churches. Of course, there is a broader application of the principle of sowing and reaping. Sowing to the flesh (sin nature) will reap corruption (moral decay which is perishable and will not last), like rotten bananas, but sowing to the Holy Spirit (God’s work and ministry) will reap spiritual blessings in this life and eternal dividends at the Judgment Seat of Christ (a harvest of reward). So, “let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9).

➤ **The spiritual harvest that God describes.**

John 4:35

“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”

Vance Havner said:

“The tragedy of our time is that the situation is desperate but the saints are not.”

Jesus speaks of the urgency of reaching lost souls when he said, “look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.”

We need to VISUALIZE. "Lift up your eyes." We need to see people the way Jesus sees them as suffering sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36) heading towards a Christless eternity. Vision and compassion is what we need.

"Let me see this world, dear Lord,
As though I were looking through Your eyes.
A world of men who don't want You Lord,
But a world for which You died.
Let me kneel with You in the garden,
Blur my eyes with tears of agony;
For if once I could see this world the way You see,
I just know I'd serve You more faithfully."

There was a man, a salesman who was sent by a shoe company to Africa. So he went to Africa, he got there and when he got off the plane, he saw the people. And he immediately called back to his headquarters and said, "I'm in Africa now, but I don't think we will have any business here. Everybody walks around barefooted, they don't wear shoes, they don't need shoes, send me back right away."

Well, an hour later, another salesman of another shoe company was arriving in Africa. He got off the plane, he saw the people and he also called back to his headquarters and said, "this is amazing, there's so many people here who need shoes. They're barefooted, send all the shoes here." Here were two men who saw the same things but had very different perspectives. And so it is for us. We can bypass the needs of people or see them and reach out to them.

We need to agonize. This means we must express a burden and compassion for the lost.

Matthew 9:36

"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."

For Jesus, he saw the needs of people. He looked beyond their fault and saw their need! Jesus did not look at their problems and issues and how they were irritating people. He looked beyond all of this and saw how lost they were and in need of grace and mercy.

We need to MOBALIZE.

Luke 10:2

“Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly *is* great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.”

In other words, we need to come together in prayer and ask that God’s people would become the kind of spiritual combines that God needs to bring in the harvest of lost souls. But we must not only pray. We need to go out into the “field” (Matt. 13:38) which is where the harvest is found. We need to be willing and ready to be part of the answer in reaching souls in need of salvation.

Mark 16:15

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”

Charles Spurgeon said:

“If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”

Andrew Murray at a mission conference in 1910, 123 years ago, said this: “we shall need three times more men, four times more money, and seven times more prayer.”

Fanny Crosby wrote:

“Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Snatch them in pity from sin and the grave.
Weep over the erring one, lift up the fallen,
Tell them of Jesus, the mighty to save.”

The reason we need to see people saved today is to deliver them from the harvest at the end of the age which will bring judgment upon the lost.

➤ **The judgment harvest that God divides.**

"The harvest is the end of the age" (Matt. 13:39).

This brings us back to our study in Matthew 13. As we are about to see, the focus of this End Time harvest is to separate or divide the weeds from the wheat, the children of God from the children of the devil, who have survived the seven-year Tribulation Period and who will be harvested by Christ as His Second Coming to earth. The unsaved will enter judgment and the saved will enter the earthly kingdom (Millennium).

This brings us back to our study of the Parable of the Tares and Wheat and our next point which is prophetic in nature.

F. The Separation

This is what will occur at the end of the age when Jesus returns as the King to judge the earth and establish His Kingdom.

Matthew 13:30

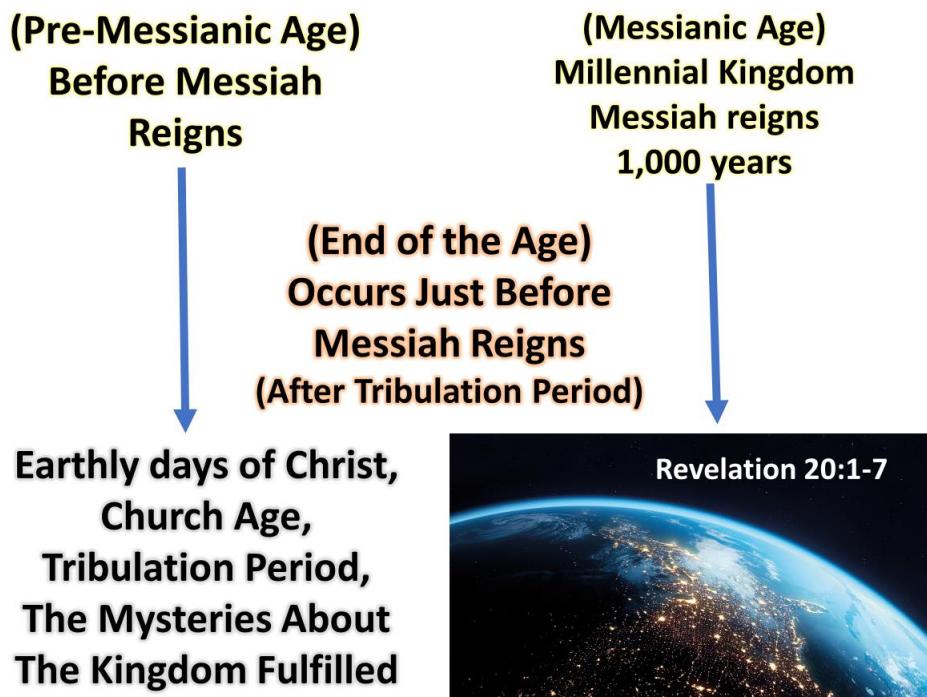
"Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them (*referring to the unsaved who are judged at the Second Coming*): but gather the wheat into my barn" (*a reference to the saved who enter the Millennium at the Second Coming*).

Again, this last point in the second parable is prophetic in its fulfillment.

I remember how my mother used to make us pull weeds in the garden when we were younger. Pulling weeds was not one of my favorite jobs. But it was necessary to separate the weeds from the vegetables or else the weeds would eventually overtake the garden. I remember walking with my wife down a country lane and noticed how one garden was completely overtaken by weeds. The gardener had obviously given up on the garden

and had failed to separate the weeds from the vegetables. In this parable the farmer told his workers to wait until the harvest to separate the tares (degenerate wheat) from the true wheat. Both were to grow together until the time of harvest and then a separation was to take place.

We have already commented on how the field is the world where both the unsaved (tares) and saved (wheat) must function and live together until the time of harvest. God's people are never commissioned to isolate themselves from the unsaved out in the everyday world. God's sovereign plan is for His children and the devil's children to coexist together in the world until the time of the harvest when the Son returns to separate the tares (unsaved) from the wheat (saved). When will this ultimate separation take place? It will occur when Jesus returns to establish His Millennial Kingdom – the time when the mystery period ends. The Bible calls it "the time of harvest" which is later interpreted by our Lord in Matthew 13:39 as "the end of the world" (age) which is the ending of the period of time in history before Messiah reigns over the earth.



This is not the end of the world that Jesus is talking about but the end of the age. The ending of the world (2 Pet. 3:10-11) as we know it will occur

later in God's prophetic program following the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ (Rev. 20:10). The Greek word "aion" refers to a specific time period when God will move in judgment at the Second Coming of Christ. This phrase appears several times in these parables and means the same thing. The ending of the age refers to an era of time immediately before Messiah rules planet earth (Matt. 39-40, 49). It ends at one point after the Tribulation Period has expired in conjunction with Christ's Second Coming.

The disciples referred to the same time in Matthew 24:3 where Christ spoke of His Second Coming following the Tribulation Period (Matt. 24:27-31). Remember that these parables carry us through the Tribulation Period of seven years and right up to the time when the King returns to establish His Millennial Kingdom. The time period of the mysteries of the kingdom encompass the era between Israel's rejection and the King's return in power and great glory to judge planet earth (Rev. 19:11-16). These parables then reveal a prophetic judgment that is going to occur after the mystery period has run its course. The harvesting and judgment is associated with the King's return (the return of Jesus Christ in His Second Coming).

The disciples were probably wondering what was going to happen to the unsaved in the first parable who bear no fruit and the tares that Jesus had been talking about in the second parable. What is going to happen to those who reject the Messiah? Jesus is now going to describe to His followers that He will bring judgment against the unsaved when the mystery period of the kingdom runs its course. The tares or spurious fruit will be harvested for judgment in the End Time. The "time of harvest" (vs. 30) is actually a harvest of judgment. The book of Revelation describes the Second Coming of Christ to earth as a time of judgment, which is also pictured as a harvest of judgment.

Revelation 14:14-20 envisions His harvest judgment upon the troops in the land of Palestine at the Second Coming: "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his

sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.

"And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand *and* six hundred furlongs."

This is a harvest of judgment! Words cannot accurately describe how terrible it will be when the Son of man returns to burn the tares! This scene envisions the wrath of the Lamb (Jesus Christ) moving throughout Palestine to destroy the soldiers who have come against Israel and the returning Messiah and King. They will face their doom on earth and damnation in hades at the Second Coming.



Revelation 14:20 once again reveals this gruesome scene: "And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles (the depth of the blood), by the space of a thousand *and* six hundred furlongs" (the distance of the blood - 200 miles - the approximate length of the land of Palestine).

Apparently there will be a mix of conventional and non-conventional warfare during the Tribulation Period with the mention of untold millions of horses in the land of Palestine.

One veterinarian concluded: "There is a rough rule to determine how much blood a horse has. Depending on the breed you can estimate that 6-10% of

the body weight is blood. Arabians and Thoroughbreds would be the highest, draft horses the lowest. A 1000 lb. Thoroughbred would have about 100 pounds or roughly 100 pints (50 quarts) of blood."

Most experts claim that the human body contains approximately 6 quarts (or 5.6 liters) of blood. The blood of the untold millions of soldiers in Palestine, perhaps as many as one billion, who are killed, will flow as deep as the horse bridles (Rev. 14:20). Some doubt the literal fulfillment of this prophecy and conclude that the blood will only be spattered to the horse bridles. I have never accepted this interpretation. The topography of Palestine is going to drastically change s a result of the End time earthquake at the end of the Tribulation period (Rev. 16:17-20). There will be newly formed trenches and furrows that have been created throughout the land of Palestine in view of the horrific End Time earthquake which will carry the blood of billions of soldiers and horses through these newly formed trenches. The carrion birds will feast upon the rotting flesh of soldiers in a meal that is called the great supper of God. This will be the greatest holocaust of humanity every witnessed by mankind.

Revelation 19:17-18 prophetically speaks of this day:

"And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great."

Nothing will be left of these soldiers except decaying and rotting flesh, organs, bones, and blood. This indeed will be a feast for the fowls. It will be Thanksgiving Day for these birds of prey.

A variety of factors can ruin a harvest depending upon where the crops are. Too much rain keeps farmers out of the field and deteriorates the crop. Too much humidity will keep grains and cotton from being harvested. We know that fires can destroy the crop before it is gathered. Drought, salinity, and extreme temperatures are major causes of crop destruction worldwide. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that 90% of crop losses are

related to extreme weather such as the direct impact of summer drought, floods, and severe storms.

In Christ's parable of the tares among the wheat, the Bible teaches that part of the crop will be destroyed at the Second Coming of Christ.

After the destruction of a harvest of troops in Palestine (Rev. 14:20) at the Second Coming of Christ, the parable of Matthew 13 depicts that the remaining harvest of unsaved humanity on earth will be gathered and thrust into the judgment and torment of Hades. Again, this will occur in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ to earth.

Matthew 13:30 gives the prophetic command:

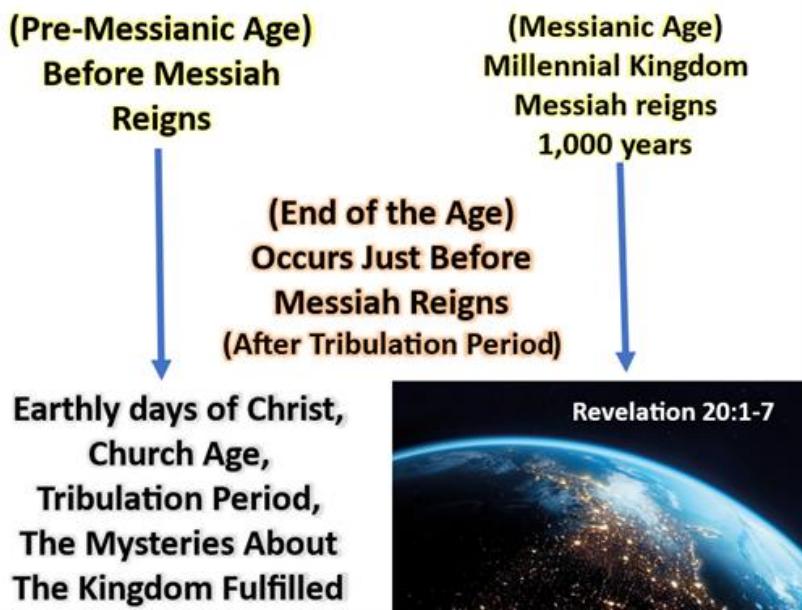
"Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

Jesus once again interprets the prophetic judgment aspect of this parable in Matthew 13:38-43: "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 (*age*); and the reapers are the angels (*who supernaturally gather the harvest*). As therefore the tares (*the unsaved*) are gathered and burned in the fire (*the judgment of hades*); so shall it be in the end of this world (*the age before Messiah rules*). The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom (*at the inauguration and inception of the Millennium the unsaved are removed*) all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire (*the unsaved are raptured and removed from earth to a place of judgment in Hades to experience God's wrath*): there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth (*weeping because of extreme anguish, utter despair, hopelessness, and the clenching of the teeth because of physical pain*). Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom (*the entrance of the saved into the Millennial Kingdom – the 1,000 years*) of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Let's outline this prophetic time of judgment to better understand it.

1. The Timing of the Judgment

This prophetic scene is reenacted many times throughout the Scriptures. The Judgment of the Living Nations (those people who survive the Tribulation Period) will occur when Christ returns to planet earth to establish His earthly Kingdom. He will return to judge the populated nations living on earth who are filled with tares or degenerate wheat. The judgment occurs at the end of the age which is after the Tribulation Period has expired and just prior to the rule of Messiah over the earth. Let's review this chart one more time that gives us the overview of the two basic ages.



As previously mentioned, the ending of the age refers to an era of time immediately before Messiah rules planet earth (Matt. 39-40, 49). It ends at one point after the Tribulation Period has expired in conjunction with Christ's Second Coming, a specific time which no person can know (Matt. 24:36).

Jesus taught in Matthew 24:29-30: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and

then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

The Tribulation Period on earth is a time of unprecedented judgment designed to unleash God's wrath upon the unsaved dwelling on planet earth (Rev. 3:10; Matt. 24:21; Isa. 13:9, 13; Jer. 30:7). Christ's return in His Second Coming (not the Rapture) will bring His final judgment upon earth dwellers that are still living. They will be the last tares to be judged by the King when He returns riding on a white horse. The kingly Christ will judge them before He sets up His promised kingdom. This will occur at one point "after the tribulation of those days" (Matt. 24:29).

Posttribulationists believe the Rapture occurs after the seven-year Tribulation Period (mixing the event of the Rapture with the Second Coming) and they teach the harvest of the saved and unsaved souls is a reference to the Rapture of the Church. But this is an incorrect conclusion for several reasons.

First, the Rapture is not associated with a universal gathering of the saved and unsaved at the same time (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Only those who are "in Christ" (Church Age saints) will take part in the Rapture. There is no mention in any Rapture passage of the unsaved being gathered for judgment by angelic reapers. No judgment occurs in relation to the Rapture event. The harvest of judgment in Matthew 13:38-43 occurs at the Second Coming of Christ when He returns to earth.

Second, the Rapture cannot possibly be in view in the parables of Matthew 13 or 24. The Rapture is an event where Jesus will take His saints back to Heaven (John 14:1-3). However, the Second Coming which is represented in these parables deals with the saint's entrance into the kingdom – not Heaven (Matt. 13:43). The same is true in Matthew 24 with the focus on entrance into the earthly kingdom – not Heaven (Matt. 25:31-34). Matthew 13 is an earthly coming with earthly events dealing with His earthly kingdom. It has nothing to do with saints being raptured to Heaven.

Many students of Bible prophecy try to view the Rapture and Second Coming as the same event. They mix the two events together. But there are two separate events which differ in many details. For instance, Christ

cannot take His Church back to Heaven while return at the same time. In the Rapture God's children are taken to Heaven (John 14:1-3) and in the Second Coming Satan's children are taken to judgment as seen in the parables and prophetic portions of Scripture (Matt. 13, 24, 25). Christ is not seen judging the earth at the event of the Rapture but only in His Second Coming. The Rapture occurs before the seven-year Tribulation Period, but Christ's Second Coming occurs after the Tribulation Period (Matt. 24:29). Following the Rapture there is a heavenly marriage of the Church (Rev. 19:7-8) but following the Second Coming the kingdom (the Millennium) is established on earth (Rev. 19-20).

A chart will help us to see the differences between Christ's return in the Rapture and His return in His Second Coming to earth.

Event of the Rapture	Event of the Second Coming
God's Children Raptured to Heaven John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 4:17-18	Satan's Children Raptured to Judgment (Reversal of Rapture) Matthew 13:38-43 Matthew 24:36-39
Imminent and signless Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 3:11; 22:12. 20	Follows Predicted Signs Occurring During & After the Tribulation Matt. 24:29-34
Christ Does Not Judge the earth	Christ Judges the Earth (2 Thess. 1:7-8); Rev. 19:11-19
Occurs Before Tribulation (Rev. 3:10)	Occurs After Tribulation (Matt. 24:29)
Christ Claims His Bride 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27	Christ Comes With His Bride Rev. 19:7-9, 11-14
Heavenly Marriage With Church (Matt. 19:7-8)	Earthly Kingdom Established (Rev. 20:1-7)

2. The Angelic Participation in the Judgment

The disciples were to be the sowers during this age but the angels are going to be the reapers at the end of the age. The Bible says that at this specific

time of judgment “the reapers are the angels” (Matt. 13:39). Angels are going to have a special part in this worldwide harvest of judgment.

Apparently the angels are going to miraculously gather the tares or unsaved before the King so that they can be cast into judgment. Notice the repeated emphasis on angelic assistance during this time of terrible judgment.

Matthew 13:30

“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.”



“The reapers are the angels”
(Matthew 13:39)

Matthew 13:39

“The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.”

Matthew 13:40-41 identifies the reapers as 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 (*as the agents of judgment*), and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.”

The Parable of the Tares seems to be focusing on all the degenerate wheat (both Jews and Gentiles) who will be taken to judgment at the Second Coming for the angels “shall gather out of his kingdom (both Jewish and Gentile humanity) all things that offend.” At one point when Jesus returns the tares or unbelievers will be cast out of the newly inaugurated or established kingdom over the earth. At the very inception and commencement of the earthly kingdom the unsaved will be cast into the judgment of Hades. This means the unsaved will not be allowed to be part

of the kingdom reign upon planet earth. The angels will swoop down and gather them in this harvest of judgment to be judged by the King.

Matthew 13:49 gives the same conclusion in the parable of the dragnet: “So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked (*unsaved*) from among the just” (*saved*).

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 also speaks of the harvesting work of angels at the Second Coming: “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

A scene comes to my mind from the old “Wizard of Oz” classic. At one point, the witches flying monkeys (untold numbers of them) were seen flying and then swooping down to pick up Dorothy. This scene reminds me how the angels will supernaturally gather the unsaved at the Second Coming to send them off to judgment. It will be a time of terror and something unlike the world has ever seen. Billions of unsaved people gathered as a harvest to experience God’s wrath.

Jesus repeats this same prophetic scenario in Matthew 24 where the context is again referring to His return to planet earth following the Tribulation Period. Once again, we see how angels will take an active role in gathering people to face the judgment of the King.

Matthew 24:31 prophetically reveals this: “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect (*the Jewish people*) from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

This is not the same trumpet that will sound in the Rapture seven years earlier (1 Thess. 4:13; 1 Cor. 15:52). It’s a trumpet that will sound in conjunction with the Second Coming of Christ to earth. Not all the trumpets in the Bible are referring to same trumpet for they are blown at different times and for different reasons.



"trump of God"

"last trump"

Occurs at Rapture

(1 Thess. 4:13; 1Cor. 15:52)

BEFORE TRIBULATION

BEGINS (Rev. 3:10)

"sound of trumpet"

(Matt. 24:31)

Occurs at Second Coming

AFTER TRIBULATION

Expires

(Matt. 24:29)



In this same prophetic scenario, the angels are seen gathering God's elect (national Israel) from all over the globe. The Jewish people will be miraculously gathered and examined to see whether or not they have placed genuine faith in the Messiah. There will be tares among the Jewish nation when the King returns (Ezekiel 20:33-38) even as there were tares living with Jesus during His earthly ministry (John 6:70). As we will see later, the Gentile masses of people will also be gathered from around the earth and judged (Matt. 25:31-46).

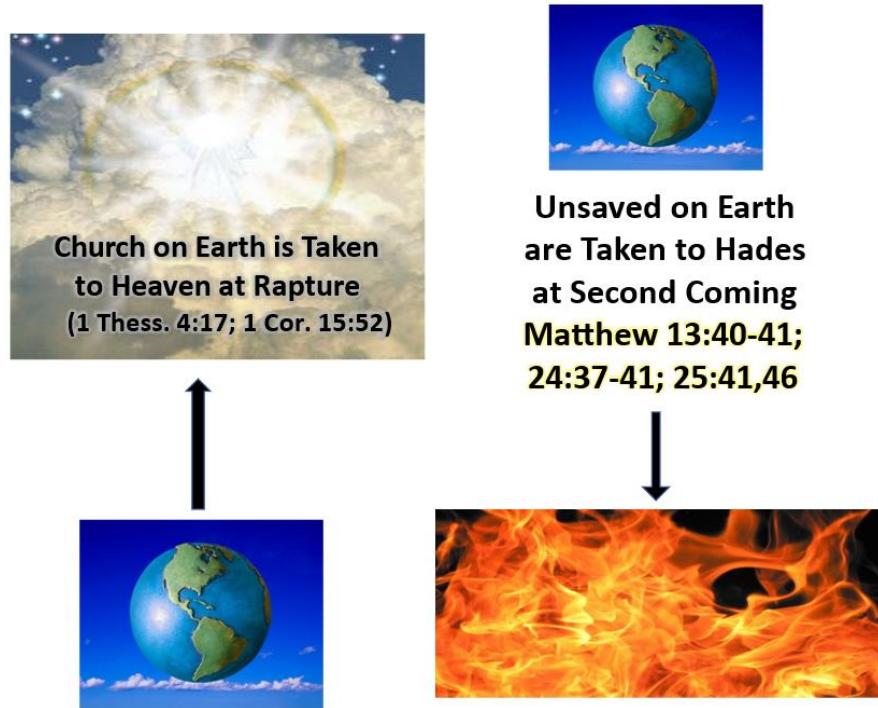
The angels are going to be busy when the King returns! They will be summoned by the King to gather the Jews and Gentile masses of the world for a day of reckoning. All living people among the nations of the world will be gathered and examined by the King to see whether they will enter the earthly theocracy. If they have placed faith in Christ, they will enter the earthly kingdom (the Millennium), but if they have rejected the gracious offer of salvation they will be thrown into judgment.

This brings us to our next point in this prophetic harvest scene.

3. The Results of the Judgment

The Scriptures are very clear on the specific details of this judgment. Comparing Scripture with Scripture gives us a rather detailed analysis of

this judgment at the end of the age when Jesus returns as the Judge and King to reign over the earth. The separation of the tares from the wheat is actually a reversal of the Rapture.



In the Rapture the saved are removed from the earth into their heavenly home as previously noted (John 14:3) but in the event of the Second Coming it's the unsaved who are removed from earth to Hades (the place of judgment). Jesus taught, "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them" (Matt. 13:30, 40-41). The gathering of the tares (weeds) is the opposite of what occurs at the Rapture. Again, in the Rapture believers are taken to Heaven but in this prophetic scene of the Second Coming unbelievers are taken or raptured away to judgment.

In this worldwide judgment at the Second Coming, we repeatedly discover from the prophetic and parabolic teachings of Christ that it's always the wicked (the unsaved) who are raptured and taken away to judgment.

Matthew 13:30 once again gives us the agricultural and harvest picture: "Let both (*the tares and wheat*) 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 (*a picture of judgment upon the*

unsaved at the Second Coming): but gather the wheat into my barn” (a picture of the messianic kingdom or Millennium – the 1,000 year reign of Christ).

“Gather ye together first the tares (the unsaved), and bind them in bundles to burn them”



Pictures the Judgment of Hades

**“cast them into a furnace of fire”
Matthew 13:42,50**

Harvest at Second Coming

“but gather the wheat (the saved) into my barn”



Pictures the Millenium (1,000 years)

Allow me to reiterate Matthew 13:39-42 and Jesus' own interpretation of this parable: “The enemy that sowed them (*the tares among the wheat*) is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world (*the age before Messiah rules*); 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 (*end of the pre-messianic age before Messiah rules*). 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 (*the unsaved or unbelievers are taken away to judgment*); And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew frequently mentioned the reaction of “wailing and gnashing of teeth” in relation to judgment (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), and Luke mentioned it once (Luke 13:28). Each time it is used, it refers to judgment on sinners before the Millennium is established. “Weeping” suggests sorrow and grief (emotional agony of the lost in hell) and the

biting or grinding of one's teeth speaks of pain (physical agony in hell). The teeth will be clenched because of the intense pain they are experiencing.

Jesus taught this same truth concerning the judgment of the unsaved in Matthew 8:11-12: "And I say unto you, That many (*many Gentiles*) shall come from the east and west (*from all parts of the world*), and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven (*the Millennial Kingdom – the time that Heaven rules the earth*). But the children of the kingdom (*the natural Jewish descendants and heirs of the kingdom promises won't get into the Millennium for their rejection of the Messiah*) shall be cast out into outer darkness (*the judgment of Hades*): there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (*a reference to emotional and physical pain in Hades*).

Many of the Jews by their birth or Jewish heritage believed they were God's children and would one day enter the earthly kingdom. However, Jesus said they will not be allowed to enjoy the earthly theocracy. This is because of their rejection of the Messiah and not placing their faith in Him as their Savior. For this reason, at the inception of beginning of the Millennium, the unsaved Jews, along with all other unbelievers, will be removed by the angels and taken to Hades where they will experience tremendous sorrow and pain as they are punished for their sins. Some have suggested that the "gnashing teeth" may also be an expression of their own wrath and hatred against Christ for sending them to this awful place since the word can also connote "growling and snarling."

One thing is certain, this will be an awful place of judgment for sinners who are being punished for their sins.

J. C. Ryle, over 100 years ago, wrote this:

"A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. Men are beginning to tell us 'that God is too merciful to punish souls for ever...that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly...will sooner or later be saved.' We are to embrace what is called 'kinder theology,' and treat hell as a pagan fable...This question lies at the very foundation of the whole Gospel. The moral attributes of God, His justice, His holiness, His purity, are all involved in it. The Scripture has spoken plainly and fully on the subject of hell... If

words mean anything, there is such a place as hell. If texts are to be interpreted fairly, there are those who will be cast into it..."

One day, when Vice President Calvin Coolidge was presiding over the Senate, one Senator angrily told another to go "straight to hell." The offended Senator complained to Coolidge as presiding officer, and Cal looked up from the book he had been leafing through while listening to the debate. "I've been looking through the rule book," he said. "and you don't have to go to hell."

And yet, many people will die a sinner's death and end up in Hell for rejecting Christ's salvation.

Betty Eadie's bestseller "Embraced By The Light" was on the New York Times bestseller list for more than 40 weeks, including 5 weeks as #1. In the book she concludes that the idea of Hell and judgment are nowhere to be found. In November 1973 Eadie allegedly died after undergoing a hysterectomy and returned five hours later with the secrets of Heaven revealed by Jesus. Eadie says that Jesus "never wanted to do or say anything that would offend me" while she visited Heaven. She concluded in her book that Jesus seems to be relegated to the role of a happy tour guide in Heaven, not the Savior of the world who died on the cross.

Of course, people have been trying to get rid of Hell and God's wrath to ease their own sinful conscience. But God's Word is very clear that there is a place of judgment and all sinners who have rejected Jesus Christ as their Savior will end up in a place where they will experience emotional anguish and physical pain. Hell is for real. It's not the invention of Dante. Jesus spoke about the place called Hell many times during His earthly ministry.

The descriptive places of Hades and the Lake of Fire are frightening places where people will suffer because of their sins and rebellion against God. The word translated "hell" in our English Bibles sometimes should be translated "hades" (Luke 10:15; 16:23; Rev. 1:18; 20:13) which is the place of temporary suffering for the unsaved. Other times it can be translated as "Gehenna" which is a reference to the final place of judgment – the Lake of Fire (Matt. 23:15; 33; Mark 9:45). The unsaved will be resurrected to stand

before the Great White Throne and be judged in the Lake of Fire at the end of time (Rev. 20:11-15). The parables of Matthew 13 are focusing on the unsaved being cast into Hades, the temporary place of suffering and judgment, where they are awaiting their final judgment and separation from God in the Lake of Fire.

Hades is the intermediate place of judgment where the rich man went and where people are sent at the Second Coming.

Luke 16:23



The Lake of Fire is the eternal place of judgment where people experience a final separation from God.

Revelation 20:11-15

On one occasion Robert G. Ingersoll, the famous agnostic lecturer, was announced to give an address on Hell. He declared he would prove conclusively that hell was a wild dream of some scheming theologians who invented it to terrify credulous people. As he was launching into his subject, a half-drunken man arose in the audience and exclaimed, "Make it strong, Bob. There's a lot of us poor fellows depending on you. If you are wrong and there is a hell, we are all lost. So be sure you prove it clear and plain."

No amount of reasoning can nullify God's sure word that there is a Hell. We have discovered this in the Parable of the Tares. We have seen in this parable how the tares are taken to the place of judgment (Hades) where they will experience the wrath of God and then later be resurrected to stand before the Great White Throne Judgment and cast into the Lake of Fire. The tares or weeds (the unsaved) are judged but the wheat (the

saved) are spared from judgment as the Second Coming and will enter the Millennium (Matt. 13:30, 36-43).

This same prophetic scene is seen elsewhere in the book of Matthew. The unsaved are severed (raptured) from among the saved to encounter Christ's judgment as the Second Coming.



Matthew 13:47-50 interprets another parable in a similar fashion making a distinction between good and worthless sea creatures: "Again, the kingdom of heaven (*in its mystery form*) 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 age before Messiah rules*): the angels shall come forth, and sever (*separate*) the wicked (*the unsaved*) from among the just (*the saved*), And shall cast them into the furnace of fire (*the place of Hades to be judged for their sins*): there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (*weeping because of their extreme emotional anguish and clench their teeth in pain*).

The prophetic imagery of the unsaved being separated from the unsaved points to snatching them away into judgment which is described as a "fiery furnace." The judgment for the unsaved is described in terms of fire. Fire is not merely a symbol of judgment but is literal and becomes part of the horrible judgment that is going to be inflicted upon the lost. The imagery of farmers throwing tares into a burning fire during the harvest time (Matt. 13:30) would give an accurate picture of the fate of the unsaved who will be living when Jesus returns to the earth.

