



PARABLE, MIRACLE & SIGN

CHARLES H. WELCH

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C. H. WELCH

Matthew & John
considered dispensationally

THE BEREAN
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Parable Miracle and Sign

of Matthew and John
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By

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52A WILSON STREET, LONDON, EC2A 2ER
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Preface to first Edition

Fellowship on the part of generous friends of the Witness has made the publication of this Volume a possibility.

The papers dealing with 'Parable, Miracle, and Sign' are collected from *The Berean Expositor* and here reprinted.

Those who join with the one writing this introductory note in thankful acknowledgement of indebtedness to the grace and the gifts which continue to mark the devoted ministry of the author, will rejoice that opportunity is extended to a wider circle of readers that they in turn may gain some acquaintance with the treasures lodged in the past files of the expository Magazine named.

Of the qualities which endear Mr. Welch to the student, two at least, will immediately be recognized: (1) a resolute and indefeasible note of loyalty to our Lord and His Word, in all aspects of teaching; and (2) the disposition, in exegesis, to a patient and sustained research rather than to risk the smallest impairment of the complete detachment required by the 'structure' of the passage examined.

We are encouraged to believe that among those who have been under the harrow of War some are turning expectantly to enquire of the 'Scriptures of Truth'. To such we would warmly and whole-heartedly commend this Book from the pen of a faithful Teacher.

PHILIP DIVE.

FOREWORD

The main purpose of the following pages is to place before the reader the *Parables, Miracles, and Signs* both of the Gospel of Matthew and also of John, so that their dispensational significance may be both demonstrated and appreciated - with the hope that such a recognition may prove to be a stepping stone to the Mystery entrusted to the apostle Paul, and made known in the epistle to the Ephesians.

In order that every reader may understand what is intended by the term 'dispensational significance' we adopt the following extract from chapter 2 of the book entitled *Dispensational Truth*.^{*}

THE WORD 'DISPENSATION'.

The Greek word translated 'dispensation' is *oikonomia*, and signifies the *act of administering*. *Oikonomia* is a compound made up of *oikos* (a house), and *nemo* (to dispense, to deal out as a steward or housekeeper). The Greek word is preserved in our English tongue in the words 'economy' and 'economics'. Let us consider the occurrences of this word. In Luke 16:2-4 it is rendered 'stewardship'. In 1 Corinthians 9:17; Ephesians 1:10; 3:2,9 (R.V.); Colossians 1:25, and 1 Timothy 1:4 (R.V.), it is rendered 'dispensation'. These are all the passages in which the word *oikonomia* occurs, nine in all, and those who are acquainted with the significance of numbers will recognize that nine, the number of finality of judgment both in relation to God and man, is in part explanatory of the goal of the various dispensations of God.

By *dispensational truth* we mean that particular revelation of God's will to man during some particular administration or economy, and specially appertaining thereto. When we speak of some teaching or practice as being *undispensational*, we mean that owing to the introduction of a new administration, certain things that obtained under a previous regime have become obsolete. By the term *undispensational teaching*, therefore, we mean that the teaching peculiar to one dispensation has been imported into another and differing dispensation, where the conditions of divine dealing render the practical application of such teaching quite inadmissible.

If the above definition is accepted, it follows that should the parables, miracles and signs of the Gospels prove to be associated with 'that particular revelation of God's will' which pertains to the kingdom of Israel or to a company other than the Church of the One Body, then the hope and the calling of the Church must be sought elsewhere. What that calling is, where it is revealed, what is its sphere of blessing, and wherein does it differ from that revealed in the Gospels, is not our present study; all we can say here is that it is the exclusive privilege of Paul as 'The prisoner of the Lord' for us Gentiles to make this new dispensation known, and that it lies quite outside of the revelation of God's purposes that fill the Gospels with their blessed message.

Seeing that the parables form an integral part of the Gospel that records them, and knowing what mischief attends the attempt to expound Scripture apart from its context, and moreover being certain that if our point of view is the true one, then it will stand the severest examination, we preface our study of the parables with a survey of the salient features of the Gospel according to Matthew, in order that the two sets of parables may be seen in their relation to the twofold scope of that Gospel. Similarly, before we examine the Eight Signs of the Gospel according to John, we again examine that Gospel in order to understand its dispensational place in the divine purpose.

