

Matthew 13 – The Parables of the Kingdom

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A set of 7 “*parables of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven* (v11).
We must distinguish Israel, the Church and the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of our Lord Jesus:

The kingdom involves the sovereign rule of God on earth, which God will establish in His Son, and He will be recognised as King.

1. The Kingdom in Prophecy:

OT scriptures promise & describe a literal glorious kingdom that will encompass the whole world, when the sovereign rule of the Lord Jesus will be manifested, and He will be universally acknowledged by all men as the King of kings (e.g. Psalm 72, Isaiah 11, Micah 4, Zechariah 8 etc).

2. The Kingdom in Anticipation:

The Lord Jesus came to present Himself to Israel as their Messiah, preaching ‘*the gospel of the kingdom*’ (see Mark 1v14-15).

The kingdom was imminently anticipated by godly men & women, e.g. Simeon (Lk 2v25), Anna (Lk 2v38), Joseph of Arimathaea (Lk 23v51).

The Lord taught His disciples to pray “*Thy kingdom come*” (Matt 6v10), and He commanded them to preach to Israel that “*the kingdom ... is at hand* (hath drawn nigh)” (Matt 10v5-7).

At times, the disciples expected the kingdom to be established (Lk 19v11); even after the Lord’s resurrection, “*Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1v6).

3. The Kingdom in Mystery:

In the purpose of God, there is this present day of grace, the Church age, when the King is absent & still rejected. He is not reigning manifestly in this world, but He reigns in the hearts of believers in the Lord Jesus, who have been “*translated ... into the kingdom of His dear Son*” (Col 1v13).

The 7 parables in Matt 13 include something of the unique character of the present kingdom in mystery (v11), as the Lord Jesus reveals “*things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world*” (v35), i.e. not revealed in OT scripture.

These 7 parables of the kingdom cover a period which begins when the Lord Jesus was here on this earth (parable 1), they encompass the entire Church age, and they extend beyond the rapture of the Church, to His 2nd advent, when He will come again in power & great glory, there will be a final harvest (parable 2), a final separation of the just from the wicked (parable 7).

4. The Kingdom in Manifestation:

After the rapture of the Church, God will take up Israel as His people again (i.e. the 70th week of Daniel 9), and a godly faithful remnant of Israel will again anticipate the imminent establishment of the kingdom. In a time of great tribulation their prayer again in that day will be “*Thy kingdom come*”, the “*gospel of the kingdom*” will again be preached (Matt 24v14). Then the Lord Jesus will return again to this earth, establish His literal millennial reign, and rule over the whole earth.

There will then be the manifested sovereign rule of God in this world; “*in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory*” (Matt 19v28), “*the times of restitution of all things*” (Acts 3v21), “*the dispensation of the fulness of times*”, when God will “*gather together in one* (i.e. head up) *all things in Christ, both which are in the heavens and which are on earth, even in Him*” (Eph 1v10) and He will “*reconcile all things unto Himself*” (Col 1v20).

Context of Matthew 13:

1. The Timing of the Kingdom Parables:

v1: "The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side". This is the day:

- Israel's rulers decided to put to death the Lord Jesus (ch12v14).
- The Lord Jesus declares His supreme greatness, as Prophet (> Jonah, ch12v41), as Priest (> the temple, ch12v6) and as King (> Solomon, ch12v42), yet He is rejected by Israel.
- The rulers commit the unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (ch12v31).
- The Lord Jesus severs the old natural links with Israel, in place of a new spiritual relationship available to the "*whosoever*" based on the obedience of faith (ch12v47-50).
- Israel finally rejects the Messiah (ch12v1-21), and He in turn rejects them (ch12v22-50).

2. The Setting of the Kingdom Parables:

v1-2 = an action parable; the Lord Jesus symbolically leaves the house of Israel, and in grace adopts a wider ministry, to the multitudes of all nations.

He is no longer in the midst of the nation; seated in the ship He is physically out of reach of the multitudes upon the shore, but they hear His voice as He teaches.

3. The Style of the Kingdom Parables:

v3: "*And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying ...*", see also v34. Why?

v10-17: The Spirit of God would reveal the parabolic teaching to those who had faith & received the Lord Jesus, but for those who were willingly disobedient and had rejected Him, there would be no revelation. They would be left in the darkness of their rejection & unbelief.

v34-35: These parables in Matt 13 give revelation of new truth that had not been revealed to the faithful & righteous of a past day (see also v52).

4. The Division of the Kingdom Parables:

A. 1st group of 4 parables spoken in public by the sea side to the multitudes (v1-35).

B. 2nd group of 3 parables spoken in private in the house to His disciples (v36-52).

v1-35: The Kingdom in Profession

1. The parable of the sower (v3-9), which the Lord interprets in v18-23.
2. The parable of the wheat & tares (v24-30).
3. The parable of the mustard seed (v31-32).
4. The parable of the leaven in the meal (v33).

The kingdom in profession as it is today, as seen by men, with mixture of what is real and also much unreality, as seen in the sphere of Christendom.

The devil is working, seeking to prevent or corrupt the work of God in the kingdom, including by the propagation of false teaching.

v36-52: The Kingdom in Reality

5. The parable of the treasure hid in the field (v44).
6. The parable of the merchantman & the pearl (v45-46).
7. The parable of the net filled with good & bad fish (v47-50).

The kingdom in reality, as seen by God, who alone can rightly discern the real from the unreal.

God is working to effect His purpose regarding His kingdom; to secure the treasure (His people Israel) & the pearl (the Church) and to preserve the good fish (the just). God will be triumphant.