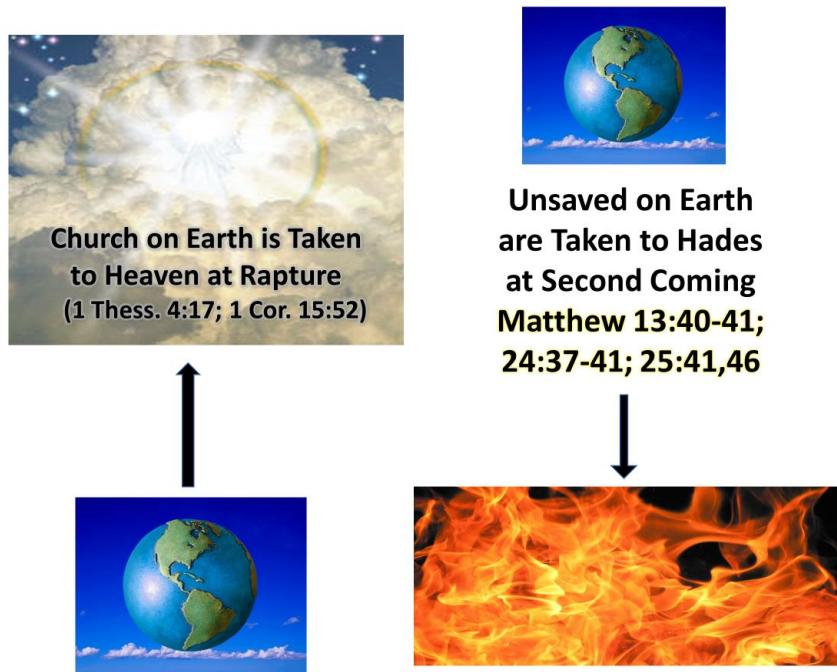
Many years ago I was involve with a music group. We were traveling in Corning, New York and decided to tour the place where they made the

famous glass dishes. I remember walking through this place and seeing a giant roaring furnace that was used in the process of making the glass. I thought to myself, “I’m glad I will not experience the “fiery furnace” of Hell. These words of description of future judgment are intended to portray a terrible future for the unsaved who throughout eternity will be punished for their sins.

These prophetic texts reveal that only the SAVED people who have survived the seven-year Tribulation Period will enter and enjoy the earthly Kingdom. They will be locked out. The UNSAVED will be raptured away and cast out of the Millennium or restored theocracy at its inception or beginning. All of this occurs at the Second Coming of Christ – His return to earth as the Judge and King.

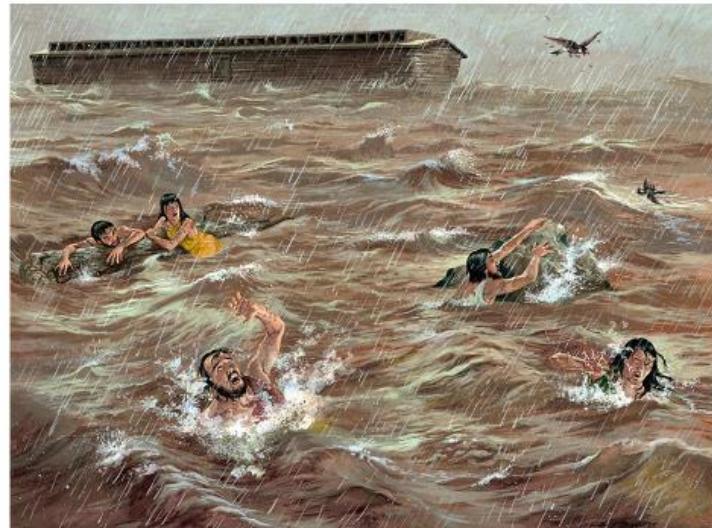
Jesus spoke about this same event in Matthew 24 where He introduces His Second Coming and what will transpire when He returns to earth. The same prophetic imagery of unbelievers being taken to judgment is revealed in the teachings of Jesus. Yes, there is snatching away or rapture of unbelievers to judgment.

Let’s review this chart again to help us understand this unique judgment that will occur at the Second Coming. It’s a reversal of the Rapture.



Matthew 24:36-39 is placed in the context of the JEWISH PEOPLE and the Second Coming: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man (*the precise moment of the Second Coming*), no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away (*to death and judgment*); so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (*the Second Coming*).

Who was taken away during the Genesis Flood? A picture gives us the answer. A picture is worth a thousand words. It was the unbelievers who were taken away to judgment for they died when they were swept away in the global flood waters to ultimately face their doom in Hades.



judged at the Second Coming and the wheat (God’s children) will be left behind to enter the Millennial Kingdom (the 1,000 years) and repopulate the earth.

Who was left behind? No, you don’t have to be a rocket scientist to figure this out. It was Noah and his family (the believers) who were left behind to repopulate the earth. This is what Jesus is teaching in Matthew 13:30. The tares (devil’s children) will be gathered together (raptured) and

I’m so glad that Jesus Christ is our ark of safety today (1 Pet. 3:20) in whom we can hide possessing the absolute assurance that our salvation is in Christ.

At the Creation Museum in Kentucky, they built a replica of Noah's Ark. My wife and I were able to see this wonderful crafting of Noah's ark, according to the specs given in Genesis. There was only one thing about it that was not Scriptural. There were EXIT signs in the ark! I don't think Noah had any exit signs on the ark! Why? Because God would preserve him and his family to repopulate the earth. In a similar way, Jesus will preserve some of His own children (representative of the wheat) to enter the earthly kingdom.



We can now read Matthew 24:40 in the correct context of the Second Coming and with the correct illustration of the Genesis Flood in our minds: "Then (as in Noah's Day) shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken (*taken judgment like the unsaved in the days of Noah*), and the other left (*left to go into the Millennial Kingdom like Noah and his family were left to inhabit the new world of the post-Flood world*)."

Even many dispensationalists and pretribulationists incorrectly assume these verses are referring to the Rapture of the Church because they sound like the Rapture. However, the entire chapters of Matthew 24-25 envision the Second Coming of Christ to earth and have nothing to do with Rapture truth.

Remember that Matthew 24:29 gives us the background and setting of Matthew 24: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." This means that everything else that follows in Matthew 24-25 is

**After the
Tribulation
of Those Days**

Matthew 24:29

dealing with events that transpire after the Tribulation Period has expired. They could not possibly be referring to the Rapture.

Pretribulationists embrace the Biblical truth that the Church will not be present on earth during the Tribulation Period and at the Second Coming but is raptured seven years prior to this event in the Rapture. Since this is true, how can Matthew 24 refer to the Rapture? The prophetic chapters of Matthew 24-25 are placed in the context of the Second Coming of Christ to earth. Neither the Church nor the Rapture are seen in these prophetic scenes. In fact, in every prophetic context and explanation related to the Second Coming it's always the unsaved people on earth that are being raptured and taken to judgment. This will not only be true regarding the unsaved Jews as is discussed here but also for unsaved Gentiles who are still living at the Second Coming. They too will be taken to judgment at the Second Advent. We will see this in a moment.

My wife and I were watching an old 70's film called "A Thief in the Night." I noticed that they got the Matthew 24:40 Bible text ("the one shall be taken") mixed up with the Rapture of the Church. Maybe you have as well. It's easy to do. Again, this is not talking about people being raptured to Heaven but taken or raptured to judgment at the Second Coming.

In the event of the Rapture (Christ's return for the Church) the SAVED are raptured and taken to Heaven (1 Thess. 4:13-18).



In the event of Christ's Second Coming and return to earth the UNSAVED are raptured and taken to Judgment (Matthew 13:38-43; 47-50; Matt. 24:36-40; 25:31-46).



Again, all these parabolic and prophetic illustrations portray a REVERSAL of the Rapture. In the Secret Coming of the Rapture for His Church the SAVED are taken to Heaven and rescued from God's judgment and the UNSAVED are left on earth to pass through the Tribulation Period (John 14:1-3; Rev. 3:10; 1 Thess. 5:2-3). However, in the Second Coming of Christ to earth, the UNSAVED are raptured from earth and taken to the judgment of Hades, while the SAVED are left on earth to enter and populate the Millennial Kingdom.

Other texts even in the Old Testament reveal the same prophetic truths taught in Matthew 13 and 24. Ezekiel 20:33-38 prophesied of the tares (unsaved Jews) being separated from the wheat: "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I

plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me (*the tares of Matthew 13*): I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD."

This Old Testament prophetic teaching aligns with the parables of Matthew 13 and Matthew 24 which deals with Christ's Second Coming to earth. The unsaved will be raptured or severed from the saved and pass into judgment while the saved will enter the Millennium (Matt. 13:43).

It's amazing that almost 700 years before Christ was born this prophecy was revealed of unsaved Jews being severed from the saved Jews and passing through judgment at the Second Coming. The prophetic Scriptures and God's future plan for the earth interlock and the prophetic Scriptures do not contradict one another. The prophetic word must be taken literally and pieced together like a puzzle.



We can understand the End Times and how the gears of Bible prophecy fit together. Many shy away from the study of Bible prophecy because there are so many views and confusion. But God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33) and therefore accurately reveals His prophetic path for the End Times.

One man approached me and told me that he believed in the "Pan Out Theory" of End Times Prophecy. I said to him, "I never heard about that theory." He then replied, "It means everything will pan out in the end but until then nobody can understand what it means." I told him that his "pan out theory" was a "cop out theory" for God did not give us prophecy to be ignorant about the End Times but enlightened ("But I would not have you

to be ignorant brethren" - 1 Thess. 4:13). We should not claim ignorant about the End Times when God clearly reveals what the future holds for planet earth.

Now let's review. Matthew 13 and the Parable of the Tares seems to be focusing on all the tares or degenerate wheat (both Jews and Gentiles) who will be taken to judgment at the Second Coming. There will be a universal, worldwide judgment on all unsaved people at the Second Coming. Matthew gives an entire snapshot of what many have termed as the "Judgment of Living Nations" on earth when Jesus returns to establish the Millennial Kingdom. Every surviving unsaved person will be judged and cast into Hades.

Matthew 13:41 again states:

"The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend (*both Jewish and Gentile humanity*), and them which do iniquity."

But Matthew 24 has been focusing on the Jewish people who survive the seven-year Tribulation Period and how unsaved, Christ-rejecting Jews will be taken to judgment at the Second Coming. It's very clear that Jesus was specifically referencing the Jewish people and their coming persecution in the flow of this chapter (Matt. 24:1-28). He then applies the judgment of Noah and the Second Coming to the surviving Jews of the Tribulation Period.



Saved Israel Enters the Millennium

In fact, Jesus continues to apply the "Parable of the Ten Virgins" (Matt. 25:1-13) to His Jewish brethren who like the tares at the Second Coming will be judged and not enter the earthly Kingdom because they are unsaved. In this instance the tares are given another name (unwise virgins). The wise virgins which had oil in their lamps (torches) (representative

of saved Jews) will enter the Millennium but the unwise virgins which had no oil in their lamps (representative of unsaved Jews) would not enter the Millennium. They will be judged.

Matthew 25:10-11 records these solemn words:

“And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.”

The door was shut! This is the door or entrance into the Millennium. The Bible repeatedly teaches that the door or entrance to the Millennium will be shut for unbelievers. Here the Jews are pictured as being judged and not able to enter the earthly Kingdom.

But there is more harvest. There are more tares to be harvested at the Second Coming. The angels will also gather the Gentile masses of humanity who are still alive following the Tribulation Period. This is clearly brought out in the continuing judgment of the tares in Matthew 25. However, in this case, the tares name is changed to goats.

Matthew 25:31-34 is placed in the context of the GENTILE PEOPLE at Christ’s Second Coming and a similar prophetic scenario is mentioned with the unsaved being taken to judgment. “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory (*the earthly throne of David in Jerusalem*): And before him shall be gathered all nations (*ethnos – non-Jewish foreigners or Gentiles*): and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand (*the children of God*), but the goats on the left (*children of the devil*). Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand,



Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom (*Millennial Kingdom –*

the 1,000-year reign of Christ) prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Matthew 25:41 reveal the fate of the goats (the unsaved): "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

All these Second Coming prophetic contexts teach the same thing. They are portraying that there will be a worldwide judgment that occurs when Jesus returns as the King to determine who enters the Millennial Kingdom. These prophetic texts give conclusive evidence that only the saved will enter the Millennial Kingdom. Jesus Christ is going to separate the tares from the wheat and the goats from the sheep at His Second Advent.

Many years ago, an old Plymouth Brethren friend of mine was helping at the Ephrata Fair tract stand. He had his own way of talking to people. One time I overheard him speaking to someone. He asked if they were one of God's sheep. The person was insulted and said, "No person should be called a sheep." Then he said, "Well, you must be a goat." I hope you are one of God's sheep and not a goat!

We will be eternally grateful that Jesus saves!

"Give the winds a mighty voice,
Jesus saves, Jesus saves;
Let the nations now rejoice.
Jesus saves, Jesus saves;
Shout salvation full and free,
Highest hills and deepest caves,
This our song of victory,
Jesus saves, Jesus saves."

Here is the prophetic point. All the tares or unsaved people will be taken away (raptured) to judgment while the wheat or saved will remain on earth to enter the Millennium or promised Messianic Kingdom. The wheat will be gathered into the barn (Matt. 13:30) which is representative of the Millennial Kingdom.

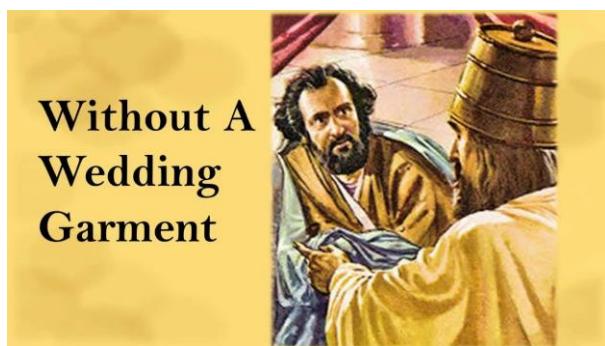
Let's review the prophetic portion of this parable one more time to make sure we understand what is going to occur at the Second Coming.

Matthew 13:30

"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."

There will be bundling and then burning. The tares will be harvested and judged in Hades which elsewhere is likened to a furnace of fire (Matt. 13:42, 50). When the King returns, He will cast the unsaved who are still living on planet earth into a fiery judgment. This is not the Great White Thorne Judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) since this occurs *after* the 1,000-year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:7). The judgments of the parables of Matthew 13 are pre-kingdom whereas the judgment of Revelation 20 is post-kingdom. This particular judgment occurs just prior to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom since this context talks about people entering the kingdom when Jesus returns (Matt. 13:43).

The same prophetic scenario is replayed in Matthew 22:12-13 where another kingdom parable is set in the context of the Second Coming and the Millennium: "And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."



**Without A
Wedding
Garment**

The wedding garment symbolizes the righteousness of God and without this no person will enter the earthly feast of the Millennium. The returning King who is a friend of sinners will say, "Friend, you are not dressed for the kingdom, you are not clothed in righteousness that comes through faith."

At this point everyone will be speechless! No person will talk back to the King! And then the judgment falls!

The unsaved who are living when the King returns will experience the baptism by fire that John the Baptizer spoke about. It's the same prophetic announcement of judgment we see in the parables.

John said in Matthew 3:11-12: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire: Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner (*storehouse, granary*); but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."



Many over the years have interpreted "the fire" as the fire of the Holy Spirit but if you read on in the verse it's clearly talking about the judgment the unsaved will experience at the Second Coming. Like the other parables, the wheat harvest (representative of the saved) will be gathered into the storehouse or barn ("gather the wheat into my barn" – Matt. 13:30) which again becomes a picture of the Millennial Kingdom.

Matthew 13:43 explains it like this:

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Herbert Lockyer reminds us:

"There will be no tares in the barn, just as there will be no wheat in the furnace of fire."

In other words, no unsaved people will enter the Millennium (representative of the barn and storehouse).

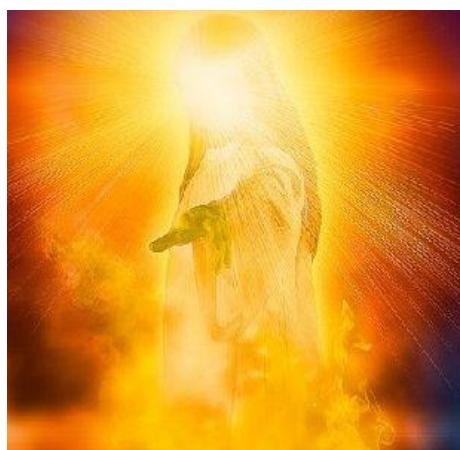
Matthew 13:43 is a very interesting verse for it tells us about the righteous character of those who enter the Millennial Kingdom. Those who are regenerated (born again) will evidence a righteous life as proof of their salvation and enter the Millennial Kingdom. In the kingdom parables that Jesus gave works are always the *evidence* of salvation; they are never the *ground* of salvation (Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:26; Titus 2:10-14). These kingdom

parables do not talk about the way of salvation but the genuine fruit that comes from salvation (Matt. 13:23).

So the “righteous” is a reference to all the saved who will enter the earthly kingdom at the Second Coming. You will notice also that they will “shine forth as the sun” which evidently is a picture of their reward which they receive before entering the earthly kingdom. The righteous living will be rewarded, and the reward will be to radiate the glory of Jesus Christ. This is similar to what Daniel says in the same prophetic context of people entering the Millennium.

Daniel 12:1-3 prophetically anticipates this:

“And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people (*to protect them from Satanic attack*): and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time (*the Great Tribulation – the last 3.5 years of Daniel’s 70th week of Israel’s persecution prior to the Second Coming – Matthew 24:15-22; Rev. 12*): and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book (*the book of the living – referring to those who survive the Tribulation Period through God’s protection – Ps. 69:28*). And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake (*a reference to the resurrection of Old Testament saints*), some to everlasting life (*the saved entering the Millennium and experiencing eternity with God in a new body*), and some to shame and everlasting contempt (*the unsaved entering Hades and eventually the Lake of Fire – something repulsive, disgusting, and abominable to those suffering*). And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”



The bodies of Old Testament Jewish saints will be resurrected at the Second Coming of Christ and be rewarded before entering the earthly Millennial Kingdom. Here Daniel similarly describes those rewarded as shining which evidently is associated with their eternal reward. Shining as the sky and stars is the way our eternal rewards will be

displayed ("ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not way" - 1 Pet. 5:4). Our eternal reward may very well be linked with our capacity to reflect the glory of God. This would be the greatest reward that any child of God could receive. The privilege of reflecting God's glory for eternity will be our greatest joy. Let me just say that there are some amazing things that lie ahead for God's saints.

There are many prophetic verses in the Olivet Discourse that speak of the blessing of the saved who will someday enter the kingdom when the King returns.

Matthew 25:34 states:

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Matthew 25:21

"His lord said unto him, Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

Matthew 25:23

"His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."

These verses give conclusive evidence that only the saved will enter the earthly Millennial Kingdom. They also teach that there will be a worldwide judgment that occurs when Jesus returns to determine who enters the kingdom. It will be a judgment to determine who will enter the restored theocracy. Jesus Christ is going to separate the tares from the wheat when He returns. Elsewhere this same judgment is likened to separating good and bad sea creatures, a separation of goats from sheep, or separating the chaff from the wheat.

Whether the separation is described as tares from wheat, good fish from bad fish, goats from sheep, or chaff from the wheat, they all point to the

same prophetic event. All these simple illustrations teach a very important prophetic event that is going to occur when the King returns to judge the earth at the end of the age. The King is coming!

Enoch also prophesied of this prophetic event long ago. Jude 14-15 reveals: “And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard *speeches* which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

When I read this, I always come to the same conclusion: “I’m glad that I am saved!” The King is coming back someday when the mystery period of the kingdom runs its course. He is coming back with a vengeance to judge the tares. He is bringing His mighty angels with Him. There will be no escape for the unsaved. All mankind will be supernaturally gathered to stand before the King.

So, it is true after all “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10-11). This event will occur at the Second Coming when Jesus returns as the sovereign King. In this day the Lord is going to deal with the diabolical sowing. This means we have no business damning people to Hell. This will be the job of the Son of God. John 5:22 says, “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son.” The Son reserves the right to initiate judgment.

Matthew 13:43 concludes by saying: “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.” If you will hear what Jesus is saying, then you can know what the future holds. The prophetic future is unveiled to those of us who will listen to what Jesus has outlined. We are blessed to hear and know how it will turn out in the end. In short, Jesus is going to win! And He is going to win big! Jesus will come back as the King, the tares will be judged, and the wheat will be gathered into the Father’s barn (kingdom). The spiritual lesson is this. God’s people are on the winning side because they are connected to

the King “and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:33). What a glorious destiny!

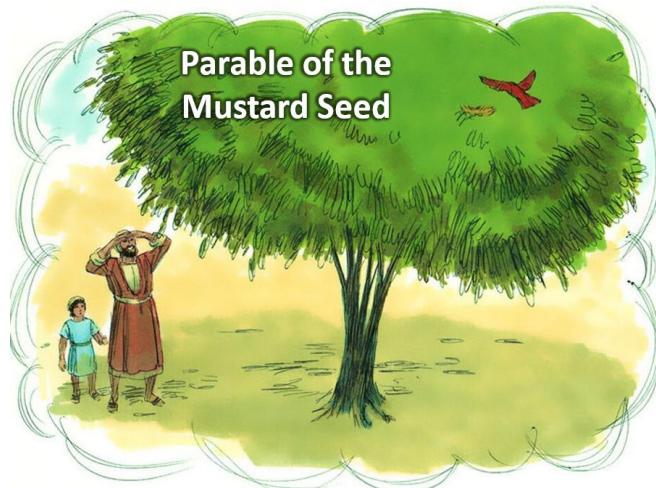
The Parable of the Mustard Seed

(Matthew 13:31-32)

I remember putting a piece of exercise equipment together. I believe it was a weight bench. I was getting near the end of the project but I noticed that there were some parts that I had not used and attached to the bench. I figured I had missed something when reading the instructions. So, I finally went back and looked at the instructions and sure enough I had missed a step. The only solution was to go back and fix the problem. I had to disassemble and then reassemble the bench. Why? It's because something went wrong in the assembly process.

In our next parable, the Parable of the Mustard Seed, we are going to discover that something went wrong in relation to the growth of what was normally a small mustard bush. Instead of remaining a smaller plant or bush it grew and blossomed into a large tree. As we approach this next parable just keep in mind that something went wrong. This is the intended meaning. It's like when you ladies bake a cake and it flops. Something went wrong. You forgot a certain ingredient or did not have the temperature set correctly.

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, we discover that something went wrong. What was to be a normal mustard seed growth has turned into a giant tree of abnormal growth. This parable like the first two reminds us of Satan's attempt to corrupt the work of God.



Mathew 13:31-32

“Another parable (*of the same kind*) put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven (*in its mystery form*) is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man (*the Son of God*) took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least (*Greek is mikros - smallest*) of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest (*Greek - megas*) among herbs (*in its natural growth state Christ's seed and Christianity became a giant movement of God*), and becometh a tree (*in its unnatural growth the devil's seed within Christendom became a movement much larger than Christianity*), so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (*satanic working*).

1. The primary understanding of the parable

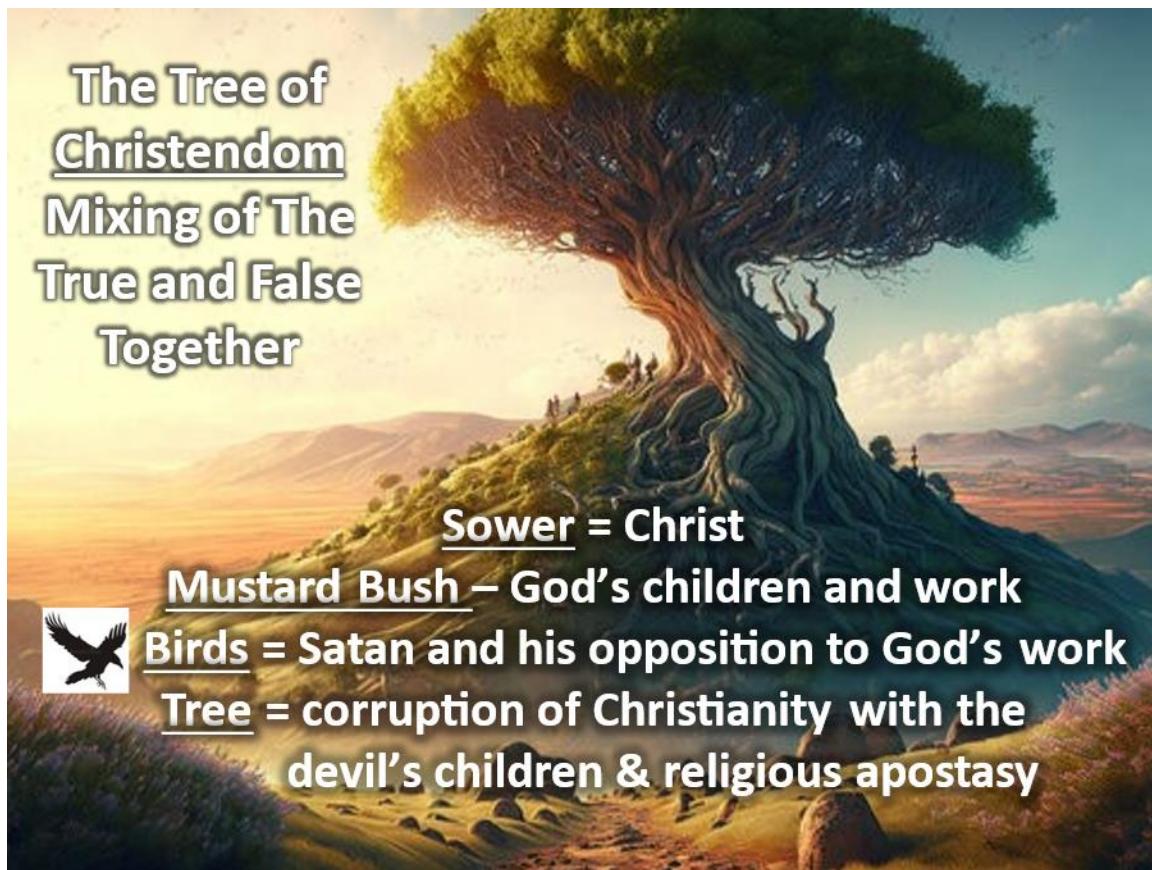
When reading this third parable we have another story about sowing with similar results occurring throughout human history as were previously depicted in the first two parables. To correctly understand this parable, we must remember that the seven parables are all part of one unfolding message. They are sending the same message – not a mixed message. There is harmony in the teaching of these parables. The seven are connected to form a completed whole. To interpret the third and fourth parable in a different light than the first two is not sound exegesis. The third and fourth parables belong together in their flow or meaning.

Christ interpreted the first two parables for us so we would have a guide in interpreting the rest of them. He gave us a start and He expects us to continue in the same direction and keep the same understanding of what was going to occur throughout the mystery period of the kingdom (between Israel’s rejection of Messiah to their reception of the returning of the Messiah). Jesus expects us to keep His mindset as we interpret the next two parables since He says nothing about their meaning and gives no direct interpretation of the next parables.

One of the basic interpretive laws in reading the Bible is that Scripture never uses a symbol in two conflicting ways in an immediate context. They are used consistently throughout the entire context and many times throughout the entire Bible. This is very important for us to understand as

we progress in the understanding of the next two parables. Jesus expects us to go on applying the same teachings He gave in the first two parables and to understand the symbols that He gave as having the same meaning. This means we must use what Jesus already gave in the previous parables to find the meaning of the symbols in the present parable of the mustard seed. We already know what the farmer, seed, and sowing represented, what the soils portrayed, who the birds were, what the wheat and weeds represented, and what is the meaning of the reapers.

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, we can view these symbols in the same way and develop a correct interpretation of this giant tree analogy while following the same train of thought in the previous parables. Satan will oppose God's work with his own devilish diversions from the truth.



Looking back at the previous parables we can properly interpret this parable.

- **The farmer sowing seed represents the Son of God.**

This is what Matthew 13:37 teaches: “He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.”

Jesus continues the picture of the sower sowing seeds. In this case He does not tell us who the sower is or what the seed is, but in context the sower is surely first Jesus, then His first disciples and then His future disciples (Christians living today) as Christ continues to sow the Gospel truth of salvation in the hearts of people through His disciples.

- **The field represents the world.**

Matthew 13:38 confirms this: “The field is the world.”

- **The seed refers to both the children of God and children of the devil.**

Matthew 13:38 goes on to say: “the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*.”

The sowing of two different seeds, representing God’s children and the devil’s children aligns with the Parable of the Mustard Seed.

- **The birds represent the devil who interferes with the spreading of the Gospel seed and the advancement of God’s purpose in the world.**

Matthew 13:4 – “And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up.”

Matthew 13:19 interprets this, “then cometh the wicked one (*representative of birds eating the newly sown seed*), and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart” (Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12).

Matthew 13:39 also portrays the devil as counter sowing his own seed among the good seed when it states: “The enemy that sowed them is the devil.”

Because the birds nesting in the tree are representative of Satan's work, as presented in the previous Parable of the Sower, we can conclude that the tree itself points to the corrupting influence of Satan.

John MacArthur opposes this interpretation of the birds:

"Some interpreters have held that the birds of the air represent demons or other evil forces, as they do in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:19). But there is no reason to expect a given figure to always represent the same thing, and the idea of evil is alien to the context of this parable."

MacArthur interprets the "birds" as Gentiles coming into the kingdom based upon the expansion of the Church (Acts 1:8). However, this interpretation ignores the context and breaks the flow of the parables at this point. It brings an allegorizing effect into the parable where one tries to find a meaning beyond the plain sense of the text.

From the previous parable, it's clear that birds represent Satan's opposition to God's work which today would include the corruption of Christianity with apostasy and false religion.

Without some previous interpretation by Christ, we could not properly understand the meaning of the next parables. But when transferring the previous teachings of Christ into this parable we can safely arrive at some interpretive conclusions. The growth of what is supposed to be a small plant or shrub growing into a giant tree is something abnormal. Furthermore, with the birds (representative of Satan) lodging in this giant tree we can only conclude that this parable once again is teaching satanic interference in the work of God.

Using the literary device of hyperbole or exaggeration in this parable, Jesus is teaching that what began as something normal and small, which refers to the initial salvation of souls during Christ's day and the continuing growth and expansion of Christianity and the Church, turned into something which was abnormal. The abnormal growth of a small mustard plant into a giant tree represents Christendom which is a mixture of God's children and the devil's children. Christendom is not Christianity but is an imitation of Christianity. The tree pictures the true among the false (the saved among

the unsaved) as in the previous parable of the tares among the wheat (Matt. 13:26-30).

The tree in this parable pictures Satan's corruption of God's work which began in Christ's day and expands and proliferates into the great ecumenical religiosity and apostasy of the Last Days during the Church Age. It also envisions the End Times with the harlot church and her religious system of the Tribulation Period (Rev. 17). It culminates with Antichrist's paganized religion which occurs just prior to the Second Coming.

The tree is a monstrosity of abnormal religious growth which has been corrupted by Satan and which continues to this present day and into the Tribulation period with the apostate or harlot church. The dirty birds (Satan and his fallen angels) are lodging in the tree of Christendom today and this is why we see the continual rise of unprecedented apostasy and wickedness within the professing Church. This is not a pretty tree but an ugly tree that represents the corruption of Christianity with pagan and false religions and corrupt and apostate denominationalism.

Proper interpretation of this parable will result in fruitful Bible study and learning the proper meaning of the Scriptures. A professional boxer was converted to Christ. He felt it was wrong to continue hitting people but only knew boxing as a profession. So he sought counsel from the deacons. One deacon responded, "Don't see why you can't continue. The Bible says that it's better to give than to receive." Of course, this was a wrong interpretation of the Bible. It does not say "It's better to hit someone so you are not hit."