Neither parable, miracle, nor sign are found in the epistles of the Mystery (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and 2 Timothy) but a clear understanding of the true import of these wondrous words and deeds has many times proved the portal to the attainment of a fuller knowledge as to 'What is the hope of His calling' today. We accordingly, with this hope in mind, commend the following pages to the reader, praying that above all things that such may manifest that true nobility of mind that earned the commendation of the Lord by the 'Bereans' of old, in that they 'searched' the Scriptures 'to see' that these things were 'so'.

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* *Dispensational Truth*, or the place of Israel and the Church in the purpose of the ages, by the same author and publisher.

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16:21. 'FROM THAT TIME BEGAN JESUS TO SHOW' - Death and Resurrection

C Threefold agony in the garden. 'The cup'.

B Baptism in death.

A Resurrection ('This day have I begotten thee', *gennao*).

It will be observed that the two sections D and *D* are in most respects parallel. Both open with the *Voice* from heaven. It is evident that the Transfiguration commences something fresh, by the way in which it echoes the baptism of John at the beginning. Both sections end with a confession. The Davidic section ends with the confession of Peter, an Israelite; the Abrahamic section ends with the confession of the Lord Himself. Not only so, each section has a definite time mentioned connected with these two distinct phases.

4:17. '*From that time* Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the KINGDOM of the heavens is at hand'.

16:21. '*From that time* forth began Jesus (absolutely identical) with 4:17) to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day'.

These time divisions are not merely human or arbitrary, they are *inspired*. The apparent recommencement in chapter 17 on the Mount of Transfiguration, the balancing of the two confessions that Christ was the Son of God, are entirely in line with these inspired divisions, and further, they exactly coincide with the statement in Matthew 1:1 that Jesus Christ was (1) The Son of David, and (2) The Son of Abraham. This twofold character of the Gospel therefore must be kept in mind if our understanding is to be clear. It is a case of 'rightly dividing' that meets us here - as everywhere.

(2)

The Son of David

Let us now gather together the passages in Matthew where Christ is spoken of as the Son of David. There are nine passages in all. The first is 1:1, with which the Gospel opens. The next is found in 9:27; two blind men follow the Lord crying, 'Thou Son of David, have mercy on us'. In chapter 20:30 and 31 another pair of blind men cry out, 'Have mercy on us, O Lord, Thou Son of David', the one addition to the title being that of 'Lord'. The significant fact concerning this is that *NO miracle other than these two is recorded by Matthew as being performed by Christ as the Son of David*. Israel were blind; they did not recognize their long promised King. Is that suggested by this strange fact?

The reader may possibly think that the miracle of chapter 15 has been forgotten. There a Gentile woman approached the Lord with the title of Son of David and with the plea for mercy upon her lips, but in this instance she was met with silence. In her hearing the Lord said, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of *the house of Israel*'. David was the shepherd king, taken by God from minding the sheep to shepherd His people, and Christ as the Son of David was the Shepherd King of Israel too. When the Canaanite left the title Son of David for the wider title 'Lord' (15:27), then the Lord granted her request, recognizing at the same time the greatness of her faith. It is true therefore to say that the only miracles which Christ performed as the Son of David were those to do with blindness and with Israel. This is the first miracle possibly that He will perform when He comes at length to take the kingdom and reign. He will open their blind eyes that they may look upon Him Whom they pierced. The fact that in each case there were *two* blind men is suggestive, for the prophets make mention many times of the coming together again of the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Another feature that is associated with this title is that the Pharisees began to realize that unless they definitely discounted the notion, the people would receive Christ as King.

As the outcome of a miracle in which a man possessed of a demon, blind and dumb, was healed, we read, 'And all the multitude (*ochloi*) were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?' (12:23). What was the immediate result? 'When the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of the demons' (12:24). Christ replied, 'If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you' (12:28).

This approach to public recognition, and the immediate attempt of the leaders of the people to discredit Christ, it will be noted is recorded in Matthew 12, where the rejection of Christ is clearly indicated. In that chapter He speaks of Himself as 'greater than the Temple' (6), 'greater than Jonah' (41), and 'greater than Solomon' (42), but in each case and capacity He was rejected. Then comes the chapter of PARABLES and *mystery* because Isaiah 6:10 was being fulfilled in Israel. Here comes the rejection of the Son of David, and for

the first time we read of the ‘mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens’, which speak of bad ground, birds of the air, tares sown by an enemy, corrupting leaven, a treasure found and hidden again, and a harvest ‘at the end of the age’.

In chapter 21 the Lord makes His public entry into Jerusalem. He will bring before the people yet once again the fact that in Himself the prophecies of the King and kingdom found their fulfilment. He rides into Jerusalem, fulfilling the words of Zechariah, ‘Behold, THY KING COMETH’ (21:5). The multitudes (*ochloi*) cried:

‘Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest’ (21:9).

Luke 19:38 renders the cry:

‘Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest’.

Mark 11:9,10 reads:

‘Hosanna; Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed is the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest’.

A crowd never says exactly the same words throughout a period of acclamation, and each Gospel gives a faithful report of the varied utterances, while all assert the one great fact that here, in the person of the Son of David, was the promised King and kingdom. Once more the leaders of the people are displeased:

‘When the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased’ (Matt. 21:15).

Once again it is evident that the public recognition of Christ as the son of David threatened their own position and authority.

The last occurrence of the words ‘Son of David’ coincides with the last question addressed to the Lord by His enemies:

‘While the Pharisees were gathered together (after having endeavoured in vain to entangle Him by their questions), Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He? They say unto Him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? If David then call Him Lord, how is He his Son? And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions’ (22:41-46).

Immediately following this passage comes the terrible denunciation of woe against the leaders of the people who sit in Moses’ seat and bind heavy burdens upon their backs, which is concluded by the lament over Jerusalem and the solemn allusion to the Hosanna of 21:9 :

‘Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord’ (23:39).

Israel, now blind, shall yet see Him. He shall yet ‘sit upon the throne of His glory’ (25:31). His title, Son of David, carries this pledge with it, and His title as David’s Lord ensures that this pledge will be fulfilled.

We drew attention to the picture of Israel’s blindness in the blind men who cried to the Saviour for mercy, and the reader, with 22:42 in mind, will appreciate the prophetic hint in the *added* title ‘Lord’ in the confession of the second pair of blind men who cried for mercy to the Son of David.

The nine occurrences of the title ‘Son of David’ form a group of seven items as follow:

- A 1:1. Jesus Christ, the Son of David (cf 1:23).
- B **a** 9:27. Two blind men. Israel.
- b** 12:23. The people’s confession. The leaders’ opposition
- C 15:22. Gentile misuse of the title.
- B **a** 20:30,31. Two blind men. Israel.
- b** 21:9,15. The people’s confession. The leaders’ opposition

A 22:42-45. The Son of David is David's Lord (cf Rev. 22:16).

The two groups are dispensationally suggestive. The blind men are grouped with Israel. In each case the leaders of the people, blind leaders of the blind as they were, led Israel into the ditch of rejection.

(3)

The Three Great Discourses

Matthew 5 to 7; 13; 24 and 25

The three outstanding discourses in the Gospel according to Matthew, indicated on page 1, must be considered together, each discourse having the kingdom prominently in view.

In the first discourse, the *Sermon on the Mount*, the opening beatitudes speak of the kingdom of heaven. The question of being least and great in that kingdom, and of entering into it are spoken of in the opening chapter. In chapter 6 the prayer given to the disciples as a pattern includes the prayer for the coming of the kingdom, and the kingdom of God is to be sought above all else. Chapter 7 reverts to the theme of entry into the kingdom.

Upon the rejection so manifest in Matthew 12 comes the second discourse, the series of parables which speak of the 'mysteries of the kingdom of heaven' and these are dealt with in detail in pages 28 to 86.

The third discourse is the great prophecy given immediately consequent upon the words of Christ when He said:

'Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord' (Matt. 23:39).

The prophecy refers to the 'end', when the Son of man shall come in great glory, when Daniel's prophecy shall be fulfilled, when the days of Noah shall once more be upon the earth, and when the nations shall be gathered before the Lord to hear His verdict concerning entry into the kingdom. Entry into the kingdom is a recurring theme in these great passages. This we will see the better when considering them in detail in pages 136 to 138.