The story has been told about several famous preachers, but it actually happened to Joseph Parker, minister of the City Temple in London. An old lady waited on Parker in his vestry after a service to thank him for the help she received from his sermons. "You do throw such wonderful light on the Bible, doctor," she said. "Do you know that until this morning, I had always thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were man and wife?"

Proper interpretation is important. I'm not belittling those who take another interpretive approach to this parable for good men have disagreed

about the interpretation even when viewing the parables from a dispensational perspective and seeking for a literal interpretation. We all believe in the authority of scripture and are drinking from the same source. My point is that those who only see this tree and the leaven in the next parable as something good and the advancement of the Gospel and Christianity are missing a key element in the flow of the parables. They interpret the birds with a totally different meaning than Jesus did in the context of the parables.

Adam Clarke takes only the positive approach to the parable:

“Both these parables (MUSTARD AND LEAVEN) are prophetic, and were intended to show, principally, how, from very small beginnings, the Gospel of Christ should pervade all the nations of the world, and fill them with righteousness and true holiness.”

Jesus' interpretation of the first parables gives us the right interpretation for the next two parables. We don't have to guess concerning their meaning. The Lord's previous interpretation will guide us. Comparing Scripture with Scripture contextually and matching similar descriptions throughout the Bible will help us to interpret the Bible correctly. Of the seven parables in the series, two are explained, the rest are not explained. Therefore, Christ gave us the interpretation of the first two in order help us with the rest.

Lehman Strauss has stated this about the interpretation of the seven parables: “Any interpretation of one of them which contradicts that of another cannot be the correct interpretation. Popular interpretation is not necessarily the correct one, nor is it a guarantee of accuracy.”

The first two parables spoke of the movement of history between Christ's rejection and Second Coming in relation to the presentation of the Gospel among humanity. We have already discovered that there would be a small response to the Gospel message in relationship to the great masses of humanity who would resist the truth. In the first parable three out of four soils representative of the human heart would not respond favorably to the Gospel. The first parable revealed that there would be greater resistance than acceptance of the truth. Satan was active in stealing the seed in the

first parable (Matt. 13:19) and keeping people from genuine conversion (Matt. 13:20-21).

The second parable revealed that the devil would sow his own seed (tares) among God's seed (wheat) attempting to destroy the true work of God taking place in the world (Matt. 13:38-39). Satan is portrayed as being very active throughout the history and course of the mystery period attempting to keep people from truth and thwart God's program. As we come to the third parable Satan is once again represented as birds lodging in the branches of a great tree attempting to weaken and destroy the work of God. In this parable we again see the continuation and consequences of Satan's work. As in the first two parables, something seems to have gone wrong!

Years ago, I remember having to take a class on cooking. We had a teacher who was somewhat of a stickler for doing everything right. Two of us guys were making pancakes and somehow my partner burned his pancake. He quickly threw the pancake into the trash so the teacher would not see it. Of course, I would never do anything like this! Anyway, he said to me, "Something went wrong." Indeed, it did! The same is true in this parable. Something has gone wrong. Satan is seen opposing Christ's work beginning during His earthly ministry and he is still opposing it today through corrupting Christianity with apostasy and false teaching.

2. The prophetic mystery of the parable.

The Parable of Mustard Seed (Matthew 13:31-32)

Conditions and Events that occur on Earth before the Kingdom (Millennium) arrives.

The MYSTERY (revealed secret) is that before the kingdom (Millennium) comes to earth Satan would oppose God's work with universal religious apostasy.

The NORMAL GROWTH & small beginning of Christianity (a mustard seed and shrub)

**The ABNORMAL GROWTH into a Giant Tree
Corrupted Christianity and Christendom
of the last days and End Times**

The True and False Mixed Together (apostate church)

Remember that the phrase “the kingdom of heaven is like” (Matt. 13:31) is speaking about the mysteries of the earthly kingdom which were not previously unfolded in the Old Testament. The mysteries of the kingdom deal with those plans, purposes, and programs that would occur on planet earth prior to the King’s return and establishment of the earthly kingdom. So Jesus was once again unveiling another secret that would take place on earth prior to the establishment of the kingdom. He is teaching that this is what the world will be like before the kingdom arrives. Here is another secret that you can know before the kingdom comes. The secret revolves around the growth of God’s people (the mustard plant) in comparison to another type of growth that would take place in the world which is identified as a tree.

Since these are the “mysteries of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:11) we want to be very specific and reveal each mystery that is being portrayed in each parable. These mysteries are the secrets not revealed about the Millennium in Old Testament revelation. The prophets knew about Messiah’s rule over the earth and what would occur during the Millennium (Isa. 9:6; Isa. 11:1-10; Zech. 14:14-21) but they did not know about the events leading up to the Millennial Kingdom. Hence, these events and conditions on earth are known as the mysteries about the kingdom.

3. The presentation of growth in the parable.

“greatest among herbs”

- **God’s Seed (children)**
 - **Natural & Healthy Growth**
 - **Expansion of Christianity**
 - **God’s Movement**
-

“and becometh a tree”

(An Annual Garden Plant Does Not Grow into a Tree)

- **Devil’s seed (children)**
- **Unnatural & Perverted Growth**
- **Christendom (true and false together)**
- **Devil’s Movement**

Mathew 13:31-32 again states: "Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven (*in its mystery form*) is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least (*smallest*) of all seeds: but when it is grown (*natural growth*), it is the greatest among herbs (*not trees*), and becometh a tree (*unnatural growth*), so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof."

Jesus presents two types of growth in this parable. There is a natural and unnatural growth. The parable does present a picture of some positive and natural growth which was designed to encourage the hearts of the disciples. Jesus predicts that people (like the mustard plants) would be planted within the world as God's children through salvation. God's saving purposes would grow and advance over the earth in His own day and throughout the mystery period.

The *normal and healthy growth* represented as God's movement in the mustard plant ("the greatest of herbs") relates to the salvation of people and God's children being propagated and placed throughout the earth. God's movement which includes Christianity would be like the garden mustard herb and bush that was the biggest or greatest of all herbs within the garden. It was not only great in size but also in its usefulness to people. But a garden herb, however great it might be, does not become a tree.

This means the tree analogy is speaking of *abnormal and unhealthy growth*. The giant tree representative of the devil's movement ("becometh a tree") relates to his own children (the devil's children mixing with God's people and this tree would continue to grow and expand way beyond the height of a normal mustard bush. Why? It's because the devil's children will outgrow and overproduce in relation to God's children as we race toward the end of the age.

➤ **There is a normal and positive growth ("the greatest among herbs")**

Jesus likens the initial sowing and salvation of His followers, and later Christians within the Church, to a tiny mustard seed that was sown in a field and then began to grow as a plant or bush. It would be "like to a grain

(kernel) of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least (*smallest*) of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs..."

Mustard seed was "the greatest among herbs" because it was larger in size than other herbs used in Bible times for medicine, and it was also an important spice and condiment. Mustard seeds and plants were highly valued.



When Jesus speaks about "the least of all seeds" He was referring to the very tiny size of a mustard seed. A question is sometimes raised about the statement of the mustard seed ("Which indeed is the least of all seeds" – vs. 32).

Some of the liberals who are always trying to find loopholes in the Bible conclude that the Bible is not inerrant or without error since the mustard seed is not the smallest of all seeds. Of course, the problem with liberals is that they are liberal. It clear that during Jesus' day that this was the smallest crop seed that was known to the farmers.

Lenski states:

"Jesus is speaking of the seeds ordinarily planted in ancient gardens, hence the remark that botanists know many still smaller seeds is pointless."

Dr. L. H. Shinners, director of the herbarium at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and lecturer at the Smithsonian Institution, stated in a conversation that "the mustard seed would indeed have been the smallest of those to have been noticed by the people at the time of Christ. The principal field crops (barley, wheat, lentils, and beans) have much larger seeds, as do other plants which might have been present as weeds and so forth. There are various weeds and wild flowers belonging to the mustard, amaranth, pigweed, or chickweed families with seeds that are as small as or smaller than mustard; but they would not have been known or noticed by the inhabitants. They are wild and they certainly would not have been

planted as a crop.... The only modern crop plant in existence with smaller seeds than mustard is tobacco, and this plant of American origin was not grown in the old world until the sixteenth century or later."

So the mustard seed was the smallest seeds known in the Biblical times of Christ on earth.

John Walvoord views the seed in this way: "Actually, the text in the Greek New Testament is a comparative (*mikroteron*) which means that it is smaller. Some hold that this is an error in Scripture because the seed of the orchid, for instance, is still smaller. This, however, is ruled out by the passage itself which limits the seeds under consideration to those that are planted in the Holy Land. The fact that smaller seeds are found elsewhere in the world is without significance."

In addition, during Bible times there was a common proverbial statement about something being as small as a mustard seed (Matt. 17:20) and Christ may have only been using this kind of proverbial expression or Jewish idiom when speaking. Proverbially, it is the smallest of seeds. We might say something is "as small as a flea." Certainly there are other things smaller than fleas but we speak in this way to get a valid point across. Here is the point. The Son's plan and purpose was to establish a people and witness in the world ("field") that would be small but spiritually effective. The Christian community that remains true to His Word, and who are genuine followers of Christ (Luke 14:26-27), would be despised in the eyes of men and small in number in comparison to the rest of mankind.

I have noticed every spring that all around my house and on the patio and furniture are small (very tiny) clover mites or bugs. You know them by their size because they are smaller than a pinhead and their color is bright red. If you brush them off your white shirt you will stain your shirt forever. These bugs are small, but they serve a purpose. I just have not discovered what it is! In a similar way, even though the number of God's children are smaller in number than the devil's children, we have a purpose on earth to be a witness for Christ and see people saved.

Jesus was teaching that the expansion of His people would be like a mustard seed, small plant-like growth, which would eventually become larger over time. It would happen quietly and inevitably. We should never underestimate God's power!

The good news is that we can be part of the growth of God's mustard seed today. We can engage in evangelism and see people come to faith in Christ. The mustard seed continues to grow as people are saved and become God's children. Have you been taking an active role in God's mustard seed program? What are you doing to reach people for Christ?

The story is told of a college professor who visited a certain chain of islands. Being agnostic, he critically remarked to an elderly chief, "You're a great leader, but it's a pity you've been taken in by those foreign missionaries. They only want to get rich through you. No one believes the Bible anymore. People are tired of the silly story of Christ dying on a cross for the sins of mankind. Most people know better by now. I'm sorry you've been so foolish as to accept their story."

The old chief's eyes flashed as he answered, "See that great rock over there? On it we smashed the heads of our victims. Notice the furnace next to it? In that oven we formerly roasted the bodies of our enemies. If it had not been for those good missionaries and the love of Jesus that changed us from cannibals into Christians, you'd never leave this place alive! You'd better thank the Lord for the Gospel; otherwise, we'd already be feasting on you. If it weren't for the Bible, you'd now be our supper!"

I think even this agnostic suddenly realized the desperate need for missions!

So what the parable is teaching is that the Son of God (Jesus Christ) originally planned to sow His own people (children of God) in this world. The mustard seed is called "the least of all seeds" meaning that God's people in their initial sowing and expansion were comparable to a tiny mustard seed. It would eventually throughout the mystery period grow into a larger mustard plant or bush but still remain much smaller in size than the tree presented in this parable.

This informs us that the size and number of God's children would be small and unassuming on planet earth in comparison to the Devil's seed (children). However, God's children would continue to expand and grow and become "the greatest of herbs" in the garden meaning larger in size and more productive than any other herbs. God's people in the process of natural growth would blossom in the world. The movement of Christianity is proof of this.

As I think of "the greatest of herbs" I also reflect on something very practical. There is nothing better or greater than being a Christian. We can live being satisfied, experience God's peace, and share Christ with others. Being part of the family of God is a great thing.

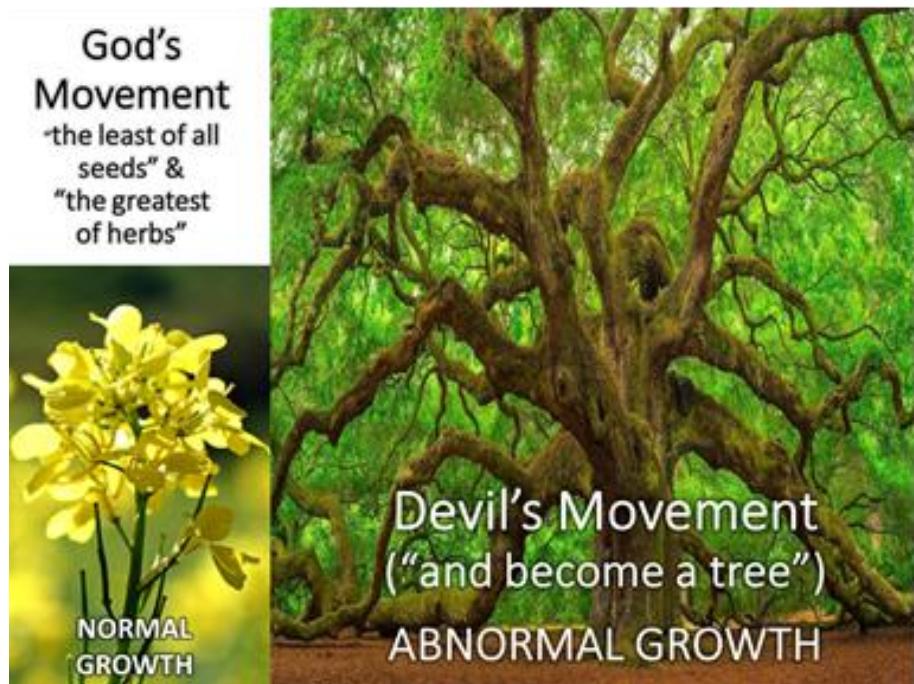
Oh it is wonderful to be a Christian
Oh it is wonderful to be God's child
Oh it is wonderful to have your sins forgiven
Oh it is wonderful to be redeemed
Justified forever reconciled."

To reiterate and summarize, the parable is teaching that God's movement with His children would possess a small and humble existence (a mustard plant) throughout the mystery period for they would dwell the midst of the great throngs of lost and unregenerate people. The growth of God's people which is comparable to a garden mustard bush would be much smaller in proportion to the devil's movement which in this parable is comparable to a giant tree ("and becometh a tree").

So there are two different movements being represented in the parable – the movement of God (the mustard bush) and the movement of Satan (the tree). In this parable we have God's movement ("least of all seed" and "the greatest of herbs") in contrast with the devil's movement ("and becometh a tree"). The difference is illustrated between NORMAL and ABNORMAL growth. This is because a mustard seed plant or bush of about seven feet high can never turn into a tree!

The natural growth of a mustard seed into a plant is pictured as a healthy and steady growth but despite the phenomenal growth of God's people

they would still only be comparable to a garden plant. They would not grow at the same rate and in the same way as the devil's tree.



In this parable God's children are likened to a grain (kernel) of mustard seed which in its *natural state* would produce a shrub of humble proportion and existence in the world in contrast to a gigantic tree that spreads forth its branches high into the sky. God's mustard seed movement refers to evangelism and the salvation of souls that began in Christ's day, which would continue with the expansion of Christianity and the Church, and end with salvation of people during the Tribulation Period (Rev. 7:8-17) and Israel's salvation at the Second Coming (Rom. 11:26). God's Mustard Seed Movement would continue to exist to the end of the age despite Satan's movement of corruption represented by the tree.

Those who have made a special study of plant life in Palestine tell us that a garden mustard seed plant, rarely, if ever, exceeds a height of seven feet. It does not reach the height, glory, and status of a tree. It's an annual herb – not a tree. The sowing of the tiny seed and growth

Mustard Seed in Israel



of the garden plant is teaching that God's people are to have a steady natural growth but humble and unassuming existence on planet earth during the mystery period of time between Israel's rejection and Christ's return to establish the kingdom (Mark 4:30; Luke 13:18). Their planting and growth, when compared to a full-grown tree, suggests smallness in size and number.

It's clearly understood that you don't plant a tree in a garden (Luke 13:19) or produce a tree from a mustard seed. So the original sowing of the Son and natural growth and expansion of God's people was intended to produce a group of people that were smaller and more modest in size in comparison to the largeness of a tree. This tells us that the Lord's people were never intended to become a gigantic social and political force in the world. Instead, they would have a smaller existence, while at the same time maintaining a steady growth much like a mustard plant or shrub appearing in a garden that springs forth from a tiny seed. Their size and growth was to be reflected in what Jesus said during His own earthly ministry, "Fear not little flock" (Luke 12:32).

Spurgeon called the "little flock" in the way: "little but lovely." "Few in number they were, He calls them a flock. Thus He takes upon Himself the office of a shepherd, and by implication He guarantees to them feeding and folding, solace and safeguard. And He speaks of "little" with a liking. As we often employ diminutive words to express endearment, calling those we love by little names, so does the Savior here seem to dwell upon the littleness of those He loves."

I think I know what he is getting at. I call one of my small grandchildren "baby" and other names that reflect endearment and love. Jesus was not concerned with great numbers but the little flock (the small mustard plant) for He knew that in comparison to the devil's giant tree God's flock would be small.

Just a passing note. The majority has always been wrong in spiritual matters. The majority was wrong in Jesus' day ("fear not little flock"). The majority was wrong in Noah's day. The majority was wrong when the twelve spies voted 10 to 2 not to enter the Promised Land and the entire

congregation endorsed the wrong decision. The majority crucified the Lord. God has never been impressed with the majority! So we should never confuse the will of the majority with the will of God. God loves His little flock!

As already mentioned, while a mustard seed is not the smallest seed in the world, it was probably the smallest seed that the Jews sowed in their gardens. It was a traditional symbol of that which is tiny. Thus, the planting and growth of His people throughout the mystery period was to be insignificant in comparison to the devil's planting and growth. God's true children were to have a humble and unassuming existence throughout the world until the Millennial Kingdom is established on the earth.

Jesus portrayed the small number of His followers in other ways, such as the comparison between a wide road where many people travel and a narrow road where fewer people travel.

Matthew 7:13-14

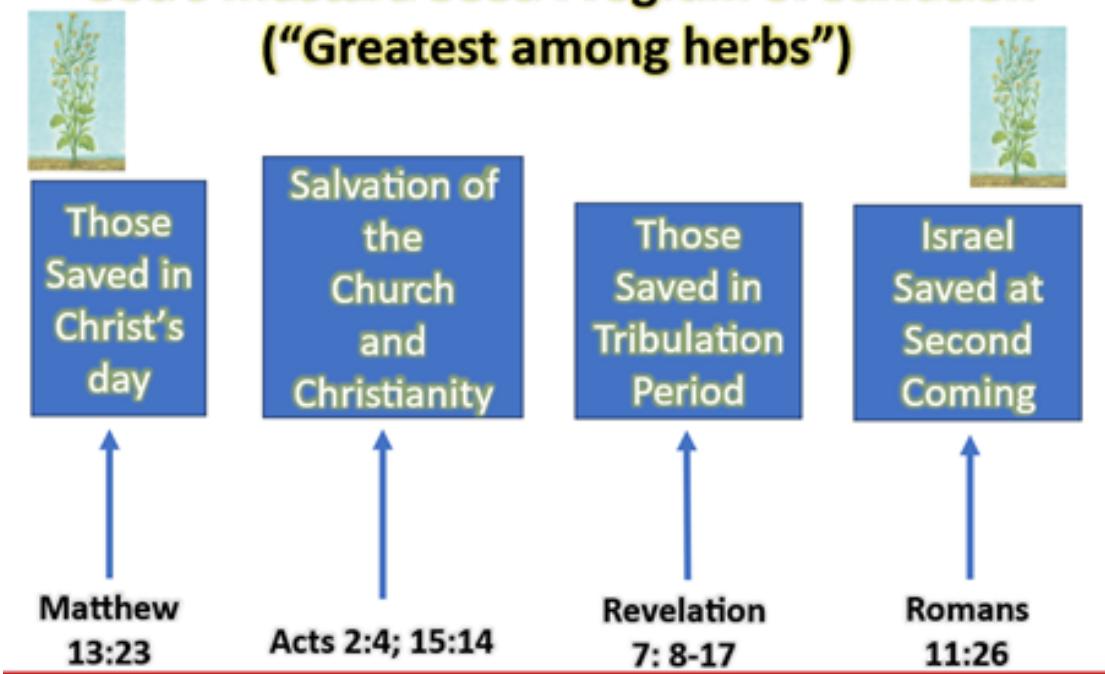
"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereto: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

There can be no doubt about what Jesus was teaching in this parable and what the general teaching of Jesus was in the previous parables of Matthew 13. Christ would sow His own seed and people among the earth and although they would have a steady and healthy growth ("the greatest among herbs") their existence on planet earth would still be smaller and unassuming in comparison to the devil's religious working ("becometh a tree"). In other words, the mustard seed and garden shrub in its natural growth could not turn into the structure of a tree which in this parable reflects the abnormal growth and work of the devil in sowing and growing his own children in the world within Christianity and in the end seeing them damned to a devil's hell.

God's Mustard Seed Program (the normal growth related to the salvation of souls) has been going on since the days of Jesus on earth and will continue to grow until the Second Coming.

God's Mustard Seed Program of Salvation

(“Greatest among herbs”)



**The Mysteries About the Kingdom
Begin in Christ's Day and End with the Second Coming**

George Sweeting, in his book *The No-Guilt Guide for Witnessing*, tells of a man by the name of John Currier who in 1949 was found guilty of murder and sentenced to life in prison. Later he was transferred and paroled to work on a farm near Nashville, Tennessee. In 1968, Currier's sentence was terminated, and a letter bearing the good news was sent to him. But John never saw the letter, nor was he told anything about it. Life on that farm was hard and without promise for the future. Yet John kept doing what he was told even after the farmer for whom he worked had died.

Ten years went by. Then a state parole officer learned about Currier's plight, found him, and told him that his sentence had been terminated. He was a free man. Sweeting concluded that story by asking, "Would it matter to you if someone sent you an important message -- the most important in your life -- and year after year the urgent message was never delivered?"

We who have heard the good news and experienced freedom through Christ are responsible to proclaim it to others who are still enslaved by sin. Are we doing all we can to make sure that people get the message?

So in this parable the saving of God's people are seen to be part of a natural and healthy growth process throughout the mystery period which would include the growth of New Testament Christianity. Although it would not be like the growth of the giant tree, God's saints would nevertheless experience a steady growth throughout the world.

This growth is comparable to a mustard plant that starts small but grows larger than the other garden plants and is very useful ("it is the greatest among herbs" – Matt. 13:32). There is a certain glory and greatness seen in the growth of a mustard seed plant. This growth expression parallels to the phenomenal growth of God's people and Christianity in the world.

Think about this. We know that our Lord began with twelve apostles. Later, there were as many as 500 believers (1 Cor. 15:6). Peter won 3,000 at Pentecost (Acts 2:41) and throughout the Book of Acts the number steadily increased (Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). The continual expansion of God's people which is reflected in the natural state of the mustard plant would be a worldwide and wonderful phenomenon as the Gospel is taken throughout the world (Acts 1:8; Mark 16:15). Nothing would stop the growth of Christianity. All of this growth was represented by the mustard seed growth which "is the greatest among herbs."

It was Tertullian, one of the Early Church Fathers of the second century, who coined the term "the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church." God's mustard seed greatness would be seen in the expansion and explosion of Christianity and the Church. It would be a movement that would not cease to exist despite Satan's efforts to destroy it and corrupt it.

Here is a wonderful testimony of someone who was saved in a communist country." Like most people, I was born with a hunger for truth and freedom. Unfortunately, I was born in Communist Romania under a brutal totalitarian regime. Romania was a land of lies, where simply questioning a government directive could lead to imprisonment, physical torture, and—in some cases—death.

"Needless to say, we lived in a constant state of anxiety and mistrust. Anyone could arbitrarily denounce a neighbor, classmate, or family

member for making anti-government statements. The government even had spies planted in the churches. The best way to avoid trouble was to remain silent, question nothing, and try to blend in. For years, I watched my parents and relatives play the part of good citizens while privately whispering their contempt for the government. I wondered, ‘Why do people always speak in whispers? Why are they so afraid to speak the truth.’

“The more fear battered those around me into silence, the more obsessed I became with finding the truth. After graduation, I went to law school and became an attorney. But my job—assigned by the government—consisted of little more than rubber-stamping newly-created communist rules and regulations. It was demoralizing.

“One evening a client came in to discuss some paperwork related to a property settlement. We had been meeting for months now, and frankly, I was exhausted. But this particular client never seemed to get discouraged. He always smiled, and he had a sense of contentment unlike anything I had ever seen. It was as though he were somehow oblivious to all of the misery that surrounded him. He radiated joy and peace, and for some reason, it troubled me. Without thinking, I confessed, ‘I wish I had what you have in your life. I wish I had your sense of peace and happiness.’

“‘Do you go to church?’ he asked. ‘Yes,’ I replied. ‘On Christmas and Easter. Why?’ ‘Would you like to come with me to my church this Sunday?’ My first instinct was to decline. After all, the communist government was notoriously anti-church. Under communist rule, Christians were frequently arrested, beaten, and imprisoned. Church buildings were bulldozed, and their land confiscated. Anyone who questioned his anti-God stance was either thrown in jail or disappeared. For all I knew, this could be a trick to test my loyalty. I paused briefly to consider my next move. Then I saw once again that look of peace and contentment. I wanted that—so much so that I decided it was worth the risk.

“The next Sunday I visited his church. As soon as the choir finished the opening song, the pastor read John 14:6—I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ I could not believe

what I heard. Someone was claiming to *be* the truth? As the pastor continued to describe the truth of Jesus Christ, I felt as though the verses he shared were written specifically for me. Looking across the aisle, I saw my client. He smiled, nodded, and gently patted his Bible as if to say, ‘Now do you understand?’

“I did. Without realizing it, I was beaming back at him. For the first time in my life, everything made sense. I had spent years searching for the truth, but I had been looking in the wrong places—law school, the government, the justice system. I suddenly realized that truth was something that came not from law books, but from God himself: the Creator of the universe—my Creator, the source of all life, peace, and happiness.

“Barely able to contain my excitement, I accepted the pastor’s invitation to trust in Christ as Lord and Savior. From that moment on, I would dedicate my life to pursuing and speaking the truth, no matter the cost. Shortly after I was baptized, I began defending fellow Christians facing imprisonment for transporting Bibles across the Romanian border, sharing their faith, or worshiping privately in their own homes. This quickly made me a target. Many days I awoke to find my tires slashed. Clients and friends—even my children—were threatened. My daughters and I were held under house arrest for almost a month. I was kidnapped, bullied, pushed into moving traffic, and beaten by the secret police. For their own protection, friends and coworkers began keeping their distance. My faith was tested daily. My greatest test, however, was yet to come.

“Late at night, after a long day in court, Miruna, my legal assistant, peeked into my doorway: ‘A big man in the waiting room says he wants to discuss a case.’ She shrugged. ‘That’s all he will tell me.’ I was taken aback at how enormous he was. As he sat down in front of my desk, his eyes seemed to bore a hole straight through me, and a sneer formed at the corner of his mouth. Slowly, he pulled back his coat and reached into a shoulder holster, withdrawing a gun ‘You have failed to heed the warnings you’ve been given’ he said, aiming at me. ‘I’ve come here to finish the matter once and for all.’ He flexed his fingers, and I heard a distinctive click.

“I am here to kill you.’ My hands shook. Fight-or-flight instincts pinged in my brain. My chin trembled. An image flashed through my mind: my assistant arriving in the morning and finding my lifeless body on the office floor. I was alone with my killer. And yet, I was not. I began silent, fervent prayers, recalling God’s promises. His Spirit breathed peace into my panicked heart. Then I sensed his message: Share the gospel.

“I considered the man before me. Behind those hate-filled eyes was a creation of God. He had an immortal soul, and he needed to know about the love God has shown in Jesus Christ. At once emboldened, I met my killer’s eyes. “Have you ever asked yourself: ‘Why do I exist?’ or ‘Why am I here?’ or ‘What is the meaning of my life?’ ‘I once asked myself those questions.’ My voice stayed calm and did not waver. He slid his gun back into the holster. I leaned forward. ‘You are here because God put you here, and he has put you to a test. Will you abide in God or in the will of a man—your boss, who requires you to worship him? God has given you free will to choose.’

“His eyes softened. My heart thumped even faster, and my confidence rose. ‘The truth is that we have all been corrupted and gone away from God.’ He nodded. ‘We all are sinners, and our sin has determined our future. Hebrews 9:27 says, “People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” His mouth fell slightly open, and his hands relaxed. ‘But the good news is that God has prepared a way out for every one of us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

“As I continued to talk with him, he appeared smaller and more peaceful. Finally, he brought his hand to his forehead and said, ‘You are right. The people who sent me here are crazy. I do need Christ.’ He promised, ‘I will come to your church as a secret brother in Christ. I will worship your powerful God.’ And with that, my killer walked away saved—a brother in Christ. He went on to enroll in seminary, and we have even kept in touch. He, like me, had found the Truth. And neither of us will be afraid to speak it ever again.”

This true story (and many more) makes us to realize that despite communism and the godless systems and regimes who want to persecute Christians, people are still getting saved. It is true. The blood of the martyrs is seed! God's mustard seed program is still being fulfilled as people are coming to faith in Christ all over the world. Jesus said, "it is the greatest among herbs" (Matt. 13:32).

As previous mentioned and the above chart reveals, God's mustard seed movement refers to the evangelism and the salvation of souls that began in Christ's day (the beginning of the mystery period) which would continue with the expansion of Christianity during the Church Age and end with salvation of people during the Tribulation Period (Rev. 7:8-17) and Israel's conversion at the Second Coming (Rom. 11:26). This would end the mystery period of the kingdom with the establishment of the Millennium. God's Mustard Seed Movement would continue to exist to the end of the age before Messiah returns despite Satan's counter movement of corruption representative by the tree.

The people of God and Christianity would become the largest and unabated spiritual movement that ever happened in the history of mankind. It would be like the mustard bush which in its natural growth is the greatest among herbs. It's certain that this statement of natural growth gave encouragement to His followers like Jesus' statements in Mark 4:26-29 where positive growth and harvest were promised. Jesus promised there would be a harvest of people (salvation of souls) that would occur during the mystery period.

The planting of the Lord's people would be successful as they experience a steady and healthy growth which is comparable to a mustard seed plant. However, as we have seen, in proportion to the devil's movement (the abnormal tree of Christendom) God's people would still pale in comparison. Their existence would not exceed the natural and healthy growth of a garden plant. Although the mustard plant is "the greatest among herbs" (Matt. 13:32) it never reaches the status of a tree. There is a certain glory and greatness in the growth of a mustard seed plant (Christianity) but nevertheless it is not comparable to the greatness in size of a tree (Christendom).

In 1912, medical missionary Dr. William Leslie went to live and minister to tribal people in a remote corner of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. After 17 years he returned to the U.S. a discouraged man, believing he failed to make an impact for Christ. He died nine years after his return.

But in 2010 a team led by Eric Ramsey with Tom Cox World Ministries made a surprising discovery. They found a network of reproducing churches hidden like glittering diamonds in the dense jungle across the Kwilu River from Vanga, where Dr. Leslie was stationed. Like a mustard plant emerging from a tiny seed the Church continues to grow. We can be part of this growth if we keep sharing the Gospel with others. The salvation of souls is pictured as a healthy, natural, and ongoing growth and expansion within the world.