In the *Sermon on the Mount* which comes in the part connected principally with the Son of David, the law of Moses is quoted and the temple at Jerusalem is referred to. The practice of making offerings at the altar, the danger of the Sanhedrin and Gehenna, the taking of oaths, the ceremonies in the synagogues, the fasting and the anointing of the head, the reference to Solomon in all his glory, the reference to *the Gentiles* as in contrast with those addressed; all link this discourse primarily with Israel.

In Matthew 24 and 25 those addressed shall be hated of *all nations*; the gospel of the kingdom is to be preached in all the world for a witness unto *all nations*. When the King comes and sits upon the throne of His glory, *all nations* shall be gathered before Him. The law of Moses is not applied to them. 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me'; this is the law that decides the question of entry or non-entry into the kingdom. This is parallel with the words of Romans 2:26, 'Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?' This wider aspect of Matthew 24 and 25, and its reference to 'all nations' are fittingly placed in that part of Matthew which is associated with Christ as the Son of *Abraham*.

The parables of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven speak of both Israel and the nations at the end of the age, under the figures of wheat, tares and fish.

We will now turn our attention more directly to the place and purpose of the Sermon on the Mount.

(4)

The Sermon on the Mount

What is its Place and Purpose?

What is the purpose of Matthew 5 to 7? A great variety of opinions exist as to the place of the Sermon on the Mount in the revelation of truth. To speak broadly, the varying views come under two heads:

- (1) *The Sermon on the Mount is the great outline of Christian practice (Bloomfield), and applies to the church today.*

- (2) *The Sermon on the Mount does not apply to the church of today, but constitutes the laws of the kingdom which is yet to be set up on the earth.*

Readers will not require a detailed refutation of conclusion No. 1 as the majority will already have arrived at conclusion No. 2. It is our duty however to reject both conclusions and to examine the theme independently. It will first be necessary to go into the reasons for rejecting No.2, especially as this has been taken up by many who have sought rightly to divide the Word of truth, and who are clear as to the distinction between the kingdom and church.

Let us look at the Sermon on the Mount and consider the claim upon our faith for the conception that these verses constitute 'the laws of the kingdom'. The opening beatitudes speak of 'mourning' and being 'persecuted for righteousness' sake'. A blessing is pronounced upon those who are 'reviled', 'persecuted', and 'slandered' falsely for the sake of Christ. We believe that the Scriptures testify that, when the kingdom of prophecy is set up and Christ reigns as the Son of David:

'In his days shall the righteous FLOURISH; and abundance of PEACE so long as the moon endureth' (Psa. 72:7).

The 'needy' and the 'poor' are to be His special care and:

'They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of My people, and Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands ... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, saith the LORD' (Isa. 65:22-25).

One cannot but realize that a different atmosphere pervades the references of the Old Testament to the kingdom of the Messiah, than that of the Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes of verses 1-12 are not the only references to the persecuted and outside position of those addressed here.

Under the conditions recognized by the Sermon on the Mount a man may be in danger of gehenna or of prison and the payment of the uttermost farthing. Divorce is still contemplated as a possibility, which we feel can find no warrant from Old Testament prophecy of the future kingdom. Again, the injunction to resist not evil and being sued for one's coat, or being compelled to go a mile, etc., bring before the mind a totally different economy from that which fills the vision of the prophets of old. Enemies are still abroad, and those that curse and hate. In the great prayer taught by the Lord to His disciples, the kingdom is still future. They pray, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven'. Those addressed still 'fasted' and had the possibility of serving 'two masters'. The kingdom of God is to be the first object of their seeking, and 'evil' is still to be expected day by day. 'Dogs' and 'swine' may still turn and rend those who indiscriminately dispense holy things, and those addressed are still in the condition that can be spoken of like this, 'If ye then, *being evil*, etc.'. False prophets will still deceive, and some still build upon sand.

We cannot reconcile the general tenor of the teaching of these three chapters with the conception of those with whom in the main we agree, namely, that the Sermon on the Mount gives us the laws of the kingdom. Rather do we see a persecuted, waiting people, suffering during the absence of their rightful king, sustained by the hope that, when He comes and the kingdom is set up, they will then receive their great reward which is in heaven, awaiting the day when they, the meek, shall inherit the earth.

We have dealt with the subject negatively in order to free ourselves from the tradition mentioned above. We can now approach the passage to search and see as true *Bereans* its purpose and place in the Gospel of the kingdom.

Reward and Entry

Amplifying what we have enunciated in the preceding section we find that those who do not perceive the dispensational position of the Gospel of Matthew express their views in some such way as '*The Sermon on the Mount gives the laws of Christ's kingdom*'. Is this true? Let us again look carefully at the subject. By 'The kingdom' is understood that future and literal kingdom of which Christ is King, and saved Israel the first and nearest to the throne. If these words of Matthew 5 to 7 are the 'laws of that future kingdom', what do we find?

- (1) When Christ reigns in person on the earth, His people *will still be subject to persecution!* For this read 5:3-12,44.

The most elementary acquaintance with prophecy will dispose of such an idea. Persecution for righteousness' sake is a mark of the *absent* Lord, not of the reigning King.

(2) The laws of 5:21-48 legislate for those who entertain 'murder' and 'adultery' in their hearts, who evade the law concerning 'divorce' and 'oaths', who are smitten on the cheek, who are sued at law for their cloak, who are pressed into the service of the state, who are cursed and hated, spitefully used and persecuted.

Is this the state of affairs that shall obtain when the kingdom comes?

(3) The kingdom is future in this Sermon:

'Thy kingdom COME, Thy will be DONE in earth, as it is in heaven (6:10)

'They SHALL inherit the earth' (5:5)

'They SHALL be filled' (5:6)

'Many will say to Me in THAT DAY' (7:22).

(4) These 'laws' are in force while there lie before men two paths, the strait and narrow that *few* find, and the wide and broad into which the *many* go (7:14,13).

If this represents the state of affairs when Christ reigns as King, then the glowing words of prophecy are an illusion, evil is supreme, hope will be made ashamed, vanity and vexation will still mark the steps of man. We believe that the Sermon on the Mount relates to the 'kingdom' and not to the 'church', nevertheless we believe much harm has been done to the cause of dispensational truth (which is the essence of all truth) by the rather hasty conclusion that this sermon gives the '*Laws* of the kingdom'. The passage contains its own explanation, which is enforced by the literary structure, and echoed by the whole of the Gospel according to Matthew. This explanation we will now consider.

Leaving the examination of opinions, we turn our attention to that which is more profitable, namely, the testimony of the Word itself.

The BEATITUDES, with which the Sermon on the Mount opens, contain the key thought, and if we do not find the key here we shall miss our way through the remainder of the passage. *That key word* is REWARD. Verse 12 sums up all that is said under varying aspects in verses 3 to 11:

'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your REWARD in heaven'.

The literary structure now comes to our aid by expanding this idea of reward. In chapter 6 the reward which the hypocrite receives now is set over against the reward which shall be given by the Lord at His coming. Almsgiving must not be done to be seen of men, otherwise there will be *no reward* from the Father in heaven. Those who give alms as the hypocrites do *have* their reward. The same thing is said of prayer and of fasting. There is a present reward given by mortal man, or there is a future reward to be given openly by the Father, and the section reaches its climax in the words, 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon' (6:24).

The second feature of this Sermon on the Mount, and one which expands and expounds the character of the reward, is the emphasis upon *entry into the kingdom*. Unless the righteousness of those addressed exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, the Lord said they should in no case *enter* the kingdom of heaven. In the conclusion of the Sermon He says, 'Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall *enter* into the kingdom of heaven ...' (7:21), and a little earlier He gives the exhortation to *enter* in at the strait gate (7:13). Suffering now, with the reward of the Father and entry into the kingdom as a future compensation, is held out by the Lord to those who possessed certain qualities which are summed up in 5:48, 'Be ye therefore *perfect*'.

Our studies in *The Berean Expositor* under the titles of 'The Hope and the Prize' and the 'The Epistle to the Hebrews' will have prepared us to see the fitness of associating reward, and entry into the kingdom, with perfection. The structure places the 'wise man' in correspondence with the perfect, which further emphasizes and illuminates the great theme. This we shall see the better when we deal with the Sermon in the light of the whole Gospel. There remain the references to the Law and the Prophets, and the sayings of the Lord Himself. The authority of the Law and the Prophets is upheld and enforced, while a deeper and more spiritual apprehension of their teaching is required of those who would enter the kingdom. We can now appreciate the main outline of the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5 to 7

- A 5:3-16. Reward.
- B 5:17,18. The Law and the Prophets.
- C 5:19,20. Entry into the Kingdom.