“Be a missionary every day
Tell the world that Jesus is the way.
Be it in the town our country or the busy avenue
Africa or Asia, the task is up to you.
So, be a missionary every day
Tell the world that Jesus is the way.
The Lord is soon returning
There is no time to lose.
So, be a missionary, God’s own emissary
Be a missionary today!”

➤ **There is abnormal and perverted growth (“and becometh a tree”).**

I once saw a man running on a track with a parachute tied to his back. I’m not kidding. He was running and as he ran the parachute would open. The only reason for this was he probably wanted to produce resistance and strengthen his legs. I always thought parachutes were used to jump out of airplanes. So when I saw this it was something very unusual and strange. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed we discover that something very strange and unusual happens. A common garden herb, an annual mustard seed plant, turns into a giant tree.

Jesus taught in the Parable of the Mustard Seed that a normal garden variety mustard plant or shrub turned into a tree. What seemed to be

normal became abnormal. Something had gone wrong in the natural growth process.



My wife used to plant bulbs in the ground during the spring that would produce a plant called elephant ears. It produces big stems and large green leaves. The plant resembles the ears on an elephant. In a similar way a mustard seed normally reaches seven or eight feet in height in one short growing season. So, when I

reflect on the mustard plant, I think of elephant ears. However, one thing is certain. My wife's elephant ears like the mustard seed plant can never grow into an actual tree. This is because the mustard plant is an annual that dies every year. It is impossible for it to grow into a tree. If it grew into a tree, it would break natural laws. But according to what Jesus says this mustard seed ends up producing a tree where the birds can roost. Therefore, this is something that is unnatural and abnormal.

Herbs or smaller shrubs do not grow into gigantic trees. This is because herbs and trees are entirely different kinds (Gen. 1:11-12). That everything produces after its own kind is a fixed law of nature. Thus, the mustard seed that produced a giant tree was something foreign to what the Creator intended. This is something that could never take place without some mysterious work or freak of nature. Jesus used a small mustard seed that was designed to produce a humble shrub or plant to teach how it would violate a genetic code and produce something unnatural to its kind.

The mustard seed in this parable refused to remain an herb. Instead, it became a tree. You might conclude that this is impossible. Yes, it is! But Jesus spoke of an impossible agricultural occurrence to get the attention of His disciples and our attention today. He points out a weird and perplexing growth that stimulates the disciples thinking concerning what is going to occur throughout the mystery period of time.

John Phillips states:

"For an herb to become a tree suggests a growth and development foreign to its nature."

And so it will be while the King is absent. Something unnatural, abnormal, and unhealthy is going to occur. There would be a weird and wicked work that would take place to corrupt the true work of God.

Richard De Haan has also said:

"The parable speaks of unnatural or abnormal growth. A mustard seed was intended to produce an herb, its smallness signifying humility, but instead it developed into a monstrosity by becoming a tree, a symbol of pride and dominance."

There can be no doubt that this tree was not the intended and normal growth of a mustard seed plant or shrub. Mustard seeds do not produce trees. Thus, according to our Lord an abnormal growth and freak of nature has occurred.

Ray Stedman has correctly remarked:

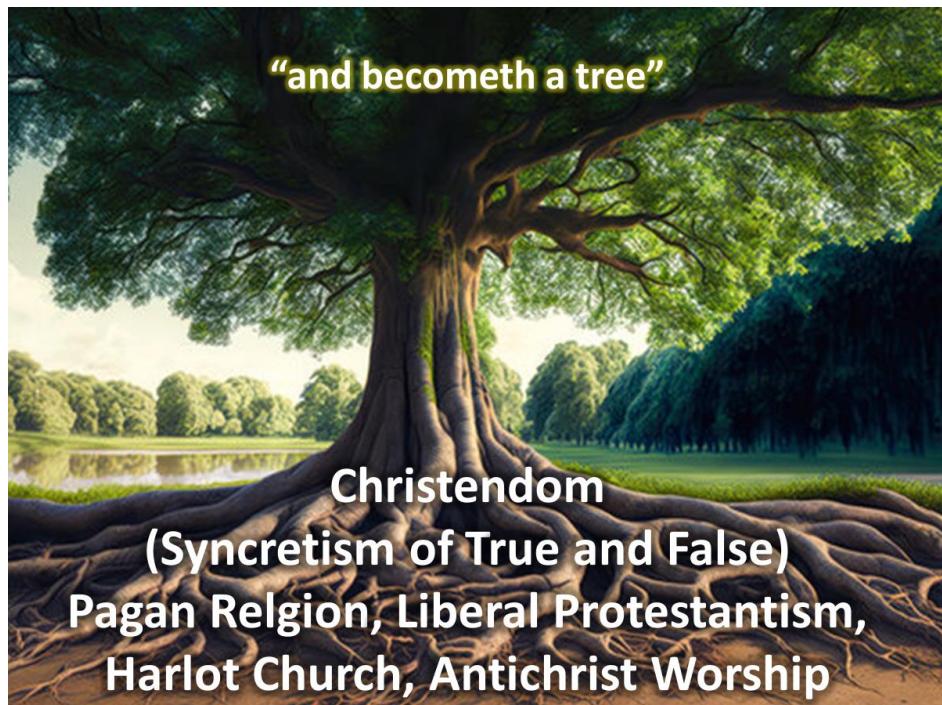
"No, mustard is not a tree; it does not grow into a tree. Then why did Jesus say it did? Right there is the heart of the parable. Our Lord obviously intended to teach that this growth is unnatural growth. It is not normal, not what you would expect from mustard seed. It is something different than is to be expected. He is surely teaching that in this age there is to be an unnatural, unusual growth. Instead of the lowly, humble plant you would expect from a mustard seed there would be a huge, abnormal, ungainly growth into a tree."

I agree with this conclusion wholeheartedly because of the flow of the parables and the facts of nature. Jesus was using exaggeration (hyperbole) to illustrate something to His disciples. The planting of the mustard seed would result in the abnormal growth of a tree.

1. The tree symbolizes Christendom (the true and false together).

The mustard seed growth is natural, and it was portraying a wonderful message of salvation of souls and God's spiritual purpose being propagated

throughout the earth (Mark 16:15). However, the tree and birds roosting within its branches is a symbol of corruption of God's work by Satan. The tree symbolizes Christendom (the true and false together) but ends with total apostasy after the Rapture of the Church with the End Time harlot church (Rev. 17) and the ultimate anti-God religion of the worship of Antichrist (Rev. 13). We will discuss these religious movements in this part of our study.



Tares are distinct from the wheat in the previous parable and in a similar way the mustard plant is different than a tree. No mustard bush can become an actual tree. When speaking about the tree Jesus is referencing something different. A tree is not a mustard bush. We've touched upon this already but let's give it more consideration. With the use of hyperbole, Jesus imagines the mustard plant or bush turning into a giant tree. This is something that is abnormal and represents the satanic growth of the devil's children who mix with God's children within what many have defined as Christendom.

The devil's work is to create an unnatural and perverted growth of professing followers of Jesus Christ. Both today and at the Second Coming many will claim to be part of God's movement, but they are imitators – not

the real thing. So the tree in this parable envisions the mixing of Satan's children among the true children of God creating a religious monstrosity of ecumenical confusion where unsaved people outnumber and dominate God's people. Again, there would be many professed followers of Christ who appear religious but who are not part of God's movement.

So the tree represents Satan's children among God's true children creating an unholy alliance called Christendom. This mixture will occur throughout the mystery period with the real emphasis of Christendom portraying the unnatural growth of apostasy (the professing Church) within the ranks of God's true followers (the possessing Church in whom Christ indwells).

1 John 2:19 is one example of the mixing of Christendom (the true and false together) when it states: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would *no doubt* have continued with us: *but they went out*, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

A tree in Scripture stands for authority and power - a symbol of world dominion (Dan. 4:20-22; Ezek. 17:23; 31:1-8). Such is the case in this parable. The tree represents the *abnormal* growth of a powerful system that would possess great influence and authority throughout the world.

It represents a religious worldwide organization of power and greatness whose ecclesiastical branches would stretch throughout the world. So what exactly is the abnormal growth that Jesus is portraying by the tree analogy? Following Christ's teaching in the last parable, the tares among the wheat, we must conclude that it is the abnormal growth of the evil with the good, the unsaved among the saved.

Once again, the tree represents the unnatural growth of the devil's seed among God's seed that would occur throughout the mystery period. This growth would eventually end up in a giant ecclesiastical and ecumenical organization called Christendom. Thus, Christ was certainly including and anticipating the ecumenical apostasy of the last days and the End Time harlot church of the Tribulation Period in this statement concerning the growth of the tree.

The growth of the two seeds together would eventually create a tree called Christendom with all of its ecclesiastical branches of worldwide influence and power. The tree stands for the unnatural, religious, ecumenical growth, and combination of all faiths and religions linked together. It would be a system of religiosity that possesses great authority and influence in the world much like a spiraling tree towering above the landscape.

To reiterate, Christendom combines the true among the false but portrays the unnatural growth of a system that is characteristically anti-god and against truth. The primary emphasis of Christendom is the evil character and apostate nature of the system. The true Church is part of Christendom, but Jesus sees the system corrupted and unnatural due to the influence of the evil and wickedness. The tree would then picture the syncretism of the true among the false, Christianity among false religion. But more specifically it portrays the uniting together of religion to form a cohesive bond that is against fundamental truth. We might call it the ecumenical tree during the mystery period when all kinds of religions and faiths would link together. There would be a great ecumenical mixing that would take place which according to Jesus was unnatural and unhealthy. This is unnatural growth and only this interpretation fits into the context of the parables.

Ecumenism can be defined in a broad way as: “a movement that promotes worldwide unity among all religions and faiths through greater cooperation.” For example, a Christian priest may invite a Muslim to speak in his pulpit, or a church may get together with a Hindu temple to hold a joint prayer service. Other churches will claim to unite in the name of Christian unity while not emphasizing the importance of doctrine and sanctification.

Many people and organizations reference the name of Jesus Christ and even state He is Lord and Savior yet clearly reject what the Bible says about Him. They have “a form of godliness” (2 Tim. 3:5) but are not of saved and of God. Some obvious examples of this are Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses who call themselves followers of Jesus Christ and claim to be “Christian” yet deny what the Bible declares concerning Christ’s nature and work. A not-so-obvious example is liberal Christianity.

Liberal Christianity is found in almost every denomination, and, although it may seem Christian, it usually rejects several essential truths. Liberals often deny or diminish the inspiration and authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16), the exclusive nature of salvation in Christ (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5), and the total dependence upon God's grace, apart from human works, for salvation (Romans 3:24, 28; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8–9). Today the liberal denominations are ordaining homosexual preachers, both men and women, and they are promoting gay marriage.

Remember that it's the aim of our enemy to attach every church to the ecumenical tree. There is a major emphasis in our day on ecumenical unity among evangelicals and Roman Catholics. Those who promote such unity state that both groups are Christian, and both are God-honoring systems of faith. But there are substantial differences between the two groups of Biblical Christianity and Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism practices and believes different things about how one is saved, the authority of the Bible, the priesthood of believers, the work of Christ on the cross, etc. The list of irreconcilable differences between what the Bible says and what the Roman Catholic Church says make any joint mission between the two impossible. Those who deny this are not being true to what they say they believe, no matter which side they are on. Any Catholic who is serious about his faith will reject what a serious evangelical Christian believes, and vice-versa.



This parable has been mistaught and misapplied in various ways. Many throughout the years have incorrectly taught that this parable tells how the Church will bring in the kingdom (postmillennialism). It has been interpreted that this is the tree of Christianity which will

keep growing until the entire world is Christianized. After the tree is fully-grown the King will then return. Postmillennialism makes the popular claim that this is the Christian tree of the Church where lost sinners can come and find refuge, become converted to Christianity, and eventually become part of the ever-growing Christian tree of world dominion.

Many today are misguided today for they have misjudged the whole movement of history because of the misuse of the symbols in the parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven. The claim is made that the tree refers to Christianity which grows to mammoth proportions, and which suggests that someday Christianity will overtake the world. In the next parable the leaven is also interpreted by others as the Gospel which will eventually overspread and transform the earth resulting in a universal Christian society. These two parables are seen as a promise of universal conversion and social transformation of society that will usher in the earthly kingdom. This is blatant error and is misleading since Scripture warns us how deception and delusion will “wax worse and worse” (2 Tim. 3:13). To think the world will be transformed is nothing less than a fanciful dream! As one old evangelist used to say, “Rubbish!”

Today “dominion theology” is being taught which suggests that the Church can become a worldwide force among humanity and bring in the kingdom. Let me say something that might not sit well with some people. Men have wasted their lives trying to accomplish what they call “bringing in the kingdom.” The tree does not represent the Church bringing in the kingdom. Do you know why? Men can’t bring in the kingdom. Only the King can bring in the kingdom!

Daniel 7:27 prophetically states:

“And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”

This is when the saints will go marching into the kingdom! Please note that the kingdom will be “given” to the saints only when the King returns. It will not be brought in by the saints but given to them when the King returns. As we have seen in the last parable the King is going to come and judge this old world and gather the tares and chaff into the fire before the earthly kingdom can be established. To think that Jesus was teaching the expansion and complete dominion of Christianity in the world before the kingdom can be established is diametrically opposed to what He had just taught in the previous parable concerning a world judgment prior to the establishment

of the Millennial Kingdom. The postmillennial teaching (the Church will Christianize the world and bring in the kingdom) goes against what Jesus taught in the previous parable. It will be necessary to judge untold millions of soldiers in Palestine and the unsaved living on earth at the Second Coming (Rev. 19:11-21 Matthew 24-25). The dream that the saints overtake the earth is just that - a dream!

Matthew 13:40

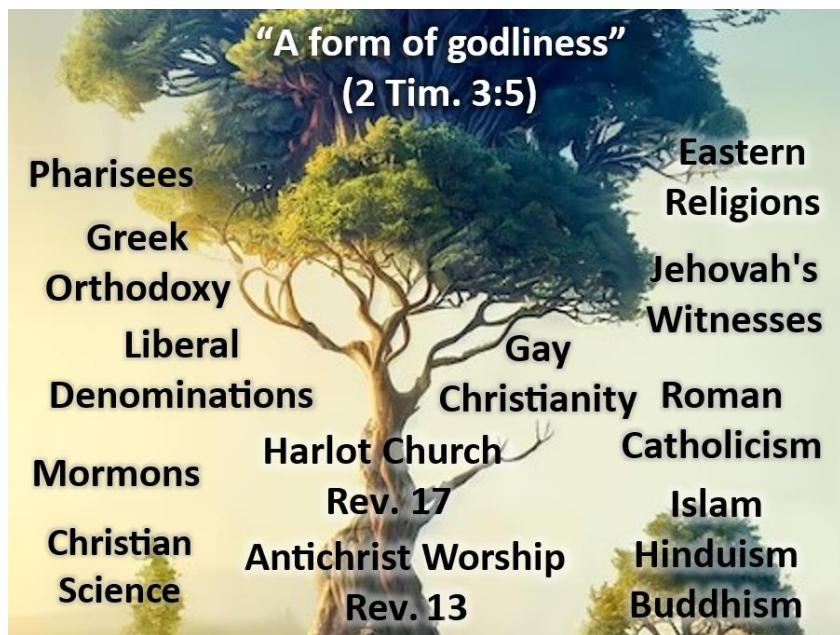
“As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.”

The main point is this. A mustard plant cannot be viewed as a tree that would represent world dominion and power. It is something of humble origin and not universal recognition and dominion. We have concluded that mustard seed planting would normally produce a larger shrub. This planting was the Lord’s intention for His people and eventually the Church. He wanted His people to experience a normal growth in the world. However, we are taken back by the next words that say, “and becometh a tree...”

This is an unnatural happening. The growth into a tree is the work of another agent (Satan) who has sought to produce an abnormal growth called Christendom (a corrupted Church). This is not the Lord’s tree but Satan’s tree. In the last parable it was the mixing of the tares among the wheat. In this parable it also envisions the mixing of God’s children with the devil’s children in an ecumenical tree of religious mixture. This tree represents Satan’s work – not the Lord’s work. Satan encourages this false growth! Satan is behind the unnatural growth of this tree.

As previously stated, the tree represents the syncretism of Christendom which is an amalgamation of the true and false together which forms a giant religious monstrosity of corruption and abnormal growth. Christianity with its natural growth in the world is seen in the imagery of the mustard plant (“when it is grown is the greatest among the herbs”) whereas Christendom (true and false together) is seen in the picture of the tree (“and becometh a tree”).

Whoever heard of a mustard plant turning into a tree. Jesus' point is that something would go wrong in the normal growth process causing an abnormal agricultural occurrence. A mustard plant would become a tree. Something that was to be of humble origins would grow into a large tree of unnatural sensational expansion. The true church is a living *organism*, but this tree represents the *organization* of ecclesiastical religion that is apart from God. The tree tells the never-ending story of how the Church was corrupted from her simplicity in Christ (2 Cor. 11:2-3).



This tree includes a vast system of apostate organized religion that is against the truth. It began in Christ's day and will continue to grow up to the Second Coming of Christ. The fact that Satan is at work is the unified message and mystery presented in the parables of the tares, mustard seed, and leaven.

Now we must understand that Christendom is not Christianity but is an imitation of Christianity where both believers and counterfeit believers coexist in a religious monstrosity of unparalleled proportion. It is a false greatness. It is characterized by ecumenicity, religiosity, numbers, influence, and wealth. The corrupt religious system offers a shelter for the devil and his fallen angels (the birds), and the devil's children. Organized religion offers a shelter for men and women who do not believe the basic doctrines and ethics of historic Christianity as they are declared in the Bible.

Let's trace the growth of the tree of Christendom.



- **The religious leaders during Christ's day were part of the tree.**

The religious tree was already growing in Christ's day with the Pharisaical leadership of Israel rejecting Christ and claiming that He was doing His miracles under the power of Satan (Matt. 12:22-37). So the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others who opposed Christ's ministry while He was on earth were part of this tree of Christendom.

- **The religious apostasy of the last days of Church Age is part of the tree.**

In the fourth century Constantine ordered that the state should be wedded with so-called Christianity. This is when the organized Church officially married the world! A large professing number of believers were organized into a secular power. With this maneuver the religious tree continued to

expand and grow. It spread its branches claiming power to rule over kings, emperors, and rulers by dictating terms to them.

Dr. Campbell Morgan commented on the secularization of Christianity in Constantine's day by saying: "That was the darkest day that dawned in all history of the Church." Today this ecumenical tree includes the three main religious branches of liberal Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Greek Orthodoxy. This religious tree of Satan is filled with false teachers in every denomination.

The religious tree is still growing and flexing its branches everywhere within the world during these last days. The Bible predicts the last days apostasy within the professing church.

2 Timothy 3:1

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come."

2 Timothy 3:13 reveals the imitators and seduction of Christianity during the last days: "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."

The apostasy of today has grown into the great ecumenical monstrosity that brings together all denominations, faiths, and religions.

1 Timothy 4:1-2

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

The "last days" apostasy is included in the tree of Christendom which is when the mustard plant abnormally grows into a tree where the birds (Satan) roost.

- **The religious apostate Church of the Tribulation Period is part of the tree.**



The ever-expanding tree of Christendom is seen through the ecumenical practices of our present day. The glory of this tree with its ecclesiastical branches is seen in the massive attempts to unite all organized religion together. These practices are building and leading up to the one-world apostate church that will merge

on to the scene after the true Church is raptured. It will also end with Antichrist worship.

God's people will be raptured (Rev. 3:10) before the one world church is established and Antichrist worship begins. This means that only the devil's children living during the Tribulation Period will be part of this ominous religious tree. So the final form of this ecumenical tree of false religion will be overtaken by only the devil's children and will culminate with a totally pagan church and the pagan worship of Antichrist.

The apostate church of the first three- and one-half years of the Tribulation Period is pictured as the great harlot of Revelation 17:1-5. The woman is called "the great whore" (Rev.17:1) which prophetically envisions an End Time religious system during the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation Period which will pose as the true Church but is nothing more than a harlot and apostate church.

The End Time ecumenical false/harlot/apostate church which is also envisioned in the tree analogy of Matthew 13:32. It will be a system against the truth which promotes a unity built on apostate philosophies and doctrines. This ecumenical harlot church commits spiritual fornication with the world leaders corrupting them with her false religion (Rev. 17:2) and she is seen riding a beast or Antichrist (Rev. 17:3) which portrays how the apostate church will control the movements of the personal Antichrist and his Revived Roman Empire during the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation Period. This woman is identified as a New Testament "mystery" which was

previously hidden but now is revealed and interpreted considering New Testament revelation (Eph. 3:3; 2 Thess. 2:7).

The Babylon of Bible prophecy is pictured as a literal rebuilt city upon the Euphrates River (Rev. 17:18). It will be the headquarters of the Antichrist (Rev. 17:10) and become the base for ecumenical false religion (Rev. 17:1-5). However, it will also become the commercial and economic capital of the world (Rev. 18).

The rebuilding of Babylon which will house pagan religion (the harlot church) is a test for those of us who embrace the literal interpretation of Bible prophecy.

Revelation 17:5 reveals a stunning ecclesiastical harlotry:

And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

When the Bible states that Babylon (the Babylonian system of the End Times) is a “mother” it means that this wicked city of Babylon was the fountainhead of all idolatry and pagan religion. Babylon is the source from which all pagan religion developed after the Flood and it was the original place where false religion took wings and began to be spread throughout the earth. This false religious and pagan system spread to Greece, Egypt, Italy, Phoenicia, Israel, India, Asia Minor, Europe, and the entire earth.

The term “harlots” is plural and in the prophetic context it indicates that the final form of Babylon (apostate religion) will be a combination of harlot systems that are against God whose roots stem back to Babylon.

Many writers have traced the religiously apostate system of worship which began in Babylon and carried on through history with Roman Catholicism. However, this description of Babylonianism encompasses all forms of paganism including perversions of Christianity and non-Christian religions which combine together in the End Times to defy God and truth.

This “great whore” (Rev. 17:1) will undoubtedly be an ecumenical uniting of all false religions and ecclesiastical churches (harlots) that have spawned

from Babel, and which will unite together in the End Times (Tribulation Period) as one apostate force that is against the true God of Heaven. These religions and religious orders will maintain their distinctives and yet unite in order to spread their own religious beliefs throughout the earth and gain the political power they need to do this.

The “tree” (Matt. 13:32) of religious and Satanic corruption will culminate in the apostate church of the Tribulation Period. In the next parable (The Parable of the Leaven) we will also discover that following the Rapture the whole will become leavened or corrupted (Matt. 13:33). Jesus is teaching the same thing. The true Church will be raptured and only false religions and ecclesiastical orders will remain on earth. These religious persuasions will unite together to form a super church of the End Times.

This is apostate Christendom. It consists of Catholicism and the cults will be part of this harlot church movement. It will be an amalgamation of end time apostasy that will be unprecedented and never before seen in the history of the earth. Mormonism, mysticism, and modernism will have their part in this whore. Liberal Protestantism, Buddhism, Mohammedanism (Islam), Shintoism, Shamanism, Hinduism, Taoism and Pantheism will be part of this end time ecumenical apostate church. Apostate Judaism will also have its own religious and political aspirations and will integrate with this super church thinking that it can gain its own following from the masses of people linking up with her. New Age teachings will be prominent in this End Time wicked system and also the occult (animism and astrology). Black magic and the occult practices are another element of Babylonianism (Rev. 18:23).

This religious system represents the ugly form of organized and ecumenical religion. It is the final form of the tree that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 13:32.

Please note that the book of Revelation depicts this woman as becoming the habitation of “every foul spirit, and unclean, hateful birds” which here are descriptive of demons (Rev. 18:2). The birds are also connected with the tree in Matthew 13, and we know there they are representative of satanic and demonic activity. More on the birds later.

- The religious apostate system of Antichrist worship is part of the tree.

Of course, as the mystery period winds down, just prior to the Second Coming and the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom, the final form of pagan religion will be the universal worship of Antichrist (Rev. 13:12-18).

The Antichrist will destroy the harlot system (Rev. 17:16) and by the middle of the Tribulation Period the man of sin will summons everyone living on earth to worship Him as the only true God.

Revelation 13:12

“And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.”

This will be the ultimate and unprecedented worldwide pagan form of worship in which Beast/Antichrist worshippers will be identified with the number 666,

Antichrist Worship

Revelation 13:18

“Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number *is* Six hundred threescore *and* six.”



John Walvoord has said:

“Probably the simplest explanation here is the best, that the triple six is the number of a man, each digit falling short of the perfect number seven.”

This Antichrist claims to be the true God, but if this were the case, he should be 777. However, the triple 666 is the number of man (man was created on the sixth day by God) and therefore represents the epitome of man's humanistic and pagan efforts to defy God. In essence, God gives a number to the Antichrist that will fall way short of deity. No matter how much this future ruler will insist on being God, the number 666 which is

attached as a numerical code to his name, will still identify him as only a man. He will be a man that falls short of the number seven which is associated with God no matter how much he wants to be God.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 declares this of the Antichrist:

“Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”

2 Thessalonians 2:8

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.”

The devil’s tree will be burned in the end. The doom of this tree is predicted to take place. The final phase of organized ecumenical religion will be destroyed by the Antichrist (Rev. 17:16) and give way to Antichrist worship which too shall be destroyed at the Second Coming.

Arno Gaebelein remarks:

“What a fall it will be when at last that tree, the monstrous tree, falls and is destroyed forever root and all!”

It's hard to imagine that a humble beginning of Christ's followers (the mustard seed plant) turning into a gargantuan tree of false religion and ultimately the worship of the Antichrist during the End Times. But this is exactly what began to occur during Christ's earthly ministry and until He returns in His Second Coming to take out Antichrist.

To summarize, we can conclude that the mustard seed which abnormally grows into a giant tree tells the story of how Satan would eventually corrupt Christ's small but useful Church (the mustard plant). This would be accomplished by building his own counter religious system that would eventually develop into a giant religious monstrosity (a mustard tree on satanic steroids). This is the modern ecumenical tree of Christendom which today contains both God's children and the devil's children but which in the

end will only consist of the devil's children linked to the apostate church and Antichrist worship during the Tribulation Period.

As previously mentioned, the emphasis of this tree is on the apostate nature of Christendom in the last days and End Times (Tribulation Period). Satan's work has caused the plant to grow into a complex tree of many organized ecclesiastical branches. It is the apostate segment among God's true people that has created this unholy alliance called Christendom. The tree is designed to be an imitation of Christianity taking on a form of godliness. It indeed is a false greatness filled with false religion, corrupt denominations, Eastern religions, the harlot church and ultimately the worship of Antichrist.

Someone was visiting the Vatican and was told by one of the guides, "St. Peter can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" This is because of the untold wealth of Romanism which stems back to Babylonian pagan religion.

As the present age draws to a close many will be drawn to the great ecumenical tree. God tells His true people to separate from those who are corrupt in doctrine and have no fellowship with them (2 Cor. 6:14-18; 2 Tim. 3:5). Today the umbrella of Christendom covers such Christ-denying systems as Unitarianism, Christian Science, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Unification Church (moonies). All of this was foreseen and included in the abnormal growth of Christendom as foretold by the Lord. Nevertheless, we do not need to sanction it or become identified with it in these last days. Let us steer clear from any direct participation, association, or resemblance that we are harboring the enemy and agreeing with their cause (Rom. 16:17). Let us make a strong commitment to not promote the false religious tree of the last days in which we are living today (2 Pet. 3:1) by meeting together inside the halls of apostate Christendom and embracing the devil's ecumenical folly.

The tree that symbolizes Christendom (the true and false together) but ends with total apostasy after the Rapture of the Church. But what do the birds represent in the tree? We have mentioned this already but let's consider this in more detail as we finish the parable.

- **The religious people living at the Second Coming of Christ are part of the tree.**

This same religious tree continues to grow and blossom throughout the mystery period up to the Second Coming of Christ when the mystery period ends.

Matthew 7:21 -23 envisions the scene of the Second Coming:

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven (*not Heaven but when Heaven rules over the earth during the Millennium – “thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” - Matt. 6:10*); but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day (*envisioning the Second Coming*), Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

The timing of this scene is when Christ returns in His Second coming to establish the Millennium which is here defined as the “kingdom of heaven” or the heaven’s rule over planet earth. The tree will be finally and forever cut down at the Second Coming of Christ. All those who still appear to be religious will discover that their religious works will not bring them into the earthly Millennium. Christ will declare, “I never knew you.” In other words, they were never God’s children. Instead, they were always the devil’s children who were part of the devil’s tree of Christendom.

2. The birds symbolize Satan and fallen angels.

I remember seeing an old Alfred Hitchcock black and white 1963 movie called “The Birds.” In this old science fiction film, the birds turned against society and began attacking them. The reason why the birds turned against society was to punish humans for taking nature for granted. How many real birds were used when filming The Birds by Alfred Hitchcock? I am told that over 25,000 live birds were used during filming, but it was difficult to catch them, as crows and ravens outsmarted the crew and many birds carried lice. Well, as we come to the final interpretation and explanation of the Parable of the Mustard Seed we want to consider the meaning of the birds.

Matthew 13:32 again declares:

“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.”

The growth of the seed into a tree (a religious monstrosity featuring apostate Christendom) is only one part of the story. We must also account for the birds in the branches. In the Parable of the Sower the birds represented Satan who snatches the seed away from the hearts of people.

In Matthew 13:4 speaks about the original birds:

“And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up.”

Jesus gives the interpretation of the birds in Matthew 13:19:

“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.”

We discovered in the first parable that the birds represented Satan and fallen angels (demons) who seek to steal the seed of God’s truth from the hearts of humanity.

Mark 4:15 conveys the same truth:

“And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.”

Luke 8:12 similarly reads:

“Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.”

If we are to be consistent in our interpretation, we must give the birds the same meaning in our present parable. One reason is because both these parables were taught on the same day and Jesus set the interpretation for them when speaking the first parable. The growth of the kingdom will not

result in the conversion of the world for as we have seen the abnormal growth of a garden variety mustard seed plant growing into a giant tree portrays something that is evil and corrupted by Satan. In fact, in the first four parables we observe Satan working by sowing His own children (seed) among God's children (seed) causing spiritual and religious corruption as intimated in the Parable of the Sower and the Wheat and Tares.



The unanimous theme is that Satan is up to something. The work of the fowls in the first and third parables are obviously the work of Satan. In these parables the birds are agents of evil as they are portrayed in another Scripture.

Revelation 18:2 declares:
“And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.”

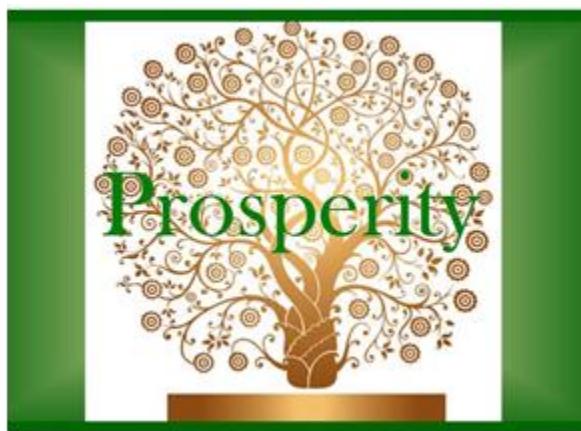
Both the system and city of the End Time Babylon will be indwelt by the birds which here are representative of Satan and demons. The birds in the Parable of the Mustard Seed do not typify young converts flocking to the church. Rather, they were previously interpreted as the presence and plots of the prince of darkness (Satan). The same is true in this parable.