- D 5:21-44. But I say unto you.
 E 5:45-48. The Perfect.
- A 6:1 to 7:11. Reward.
- B 7:12. The Law and the Prophets.
- C 7:13-23. Entry into the Kingdom.
- D 7: 24-29. These sayings of Mine.
- E 7:24. The Wise.

It seems fairly clear that the 'laws' of the Sermon on the Mount relate *not* to the time when the kingdom will be set up, but to the period that precedes the kingdom, when suffering for truth is sustained by hope of future blessedness, and when those that are to enter the kingdom shall be brought by means of the testings through which they pass to that condition which is called 'perfect', and which figures so prominently in Philippians 3, Hebrews and James.

'Entry' into the kingdom, a distinctive feature in the remainder of Matthew's Gospel

We have seen that entry into the kingdom is the great feature of the Sermon on the Mount, and that the endurance and high standard of spirituality which is inculcated has in view the future entry into that kingdom. Let us take a wider view of the subject, this time looking at the whole Gospel instead of chapters 5 to 7. We will go in the first case to the great sequel to the Sermon namely, the Prophecy on the Mount, given in chapters 24 and 25. After outlining before us the times that will lead to the setting up of the kingdom of heaven, the Lord speaks of the characteristics of those who shall enter into that kingdom. The two passages are the parable of the ten virgins, and its fulfilment in the case of the living nations (Matt. 25).

Truth is truth, whether we who utter it realize its fulness at the time or not, and in pages 136 to 138, the fact is stressed that the words which are cognates of the verb 'to enter' are 'pivotal' in the structure of the parable of the Ten Virgins. The great point of this parable is that of 'entering'. The five wise virgins 'went in' (*eiserchomai*) to the marriage, and the door was shut. Here we have the Lord in His last discourses referring back to His first. The man who heard His sayings, and who did them, is likened to a *wise* man who built upon a rock. The other man is likened to a *foolish* man. In the day of testing the wise man's building stands. Reward is promised to the servant who is not only faithful, but *wise* (Matt. 24:45-47). The Lord does not use the word 'foolish' of any others except those cited in Matthew 7 and 25. Immediately following the parable of the Ten Virgins comes the parable of the Talents, where the reward for faithfulness is expressed in the words, '*enter thou into the joy of thy lord*'.

We now come to another but parallel case, where the two classes are not classified as wise and foolish, but as sheep and goats. The time when this takes place is when the Son of man comes in His glory and sits upon the throne of His glory. Before Him all the nations are gathered together, and to those who have been kind to the least of the brethren of the King upon the throne are addressed the words:

'Come, ye blessed of My Father, *inherit the kingdom* prepared for you since the overthrow of the world' (Matt. 25:34 Author's translation).

By their own confession the nations did not render 'Christian service', for they will say, 'When saw we Thee a stranger, etc?'

In sharp contrast with these nations who, though they have never professed the name of Christ, yet did those things that were well pleasing, come those of the favoured nation who said:

'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied (taught) in Thy Name? and in Thy Name have cast out devils (demons)? and in Thy Name done many wonderful works?' (Matt. 7:22).

To these the Lord will say:

'I never knew (approved of) you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity' (Matt. 7:23).

The threefold insistence upon 'in Thy Name' is in contrast with 'When saw we Thee?' Romans 2 deals with these nations and the conditions of their entry, particularly in verses 6-11, 13-16, 26, 27.

Let us revert a little. Matthew 22 speaks of the marriage of the King's son (pages 113 to 121). This is the same marriage into which the five wise virgins had entrance. In verse 12 our special word 'enter' (*eiserchomai*) comes. A man is observed by the King as being without the wedding garment, and he says:

'Friend, how didst thou *enter* here, not having a wedding garment?' (Matt. 22:12 Author's translation).