As previously mentioned, since the birds nesting in the tree are representative of Satan's work, we can conclude that the tree itself points to the corrupting influence of Satan. A person's interpretation of the birds in the parable will result in the correct understanding of the tree and overall understanding of the parable. Satan has corrupted Christianity with the tree of Christendom which we have previously seen was the mixing of the Devil's children among God's children creating a giant religious tree filled with apostasy and false doctrine.

Some conservative scholars have tried to argue that the tree in this parable represents the natural and prosperous growth of God's children among the world in the present expansion of the kingdom and not unnatural or evil growth. They base this on other Scriptures outside the context of the parable of Matthew 13.

Daniel 4:11-12 portrays Nebuchadnezzar and his prosperous kingdom with birds roosting in a tree: "The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: The leaves thereof *were* fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it *was* meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs (*branches of the tree*) thereof, and all flesh was fed of it."

Ezekiel 31:6 also gives the impression of prosperity where birds flocking in the trees represent the advancement of the Assyrian Dynasty: "All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs (*branches of the trees*), and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations."



So the conclusion of some is that the tree and birds speak of prosperity in other Bible verses so they must mean the same thing in the Parable of the Mustard Seed. The problem with equating the Parable of the Mustard Seed with the trees in Daniel or Ezekiel, and with their corresponding birds (indicating prosperity and blessing)

can be easily stated. Context, context, context! Although we can often clarify similar taught truth and symbols by comparing Scripture with Scripture many expositors are simply unwilling to compare the Parable of the Mustard Seed with the preceding teaching already interpreted by Christ in the first two parables. The flow of the first two parables spoke of devilish corruption and the birds clearly represented Satan's work (Matt. 13:19).

Neither of the first two parables were a sign of blessing or prosperity. Why would Christ change the meaning in this parable? Therefore, the birds in the branches are a sure sign of satanic corruption and evil taking place in the world to hinder and thwart God's purpose. They are not a sign of prosperity let alone God's prosperity. They are representative of Satan hijacking what God began (the Church) and causing apostasy and doctrinal corruption within the Church in the ecclesiastical organization of Christendom which houses the false among the true, the songbirds among the buzzards and ravens.

Let's once again confirm the progression of evil in the first four parables.

Corrupting Influence and Evil of the Devil *Satanic Mixture and Manipulation in 4 Kingdom Parables*	
#1 - Parable of the Sower Satan and Fallen Angels Represented as Birds Keeping People From Salvation (Matt. 13:19)	#2 - Parable of the Wheat and Tares A Mixture of the Devil's Children with God's Children to Create Deception (Matt. 13:38)
#3 - Parable of the Mustard Seed Abnormal Growth of a Religious Satanic System (Matt. 13:31-32) Satan and Fallen Angels Represented as Birds	#4 Parable of the Leaven The Satanic Corruption of God's Word (Matt. 13:33)

So the tree and bird descriptions found elsewhere in the Bible do not override the contextual evidence in these parables that the tree and birds represent evil. In fact, we can conclude that the Babylonian and Assyrian dynasties (Daniel 4:11-12; Ezek. 31:6) were not a sign of God's direct hand of blessing and prosperity for they were pagan empires under the influence of demons. Therefore, I am at odds with the interpretation that concludes the tree and birds represent the spiritual prosperity and blessing of God in

the Parable of the Mustard Seed. Of course, good men whom I respect have come to the opposite conclusion.

Dwight Pentecost, a dispensational giant and highly respected teacher concludes: "The symbol of the birds lodging in the branches can be understood by referring to similar imagery used in Daniel 4. In applying the interpretation of Daniel's tree vision to the present parable, we can see that Christ was teaching that though the new form of the kingdom would begin with an insignificant beginning, it would grow to great proportions and provide blessing and bounty for the many people who would come into it."

Stanley Toussaint agreed with this interpretation:

"The parable of the grain describes the prosperous growth in number of the heirs of the kingdom in the sight of men."

Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary states:

"The parable of the mustard seed affirms that during that time period, the number of people who will inherit the kingdom will be very small at first. But though it begins like the smallest of seeds, the nucleus will enjoy growth completely out of proportion to its initial size."

John MacArthur concludes:

"The kingdom of heaven would grow from tiny beginnings to a great tree and would ultimately provide shelter, protection, and benefit to the entire world. ... Thus, the worldwide success of the Gospel is seen in this parable, which causes many to be saved."

These conclusions by conservative scholars seem to miss the entire flow and context of the previous two parables which taught the decline in the ministry and outreach of the Gospel in the hearts of lost humanity. Consistency and continuity within the parables would lead us to the conclusion that this tree and the birds are not representative of the good growth of God's seed. Rather, it's an unusual and unnatural growth of the Devil's seed. It is a growth that is foreseen and foretold by the Lord but never planned and sanctioned by the Lord.

The Lord's planting was that of a mustard seed which would normally produce a garden shrub – representative of a company of people that would be smaller in size and of humble origin. God's true people were never destined to become the kind of tree described in this parable. The tree in this parable was the result of satanic growth. The expression "and becometh a tree" speaks of abnormal growth caused by the work of the devil. Again, something went very wrong in the growth of this tree. The mystery or secret happening about the kingdom is not its expansion before it arrives on earth but the actual disruption of God's work or program through the corrupting influence of Satan.

The devil is the bird in this tree promoting and pushing his program of apostasy among the churches. No doubt he is working in connection with his other demonic agents and even his own preachers who are antichrists (1 John 2:18) and enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18). All have their backing by Satan, and all are roosting in the ecumenical tree of Christendom pushing Satan's plan of mixture and doctrinal confusion.

Paul Van Gorder has correctly stated:

"The magnificent, grandiose tree of Christendom becomes the resting place for the birds of the air, the very emissaries of Satan."

J. Vernon McGee also comes to this conclusion:

"The birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Years ago I heard another liberal preacher interpret the birds as being different denominations. He spoke of the Baptist birds, the Presbyterian birds, the Methodist birds, and all other church groups as being birds. That, of course, is a contradiction of our Lord's own interpretation of the birds in the first parable. We can be sure that the birds in the parables of this discourse do not speak of anything good, but rather they represent evil. The birds are the ones that took the seed which fell by the wayside. Our Lord said that they represent the enemy who is Satan. I am afraid that Christendom today is a mustard tree filled with a lot of dirty birds!"

Satan began the mixing process even in Christ's day and he continues to mix the true with the false today within this mammoth movement of Christendom. If we interpret the parable correctly, we must remember that

the true Church is included in this tree of unhealthy mixture. This is not by the Lord's choice. The work of Satan has caused it to be so by his mixing methods. Nevertheless, the real story behind Christendom and the ecumenical tree in our day is how Satan is pushing his own agenda by forming a church that is corrupt. It is the apostate segment among God's true people that has created this unholy alliance called Christendom.

2 Corinthians 11:14 -15

"And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed (*masquerading, changing*) into an angel (*messenger*) of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness (*portraying religion and posing as ministers of the truth while using words like Jesus and the Bible*); whose end shall be according to their works."

J. N. Darby once stated that Satan is never more satanic than when he carries a Bible! Satan and his fallen angels are the birds which influence false teachers and apostates. In other words, the birds (Satan and his demons) are working through the apostates of the last days.

1 Timothy 4:1 again reminds us of his work:

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith (*what Christians believe and embrace – sound doctrine and the Bible*), giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils."

The birds are at work within Christendom. Demons create a religious disguise as they work in concert with false teachers and apostates. This means that Satan and demons (the birds) and those he is influencing (his bird followers) are roosting together in this giant ecumenical religious tree for apostates have become part and one with the work of Satan and demons. There are many birds today that stand in the pulpits across America who are energized by Satan. Satan's

The Birds of Christendom



messengers are not only wolves in sheep's clothing but birds in disguise. The ecclesiastical birds of Christendom are roosting in all the branches of liberal Protestantism and denominationalism. We find the birds in the cults with weird, Bible-distorting, and Christ-rejecting doctrines. But the real bird behind everything is Satan.

Satan is behind the great apostate movements of today. He is working in concert with the dirty birds of denominational corruption and liberal Protestantism who have embraced German rationalism and higher critical theories and even socialistic and communistic philosophies. Satan is working with the dirty birds of Roman Catholicism and other apostate denominations and religions within the world who teach sacramental salvation and good works as the way to be accepted before God. The church for the most part has gone to the birds! The buzzards of the organized church are roosting in the complex and ecclesiastical branches of Christendom.

The great ecumenical rallies of our day house all kinds of birds and they are not beautiful bluebirds, robins, and other songbirds which make their nests in this tree. They are the vultures and buzzards or birds of prey that make their home in the apostate churches across America. They are the unclean and hateful birds (Rev. 18:2). Today any old bird can join the church!

One Catholic said when a terrorist tried to assassinate the pope that "It was like trying to shoot God." No! A thousand times no! The pope is but one of the birds flocking into the Christendom tree of the last days who is energized by Satan. The working of the birds is evident in our present day. The different birds of Christendom (Satan working through apostates) promote errant conclusion regarding Christ, the Holy Spirit, and other Biblical subjects.

A recent survey of broad evangelical circles and the cults have followed what I term as "Bird Theology."

- ✓ The Holy Spirit is a force, not a personal being. 56% Agree
- ✓ God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. 48% Agree

- ✓ Individuals must contribute to their own salvation. 74% Agree
- ✓ My good deeds help to earn my place in Heaven. 39% Agree
- ✓ God will always reward faith with material blessings. 37% Agree

We could add to this that many within Christendom are accepting the “Bird Theology” that homosexuality and gay marriage are acceptable in God’s sight, and we should be engaged in “wokism” theology. Others are still sounding the “Bird Theology” that Jesus Christ is not God, He was not virgin born, did not rise from the dead bodily and the Second Coming of Christ is a myth. So there are many religious teachings today which are being propagated by demons (the birds) within this giant ecclesiastical tree.

For this reason, Jesus forewarned the disciples that during His absence and prior to the earthly kingdom’s arrival that there would be a phenomenal growth of people who claim to be related to Him and His work. But the disciples should not be deceived nor equate this unnatural growth with success. It would be unhealthy growth. Though the tiny seed would become an abnormal tree, its largeness and greatness would “become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Rev. 18:2). Like the tares Satan is at work creating confusion as he clutters the branches of the tree of Christendom with his own children of the devil posing as Christians.

We were taking a trip to Pensacola Florida and stopped to sleep in Alabama. It was a warm November evening. When I went outside, I could hear many birds roosting in a tree. They were fluttering, chirping away, and making a lot of noise. So it is with Satan. The dirty bird with his emissaries is roosting in the giant ecumenical tree that houses false religion and apostasy. Satan is behind it all.

The devil is an old bird who has planned to promoted his doctrines of demons in the latter times by way of the seducing spirits which are behind the messages of false teachers. Demons with their false doctrines (1 Tim. 4:1) and teachers have silently flown into the church, and they are presently roosting comfortably in their new nests. Apostasy is very real today and it is in full bloom in the ecumenical tree of Christendom. The devil’s tree is full of birds of a different feather.

Herbert Lockyer has said:

“Christendom is so top-heavy because too many fowls of the air lodge in the branches of its tree.”

As long as there are buzzards in the branches of the organized church, there will be opposition to the Word of God. Of course, nothing surprises the Son of God. He precisely unfolds to us what would take place so that we don't have to remain in the dark concerning what would occur before the Second Coming and millennium is established on earth. In the meantime, God's children are to avoid promoting and participating in the ecumenical rallies of our day where the birds are roosting (2 John 9-11). God has not called us to roost with the birds! We should not promote the growth of this tree of apostasy.

On a more recent vacation to Lakeland Florida, my wife and I went to a park that was filled with wildlife. There were many kinds of birds in the park. I made the mistake of feeding a few birds while were eating our lunch. Suddenly, there were birds everywhere. They were landing on my grey truck and leaving their white marks! So, I stopped feeding them. In a similar way, we are not to feed the birds that are roosting in ecclesiastical Christendom. We are not to harbor or promote apostasy in any form or in any way.

Beloved, let us hold fast until Jesus returns (Rev. 3:11). The local church is not to place itself in a working relationship with unbelievers or unbelieving systems of apostasy while attempting to do God's work.

2 Corinthians 6:17

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you.”

We are to separate from the birds and not roost with them! God has drawn a line that cannot be moved. If we cross the line, we in some sense become part of the birds and their work. 1 Corinthains 10:20 says, “and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils (demons) for demons are behind all apostasy. It was true of the pagan temple feasts in Paul's day where demons ruled and it's also true today within the ever growing and

expanding tree of Christendom. The birds along with their religious messengers and ministers are everywhere. We should not want to be part of those movements and churches that are helping this tree to grow. 1 Peter 1:15-16 remind us why we must not become part of this corrupt tree: “But as he which hath called you is holy (*calling of God*), so be ye holy in all manner of conversation (*command of God*); Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (*character of God*).”

The Parable of the Leaven

(Matthew 13:33)



In his book *Teacher Man*, Pulitzer Prize-winner Frank McCourt reflects on his 30 years as a teacher in New York City high schools. He used a variety of techniques in his English and creative writing classes, but one that seemed to surface again and again was the power of a compelling story to capture attention and encourage

learning. This method of instruction was used by the greatest Teacher of all - the Lord Jesus Christ. The next parable or story that Jesus tells is again spoken to reveal the course of the age until Christ returns to establish the Millennial Kingdom. It is another parable similar in kind to the previous three parables.

Matthew 13:33

“Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven (*in its mystery form*) is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

This is undoubtedly the most misinterpreted parable in the entire Bible. The unscriptural use of the symbols in this parable has led to a completely opposite interpretation and understanding than Christ intended to give to the parable.

Leman Strauss has correctly stated:

“It is possible that more controversy has revolved around the explanation of this verse than around any other single verse in the Bible.”

I. The popular interpretation of the parable

The meaning of this parable has been grossly distorted from the original understanding that our Lord attached to it. Most interpreters when explaining this parable throw all principles of Bible interpretation to the winds by refusing to see how the symbol of leaven is used elsewhere in the Bible. The usual interpretation is that the leaven is symbol of good and represents the Gospel whereas the woman is the Church. The Church is to take the Gospel and put it into the world of lost humanity which is represented by the three measures of meal. The Gospel will then quietly but surely do its work like leaven, like yeast in bread, until all of humanity is reached by the Gospel and the whole world is transformed. Then finally the kingdom will come to planet earth.

This sounds like an “Alice in Wonderland” fairytale. To conclude that the world is getting better through a spiritual leavening process is one for the fairytale books. This parable is teaching the very opposite – the growth and expansion of evil.

Gary North must believe in fairytales:

“The kingdom of God is like leaven. Christianity is the yeast, and it has a leavening effect on pagan, satanic cultures around it. It permeates the whole culture, causing it to rise.

Although this has been the postmillennial interpretation of this parable it is absolutely wrong! In fact, this philosophy borders on the error of universalism which teaches how everyone will be saved in the end. To think that the Gospel will advance secretly penetrating the world like yeast in bread and gradually save and transform society is a fanciful dream. I reject this interpretation because it has no present-day reality attached to it but more than this the Word of God cannot substantiate the interpretation.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 once informs us that things are trending downward: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

2 Timothy 3:13 adds:

"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived."

Jesus taught in Matthew 24:6 that as we approach the end of the age wars would increase – not decrease: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet." In fact, the teaching of Bible prophecy reveals that the world will be in a state of armed rebellion against Christ at the Second Coming, a rebellion led and motivated by a Satanic trinity – Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet (Revelation 16:13-14; Psalm 2). The Bible reveals that the Millennial Kingdom will be ushered in by the cataclysmic judgments described in Revelation 6-19. Afterward the King returns riding on a white charger to reclaim the earth (Rev. 19:11-21). Read it for yourself. The kingdom will not come to earth gradually through the preaching of the Gospel but by the sudden appearance of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords!

The dream of worldwide acceptance of the Gospel message and the transformation of society is absurd. If leaven is the Gospel permeating society and christianizing the entire earth, then it has not succeeded. If I were convinced that this is the true meaning of this parable, then I would be tempted to throw away my Bible and give up the ministry. I would probably be the most discouraged and disappointed man alive on earth. The dream of a converted society is ludicrous. Never in all of history has there been more crime, more violence, more injustice, more wretchedness, and more evil among mankind than there is in our day.

Our Lord did not interpret the meaning of this parable to His disciples because He evidently expected them to know what the meaning was. We will prove that this was the case when investing the meaning of the symbols presented in the parable. Every Jew knew what Jesus was speaking about then using the symbols of leaven, a woman, and meal. Tragically not many interpreters of the Scripture know what our Lord meant by this parable.

The postmillennial theory basically states that the Church is going to permeate society to such an extent that the entire world will be Christianized. As previously mentioned, this is known as Dominion Theology. It teaches that Christ's kingdom will gradually advance until it reaches worldwide dimensions. Then, after the kingdom is already established, Jesus will be ready to return in His Second Coming. In other words, postmillennialism teaches that Jesus actually returns to earth after the Millennium is already established through the Church. This theory holds that the Millennium will gradually emerge through the transformation of society.

However, after two world wars and the increasing terrorist threats worldwide and war conflicts in the Middle East, along with the demoralization of society (child pornography, pedophilia, drugs, crime, murder, sex crimes, same-sex marriages, gender transitioning and confusion) many have debunked this theory and gone to amillennialism (there will be no Millennium). Here is the point. Not only the Bible but history and the evil in our present-day society disproves the theory that leaven is a symbol of the Gospel transforming society. This cannot be what the parable is teaching.

II. The proper understanding of the parable

When understanding the Parable of the Leaven we must once again reestablish the primary point of the previous parables. The first three parables foretold the trend of the age between Christ's absence and His return (the Second Coming) as a time of satanic manipulation and corruption. Therefore, the teaching of this parable must be consistent with the previous parables.

Several years ago, the American Environmental Protection Agency allowed an ocean of sludge to pollute Colorado's Animas River, turning the tributary to a sickening bright yellow color. The accident occurred when a crew tried to pump out the polluted buildup of an abandoned mine. The waste overflowed, ruining a hundred-mile stretch of river. This parable represents the continued flow of evil and corruption on earth during the mystery period. Like a polluted river, our world is polluted by the toxic buildup of false doctrine and sin.

The problem in this world is not political, and it can't be solved by political means. It's not a legal problem and all the laws in the world can't solve it. If everyone was a lawyer and had a degree in law, we'd still have a corrupt culture. It's not an educational nor a financial problem. If everyone were a teacher or a millionaire, we'd still be in trouble. The real problem is deception, sin, and evil in the hearts of people which is like yeast (leaven) expanding in bread. So evil continues to grow in the world of humanity and this ever-expanding flow of evil occurs through satanic manipulation.

A. The leaven is a symbol of evil.

Following the flow of the previous parables allows us to correctly interpret this parable as something sinister and evil. If the leaven is a picture of the Gospel healing the entire world and society then why is there only a twenty five percent response in the first parable to the Gospel message?

How can the whole earth be leavened for good when the tares (devil's children) remain to the end of the age and experience God's judgment as presented in the second parable?

How can the whole world become leavened for good if the fowls (Satan and his emissaries) are found lodging in the ecumenical tree of Christendom? It must be understood that as long as there are buzzards in the branches of the organized church (Matt. 13:32), then the world can never be saved and totally transformed. It has been over 2,000 years since our Lord spoke this parable. Surely if leaven is a picture of the Gospel saving and transforming society, then we should just about have the world converted. There should be a lot of evidence all around us. But the news reports and world events

have a different commentary on the world. It is not getting better. It is getting worse. The world is more unstable and ungodly than it ever was before in the history of the human race.

Jesus never said that the Gospel of leaven would permeate the world and save all of mankind. This is universalism which is an anti-biblical teaching. If the whole world is going to be saved, then Jesus lied when he gave this parable and when He spoke of great throngs dying and going to hell on a broad road that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

We must understand that it was not the intention of our Lord in these parables to teach the triumph of the Gospel in this age. Rather, Jesus was teaching about the workings of Satan in his opposition to the Gospel. As we have seen, the first four parables actually reveal the work of Satan. He steals the seed from the hearts of people and brings confusion to their minds concerning salvation (Matt. 13:19-23). He seeks to hinder God's work through corruption by sowing tares (false Christians) among God's true people (Matt. 13:24-30). He promotes false growth in the mustard seed parable (Matt. 13:31-32) and now in the parable of the leaven we are going to witness how Satan distorts truth (Matt. 13:33).

Parables 1-4 = Satan as an Imitator

**He Plants FALSE CHRISTIANS
(Parables of Soils and Tares)**

**He Encourages FALSE GROWTH
(Parable of the Mustard Seed)**

**He Introduces FALSE DOCTRINE
(Parable of the Leaven)**

We have also seen that parables one through four reveal how Satan is primarily an *imitator*: He plants false Christians (parables of the soils and the tares), he encourages a false growth (parable of the mustard seed), and he introduces false doctrine (parable of the leaven). In the parable of the leaven, we see the climax of the efforts of Satan to subvert and

destroy what God is doing. As we have seen, Satan does this through wicked people who claim to be part of Christianity but at the same time seek to corrupt the truth in order to manipulate others (2 Cor. 11:3-4) and even abandon the truth to destroy the faith of others (1 John 2:19). Satan's efforts in the first four parables is imitation which results in manipulation.

Bart Ehrman is a distinguished professor of religious studies at The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and is one of America's most widely read so-called scholars of early Christianity and the New Testament. His books such as "Misquoting Jesus" and "How Jesus Became God" challenge a lot of beliefs and conventional wisdom. As for Ehrman's beliefs, as a child, he was an altar boy in the Episcopal Church. At age 15, he became a born-again fundamentalist evangelical Christian. After attending the Moody Bible Institute, he studied at Princeton Theological Seminary, which introduced him to texts and interpretations that led him to a more liberal form of Christianity. Eventually, he left the faith altogether.

Ehrman was asked in the interview: "Is it fair to say you're an atheist now?" Ehrman replied: "That is fair to say (laughter). I actually consider myself both an atheist and an agnostic because I - you know, I don't really know if there's a superior being in the universe, but I don't believe there is. And so in terms of what I know, I'm an agnostic. But in terms of what I believe, I'm an atheist."

Next he was asked: "In a time like this, do you wish you could still believe in a heaven that offers eternal life, in a place where you would be united with loved ones?" Ehrman replied: "Yeah, that would absolutely be good. It's not that I wish I believed it; I wish that it were true. And as I say in my book, as we'll probably get to, it may be true that we will live after we die. But if we do, it'll be something pleasant like that. It's not going to be something awful. So I - you know, it's not that I wish I believed it so much as I wish that it were true."

In this interview Ehrman demonstrates that Satan kept the Gospel seed from being planted in his heart (Matt. 13:19), that he is a tare among the wheat (Matt. 13:25), that he is part of Christendom but not of Christ (Matt. 13:32), and that his teachings are filled with leaven or false doctrine (Matt. 13:33). How can a professed atheist direct us in the truth? It's an oxymoron.

Cable television star Ted Turner is another example of someone who left the faith. His legacy and conclusions are designed to manipulate and deceive others. He criticized conservative Christianity and said, "Jesus

probably would be sick at his stomach" over the way his ideas have been twisted by today's preachers," the Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported.

Turner made his remarks at a banquet in Orlando, Florida, where he was given an award by the American Humanist Association for his work on behalf of the environment and world peace. Turner said he had a strict Christian upbringing and at one time even seriously considered becoming a missionary. He laughed and said, "I was saved seven or eight times," the newspaper quoted him as saying. But he said he became disenchanted with Christianity after his sister died, despite his prayers. Turner said the more he strayed from his faith, "the better I felt."

Ted Turner is another prime example of how Satan kept the Gospel seed from being planted in a person's heart. Turner is a tare among the wheat. He is part of Christendom but not Christ and his conclusions are also filled with leaven or false doctrine. This is true of all false teachers and apostates of the last days and End Times (Tribulation Period).

Mark 13:22

"For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if *it were* possible, even the elect."

Jesus was teaching a progression of religious mixture and deception in the first four parables, and we must come to grips with the evil that is being presented in these parables.

T. Ernest Wilson has this to say about the main focus of the parables: "To summarize: These first four parables of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13 teach us that the message of the kingdom is being opposed by four devil-inspired movements: satanic opposition, sinister imitation, sensational expansion, and subtle infiltration."

Opposition to God's Work During the Mystery Period:

- **Satanic Opposition = Parable of the Sower**
- **Sinister Imitation = Parable of the Tares**
- **Sensational Expansion = Parable of the Mustard Seed**
- **Subtle Infiltration = Parable of the Leaven**

Stanley Toussaint has wisely observed:

"This parable reveals the fact that evil will run its course and dominate the new age. But it also indicates that when the program of evil has been fulfilled, the kingdom will come."

The fact that Leaven is consistently seen to be a symbol of evil in Scripture unveils to us the character of the age before Messiah returns in His Second Advent. It will be a time of increasing evil (not good) as revealed in various Scriptures (1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3; 2 Pet. 3; Jude; Rev. 6-19).

It's interesting to read how familiar present-day conservative scholars also embrace the teaching that leaven is something that can be positive and that the disciples would understand the term leaven to mean prosperity and the power or penetration of the Gospel among humanity. Of course, Biblical and conservative scholars do not teach postmillennialism or that everybody in the entire world is going to be saved and then the king returns. They merely teach that the Gospel will penetrate society and allow God's kingdom to expand in the world.

John MacArthur again writes:

"But Jesus' purpose in these two parables (parables of the mustard seed and leaven), as in many other teachings, was to assure the apostles, the early church, and every believer in every age that ultimately His kingdom not only would not fail but would prosper and grow. Christianity will win, evil will be destroyed, and Jesus will reign. Christ Himself is building His church, and the very "gates of Hades [death itself] shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18).

Tom Constable concurs with this interpretation:

"Some interpreters have understood yeast as a metaphorical reference to evil. However not all uses of yeast in the Old Testament carry this symbolic meaning (e.g., Lev. 7:13; 23:15–18). This parable stresses the hidden internal change taking place in the kingdom between its inception in Jesus' ministry and its final form when the kingdom will cover the earth in the Millennium."

Again, this is certainly a fanciful conclusion that ignores the Biblical teaching about leaven which the disciples would fully understand because

of the other teachings on leaven given by Christ. If the leaven represents something that is good, then why hide it as indicated in this parable? We are never commissioned to hide the Gospel but proclaim it to the world (Mark 16:15). Jesus told His disciples to spread the truth that He gave to them from the housetops (Matt. 10:27). We are never commissioned to hide truth. So this parable has an evil connotation attached to it.

Stanley Toussaint again observes:

“Finally, the verb used here, ‘to hide,’ is very unusual if leaven represent good. It is a much more fitting word if the leaven is to have a sinister effect. This is similar to the idea in the parable of the wheat and darnel. The way the woman hides the leaven in the meal parallels very closely to the manner in which the enemy sowed darnel by night.”

We might call this the parable the sneaky housewife. The fact that a sneaky housewife is hiding the leaven in the meal would suggest that there is something evil and sinister taking place. She is trying to hide or cover up something with her actions. She has an ulterior motive and is trying to get away with something she knows is evil and wrong.

The interpretation that leaven is evil corruption fits well with the previous parables which also convey that through secrecy something evil and sinister was occurring (“But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat” – Matt. 13:25). In addition, the devil was responsible for catching “away that which was sown in his heart” (Matt. 13:19) by acting as an evil and sinister agent working in the hearts of the unsaved. Then too, the abnormal growth of a mustard seed into a tree would also suggest something that was unplanned, manipulative, and a distortion to God’s original design (Matt. 13:31-32). Secrecy and evil are the primary thrust of the first three and now the fourth parable. This parable of the leaven points to the corruption of God’s Word. The Biblical teaching on the symbolism of leaven clearly reveals this.

The typology of leaven consistently stands for something that is evil. Not only does the contextual flow of the parables reveal that leaven is something evil (not good) but also the entire testimony of the Scriptures will give us the proper interpretation of the leaven. If we would not stray from the context of evil which is being portrayed in these parables, then we

would never conclude that the leaven refers to something that is good or speaks of positive permeation and growth.

It must be concluded that evil permeation and growth are the main thrust in every instance where leaven shows up in Scripture. Wherever leaven appears the evil is associated with its meaning. Leaven has a consistent sinister and evil connotation attached to it throughout the Bible. Never once is it used as a symbol of anything good. Of course, there is nothing inherently wrong in eating leaven (I love leavened pizza!). There are no prohibitions given in the present dispensational order that forbid God's people from eating leaven (1 Tim. 4:4). But the typology and illustrations God used of leaven in both Old and New Testaments teaches us an important lesson on corruption, evil, and sin. This is what leaven answers to in the Bible.

God has chosen to give leaven an evil connotation to teach spiritual truths to both past and future generations that read the Bible. The typical teaching on leaven is designed to illustrate the principle of evil corruption. We can follow the Scriptures which speak of leaven and prove conclusively that leaven is always portrayed as a symbol or picture of evil.

Leaven = A Type and Picture of Evil

- **Lot and Leaven (wickedness)**
- **Passover and Leaven (separation)**
- **Mosaic Law and Leaven (sin)**
- **Pharisees and Leaven (hypocrisy & legalism)**
- **Sadducees and Leaven (Liberalism)**
- **Herod and Leaven (licentiousness)**

➤ Lot and Leaven (picture of wickedness)

The first reference to leaven in the Old Testament is in Genesis 19. When God's angelic messengers visited Lot in Sodom, we are told that "he made

them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat" (Gen. 19:3). The leaven was omitted from the bread. We can be sure that leaven was commonly used in the wicked city of Sodom and that the Mosaic regulations had not yet been instituted. But God must in some way, perhaps through the angelic visitors, conveyed to Lot that no leaven was to be introduced in the bread on this occasion with the visit. Leaven was not appropriate food for angels. Food for God's holy angels must not have anything that would typify evil.

It's interesting that angel food cake is customarily prepared without either yeast or chemical leaveners. Instead, these cakes are leavened by air entrapped in the product through vigorous beating. Perhaps the idea of not adding leaven to the flour of angel food cake came from Genesis 19 where Lot was instructed to not use leaven in his angel recipe! Of course, this is pure conjecture!

➤ Passover and Leaven (picture of separation from the world)

The next mention of leaven is in connection with Israel's redemption and flight from Egypt. The Passover Lamb was to be slain and its blood applied to the two sideposts and the upper doorposts of the houses. Then on the night before their departure from the land of bondage (Egypt), the Israelites were to "eat flesh ... roast with fire and unleavened bread" (Ex. 12:8). In the years to come Israel was to celebrate their deliverance with an annual memorial feast, a celebration which was to last seven days.

During the entire week of Passover leaven was to be removed from every Jewish home to commemorate their hasty deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 12:15-19; 33, 34, 39; 13:7). There was no time to leaven bread. In addition, the removal of the leaven was to teach the spiritual lesson that God always wants sin (leaven) to be put away from the lives of His children. God wants His people to live separate from the world (Egypt). Eating unleavened bread in conjunction with their departure from Egypt taught the importance of leaving Egypt (the world) behind. Our desire and decision should be to follow Jesus and not the world.

"The world behind me, the cross before me;

The world behind me, the cross before me,
The world behind me, the cross before me;
No turning back, no turning back."

The Israelites were told to leave all yeast behind to indicate a complete break with their previous Egyptian servitude and they were to enter into an entirely new way of life. In modern terms, we are to leave the world and burn our bridges behind us! In other words, we should make an irrevocable decision and never retreat. Such was the case with the Jews leaving Egypt. The practice of putting away leaven was to be a reminder of God's great concern for purity of life. During the feast the house was instructed to eat only unleavened bread (Ex. 12:15, 17-20). If leaven is a type or symbol of that which is good, then why would God instruct His people to remove it from their households?

By way of application, what kind of leaven must you remove from your home? Are there some things in your home that you need to dispose of? Maybe you need to do a good spiritual housecleaning and get rid of the leaven that is seeking to destroy your relationships and spiritual life. God has called us to get rid of the leaven in our homes and hearts. God has called us to be holy people – not worldly people. According to 1 John 2:16, worldliness consists of the lust of the flesh (*inward passion for sensual satisfaction*), the lust of the eyes (*an outward visual look through the eye gate which spawns our soulish passions*), and the pride of life (*self-satisfaction and boasting in relation to who we are, what we have, and what we have done*).

It's interesting that the origin of leaven as a symbol of corruption or evil is traced back to both Sodom and Egypt. These two locations were known for evil and their opposition to Jehovah and His people. It's no accident that both Sodom and Egypt are associated with leaven (a principle of evil) and therefore the need to eat unleavened bread in relationship to these wicked cities.

➤ Mosaic Law and Leaven (sin)

Leaven was also excluded from all blood offerings and sacrificial offerings made by fire. God said, "Thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with

leaven" (Ex. 23:18; 34:25). Instructions were given concerning the meal offering that was to be offered with blood sacrifices. It was not to be baked with leaven nor eaten with leaven (Lev. 2:11; 6:14-17; 10:12; 23:17-18). The reason for these explicit prohibitions was obvious. The offerings were a type of the perfect sacrifice of the sinless Son of God. "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). Therefore, leaven which is personified as sin and evil could not be associated with the sinless Son of God ("yet without sin" – Heb. 4:15).

After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to assess the damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, perched like a statue on the ground at the base of a tree. Startled by the eerie sight, he knocked over the bird with a stick. When he struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother's wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings. She could have flown to safety but refused to abandon her chicks. And so it was with the Son of God. He could have called ten thousand angels to rescue Him but he remained on the cross to take the judgment for our sins.

The presence of leaven of yeast (sour or fermented dough) started a process of fermentation that was typical of spiritual corruption. Therefore, it was forbidden to be used in all offerings in which Christ was prefigured. Only unleavened cakes were permitted on the altar of Jehovah (Lev. 10:12). All typology related to Christ must be a picture of purity for Jesus was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26).

The only loaves that contained leaven were the loaves used in connection with the Feast of Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-21). These loaves would suggest that the principle of sin would still exist in God's people. The leaven of the flesh is still present in every believer (Rom. 7:18). Whenever man enters into the picture leaven is still present with him. When bread typifies God's people it is always leavened bread. This is true in the Pentecost offerings and also the peace offering (Lev. 7:13) where leaven was present in the bread to indicate and typify sin in the offerer's life and the need for cleansing. This means when I come to Christ for cleansing, I come to Him as

a sinner full of leaven. I'm all leavened up with sin and in need of Christ's cleansing (1 John 1:9).

Amos 4:5 also speaks of offerings of leaven: "And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim *and* publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD." The offering of thanksgiving was to be an offering of leavened cakes. Why is this? It's because God was speaking in irony about their sinful worship and offerings. Their offerings had become a sham. The people's religious activities were carried out to impress others, not to fellowship with God. The Israelites would brag about their devotion, but their day-to-day conduct violated the spirit of their offerings. So God was saying that their sinful worship should be offered "with leaven" because that is what their worship was – leaven!

It can be proven that in every instance where leaven is used in the Mosaic Law offerings man is in view and he is being represented as a sinner. So we discover that from Lot's day to the days of Egypt and Sodom, to the days of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened bread, and finally to the days of the Mosaic Law, leaven was always a picture of sin or evil. Never once is it presented in the Old Testament as something that is positive or good. This means the Jews in Jesus day would immediately know this when Jesus spoke about leaven being secretly hid in three measures of meal represented something evil and ungodly. The Scriptural facts are undeniable.

Amazingly MacArthur disagrees with these Scriptural conclusions and writes the opposite: "To the average person of Jesus' day, Jew or Gentile, there is no evidence that leaven carried any connotation of evil or corruption." To come to this conclusion is to ignore everything that we have just studied about leaven in the Old Testament which the Jews certainly knew about and believed. They understood about the consistent negative use of leaven in the Old Testament Scriptures and would immediately understand that this woman was doing an evil and sneaky act when hiding the leaven in the meal.

Many people today leave behind a legacy of evil and corruption. They die the way they have lived. After their death the liberal minister at their funeral might talk to the people about how good the man was and try and

cheer up the listeners. But he cannot change his legacy. In a similar way, the legacy of leaven as a picture of evil and corruption cannot be changed, and it carries with it the same evil connotation into the New Testament.

One particular man made free use of Christian vocabulary on his rise to power. He talked about the blessing of the Almighty and the Christian confessions which would become the pillars of the new government. He assumed the earnestness of a man weighed down by historic responsibility. He handed out pious stories to the press, especially to the church papers. He showed his tattered Bible and declared that he drew the strength for his great work from it as scores of pious people welcomed him as a man sent from God. Who was this man? His name was Adolf Hitler and he was a master of outward religiosity--with no inward reality!

➤ Pharisees and Leaven (hypocrisy and legalism)

Luke 12:1-2 says:

"In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known."

Jesus identifies the leaven of the Pharisees with hypocrisy. The hypocrite is an actor, a pretender. He looks and plays the part of another. His outward life appears to be righteous and holy but on the inside of his heart there is a cesspool of iniquity. This is why Jesus said: "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known." The Pharisees leaven of hypocrisy was to live an outward showy life of piety but neglect the inward heart. What appeared on the outside was not true on the inside. This is the height of hypocrisy! It is to live a double life.

Matthew 23:27

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whitened sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."

When a person takes on the appearance of godliness on the outside but freely and without restraint embraces sin in the secrecy of his heart then he is a hypocrite who is putting on a show. He is acting out the part of godly

living but denying the power to live godly (2 Tim. 3:5). Hypocrisy (living a double standard life) is portrayed as leaven.

The story is told of a zoo that was noted for their great collection of different animals. One day the gorilla died, and to keep up the appearance of a full range of animals, the zookeeper hired a man to wear a gorilla suit and fill in for the dead animal. It was his first day on the job, and the man didn't know how to act like a gorilla very well. As he tried to move convincingly, he got too close to the wall of the enclosure and tripped and fell into the lion exhibit. The lesson is this. In the end, hypocrisy and deception never pay!

One particular man made free use of Christian vocabulary on his rise to power. He talked about the blessing of the Almighty and the Christian confessions which would become the pillars of the new government. He assumed the earnestness of a man weighed down by historic responsibility. He handed out pious stories to the press, especially to the church papers. He showed his tattered Bible and declared that he drew the strength for his great work from it as scores of pious people welcomed him as a man sent from God. Who was this man? His name was Adolf Hitler and he was a master of outward religiosity--with no inward reality!

Jesus not only mentions the leaven of hypocrisy of the Pharisees but also the legalism of the Pharisees in another passage of Scripture. The hypocrisy of leaven often flows out of the leaven of legalism. So the leaven of hypocrisy that was linked to the Pharisees is further identified and explained by our Lord in Matthew 16:6 as a legalist system of salvation: "Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."

Matthew 16:12 gives us the interpretation of the leaven:
"Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."

Jesus mentions the doctrine or teaching of the Pharisees first which here is clearly referencing external legalism. Legalism is man's personal efforts to follow the law and meticulous manmade rules allegedly based on the law,

so that he might gain acceptance before God. This is done by creating an outward form of holy living based upon outward compliance to laws. The Pharisees were legalists who taught that outward obedience to the law and the traditions would please God, give a man acceptance before God, and usher him into God's kingdom. Legalism is basically the efforts of man attempting to live godly to gain or merit acceptance before God without the assistance of God's grace, life, and power.

The core meaning and teaching of legalism refers to man's efforts to gain or merit his justification or salvation through his good deeds which often include manmade traditions. The leaven of legalism is an epidemic in the mainline liberal denominational churches of today and Roman Catholicism which promote a manmade type of salvation and justification through good works. A person must participate in the sacraments (sacramental salvation), almsgiving, keeping the Golden Rule, and such like.

The Roman Catholic Church has long promoted an elaborate system of religious legalism which is evident in its sacramentalism and emphasis on human merit. Roman Catholicism denies the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, teaching that a person is justified by faith in Christ together with his Spirit-wrought good works.

A man who was saved as a Catholic gave us this testimony of the legalism associated with Roman Catholicism. "The official teaching of the Catholic Church is that we gain entrance into the church through the sacrament of baptism and maintain a relationship with God by keeping his commandments, church laws, and through the grace brought to us through the Mass and the seven sacraments. Living in a 'state of grace' is fluid, and we are always in danger of losing it by committing what are called 'mortal' sins. When this happens, the only way back into God's good graces is through what is called 'perfect contrition' (which is pretty much impossible to attain) or by confessing our sins to a priest and receiving absolution from him.

"One can never be completely sure of his or her final destiny, because that depends upon our being in a state of grace at the time of death. We were encouraged to 'make' nine First Fridays (go to Mass and receive communion on nine consecutive first Fridays of the month) so that we

could be assured that we would have the opportunity to make a good confession prior to death. This is called an indulgence, which is basically a promise or guarantee from God (through the authority of the church) based upon some good work we perform. But indulgences are only the tip of the legalistic iceberg. All of salvation is performance-based in the Catholic Church."

The leaven of legalism is mentioned elsewhere as a form of legalistic works which attempts to mix law and grace causing total corruption to the way of salvation by grace.

Galatians 5:7-9

"Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion *cometh* not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.'

The "truth" has reference to the teaching of salvation by grace that was being corrupted by the legalists (Gal. 1:6-9). Grace truth was being jettisoned for the Galatian form of legalism (a mixture of law and grace to aid man in his salvation (Acts 15:1). In Galatians 5:7-9 Paul is comparing legalism to a leavening process. When man's outward works or compliance to the Mosaic Law becomes any part of his salvation then the whole truth or teaching about grace becomes leavened or corrupted. The leaven of legalism (law/works salvation) permeates the teaching of grace and corrupts it.

A little law (human works) corrupts the whole teaching of grace just as a little yeast permeates the entire unleavened lump of bread dough. Grace is unleavened and law is yeast. When the two are joined together then grace is corrupted. Grace loses its distinctive unleavened truth that man can only be saved by the free and unmerited favor of God (Rom. 11:6).

The Pharisee form of legalism was not a mixture of grace and law but pure law (leaven). Jesus was very adamant that this legalism would not bring a person into the kingdom.

Matthew 5:20

"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees (*legalism – man's attempt to gain God's favor through human effort*), ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The scribes and Pharisees were trying to buy their way into Heaven by the righteous acts they performed. They did not view grace as having any part in their acceptance before God. Their form of legalism (salvation before God) was totally based upon Mosaic observance and meticulous human traditions that emphasized outward compliance without any inward change of heart (reformation without regeneration).

This type of legalism is ramping up today. Where I live people follow laws and traditions thinking that they will somehow give them acceptance before God at the end of their lives. Meticulous and ridiculous observances are made that are supposed to enable man to gain God's favor and get him to Heaven in the end. Ascetic legalism (Col. 2:20-23) which bars people from having certain luxuries and comforts in life is adopted by many people today.

Today there can be a strong emphasis placed on ascetic living without any change of heart toward God. This was the case with the Pharisees. They practiced outward legalistic observances without regeneration. They believed that outward compliance was all that was necessary for God to accept them ("All that the LORD hath spoken we will do" – Ex. 19:8).

On the surface the Pharisees impressed others with their outward pharisaic of legalistic goodness as they followed minute man-made regulations of the law. They appeared to be righteous by creating many dogmatic hairsplitting laws that were not based on Scriptural principles but mere human opinion. They were rigid and strict in their unscriptural demands and added to Scripture by making the simple command of Exodus 20:9, "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work" into a towering and threatening edifice and complex system of ex-cathedra laws. To them picking corn for food on the Sabbath was considered work (Matt. 12:1-5). They reprimanded Christ for healing a man on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:10-14; Mk. 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-11). In Matthew 15:1-2 the legalists were concerned about washing

themselves up to their elbows before eating and taking a ceremonial bath after entering the marketplace.

In Luke 15:1-2 and 19:7 the legalistic rule forbid eating with sinners (Matt. 9:9-13 and 11:19). In Mark 11:15-18 we see how their temple rules were contrary to God's holy plan for the temple. The Pharisees eventually built up so many laws that the people became burdened down by the intricate man-made rules and regulations. The Pharisees had the mistaken idea that they had some kind of monopoly on divine truth and wanted people to know they must come to God through them (not through Jesus Christ).

Eventually the regulatory rules supposedly based on the Law became outlandishly stretched to the point where the Talmud forbid walking more than 2,000 cubits on the Sabbath except between one's own personal possessions! The Babylonian Talmud is so comprehensive and detailed that an English edition of this work fills 36 volumes and almost 36,000 pages! The extremes to which the rabbis went bordered on the insane.

Josephus records how it was forbidden to stuff a little piece of wax in the hole of a container to stop the liquid from running out since this was viewed as working on the Sabbath. Nor could a person wipe a wound on the Sabbath. A man could not move a sheaf in his field on the Sabbath, but he could lay a spoon on the sheaf and in order to remove the spoon, he could also indirectly remove the sheaf on which the spoon lay.

So the leaven of the Pharisees also dealt with the doctrine or teaching of the Pharisees (legalism – salvation by law or works) which actually fueled their hypocritical lifestyle. The teaching of legalism created an outward compliance to manmade laws without changing the heart. The Pharisee's leaven of hypocrisy or hypocritical living (Luke 12:1-2) was created by their legalistic doctrine (Matt. 16:12) that emphasized outward compliance to rules for salvation without the inward change of heart and life.

"What must I forsake?" a young man asked. "Colored clothes for one thing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that is not white. Stop sleeping on a

soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don't eat any more white bread. You cannot, if you are sincere about obeying Christ, take warm baths or shave your beard. To shave is to lie against him who created us, to attempt to improve on his work."

This was one example of extrabiblical scruples which was used more than 1,800 years ago. The list has constantly shifted over the 1,800 years since this one was actually recorded. But the point is that these types of rules have nothing to do with spirituality or salvation. Once again, legalism places a meticulous and ridiculous emphasis on rules rather than on a changed heart and right relationship with God. The outward living of the Pharisees became filled with so many minute rules and regulations, which had moved so far away from the commands of God, that their rules were nothing more than rituals or ceremonies that had no Mosaic commands to back them up. So the leaven of the Pharisees included their ex-cathedra teachings of rules and regulations which taught a man to live a rigid and strict life on the outside but forget about the condition of one's heart on the inside.

We have seen then that the hearts of the Pharisees were full of the degrading and deadly leaven of both hypocrisy and legalism. In the case of the Pharisees, the leaven of their hypocrisy flows out of the leaven of their legalism. The Pharisees believed that God would be pleased with them and accept them if they maintained a correct appearance externally before the eyes of his fellowmen. Their inward heart might be filled with putrefying corruption of sin such as jealousy, envy, covetousness, lust, bitterness, and hatred. But if they maintained an outward appearance of goodness then God would be pleased with them. This is not only legalism but hypocrisy. When a person attempts to look good in church on Sunday and then goes out and lives like the devil during the week it demonstrates that they are trying to mask themselves and cover up their true heart.

In a church nominating committee meeting the pastor suggested a name for consideration, but one of the deacons said, "I wouldn't recommend him. He's a thermometer instead of a thermostat!" In other words, this man was like a thermometer for he always allowed his surroundings to regulate him instead of being like a thermostat and controlling his life and being a positive influence for God. Are you a thermometer (going with the flow) or

a thermostat? (controlling your own life). You might play the game of being spiritual when you are around Christians, but when you are at work you might join in with lifestyle of the ungodly and make no impact upon them. If this is the case, you are a thermostat Christian who changes depending on who you are with and the surrounding circumstances.

Outward actions can merely become a mask or false disguise (Matt. 6:1-6, 16-18). The hypocrite appears clean on the outside but on the inside he is full of “dead men’s bones” (Matt. 23:37). The hypocrite is quick to detect the slightest defect in others while he is blind to his own weaknesses and faults (Matt. 7:1-2, 5; Luke 6:42).

The leaven of the Pharisees is nothing more than an outward show of righteousness and godliness based on form and ceremonies while at the same time possessing an inward heart of corruption. To reiterate, the Pharisees were the legalists of Jesus’ own day because as a legalist they depended on the legality of Mosaic Law and their own rituals as the way to holy living and acceptance before God. They followed outward manmade teachings, supposedly based on the law, and actually believed that this is all that mattered and what was needed for holy living and acceptance before God. They claimed to follow the law, which was concealed in multitudes of manmade traditions in order to convey a sense of spiritual maturity, pride, holy living, and professional elitism. At the same time, they had no inner desire to maintain true purity, walk in victory, and fellowship with God (Matt. 15:8).

Of course, we all have certain rules of discipline we follow which are based on solid Biblical commands and principles. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this. Certain rules can declare our conviction and stand based upon God’s clear revelations of Scripture. But we must always be careful we do not merely live by rules and lists since Christianity is not a legal relationship but a loving relationship with Christ (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20).

Charles Spurgeon once said:

“I have found, in my own spiritual life, that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit. The habit of regular morning and evening prayer is one which is indispensable to a believer’s life, but the prescribing

of the length of prayer, and the constrained remembrance of so many persons and subjects, may gender unto bondage, and strangle prayer rather than assist it."

➤ Sadducees and Leaven (Liberalism)

Jesus also spoke about "the leaven of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:12) which was different than the leaven of the Pharisees. The Sadducees unlike the Pharisees were the liberals of Jesus' day. The Pharisees were basically conservative in their doctrine, but the Sadducees were very liberal in their teaching or doctrine. They were the agnostics, the humanists, and the theological liberals of their time. They denied the existence of angels and the supernatural. One of the key doctrines that they denied was the resurrection (Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8). So the doctrine of the Sadducees was liberal or corrupt teaching that was fueled by unbelief. This certainly is what the Parable of the Leaven is talking about (corrupt doctrine). The Pharisees had the tendency to add to Scripture while the Sadducees took away from Scripture.

The leaven or liberal doctrine of the Sadducees is still within the church today. The so-called men of God are merely men of cloth but not men of God, and they are still denying the supernatural. They are still questioning the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the virgin birth of Christ, the supernatural regeneration of man, and other doctrinal essentials such as the inerrancy of Scripture and the Second Coming of Christ. So the leaven of the Sadducees was corrupt doctrine.

Dr. J. J. Van Gorder told of a sign over a woodworker's bench which read: "All kinds of twisting and turning done here."

This would be a fitting sign to hang from some of the pulpits in America. 2 Peter 3:16 speaks of those who "are unlearned and unstable" and who "wrest (twist, torture), as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." The leavened liberal doctrine of the Sadducees is still with us today. Corrupt doctrine fueled by unbelief would be the best way to describe the leaven of the Sadducees.

Inscribed on the cornerstone of a large, fashionable church was the text: "But we preach Christ crucified." As the years passed, vines grew up around it until all that was visible were the words, "But we preach." Ironically, this was a sad commentary on the deteriorating ministry of that church, for the pastor spoke only of social issues and no longer mentioned the crucified, risen Savior. The sad story of liberalism is found in the words "the leaven of the Sadducees" and it can be written across the doors of many churches today. In fact, you can also add the word: "Ichabod" which means "The glory of God is departed" (1 Sam. 4:21).

➤ Herod and Leaven (licentiousness)

Mark 8:15

"And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod."

The Herod of Christ's day (Herod Antipas) was a licentious worldly man who induced the wife of his own brother to live with him in adultery. He was a worldly and wicked man who had John the Baptist's head served up on a silver platter for reproving the king's immorality. Therefore, the leaven of Herod is a type of pseudo-Christianity that engaged in a libertine lifestyle of open sin. Licentious means to be promiscuous and unprincipled in sexual matters. It means to disregard accepted norms based upon God's moral code. The leaven of Herod was another type or evil which Christ addressed. It was a way to describe licentiousness sexual and worldly living which would include secularism. Those who followed Herod were called Herodians who were in league with the Pharisees (Matt. 22:16; Mark 3:6; 12:13).

The followers of Herod were clever politicians who were constantly trying to win the favor of their king and leader. They were secular and worldly in their thinking and philosophy of living. Jesus called Herod a fox (Luke 13:31-33). He was a cunning and conniving worldly man who lived for the things of this world. In a general way, the leaven of Herod portrays worldly, secular, and licentious living without possessing any scruples or lack of restraint. The leaven of Herod is present in the church today. The leaven of sexual immorality has swept into the professing church at alarming rates through pornography and promiscuous sex. The leaven of homosexual

attraction and lust is running ramped. Many preachers no longer speak out against such sins as these and much of the church has become leavened with sexual sins.

On a broader scale, the leaven of licentiousness (unprincipled living) occurs in the Church in various forms of worldliness. There is the leaven of a worldly and carnally based rock idiom that has swept the hallowed halls of the church with such a giant tidal wave that there is no turning back for many churches. In mimicking the unsaved and unregenerate lifestyle, much of the church has jettisoned the Biblical teaching of separation (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

There is also the leaven of materialism. Sometimes we can succumb to worldly materialism thinking that we need to keep up with the Joneses or else we have not arrived in life (1 Tim. 6:10; Ex. 20:17). Many have given in to the idea that the only really important thing in life is to have a nice home with a swimming pool, luxuries, and three cars. People can build their lives around material things, aim at them as goals, and become distressed, disenchanted, and discontented if they cannot have them (Matt. 6:31-33). Their children pick up on the same idea. They begin to believe that material things are the most important matter in life and luxury is what gives a person status and prestige in a community. This unprincipled and unbiblical type of leaven living is prevalent in the church today.

God's saints want to overstep God's rules or boundaries and live for themselves. The leaven of Herod represents "the spirit of the world" (2 Cor. 2:12) which is against God and righteousness. The leaven of Herod can very easily rise within the hearts and lives of God's people today. Let us stay on guard and obey Christ's command to not conform to the world system (Rom. 12:2).

When the fermented yeast enters the dough mixture it tends to puff up the entire piece of dough. As we have seen, this leavening process of fermentation and expansion becomes a fitting symbol to represent the external legalism of the Pharisees (inward corruption of heart that results in the rise and expansion of outward showy religion), the liberal doctrine and unbelief of the Sadducees (unbelief that leads to the rejection and

expansion of liberal teaching), and licentious worldly living (inward corruption of heart that results in the outward spread of worldly living).

We must conclude that if Christ intended leaven to be a type or symbol of good Paul did not know about it! He picked up on the leaven symbol that Christ presented. It portrayed evil and spiritual corruption.

In 1 Corinthains chapter 5 Paul talks about a church member who was leavening the testimony of the local church and if left go it would negatively impact the congregation's testimony and even filter into the lives of the people. Paul faced what he identified as the leaven of worldly and licentious living in the Church of Corinth. He cited a case where a young man was actually living in sin with his stepmother (1 Cor. 5:1). After stating that this leaven of worldliness was being accepted in their presence the apostle needs to remind the people of what happens in the leavening process.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8 states:

"Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast (*the Lord's Supper*), not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth."

The church in Corinth had within its membership those carnal and professing Christians whose lives were influenced by the leaven of Herod - worldliness (1 Cor. 5:9-11). According to Paul leaven was a symbol of evil and worldly living that had worked its way inside the church. Paul wanted to remind the saints that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6). What he means by this statement is that when God's people are allowed to live in open rebellion and commit sinful atrocities without discipline, they have a way of affecting the entire testimony of the local church. Instead of a Bible Church they become known as a Leaven Church. In addition, this wicked way of worldly living could also lead others to follow a similar path and experience a similar worldly fate in their lives.

Paul is telling the Corinthian church that they need to purge the leaven from their local congregation. When he says, "Purge out therefore the old leaven" (1 Cor. 5:7) he means the church needed to dismiss this worldly brother so that the church could form "a new lump" that was unleavened or not corrupted by such wicked and licentious living. The reason for this purging process is then stated: "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

The obvious connection to Christ's sacrifice is this. Since sin required the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, it is inconceivable that it would ever be tolerated in the assembly of believers. Since sin caused Jesus to die on the cross is it a terrible mockery to allow sin to corrupt God's church. Grace should teach us to separate from sin and ungodliness (Titus 2:11-12). Tolerating sin is a mockery of the death of Jesus Christ! We should not glory in the sin (the leaven) nor tolerate the sin that caused our Savior to die in our place as our Passover.

For this reason, God's people were not to enter the communion service or Lord's Supper ("the feast" – vs. 8) with such sinful atrocities taking place in their membership. This means that the congregation was to separate themselves from the sinning brother and exclude him from the Lord's Table. The "leaven of malice and wickedness" (1 Cor. 5:8) refers to the presence of sin in the congregation. When we come to the communion table, we need to have our congregation clean, and our own personal lives cleaned up ("the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" – 1 Cor. 5:8) or else we create a mockery out of the Lord's Supper and holy table which teaches us that God hates sin and gave His Son to die for our sins (Titus 2:11-12).

Charles Spurgeon once said:

"If I had a brother who had been murdered, what would you think of me if I daily consort with the assassin who drove the dagger into my brother's heart; surely I too must be an accomplice in the crime. Sin murdered Christ; will you be a friend to it? Sin pierced the heart of the Incarnate God; can you love it?"

One again we see that leaven is a picture of sin. It is small but powerful and it works secretly. It puffs up the dough and spreads. The sinning church

member in Corinth was like a piece of yeast. He was defiling the entire loaf of bread (the congregation). This man was like a cancer in the body that needed to be removed by drastic surgery.

The point is this. Sin (leaven) has a corrupting influence. Using the analogy of a little yeast being added to bread brings out the important spiritual lesson. When sin is left unchecked it in some sense leavens the entire congregation. Sooner or later the testimony and members of a local assembly become corrupted and infected. Sin must be dealt with or else the testimony of the church is at stake. Furthermore, its members can become lackadaisical toward holy living and tend to cater to worldly or carnal living. The apostle is saying that if they tolerate a little moral sin (leaven) in the church, it will soon grow and expand until the whole fellowship is seriously affected. Righteous and godly discipline is necessary to maintain the godly testimony of a church ministry and the cleanliness of its members.

The leaven of worldliness has corrupted the testimony of the local and corporate church today. The leaven of worldly music, the leaven of gossip, envy, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, drunkenness, adultery, wife swapping, secular psychology, and many other sins have leavened the corporate church. Fundamental local churches today need to deal with these types of sins which are nothing less than open rebellion against God. The leaven of secular worldliness can affect any congregation.

Years ago, there was a terrible accident in which several youth were killed when their car was struck by a train. At the trial the watchman was questioned: "Were you at the crossing the night of the accident?" "Yes, your Honor." "Were you waving your lantern to warn of the danger." "Yes, your Honor," the man told the judge. But after the trial had ended, the watchman walked away mumbling to himself, "I'm glad they didn't ask me about the light in the lantern, because the light had gone out." Here is the application. God sees it, when our light has gone out and our light is snuffed out when we look like the world, talk like the world, and act like the world (Matt. 5:14-15).

Jesus commanded that the Church of Ephesus get back to loving Him instead of just going through the doctrinal motions. Failure to do so would result in the removal of their lampstand which means they would lose their testimony in the community. Revelation 2:5, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." It's a sad day when the light goes out in a church!

The leaven of worldliness and carnality in the church today is a growing problem. Is there some leaven in your life today that needs to be taken care of or dismissed from your life? Perhaps the leaven of some particular worldly sin has been growing in your heart. Remember what the Scripture says. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Sin that is left go and unconfessed will permeate your entire life. If you try to hide or cover up your sin it will eventually permeate your entire life.

Proverbs 28:13

"He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy."

God wants you to be a "new lump" today by repenting of your sin and taking the initiative to live a clean and holy life. Each one of us as God's children must purge the leaven from our lives. There are many times we must see the leaven of worldliness penetrating and overtaking our lives and simply confess our sins to God (1 John 1:9). God wants to make you into a new lump. He does not want you to be sourdough but unleavened bread. He wants you to start living the "unleavened" life of "sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8). After all, the real feast occurs in the Christian life when we live free from the leaven of worldliness.

H. A. Ironside once wrote:

"I remember the well-known evangelist Gipsy Smith dancing across the platform one night, to the amazement of those who had gathered to hear him preach. Then he explained, 'My friends, I just wanted to show you that I can perform as gracefully as I ever did; but since the day I was converted, no one has invited me to attend a dance or a drinking party!' "Why hadn't they?" continued Ironside. "Because they knew that from the day he was saved, Gipsy Smith had been out-and-out for God!"

This brings up a practical point. We must apply the lesson of leaven to our own personal lives. Have we been allowing some form of leaven to penetrate our lives and cause us to become corrupt in our Christian living? We must beware of the penetrating adverse effects of leaven in our personal lives, marriages, churches, and doctrinal understandings of Scripture. Leaven spreads and it can very quickly get out of control if we are not discerning and making wise ethical and doctrinal decisions.

On the day of Passover, the Israelites were commanded to remove every bit of leaven from their homes. Sin is like leaven - a little bit leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6). We cannot tolerate the sin of leaven to enter our hearts and lives for it will expand and overcome our lives.

2 Corinthians 7:1 reminds us of the importance of removing the leaven of sin from our lives: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Well, we have been studying how leaven is a picture of sin and evil in Scripture and how a little leaven can leaven the whole lump. This is a good illustration that reminds us of not allowing a little leaven into our hearts and lives. Now that we have studied the Biblical typology of leaven there should be no doubt concerning the primary point of the parable of Matthew 13:33. The parable is speaking of an evil influence that pictures corruption of some kind which will occur during the mystery period between Israel's rejection of the Mesiah until the King's return to earth.

Matthew 13:33

"Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven (*in its mystery form*) is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

We have observed that in every place where leaven is used in both Old and New Testaments it has an evil connotation and corruptive influence attached to its meaning. Scripture language paints an evil and corrupting influence of leaven. Lot and feeding the angels unleavened bread, the Feast of Unleavened Bread with the remembrance of putting the old life behind,

and the Mosaic offerings that were to be unleavened. All of this points to a negative connotation assigned to leaven.

Also, Jesus spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees and the leaven of Herod. Jesus repeatedly gave a corruptive picture of leaven during His earthly ministry. Paul also spoke of the leavening of sin in the church congregation of Corinth and the leavening of legalism. So when coming to Matthew 13 there is no difference in the meaning and understanding of the symbol of leaven. Jesus retains the same imagery of leaven when explaining the Parable of the Leaven. Leaven is repeatedly seen to have a corrupting influence and negative imagery attached to it. And yet conservative authors still miss this obvious point of this parable.

John MacArthur once again gives this wrong information about leaven: “Because leaven causes fermentation, some interpreters insist that in Scripture it always signifies that which is evil and corrupting when it is used figuratively. But such a restrictive view is arbitrary and certainly does not fit the present text.”

I beg to differ with this conclusion. The ideal that leaven is evil fits perfectly within the context. In fact, the first three parables portrayed an evil influence among God’s true work during the mystery period and surely this parable is no different despite what MacArthur reasons. Furthermore, the legacy of leaven as seen throughout the entire Bible is one of evil and corruption.

MacArthur goes on to say:

“The term *leaven* can incidentally represent something that is good, evil, or morally and spiritually neutral, depending on how it is used. But the primary analogy pertains to pervasive influence, which is leaven’s most obvious and distinctive characteristic.”

MacArthur has missed the boat in relation to the correct interpretation of this parable. The language of Scripture does not present leaven or yeast as a positive and pervasive influence. Leaven reveals a primary analogy that pertains to the pervasive influence of evil – not good.