His punishment is the same as that awarded to the evil servant (24:51), and the unprofitable servant (25:30) (pages 131 to 136). Outer darkness and gnashing of teeth are always associated with the loss of place in the kingdom (*see* Matt. 8:12; 13:42,50). The context of the one occurrence in Luke (13:28) includes references to the Sermon on the Mount, the shut door of the wedding feast, and the parallel to Matthew 8:12. What is the wedding garment? It is the righteous award of the saints (Rev. 19:8), granted to those who like the five wise virgins were 'ready' (cf. Rev. 19:7); in other words, the wedding garment is fashioned out of obedience to the higher law of the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 21:31 there is a statement concerning forfeiture of place in the kingdom.

'The publicans and the harlots GO into the kingdom of God BEFORE you' (Matt. 21:31).

Matthew 19, however contains the fullest exposition of the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. A rich young Ruler asks the Lord what good thing he must *do* in order to have *aionion* life (which Matthew 25:46 uses synonymously with inheriting the kingdom). Both in Matthew 19 and 25, 'doing good' and 'keeping the law' are the *only terms given by Christ*. How anyone can, without violence to context and conscience, preach *as a gospel message* eternal life and eternal punishment from these two chapters of works and law passes understanding. The Lord without ambiguity refers the young man to the Law of Moses. The first commandment is that dealing with murder; it is the same in Matthew 5. The second is the command concerning adultery, which is also the second in Matthew 5. Other laws are instanced which come in a different order. To this the young man replies:

'All these have I kept from my youth up, what more do I want?'

The Lord did *not* say to the young man that he boasted of false obedience, or possessed a false righteousness. He acknowledged the young man's statement, and bases His added teaching upon it; and here we arrive once more at the pith of the Sermon on the Mount:

'Jesus said, If thou art willing to be PERFECT, go, sell thy possessions, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have *treasure in heaven*: and come and follow Me' (Matt. 19:21 Author's translation).

Aionion life was one thing, treasure in heaven another. The good thing required for *aionion* life was obedience to the law of Moses. Perfection, however, came by the higher law of Christ. He said, 'I say unto you' that murder is in the heart of the man that calls his brother fool, and adultery in the heart of the man who merely desires. This is the *strait* gate that few find. Many are going the easy road that ends in the destruction of all their works, 'saved so as by fire'. When the disciples heard that it was more difficult for a rich man to *enter* the kingdom than for the camel to pass through the eye of a needle, they expressed surprise. Both camel and rich man must be unloaded before such entry is possible (the eye of a needle is the small door fixed in the city gate and opened after dark). When Peter heard these things he said:

'Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; what shall we have therefore?' (Matt. 19:27).

Then comes the reply which links all these great passages together:

'Ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses ... inherit *aionion* life' (Matt. 19:28,29).

Our last passage is Matthew 18, where the little child is set in the midst as the pattern:

'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not ENTER into the kingdom of heaven' (verse 3).

Verse 8 uses the parallel expressions '*enter* into life' and '*aionion* fire'.

Much more might be said in bringing out the underlying harmony of all these passages, but we write for 'Bereans' and trust that it is at least clear that the question of gaining or losing an entry into the kingdom is one of supreme importance in this testimony of Christ while on earth, and that around this theme the Sermon on the Mount revolves.

The Law for the Perfect

Having gathered from the structure (page 14) the emphatic words, and parallels in other parts, the scope and object of the Sermon on the Mount, we can safely look at some of its details without fear of misapplying their teaching.

It is perfectly evident that one and the same people are addressed throughout, and the exhortations, warnings and teaching are focussed upon one point. The kingdom of heaven of 5:3 is seen to be closely connected with the earth in verse 5. This is seen again in chapter 6:10, 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven'. Those who are addressed here hold a twofold responsibility towards the world, which may or may not be fully entered and realized:

'Ye are the SALT of the earth' (5:13).

'Ye are the LIGHT of the world' (5:14).

Salt may lose its savour and so be worthless. Light may be hidden under a bushel and so be valueless. The light of good works was so to shine that men should be led to glorify the Father which is in heaven.

The coming of Christ to Israel with its proclamation of King and kingdom did not set aside the law:

'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil' (5:17).

The 'therefore' of verse 19 shows that the 'least commandments' there spoken of are those of 'the law'. Whoever breaks (*luo*, destroy being *kataluo*) one of the least of these commandments, and shall teach men so, forfeits position in the coming kingdom. Whoever shall do and teach them (note the order), this one shall be called great in the kingdom. But the doing of the law was not the highest attainment, as the rich young man learned in Matthew 19. Perfection requires something more. The Lord therefore proceeds to take the law and open its fuller and deeper spiritual application. A righteousness greater than that of the Scribes and Pharisees would obtain an entrance into the kingdom but reward and treasure in heaven were connected with something more. Six times in chapter 5 does the Lord speak of the old law and the new.