MacArthur concludes:

"Even when leaven is used in relation to something evil, as in Jesus' warning about 'the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy' (Luke 12:1), the point is not that leaven and hypocrisy are both inherently evil but that they both are inherently pervasive and powerful in their influence."

This kind of reasoning dances around the truth and defies what these verses actually teach. Although leaven is powerful and full of penetration the teachings of Christ and Paul are consistent. Leaven always acts as an evil penetration and opposing force. There is no verse in Scripture that speaks of the positive penetration of leaven as MacArthur suggests. Anybody can see this when reading the leaven verses and taking them at face value. Both Jesus and Paul present leaven as spiritual deterioration and the personification of sin, false doctrine, and evil. The penetration of leaven has an evil connotation. It never refers to good penetration and positive influence.

Now that we have studied both the context of the first three parables and the history of leaven we can arrive at a proper conclusion of this parable. *The fourth parable agrees with the other three parables.* It is a parable of corruption. It is a parable that is against worldwide positive influence. Instead of teaching the spread of positive influence in the world it is actually portraying worldwide corruption and the permeation of evil. Let's study our Bible's and believe what they are teaching instead of reading between the lines to prove our own private interpretation of Scripture. Leaven is a consistent picture of evil penetration. Contextually and Scripturally we must view leaven as having a sinister and corrupting influence or effect in this parable. This is what we want to investigate as we interpret the parable and discover its true meaning. Now that we know the leaven is a symbol of evil, we can better understand what is occurring.



What evil or corruption does the leaven represent in Matthew 13:33? There can be no doubt that in this context the leaven is referring to false doctrine

corrupting the truth. Like the first three parables, we once again see the corrupting influence of Satan. Satan is up to no good. In this case, he corrupts the truth with “leaven” (false doctrine) to deceive people. Jesus previously interpreted leaven as representing false doctrine when referring to “the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matt. 16:6) and then identifying as “the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matt. 16:12).

The adding of leaven to meal would also portray corruption for as we have discovered any introduction of leaven in the meal offerings was strictly forbidden in conjunction with the Old Testament sacrifices which pointed to Christ. They were not to be baked with leaven nor eaten with leaven (Lev. 2:11; 6:14-17; 10:12; 23:17-18). Christ is evidently looking back to these offerings. When the woman is seen introducing leaven into the meal Jesus is teaching an important and very graphic lesson on spiritual corruption. The disciples knew this and would immediately pick up on the negative and evil connotation of putting leaven into the meal.

A woman introducing leaven into three measures of meal (flour) is something has evil written all over it. The disciples would also know this was a diversion from what was normal in relation to Old Testament teaching.

The “three measures of meal” or flour no doubt had a particular emphasis and connection to the Old Testament teaching of the meal offering. It consisted of three parts of meal or flour. The disciples knew this immediately when Jesus spoke of the three measures of meal. The three

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” - Matt. 13:33

Notice the Similarity to the Old Testament Offerings

An “ephah” refers to a dry measurement of 3 parts flour with no leaven

“And he shall prepare a meat (meal) offering of an ephah (dry measurement of three parts flour) for a bullock, and an ephah for a ram, and an hin (liquid measure) of oil for an ephah” - Ezek. 45:24.

“And the meat (meal) offering shall be an ephah (dry measurement of thee parts flour) for a ram...” – Ezek. 46:5

“And he shall prepare a meat (meal) offering, an ephah (dry measurement of thee parts flour) for a bullock – Ezek. 46:7

“And in the feasts and in the solemnities the meat (meal) offering shall be an ephah (dry measurement of thee parts flour) to a bullock, and an ephah to a ram, and to the lambs as he is able to give, and an hin of oil to an ephah” – Ezek. 46:11

measures of meal in this parable was the same amount offered as a meal offering by Gideon and Hannah (Judges 6:18-19; 1 Sam. 1:24). It was the amount that Sarah made for the angelic visitors (Gen. 18:6). It was also the quantity commanded by God for the Old Testament meal offering.

The disciples also knew that the offering was to be with unleavened bread. Therefore, it was shocking to see a woman introducing leaven in the meal offering!

Leviticus 2:4 says:

“And if thou bring an oblation of a meat offering baken in the oven, *it shall be* unleavened cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, or unleavened wafers anointed with oil.”

Leviticus 2:11 also reveals:

“No meat (*meal*) offering, which ye shall bring unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the LORD made by fire.”

The Bible says that the angel of the Lord devoured the unleavened offering of Gideon.

Judges 6:21

“Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.”

There can be no mistake about this. God requires unleavened flour when it comes to making the meal offering (Leviticus 2:4) which consisted of three parts flour. No leaven was to enter the bread at any time or else it would become corrupted. No leaven was to be placed in the three measures of meal for as we have already confirmed the unleavened cakes typified the sinless Son of God who would one day enter the world of humanity, live a sinless life (Heb. 7:26), and be put on a cross as a perfect sacrifice for the sins of lost mankind (1 Peter 3:18).

The exclusion of leaven in the meal offering was necessary to carry through the typology of the offering. In the parable of Matthew 13 the housewife was obviously preparing unleavened cakes for the meal offering (not for a normal supper) and she secretly added leaven to the dough to pollute the sacrifice that typically represented Jesus Christ. This then brings us to the meaning of the meal.

The significance of the unleavened meal typically and in a specific way speaks of Christ and His doctrine – the pure meal of the doctrine of Christ. There was no leaven in the person and work of Jesus Christ! He was the Godman who was without sin, and He was sacrificed on the cross as the sinless Son of God who bore the weight of our own sins.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says:

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

In our next point we will discuss how the woman who represents organized religion throughout the mystery period has attempted to destroy the significance of the unleavened meal or teaching about Jesus Christ's person and saving work. Satan has a love affair with the teaching or doctrine that mocks the person of Jesus Christ and His work of salvation. This is why liberalism, the cults, and religions notoriously reject the person and work of Jesus Christ as sufficient ground for their salvation, payment for their sins, and their entrance into Heaven. They reject the unleavened meal of Christ's person and work.

The unleavened doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ along with the doctrine of the Trinity has been consistently denied by false religion and it began in the days of Jesus (John 5:18; Matt. 12:24). The Jewish religious leaders and people living in Christ's day rejected Him as their Messiah, God, and Savior (John 1:11) The Arian heresy of the early 4th century and the Jehovah's Witnesses of our present day, among many other cults and religions, still reject the deity of Jesus Christ. The pure meal or doctrine of Jesus Christ has been polluted by liberalism and false teaching.

The musical "Jesus Christ Superstar" in the 1970's presented Christ as a mere man, somewhat confused about his mission, and attracted in a romantic way to Mary Magdalene. They paint Jesus as a sacrilegious character. At one point Jesus supposedly submits to God's will at the end of the song and he exclaims, "Take me now before I change my mind." Jesus is depicted as a leader of the masses who was never understood by them and who died only so that his name could become known. The crucifixion and death of Jesus bring the musical to a final ending without hope, and without even an allusion to the Resurrection. This is the type of productions that liberals love who reject the unleavened meal of Christ's person and work.

The pure meal or teaching of Christ's deity has been leavened or corrupted. Liberals still talk about Jesus Christ being a good man, a good example, or a good prophet but they stop short of pronouncing Him as God incarnate

who came in the flesh to save us from Hell. But we know that Christ is equal with the Father in His Person and His work. We must remember that Christ is undiminished deity (Phil. 2:6). He is the exact representation of God's being and existence (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15).

Martin Luther once said:

"Anything that one imagines of God apart from Christ is only useless thinking and vain idolatry."

The pure meal or doctrine of Christ's sacrifice is also sufficient to save a man completely and forever (Heb. 9:26; 10:14; 7:26). Later we will determine that the woman (representing false religion) has corrupted this wonderful teaching about Christ and His salvation purpose throughout the earth. She has secretly placed leaven (false doctrine) in the meal which is referring the true doctrine regarding Christ's person and saving work.

For instance, many of today's evangelicals possess ignorance of Catholic doctrine. Roman Catholicism teaches baptismal regeneration as the only way to remove original sin. It sees penance as a way to atone for sins committed after baptism. It views earthly priests as having the same privilege as Jesus Christ in that they can forgive sins and bring a person into a right relationship with God.

A person is involved in a lifelong process whereby he or she cooperates with the church in securing their forgiveness of sins. Sins are only potentially forgiven and must be worked off through a process mediated by the Roman Catholic Church and its sacraments over the lifetime of the believer. Grace is actually viewed as graces that are placed in a person's life that enable an individual to obey and perform meritorious works that can earn their right to Heaven. Salvation is actually a lifelong process that begins at the sacrament of baptism but is achieved only though continual observances of the church sacraments and performing works of human merit.

This false church also teaches that if a person claims to be justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ that they are to be cursed by God. Anathemas are hurled against those who disagree with their system of human merit. The

Mass is the continual sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the cross. It teaches that a person is saved on an installment plan by eating Jesus Christ in the Mass. Then too, Mary plays a vital role in the forgiveness of sins and freely cooperates in the role of human salvation. Praying through the rosary supplies the Catholic with spiritual power and the salvation blessings of Mary. Purgatory is the place where Catholics go when they die so that they can be purged and purified from every stain of sin and enter Heaven someday.

Catholic doctrine is not the doctrine of Christ! Its message of salvation is full of leaven. One can conclude that the pure meal or doctrine of Christ has been set-aside in the Catholic Church for sacraments, church dogma, and church tradition. The pure meal has been leavened! All the major religious systems of the 21st century of liberal Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox Church with their trappings of ecclesiastical garb and fair speeches and false doctrine have polluted the meal or doctrine of Christ. As we will see, the woman who represents false religion has corrupted the meal. As in the days of Malachi they have “offer polluted bread” upon God’s altar (Mal. 1:7) but today it is the polluted bread of doctrinal corruption.

Simon Davis, writing for Religion News Service, tells us, “Since atheist blogger Martin Hughes left Christianity, he hasn’t missed believing in God or in hell. But he does miss believing in heaven.”

Hughes said, “I wish that there was one to go to, and that’s the truth.” He went on to say he knows his view is not “atheistically correct.” But he says that in his own version of heaven, he would “understand everything.” There would be “deep, rich happiness that feels like Mom’s sweet potato pie on Thanksgiving.” The departure from doctrinal and ethical truth is everywhere.

Seventeen percent of evangelical women between the ages of 15 and 44 have had physically relations with another woman, according to data gathered by the CDC and analyzed by Grove City College sociology professor David Ayers. Among evangelical men, the percentage who’ve had sex with other men hovers around five percent.

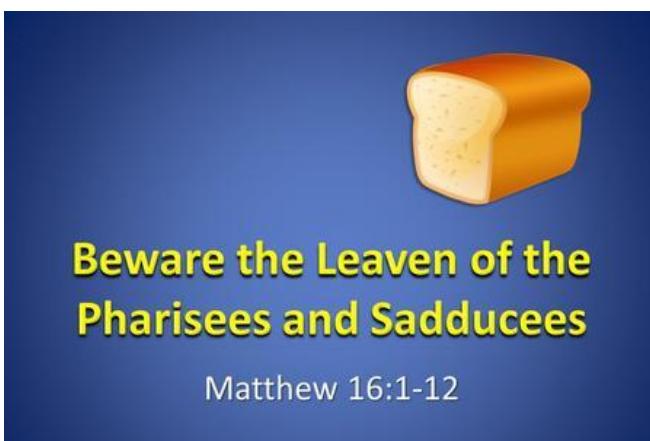
Changing attitudes toward same-sex relationships in the US generally and among older and younger evangelicals specifically have been well documented. The same-sex experiences and orientation of younger evangelicals, however, have not been widely reported. The apostasy from truth continues to leaven the professing church with entire denominations accepting homosexual marriages.

A Barna Report on “What Americans Believe” indicates a great deal of ambivalence (mixed feelings) among Americans with regard to their beliefs. For instance, while 62 percent of the respondents said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, 65 percent said the term “born again” does not apply to them; fewer than 50 percent strongly agreed that the Bible is the written word of God and is totally accurate in all it teaches. The leaven continues to spread. As Bible believers we must embrace “sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1) and stand against the leaven of false doctrine.

When Dwight L. Moody was dedicating the first building of what later became the Moody Bible Institute, he gave the cornerstone a whack with the trowel, then made an invocation to this effect: “Lord, you know that what this old world needs more than anything else is thy Word. We pray that if the day ever comes when anything contrary to the Bible is taught here, you will wipe this school from the face of the earth.” Now this was a real prayer and plea to remain unleavened in doctrine!

We can therefore that the addition of leaven into the meal is an indication and illustration of how Satan during Christ’s day strategically sought to corrupt the way of salvation through Jesus Christ in the initial message of “the word of the kingdom” (Matt. 3:19). This message included the message of repentance, faith, and salvation in view of the coming kingdom (John 1:29; Mark 1:15). But the corruption would continue throughout the mystery period and up to the end of the age (Pre-Messianic Age). Satan would introduce false doctrine into the Church resulting in the truth of the Gospel, Christ’s person and work, and other doctrines becoming corrupt. This corruption of truth has caused many people through the mystery period to be overcome with doubt and religious delusion.

Satan has leavened the way of salvation, the pure Gospel message, and the person and work of Jesus Christ with legalism, liberalism, and licentiousness. He has changed the meaning of the Gospel creating “another gospel” (2 Cor. 11:4) and corrupted the way of salvation through perverting the truth. This has always been true since the days of Christ until the present day in the Church Age. It will also be true during the seven-year Tribulation Period with the harlot church and Antichrist worship until the earthly kingdom is established and the mystery period runs its course. At every phase Christ and the way of salvation has been corrupted by Satan.



Of course, it's true that starting in Christ's day and throughout history there has been much leavening or doctrinal corruption in relation to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Men and movements have historically and to this day rejected Christ's deity and saving work.

Both Biblical and historical evidence would prove this to be true. But Jesus seems to be teaching a progression of leavening in Matthew 13:33 with a specific starting and ending point involved in this leavening process - “till the whole is leavened.”

Satan has been leavening the doctrine of Jesus Christ (the pure meal) throughout the centuries. But the leavening effect spreads and becomes increasingly worse over time. Therefore, in each time period from Christ's day to the ending of the Tribulation Period (the entire length of the mystery period) the yeast of doctrinal corruption continues to grow, advance, and pagan/liberal religion becomes more widespread in its rejection of the pure and unleavened meal of Christ (His person and saving work).

In other words, the leavening process would gradually get worse “until” there is total religious idolatry and abandonment on a universal scale. The progression of doctrinal corruption would continue “until the whole is

leavened.” A chart helps us to see the progression of the leavening throughout the mystery period “until the whole is leavened.”

The Days of Christ on Earth

(The Leavening of Doctrine BEGINS)
Pharisees, Sadducees, Judaizers

The Last Days of Church Age

(The Leavening of Doctrine CONTINUES)
Apostasy (1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 3:3)
Lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7)

The End Times of Tribulation Period

(The Leavening is COMPLETE)
Apostate Church (Rev. 17), Antichrist Worship (Rev. 13)
“till the whole was leavened” – Matt. 13:33

We will mention this at the closing of this parable. But for now, we must understand that the mystery (Matt. 13:11) of this parable is that until the kingdom arrives there will be a religious leavening process that will occur on a universal and worldwide scale. The leavening process will culminate in religious delusion and total apostasy on planet earth under the apostate church (Rev. 17) and ultimately under Antichrist worship (Rev. 13) before the King returns. This is when everything will be leavened or as Jesus taught, “till the whole was leavened” (Matt. 13:33). The total leavening will mark the end of the mystery period and be followed by the judgment of the coming King (Rev. 19:11-21).

B. The work of the woman is a symbol of evil.

Not only is leaven a picture of corruption and evil, but the woman secretly placing leaven in the meal also pictures an evil and sinister figure performing a dastardly deed that causes a corrupting or a leavening process to occur throughout the mystery period.



In order to understand what the woman is doing we must identify what the woman represents. Some have erroneously identified the woman as Joan of Arc or Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science. Others have said that the woman refers to the Women's Liberation Movement that has introduced evil into the world. These are unbiblical propositions that have no Scriptural merit. However, we must conclude that Biblically, typically, and prophetically a woman can often represent something that is evil and out of place (Zech. 5:1-8; Rev. 2:20; Rev. 17:1-6). Sorry ladies!

Why did God use women to symbolize evil? Perhaps the reason is because the original woman Eve was out of place when it came to introducing sin to Adam. 1 Timothy 2:14 confirms: "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." The original disaster of the Genesis Fall has roots in a deceived woman even though Adam was responsible for plunging the world into sin (Rom. 5:12).

Of course, women are not compared to a sinister figure because women are inherently more evil than men, because they are not. However, the Bible pictures and prophetically portrays women as having a polluting religious effect on God's people and what is right. So the work of the woman is definitely a work of religious pollution or defilement that affects the truth of God's Word related primarily to Christ and His work of salvation.

The work of this woman represents the pagan and liberal forms of religion which corrupt the truth with the leaven of false doctrine. The work of the woman symbolizes a dishonest, deceitful and a damnable work of religious corruption. The typical and prophetic picture of a woman in Scripture reveals how through the introduction and indoctrination of false religion she will have a corrupting influence on society and the truth. To state succinctly, the woman then is a clear symbol that represents the function

and corruption of false religion which has corrupted the pure and unleavened meal of the doctrine of Christ.

Dr. Scofield correctly observes:

“A woman, in the bad ethical sense, always symbolizes something out of place religiously.”



Revelation 2:20

“A woman, in the bad ethical sense, always symbolizes something out of place religiously.”

Dr. Scofield

Jezebel is one example of how a woman representing a false religious system was corrupting the Church of Thyatira with pagan religion. Christ said in Revelation 2:20, “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.” This text illustrates the corrupting influence that this woman had when she introduced a religion of libertinism to the congregations at Thyatira. It portrays a woman as having an evil connotation and religious influence in the local churches who was promoting false religion.

In this section of Scripture, we see how a woman was performing a sinister and evil work among God’s true people. Christ spoke these words to the church of Thyatira because a woman nicknamed Jezebel was promoting a pagan religious practice that was associated with sexual immorality and idolatry. Her worldly philosophy taught that believers could take part in the sexual debauchery that accompanied pagan religion. Sex was seen as a religious exercise. At the same time, they could participate in pagan ceremonies and festivals where food was sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 10:20).

Jezebel in the Old Testament had corrupted God's people with fornication and idolatry through introducing the priests of Baal and their pagan worship which involved sexual immorality and magical practices (1 Kings 16:31; 21:25; 2 Kings 9:22). In a similar way, this woman taught that Christians could engage in these types of sinful practices without offending God. This woman was introducing the old practices of the Babylonian cult into the local church. Sex is seen as being part of a religious experience and therefore God approves of sexual exploration and prostitution.

A friend of mine once shared with me how a professing Christian woman said that she would commit adultery or fornication with another man as a means to win him to Jesus Christ. Of course, this is the Jezebel philosophy that was in Thyatira.

This evil woman justified the compromise by concluding that it would allegedly advance the cause of the church. Worldly philosophy says, "If it works then use it." But God says, "If it's unholy then don't do it." In any event, the church of Thyatira was the worldly church since it followed this modern-day Jezebel. But what was acceptable to this local society in Thyatira was detested by Christ. Apparently their departure from morality had gone on for some time (Rev. 2:21) and Christ reprimands them for following the corrupt teaching of this wicked woman.

So in Matthew 13:33 and now in Revelation 2:20 we see how Scripture sometimes typically portrays a woman in a bad light because of the false religion and evil she introduces to God's people. The woman in Matthew 13:33 represents religious corruption and a function of false religion. We have many Jezebel systems within the professing church today.

As we have seen, this religious and doctrinal corruption already began during the days of the Judaizers, Pharisees, and Sadducees and would continue to blossom during the last days of the Church Age in the departure of the professing Church from the cardinal doctrines of the Bible which would also include morality and ethics. But the primary doctrinal departure of this woman is focused on the person and saving work of Jesus Christ (the pure and unleavened meal). If you corrupt these two doctrines, then people are deceived and dammed.

T. Ernest Wilson observes:

"The parable of the leaven in the meal, then, would speak of the *subtle infiltration* of heretical teaching concerning the Person of Christ."

Arno Gaebelein looks ahead to the Tribulation Period and concludes: "The woman in the parable represents the same, the apostate church, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. She has with her evil doctrine, the leaven, corrupted the fine meal, the doctrine of Christ."

It's true that a final leavening process will occur in conjunction with the End Time harlot church (Rev. 17) which will also corrupt the pure meal of the person and work of Jesus Christ, hiding it behind rituals, liturgies, and overriding the truth about Christ with false Christ's and gospels and other pagan concepts. But the leavening process has a past, present, and prophetic connection. The corrupting influence of this woman (false religion) has been true historically (during Christ's day), it is true presently (during the Church Age with modernism, liberalism, and other Christ's rejecting religions), and it will also be true prophetically with the harlot church (Rev. 17:1) and Antichrist worship (Rev. 13).

The woman who represents false religion on every ecclesiastical level will continue to corrupt the pure and lovely doctrine of Jesus Christ (the unleavened meal). The deity, death, and distinguished mark of Christ's teaching on His resurrection (John 2:19-21) are precious truths that warm the hearts of His people. But this rogue religious woman finds no interest in the doctrine of Christ (the pure and unleavened meal). She has a way of corrupting and subverting this important teaching of the "precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

John Phillips specifically relates the doctrinal corruption to today:

"The parable of the leaven is a companion to the parable of the mustard seed, where we saw the outward display of the professing church. In the parable of the leaven we see the inward decay of the professing church." The professing church of today is in a deplorable state!

My friend who is now with the Lord, Dr. Paul Van Gorder, once said:
"When we look at organized religion, an appalling scene meets our gaze."

A Lutheran church has stood at 400 S Logan Street in Denver since the early 1900s, but as of recently it has become unoccupied. In April of 2017, the church was reopened as a place of worship for the followers of a brand-new religion: “Elevationism,” dedicated to the spiritual benefits of cannabis.

It's only fitting that the home of the International Church of Cannabis is in Denver, a city that is literally a mile high. The church's overgrown, antiquated exterior is in striking contrast with its flamboyant technicolor interior, complete with a huge “WEED” sign, rows of pews to smoke on, and a neon rainbow mural on the ceiling. Elevationism does not have any specific dogma about Christ, nor does it require conversion from other religions, so long as its adherents recognize cannabis.

It is true, from Christ’s day to our own day we find this woman corrupting and abandoning the truth of Christ’s person and saving work. She has never ceased her evil leavening work. The New Testament writers pick up on the corruption and seduction of this woman (false religion) throughout the New Testament and during the last days of the Church Age in which we live today.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.”

Scripture teaches that during the last days of the Church Age doctrine will take a back seat and that Gospel preaching would be replaced with fables and errant philosophies which lead people away from the truth of salvation in Christ. This is happening in the present-day professing church, and it will only become worse as we move closer to the Rapture.

1 John 2:18 warns:

“Little children, it is the last time (*hour or specific season*): and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, (*during the Tribulation Period*) even now (*during the last days of the Church Age*) are there many antichrists (*those*

who are against Christ); whereby we know that it is the last time" (hour – a definite point in time).

The present-day “antichrists” refer specifically to the false teachers who are in religious disguise but who reject the doctrine of the unleavened meal (the person and work of Jesus Christ). These apostates along with their corrupt doctrine are constantly expanding like leaven. John is teaching that there is a clear indication that history has entered a climactic era: the last hour. Despite the lapse of centuries since John wrote, the climax of all things is impending in a special way. The stage is being set for history’s final drama of the Rapture, the Tribulation Period, and the Second Coming! And there are many Antichrist’s (those who oppose Christ and His doctrine) which are in season and part of this last hour before the Rapture occurs.

Every early heresy that faced the church in its early formation within the first four centuries of existence was an attack on the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there were many of them. Every one of them attacked Christ’s as not sharing the nature of God. There was Sabellianism that said that He didn’t exist as a person but was simply a mode in which God revealed Himself sometimes. There was Docetism which means “to appear to be,” and taught that Christ wasn’t human, He was only an apparition.

There was Monophysitism that claimed Christ’s divine and human natures remained separated and were never united. And somebody named Nestorius came up with a variation of this heresy. There was Adoptionism. It taught that Jesus was a man who, because He was such a good man, that in the womb or tomb God adopted Him and He became God. But He wasn’t pre-existing God. There was Apollinarianism which said He was neither a real man nor God but He was merely being taken over by the eternal Logos.

There was also the serious view called Arianism from Arias, who essentially said Christ was a created being, created by God, not God but created by God. Here is the point of all this. If you’ve got the wrong Jesus, then everything from this point forward is useless.

John says there are many “antichrists” (false teachers) who reject the Lord Jesus Christ of Scripture – who He is (God in the flesh – deity) and what He has accomplished in His death and resurrection on the sinner’s behalf.

1 John 4:3 also records:

“And every spirit (*demonic spirit*) that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (*the bodily incarnation of God into the world in the person of Jesus Christ*) is not of God: and this is that *spirit of antichrist (a false spirit and witness against the teaching of the person of Jesus Christ)*, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.”

If you are believing in a false Jesus, you will be damned to Hell. You preach any other Christ than the true Christ, you will be damned. This is what Galatians 1:8 says, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”

All false religions reject the true Jesus Christ of the Bible and the unleavened doctrine of Christ. This is a primary reason why they are false religions. From Islam to Mormonism to Jehovah Witnesses, they all reject the true Christ. But at the same time they actually honor a false Christ – “another Jesus” (2 Cor. 11:4). The Muslims honor Jesus. They call Him a prophet, a true prophet. Why is that? Because that’s the subtlety of Satan - to go against Christ by misrepresentation. The Jesus of Mormonism is a created being who is the spirit brother of Adam and Lucifer, created by a god who was created by another god.

Of course, we can scripturally conclude that the Jesus of Mormonism is not the true Jesus but a false Jesus, even though Mormons affirm that they believe in the Jesus that we believe in. It has always been Satan’s anti-Christ strategy to affirm the wrong Christ, the wrong Jesus, and thus to subtly deceive people through redefining Jesus. It’s been very effective through the centuries.

It is the spirit of antichrist to give honor to a false Jesus. This “spirit of Antichrist” has found its way, amazingly, into evangelicalism. I’m shocked by what people believe who call themselves Christians. But I continue to realize that they are under the sway of the great deceiver, Satan himself, and the spirit of anti-Christ, so that they are satisfied to believe in a false Jesus. The unleavened meal of Christ (the doctrine of Christ’s person and

salvation work – Christology and Soteriology) is still being leavened today by popular religious speakers.

Creflo Dollar, in gross irreverence, questions the deity of our Lord and is an antichrist spirit. “Jesus didn’t show up perfect; He grew into His perfection. You know Jesus in one Scripture in the Bible, He went on a journey and He was tired. You better hope God don’t get tired, but Jesus did. If He came as God and He got tired, He says He sat down by the well because He was tired. Boy, we’re in trouble. And somebody said, ‘Well Jesus came as God.’ Well, how many of you know the Bible? Says God never sleeps or slumbers. And yet in the book of Mark we see Jesus asleep in the back of the boat,” end quote.

So according to Creflo Dollar the fact that Christ was tired and went to sleep meant He wasn’t God. This kind of attack on the deity of Christ comes right from anti-Christ sources. They go beyond this. They diminish Jesus and then they elevate themselves.

Kenneth Copeland pretends to speak for Jesus in the first person, and he says this: “Don’t be disturbed when people accuse you of thinking you’re God. They crucified me for claiming I was God, and I didn’t even claim I was God. I just claimed that I walked and that He was in me. Hallelujah.”

The concept that we are “gods” has been floating around sometime within the charismatic chaos of the last days. This type of rhetoric is really shocking. It’s interesting that you can find the books of these type of people alongside the books of people who tell the truth about Jesus Christ on the same shelf in the same store.

There is also the Oneness Pentecostal movement. The most well-known one would be T. D. Jakes. He is Oneness Pentecostal; a Jesus only advocate who denies the existence of the Trinity. The Oneness Pentecostals espouse an old heresy called Modalism. Modalism says that God is not three persons, not three co-equal, co-existent, co-eternal persons, but God is only one person who sometimes acts like the Father, sometimes acts like the Son, sometimes acts like the Spirit. Of course, this destroys the nature

of the Father, the nature of the Son, and the nature of the Spirit for they all God.

The estimate is that there are 25 million people in the Oneness movement. This means that twenty-five million of them deny the existence of the Trinity.

Joel Osteen was asked if he thought that people who refused to believe in Jesus are wrong. He said this: "Well, I don't know if I believe they're wrong. I believe that's what the Bible teaches. I believe that's what the Bible teaches, but I think that only God will judge a person's heart." Just subjectivity. "I spent a lot of time in India. I don't know all about their religion, but I know they love God, and I don't know - I've seen their sincerity, so I don't know."

Osteen was also asked about the Mormons, are they Christians and he said: "Well in my mind they are. Mitt Romney has said he believes in Christ as his Savior, and that's what I believe, so you know, I'm not the one to judge the little details, so I believe they are."

William Barclay was a popular Scottish theologian who died in 1978. His books are immensely popular. But Barclay was a "mystery." He was modernistic in many of his views yet extremely instructive in other ways. But his attack on the authority of Scripture and the doctrine of Christ reveals that he was indeed a rank liberal filled with leavened doctrine.

Barclay once described himself as a liberal evangelical which is certainly a contradictory expression. The truth about the engaging professor is that he was a theological modernist. For example, he did not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. He wrote that we are not compelled to accept this teaching "in the literal and physical sense."

Barclay did not hesitate to discredit miracles in the Bible. While he felt there was some essence of the miraculous in Christ's deeds, he believed many of the Lord's miracles had perfectly natural explanations. For example, he argued that the Savior did not literally multiply the loaves and

fishes. Jesus merely motivated the thronging people to share their food with one another.

He said that Christ did not actually walk upon the Sea of Galilee. It was just that, from the disciples' vantage point, it appeared that he did as he walked in the shallow water near the beach. And the Lord did not really intend for Peter to cast his fishing hook into the sea to obtain a coin from a fish's mouth. He meant for the apostle to use his fishing skill to raise funds for the temple tax. So went the Barclay "spin" on the Lord's miraculous deeds.

Was Christ truly the Son of God? If you were to read some of Barclay's writings regarding Jesus, you would be convinced that he believed in the Savior's deity. For example, in his discussion of John 1:1, the famous theologian said that Jesus was "of the very same character and quality and essence and being as God."

However, a preacher shared this: "But when two friends of mine once visited with Barclay at his home in Glasgow in the spring of 1970, the distinguished professor strongly denied that he believed that Jesus was divine. He insisted he never had endorsed that idea. He claimed that the Lord himself believed that he was divine, as did others. But personally, Barclay did not. When my friend cited the apostle Paul as evidence to the contrary, the professor snapped: "I don't care what Paul said."

And what did Barclay believe regarding salvation? Barclay repudiated the doctrine of the substitutionary nature of the death of Jesus. He denied that, in the divine scheme of things, Christ had to die to atone for the sins of humanity. The Lord himself expressed it like this: the Son of man came to "give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). But Professor Barclay believed that taking this statement as literal was a "crude" approach to a passage that was merely an instance of the "poetry of love." The real power of Jesus' death, he suggested, was in its benevolent, selfless example — nothing more.

Though Jesus taught more about the topic of hell than did any other Biblical character, Barclay denied the existence of eternal torment.

The punishment of hell is “not to be taken literally” he said. In fact, as historian J. D. Douglas observed, “Barclay was a universalist (one who believes that all people will be saved ultimately).” In one of his books, the professor declared that man “cannot drift beyond the love and care of God.” Supposedly, the Lord God will “never leave or forsake” any person — regardless of the depth of his depravity.

For all his learning, the Scottish expositor knew nothing of the concept of God’s justice and wrath.

Barclay was an apostate who repudiated the unleavened doctrine of Christ and many other doctrines.

When it comes to the doctrine of Christ, we need to get it right and spread it right. The leaven of doctrinal corruption, especially the doctrine regarding Christ’s person and work, shows up everywhere. It’s in books, propagated in the pulpits through false teachers of the last days, and it’s all over the Internet.

Matthew 13:33 reveals how the doctrinal corruption occurs when Jesus states the “kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”

The fact that she is hiding the leaven in the meal is significant. It indicates secrecy and deception on the woman’s part. Here it is the secrecy of introducing false doctrine which is designed to corrupt the truth. This woman (the sneaky housewife) was trying to get away with something that she knows is wrong. Because of the secrecy involved in this scene it must be portraying something other than a housewife baking bread for her evening household meal. Every housewife used leaven when she would bake bread for normal family consumption. But the fact that leaven had to be secretly introduced in the flour would indicate that the meal offering was being prepared for an offering unto the Lord. This is why there was the secret introduction of leaven into the three measures of meal.

I must reiterate something. If the leaven in this parable indicates something good, then why hide it? Hiding leaven cannot refer to



the spreading of the Gospel among humanity. The truth of the Gospel is never to be hid. Just the reverse is true. The Gospel must be proclaimed openly and faithfully to a world lost in sin (Mark 16:15). Secrecy has nothing to do with the expansion of the Gospel message. But secrecy and sneakiness is part of a plot that is designed to undermine the truth of Christ's person and salvation work (the pure meal). This is what is occurring today. The woman which is representative of false religion brings her false doctrine and teachers into the Church through stealth or sneakiness.



The military has a stealth bomber which is designed to avoid enemy radar. It has state of the art features which allows it to secretly maneuver in enemy territory. This is what the Parable of the Leaven is teaching. The woman is trying to be avoided or remain undetected because of her sneaky and evil actions. In promoting apostasy Satan attempts to

secretly sow false doctrine and deception among people. He acts in a stealthy or secret manner in deceiving and corrupting the lives of others through presenting "another gospel" or "another Jesus" (2 Cor. 11:4) and misrepresenting the Jesus of Scripture. The errant teaching is often hidden behind religious garb, symbols, and traditions that take on a "form of godliness" (2 Tim. 3:5) but the actual teaching that is being propagated is contrary to the doctrine of Christ and salvation.

Galatians 2:4 confirms Satan's secret corruption and undermining of the truth as Jesus taught in Matthew 13:33: "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in (*secretly smuggled in a false gospel*), who came in privily (*secretly or in a stealthy manner*) to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage."

2 Peter 2:1-2 also speaks of the secret corruption of this woman:
"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily (*secretly or craftily*) shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring

upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of."

Jude 4 goes on to say:

"For there are certain men crept in unawares (*entered secretly*), who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Timothy 3:6-7 also confirms:

"For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The purpose of secrecy is to produce seduction among gullible people. False religion which is against Christ is very seductive and blinds people keeping them away from the reality of Christ's person and saving work on the cross (Matt. 13:14-15). Once again, when the disciples heard this story of the leaven being introduced into the meal offering, their immediate reaction was one of shock and amazement. When Jesus told them about a woman hiding leaven in meal they would have immediately thought, "What a dirty trick. What a dastardly deed and sneaky thing to do." So we must place ourselves in the disciple's shoes and put ourselves back in their time so we can understand what the sneaky trick was that this woman performed.

This was the infiltration of something evil into the meal offerings which were to be a pictorial and typical representation of Christ and His sinless sacrifice on the cross. Christ therefore was teaching that the Scriptures which represented His person and sacrificial work (Luke 24:47) were being corrupted by this womanizing or religious influence of false religion. The leaving of false doctrine regarding the doctrine of Christ (the pure unleavened meal) began during Christ's earthly ministry and continues to spread in this present time.

Paul taught in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 that the leaven of false doctrine and spiritual corruption was at work in his day and by extension today in the

present Grace Age. He writes: “For the mystery of iniquity (*lawlessness*) doth already work: only he (*Holy Spirit*) who now letteth (*restrains*) will let (*restrain*), until he be taken out of the way” (*the Spirit’s restraining influence removed from earth through the Rapture of the Church*).

Paul was teaching that secular, sinful, and spiritual (religious) corruption (leavening) had already set in during his time. Surely it has grown (leavened) to gigantic proportions in our present hour. The “mystery of iniquity” or lawlessness (Greek - anomia) speaks of the moral, ethical, and religious decline among mankind which is ultimately leading up to the future worship of Antichrist. Paul is talking about a breakdown of truth and ethics on every level – socially (society), ecclesiastically (Church) and domestically (family unit). But the Bible teaches that sinful depravity and doctrinal departure to some degree is presently being restrained through the Church (God’s people) as they are being indwelt by the Restrainer (Holy Spirit) and promoting salt and light in the world.

Today sinful and religious departure (leavening) and evil anarchy are being kept in check through the working of the Holy Spirit through Christ’s Church. The Spirit prompts believers to stand up for righteousness and truth in the midst of a sinful world which keeps the entire leaving process from occurring in relation to social and religious corruption.

God’s people have a buffering affect in the Church and world today. They keep the full leavening process from occurring. But eventually the whole will be leavened with errant doctrine and spiritual corruption as Jesus predicted (Matt. 13:33). This is because there will be no believers left on planet earth to help counteract the leavening process following the Rapture. The Holy Spirit will withdraw His unique restraining ministry through the Church. This will cause total religious apostasy to break out in the church and complete sinful degradation to occur on planet earth. Imagine what the church and world will be like without the restraining forces of godliness and righteousness!

2 Thessalonians 2:3 states:

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away (the departure) first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.”

I understand this to mean a specific religious departure or apostasy from truth. The sense is this. The Day of the Lord (Tribulation Period) cannot commence on planet earth until the full-blown apostasy occurs or “till the whole is leavened” (Matt. 13:33) as Jesus taught. Since this complete doctrinal departure and worship of Antichrist had not yet occurred the saints could be sure that they were not living in the Tribulation Period. The saints could be certain that they had not entered the period of judgment (Day of the Lord) because this specific apostasy of Antichrist worship has not yet occurred on earth.

From other Scripture we know that there will be a religious departure (apostasy) that will initially be promoted within the apostate church (Rev. 17) but this will culminate with the apostasy of Antichrist who will declare Himself to be God and mock the person and work of Christ. This is what Paul is talking about in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. There is coming a day when “a falling away” (the falling away) will occur. It will be a complete doctrinal apostasy that will take place on a universal and worldwide scale which will abandon the pure meal or doctrine of Christ’s person and work.

Once again, Jesus revealed in Matthew 13:33 that a time will come when the entire meal or doctrine of Christ will be leavened (“till the whole was leavened”). It is certain that this will occur after the Rapture of the true Church (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

One reason is because following the departure of the true Church only the false church will remain. There will be a final banding together of the apostate church after true Christians are raptured from planet earth. Those who are left behind will evidently experience a common religious bond. The pagan and religious systems of the world will ecumenically unite, and the woman of the End Times will emerge on the world scene as a great harlot (Rev. 17:1-6) rejecting the pure doctrine of Christ. No pure and unleavened truth will remain regarding Jesus Christ following the mass exodus or departure of God’s people from earth since they will be the very ones who embraced the pure or unleavened meal or teaching of Christ.

With the departure of God’s people (John 14:1-2) the “whole will be leavened” for only the ecumenical apostate church will be left to promote

the doctrinal corruption concerning Christ. This will be an eerie time to be alive as the apostate system overtakes the earth.



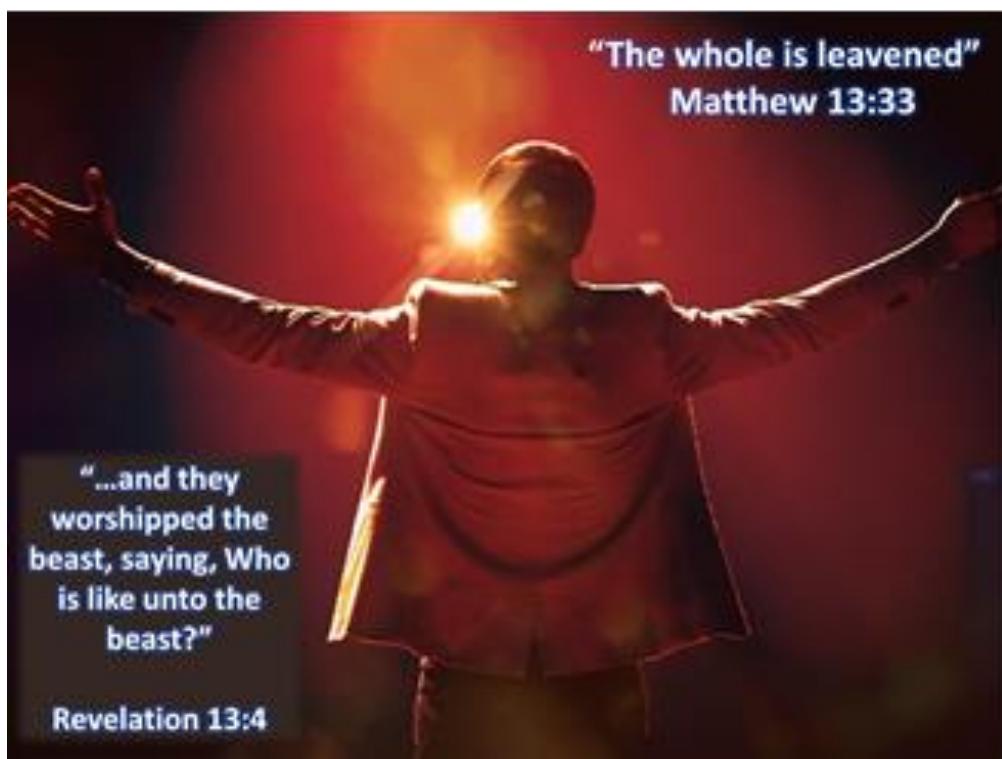
Another reason for the total leavening, and this is mentioned in the Thessalonian text, is that there will be a final form of religious apostasy which occurs with the Antichrist delusion. He will promote himself as God and want nothing to do with Christ's person and work upon the cross (2 Thess. 2:8-12).

Perhaps the time of complete leavening is fast approaching. The saints "gathering together unto him" (2 Thess. 2:1) may occur at any moment. Jesus is coming again! Following this joyous reunion in Heaven of God's true people there will also be a reunion of the apostate church on earth. Great ecumenical ties will be made without the influence of God's true people. From a religious perspective this will result in the whole doctrine of Christ to be leavened. Nothing will be left that resembles the unleavened meal or the doctrine of Christ. It will be fully leavened or corrupted with the exodus of God's people from earth. The final leavening process will occur through the apostate church and Antichrist worship.

It must be understood that the entire teaching regarding Christ will be immediately lost following the Rapture. With the true Church gone only the false church will remain resulting in the complete leavening of the Gospel and doctrinal truth regarding Christ's person and work. The evil and sinister

work of the sneaky woman will have been successful. She will have accomplished her goal of leavening the entire meal or teaching of Jesus Christ within the apostate system of the End Times.

In addition, when the Antichrist ("the man of sin" – 1 Thess. 2:3) takes control of the earth during the second half of the Tribulation Period he will continue the leavening process that was started by the woman (apostate church). Antichrist will reject the doctrine of Christ right up to the time of the King's return. Again, the greatest departure and apostasy will be when the Antichrist claims to be God and calls upon the entire world to worship Him instead of the true Christ (2 Thess. 2:3-11; Rev. 13:6-8).



2 Thessalonians 2:4 speaks of this final Antichrist apostasy:
"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

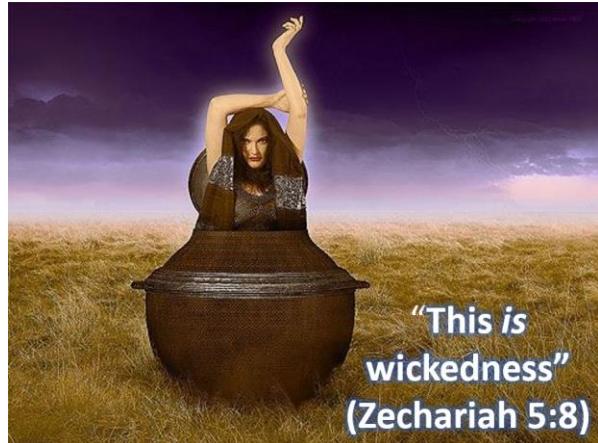
The truth of the pure or unleavened meal (Christ's person and work) will be totally leavened when unredeemed humanity is worshipping the Antichrist. Again, this will be an eerie time in earth's history when total apostasy overtakes mankind.

So the woman which is representative of false religion is seen in Christ's day, the last days of the Church Age, but she is also seen during the Tribulation Period. I would like to do some further research on the woman (false religion and pagan worship) that will specifically occur during the Tribulation Period.

Prophetically, Zechariah also uses the imagery of a woman and envisions a future period of End Time corruption and evil that will occur on a worldwide scale throughout the earth during the Tribulation Period. A day of complete leavening is approaching.

Zechariah 5:7-8 records:

"And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead (*a heavy lid*): and this is a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah (*measuring basket*). And he said, This is wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead (*a lid*) upon the mouth thereof."



After judging unbelieving Israel in the vision of the flying scroll (Zech. 5:1-4) we discover that Israel's sins must also be removed from her land for the Millennium to begin (Zech. 5:5-11). In order to do this Zechariah reveals that Israel's sins will in some sense be moved back to Babylon to be judged during the End Times to be judged by God so Palestine can once again truly be called the Holy Land.

This is where You will notice that in Zechariah's vision a woman is seen sitting in a measuring basket and she represents or personifies "wickedness" (vs. 8). Historically the measuring basket (ephah) points to Israel's iniquities of godless commercialism (Amos. 8:5; Neh. 5:1-13; Mal. 3:8-9) and another religious evil which would include idolatry as seen in the next verses. We find that one of the great sins of the Israelites when they returned from Babylon was an insatiable love for money and desire for material things. But they also could not get away from idolatrous worship.

This was historically true of Israel. However, Zechariah prophesies that Israel's sins of commercialism and idolatry will one day return to Babylon from where they originated.

The woman attempted to get out of the ephah, so a heavy lead cover was put on the ephah to keep her in. A talent of lead would weigh from seventy-five to one hundred pounds. Why would she want to escape? It's because she knew her judgment and doom was coming in Babylon.

Zechariah 5:9-11 speaks of this future resurgence of Israel's Babylonian sins: "Then the angel that talked with me went forth, and said unto me, Lift up now thine eyes, and see what *is* this that goeth forth. Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind *was* in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. Then said I to the angel that talked with me, Whither (*where*) do these bear the ephah (*measuring basket*)? And he said unto me, To build it an house in the land of Shinar (*the land of Babylon*): and it shall be established, and set there upon her own base" (*indicating an idol pedestal and how the idolatrous worship of Israel would be transferred back to Babylon to be judged during the End Times - Isa. 44:9-20; 46:1-2, etc.*).

Storks were unclean birds for the Israelites (Lev. 11:19; Deut. 14:18), so these stork-like women were appropriate carriers of the contaminated basket of wickedness (Israel's godless commercialism and idolatry) which according to Zechariah are twin sins of wickedness will be resurrected during the End Times (Tribulation Period) in the actual place of Babylon.

Dr. McGee comments on this:

Some time ago a movie was produced called "The Flying Nun"; so I call these two women the two flying nuns. But what do they represent? Well, we may be sure that they represent agents of evil because they are associated with and protective of the woman in the ephah—and the angel had said of her, "This is wickedness."

In this Scripture and others Babylon represents the system that promotes economic independence and religious idolatry. Such was the case in the

original Babel and so it will be during the End Times (Tribulation Period). The Bible predicts that the system and city of Babylon will reemerge during the End Times and this is indicated in the imagery of a wicked woman. This future wickedness will possess the same economical and religious aspirations of godless commercialism and idolatry which were present in Babylon and the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). The personified and predicted wickedness is related to an economic and religious powerhouse of the End Times that stems from ancient Babylonian corruption.

Notice again that the woman is pushed down into the basket by the angel (vs. 8). The woman is then taken by two other winged women (vs. 9) and was transported to the land of Babylon. This prophetic vision portrays how End Time wickedness will once again flourish in Babylon and identifies this awful wickedness with a woman's presence.

The New Testament picks up on this same prophetic imagery of a woman that is linked to Babylon's resurgence during the End Times (Revelation 17-18). However, the New Testament adds a "mystery" (Rev. 17:5) to the resurrection of this ancient city of commerce and idolatry and the mystery is that Babylon will reemerge as a religious, idolatrous, apostate system that represents all the wicked and religious systems which have been spawned from the Tower of Babel and ancient Babylon (Gen. 11:1-9). All apostate systems will merge together for the End Times and create a super apostate church. Once again, a woman who is described as a harlot takes on the symbolism of evil, seduction, and corruption.

Let's revisit the truth we briefly examined in the Parable of the Mustard Seed when discussing the harlot of the End Times. The Parable of the Leaven in a similar manner also looks ahead to the apostasy of the Tribulation Period which is the time when "the whole is leavened" as Jesus taught (Matt. 13:33) – when truth is abandoned on an unprecedented scale like never before seen on earth. The leavening process began during the last days of the Church with doctrinal and ethical apostasy (2 Tim. 3:1-8; 1 Tim. 4:1; Jude 3) but it will climax during the seven-year Tribulation Period with the apostate church overtaking the earth and end with Antichrist worship.



Revelation 17:1-5 envisions this End Time woman and harlot riding (controlling) the movements of the beast (Antichrist) during the first half of the Tribulation Period. “And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee

the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters (*interpreted as great masses of people – Rev. 17:15*): With whom the kings of the earth (*leaders over the earth*) have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication (*they are drunk on the religious/spiritual fornication and evil corruption this woman offers*).

“So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns (*the ten horns on the seventh head indicate the ten nation confederacy of the Antichrist, a Revived Roman Empire – Rev. 17:12; Dan. 7:24*). And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand (*wealth and riches*) full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication (*spiritual unfaithfulness to God through promoting detestable acts of apostasy and uncleanness*): And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”



Like Zechariah’s vision, a woman is once again revealed in the apocalyptic literature of Revelation. This time in the form of a harlot. During the coming Tribulation Period a sinister woman is seen prostituting or corrupting the world religiously and possessing great political and economical powers throughout the entire earth. This woman is presented as a harlot (“the

great whore"- Rev. 17:1). One does not need to guess concerning the identity of the whorish woman. She is the counterfeit bride that masquerades as the true Church during the Tribulation Period. She is pictured as the prostitute church of the End Times. God's true Church is represented as the bride of Christ in the New Testament (Eph. 5:24-28; 2 Cor. 11:2). Therefore, a harlot represents a religious system which is a false church, a religious counterfeit that is not related to the true Bride of Jesus Christ.

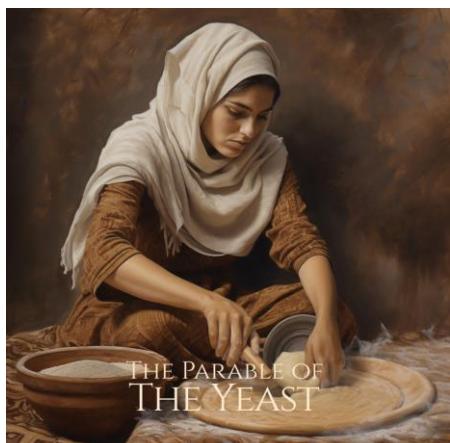
The woman who symbolizes the apostate religious system was "drunken with the blood of the saints" (Rev. 17:6). This makes it clear that the apostate religious system of the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation Period will be completely devoid of true Christians. As a matter of fact, the apostate church will attempt to kill all those who follow Jesus Christ and truth.

You will notice that the final form of this revived Babylonianism consists of many "harlots" or prostitutes (Rev. 17:5). The woman is the harlot of Revelation 17 is given the label of "MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS" (Rev. 17:5). This means that this woman is the source (mother) and therefore representation and culmination of all the apostate religious systems which have stemmed from ancient Babylon. The harlot church is an ecumenical End Time monstrosity that will unite all apostate systems together ("harlots") whose apostate teachings stem back to Babel and Babylon. This is a "mystery" or new revelation that was not revealed in the Old Testament prophetic literature but is now revealed to us today. Zechariah prophesied of wickedness returning to Babylon (Zech. 5:5-11) but the book of Revelation unlocks the secret about Babylon's reemergence as consisting of a worldwide apostate religious system that overtakes the entire earth.

Dr. L. E. Maxwell wrote in *The Prairie Overcomer*: "Let's face it. The fever of one universal church fills the air. The plague spreads. It sweeps Christendom and is appealing even to the Mohammedans. It often manifests itself in ominous outbursts of deep religious emotion ... What will be the consummation of this religious fever? We can expect only a huge religious monopoly, a veritable juggernaut, to emerge from this obsession for a super church ..."

This is what is envisioned in Revelation 17:1-5 – an ecumenical, universal, super church of rank apostasy. This woman is seen corrupting the earth with false doctrine and will be the specific time when “the whole is leavened.” This means the truth will be completely abandoned and forsaken in the apostate teachings of this wicked system. The Bible is envisioning a future time during the Tribulation Period when the Parable of the Leaven will be prophetically and ultimately fulfilled through the wicked departure of this woman (the apostate church).

Jesus again confirms in Matthew 13:33 “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal (*this during the days of Christ’s earthly ministry and the last days related to the Church Age*), till the whole was leavened” (*the truth on a worldwide scale is abandoned because of the apostate church and the final form of Antichrist worship during the Tribulation Period*).



This parable is obviously portraying a woman who is committing a religious atrocity. Who is the woman? In summary, in an all-encompassing sense and scope the woman represents the religious evil influence that has been present on earth throughout the mystery period which began in Christ’s day with Israel’s rejection (Matt. 12:13), which extends to our present today in the Grace Age, and which culminates with the apostate ecumenical church of the Tribulation Period and Antichrist worship.

We see the spread and progression of the leaven or yeast of false doctrine throughout the mystery period. As previously mentioned, in Christ’s day this woman represented those who opposed the “word of the kingdom” such as the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. 13:13-14) with their destructive leaven of legalism and liberalism (Matt. 16:6-11). As the mystery period continued to advance we can look back and see how this woman, representing religious apostasy, continued to spread her leavening doctrine of false teaching during the early first century Church (Acts 20:28-

31; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:5; 4:3-4; 2 Pet. 2:1-3, 11-12; 1 John 2:18-19; 2 John 7-11; Jude 4-5).

The corrupting influence was seen with the Nicolaitans and their false doctrines (Rev. 2:15) which would later develop into Roman Catholicism with all of her paganism that stems back to Babylon. The baptismal regeneration, practice of penance, the selling of indulgences, rejection of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ, receiving forgiveness of sins through priests, the pope's infallibility, the worshipping of Mary, and many other deceptive and damnable doctrines were introduced into Christianity by the influence of this evil woman of corrupt religion.

Later the woman would emerge in liberal and modernistic Protestantism and denominationalism that rejects the deity of Christ, salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ, faith alone in Christ alone, the virgin birth, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the miraculous, man's need for the new birth, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The woman is also witnessed today through the constant promotion and proliferation of the cults with their weird and wacky doctrines which reject the pure unleavened meal of Christ's person and salvation work.

One Christian man shares this story. My Bible college professor taught us about the danger of blaspheming God's Son by claiming that He is anything less than God. He told how for some the earth opened, for some fire fell from Heaven, and for some floods came. He told us that he had one response when false cults come to proclaim their heresy. "I have just paid off my house and enjoy it very much. If you are going to continue to spout evil doctrine that will anger the God of the universe, at least get off of my porch!"

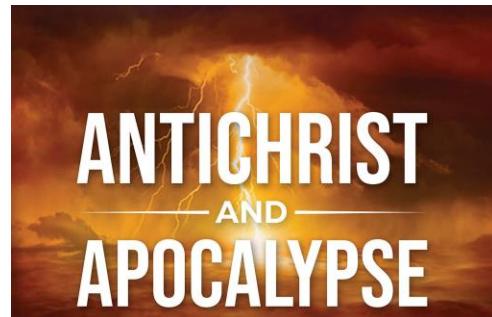
The woman is also represented in the religions of this world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Then too, the woman is also seen in the emergent church and the continual growth of the ecumenical church which is bringing all faiths, denominations, and religions within Christendom. The devilish work of this woman has been very effective throughout the

centuries, and she will continue to distort God's truth as the leavening process continues.

The leaven of false teaching, specifically the corruption of the meal of Christ's person and work is connected with the wicked woman (corrupt religion) of apostate Romanism, Protestantism, Liberalism, Modernism, and all religious faiths such as Islam and even the dark world of the cults. All apostate systems fall under the umbrella of this Babylonian woman of apostasy.

Someday all religious systems will unite together and form the "great whore" (Rev. 17:1) and become a religious, political, and economic power during the End Times. In the prophetic Scriptures of Revelation 17-18 we discover that this woman is both the city (Rev. 17:18) and the religious/political system of Babylon (Rev. 17-18). She reveals herself as an apostate ecumenical church in chapters 17:1-14.

Eventually the prophetic word reveals that the Antichrist will judge and overtake the apostate church by destroying the religious-based system of the harlot (Rev. 17:16) and he will then build his own world religion resulting in all humanity worshipping him. We have not been left to our own imagination in trying to understand the apocalyptic landscape of the Bible. The unveiling of prophetic truth informs us that an End Time figure identified as the "beast" and "Antichrist" will eventually make his bid for world dominance, power, and worship creating a universal paganized form of worship that has never occurred on planet earth. It will be a time when "the whole is leavened" (Matt. 13:33). It's the final departure and form of leaven which will keep people away from the pure meal or doctrine of Christ.



Revelation 13:4 unveils the future:

"And they worshipped the dragon (*Satan*) which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast (*Antichrist*), saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?"



Revelation 13:8 also predicts: "And all that dwell upon the earth (*the unsaved*) shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Revelation 13:15 envisions the death of non-beast worshippers: "And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast (*a statue of the Antichrist*), that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause (*through a worldwide demonically inspired proclamation*) that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed."

A terrible future awaits planet earth when the whole will be leavened (Matt. 13:33). When truth is abandoned on a worldwide scale for worship of Antichrist the wicked work of the Babylonian woman will have reached its climax and the original goal of her followers who said at Babel: "Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven" (Gen. 11:4). In the coming day "the whole will be leavened" which means there will be utter abandonment from the truth regarding Christ's person and salvation work as people bow before the Antichrist and worshipping Satan instead of God. In fact, Christ will be mocked or blasphemed by the Antichrist (Rev. 13:5-6). The leavening process will have reached its climactic end with this worldwide worship and apostasy.

Another observation from Matthew 13:33 is that the leavening process stops when the entire amount is leavened ("till the whole is leavened"). Therefore, the Bible predicts that after the leavening process has reached its climax and culminating point the King will eventually return to earth. The mystery regarding the leavening process will be fulfilled and Christ will return to planet earth riding on a white horse in His glorious Second Coming (Rev. 19:11-16).

Stanley Toussaint correctly observes:

"This parable reveals the fact that evil will run its course and dominate the new age. But it also indicates that when the program of evil has been

fulfilled, the kingdom will come. This is indicated by the use of the preposition ‘until.’”

It’s interesting that at the proper temperature yeast begins fermenting and a gas is given off within the dough causing it to swell. Then, when the bread has risen just to the right amount, the woman would fashion it into individual pans and place them into the oven. The heat of the oven would kill the microscopic organisms and the fermentation would stop. So it will be someday when the Son of man returns to earth. When Jesus returns to earth the leavening process will stop. He will put an end to it.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 reveals:

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.”

The heat of Christ’s fiery judgment will stop the leavening process that has been introduced by man. His fiery wrath will end its fermentation.

Revelation 19:20 records:

“And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

In the end, Jesus is going to win! When this evil Babylonian system is destroyed and removed from the whole earth, the kingdom of God will come to the earth. What a glorious prospect this is for you and me who live in this present evil age. Better days are coming when the King returns to earth to remove all the leaven and start the Millennium.

III. The primary mystery of the parable

We must conclude this parable by clearly stating the mystery represented in the parable as we have done in the previous three parables. What then is the new revelation and mystery (sacred secret) of the parable of the leaven? The mystery (Matt. 13:11) of this parable is that until the kingdom

arrives there will be a religious leavening process that will occur worldwide. As previously mentioned, the leavening process will culminate in religious delusion and total apostasy on planet earth under the apostate church (Rev. 17) and ultimately under Antichrist worship (Rev. 13) before the King returns. The total abandonment of truth on a wide world scale brings about the full leavening process but it will also eventually bring the mystery period to a close with the judgment of the returning King (Rev. 19:11-21).

The Parable of the Leaven (Matthew 13:33)

Conditions and Events that occur on Earth before the Kingdom (Millennium) arrives.

The MYSTERY (revealed secret) is that before the kingdom (Millennium) comes to earth Satan would through a sinful, deceptive, and corrupting leavening process undermine the doctrinal truth of Christ's person and saving work.

The Leavening process began in Christ's day (Matt. 16:12)

Extends to the Last Days of Church Age (2 Tim. 4:3)

Climaxes during Tribulation Period with the Harlot Church and Antichrist Worship (Rev. 17:1-5; 2 Thess. 2:4).

With the worldwide deception of the apostate church and Antichrist worship "the whole is leavened" (Matt. 13:33).

The mystery or sacred secret previously unrevealed about the kingdom is this. Since the days of Israel's rejection and until the Second Coming of Christ to establish His kingdom there will be a leavening process occurring that is seeking to undermine the truth and in particular the truth about the doctrine of Christ as it relates to His person and salvation work (the unleavened meal).

A woman representing religious deception and spiritual prostitution will spread false doctrine throughout the church centuries but following the Rapture of Church and during the End Times (Tribulation Period) a corruption will occur on a universal and unprecedented scale in conjunction

with the harlot or apostate church. This is specifically the time when “the whole is leavened” (Matt. 13:33). The super church will be an ecumenical uniting of every false religion on earth which in some sense has roots in Babylonian religion and this End Time harlot church will bring about spiritual deception on a worldwide basis among the leaders of the earth and all humanity.

But this deception will turn into another deception of Antichrist worship. The Antichrist will destroy the harlot system at the middle of the Tribulation Period (Rev. 17:6) and then deify Himself and demand total worship.

It's during these dark days of universal deception on planet earth when all will be leavened. After this full leavening process occurs during the seven-year Tribulation Period the King will return to establish His earthly theocracy. So the kingdom cannot come to planet earth until the woman finishes her leavening work. This is the sacred secret that the righteous men of Old Testament have not heard (Matt. 13:17).

Thomas Figart writes:

“The ‘*mystery*’ then would be represented in the fact that the ‘*meal*,’ the true ‘*word of the kingdom*’ would be penetrated with hypocrisy, improper doctrine and any other satanic influence working their way through until they were thoroughly mixed with the truth ...”

This is an accurate assessment. The truth would be corrupted or leavened in Christ’s day and down through the centuries by a religious system that is backed by Satan. The work of the woman is that of religious corruption. She is seen contaminating and corrupting the truth of God’s Word and specifically that which relates to the doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ (the unleavened meal). Because of her evil work she is seen acting dishonestly and deceitfully. This is why we might call this the parable of the sneaky housewife.