'Ye have heard'. 'But I say' (Matt. 5:21-44).

A 21-26. Anger.

B 27-30. Desire.

C 31,32. Subterfuge to avoid keeping covenant.

C 33-37. Subterfuge to avoid keeping oath.

B 38-42. Non-resistance.

A 43-44. Love to enemies.

The words 'without cause' in verse 22 are to be omitted. The law read, 'Whosoever shall *kill* shall be amenable to the judges'. Christ said, 'Whosoever is angry with his brother shall be amenable to the judges'. To say 'Raca' to one's brother, that is, to speak contemptuously, is to make oneself amenable to the Sanhedrin, the great national Council. To go further and say 'wicked reprobate' is to make oneself amenable to the 'Gehenna of fire'.

The three grades of punishment occur again in the sequel (verses 25,26) namely, the adversary, the judge, the officer. Prison is equivalent to Gehenna. Some may feel that a proof text for the orthodox 'hell' is being taken from them, but we make bold to say that the modern conception of hell does not enter into the scope of the passage. Entrance into the kingdom is joy; rejection is outer darkness and gnashing of teeth. It is not a question of salvation or damnation, nor of heaven or hell here, any more than it is in Matthew 25:31-46. It is entry or non-entry into the kingdom. The three stages of verse 22 indicate the straitness of the gate, and the 'destruction' towards which the broad way leads. If the Gehenna of verses 29, 30 be taken literally, of course the cutting off of the hand and the plucking out of the eye must be literal too. We do not remember ever meeting, even among the most devoted advocates of the Sermon on the Mount, one who had plucked out his eye or cut off his hand, yet many if not all had been 'offended' sometime or other.

The deeper spiritual commandment that is given to those who seek the kingdom and its blessedness is focussed in the closing verses of the chapter.

A 45. That ye may become children of your Father in heaven.

[Sun on evil and good.

- B 45. For. {
 | Rain on just and unjust.
 { If love them that love - What reward?
 B 46,47. For. {
 | If salute brethren only - Where differ?
- A 48. Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven.

This insistence upon being like the Father is seen in the great prayer of chapter 6. 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors', and in the Lord's comment:

'For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses' (verses 14,15).

See also Matthew 18:23-35. This truth however is not a part of the gospel of the Grace of God, and cannot be preached as such without confusion and harm. It is however an essential element in the perfecting of the believer in view of the kingdom on earth and its rewards.

The Theme of Chapter 6 - 'Seek ye first'

We have already seen that the subject of *Reward* is a prominent theme in Matthew 5 to 7, forming the key-word of the opening verses, and punctuating the first part of chapter 6. The fact that 'reward' is emphasized so much shows that the question as to whether the basis of the Sermon is 'law' or 'grace' is not relevant. The subject is not a question of salvation, either by works or by faith, but of perfecting, of reward, of enduring in view of the kingdom.

Let us notice the way in which the subject of reward runs through chapter 6:

Verse.

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Alms given before men. | <i>No reward in heaven.</i> |
| 2 | Hypocrites who seek glory of men. | <i>They have their reward.</i> |
| 4 | Alms in secret. | <i>The Father shall reward openly.</i> |
| 5 | Prayer as hypocrites. | <i>They have their reward.</i> |
| 6 | Prayer in secret. | <i>The Father shall reward openly.</i> |
| 16 | Hypocrites fasting. | <i>They have their reward.</i> |
| 18 | Appear not to fast. | <i>The Father shall reward openly.</i> |

If we were to concentrate our attention upon the subject of Alms-giving, of Prayer, of Fasting, etc., we should doubtless learn much for our good, but we should probably miss the essential lesson of the chapter, and the real object which the Lord had in view at the time. If we step back as it were and obtain a comprehensive view, the true theme is so evident that minor details can then be considered with safety. In the accompanying structure it will be seen that there is a repetition of theme too obvious not to be intentional. This repetition emphasizes *the* theme for us.

Matthew 6

- A 6:1-4. Almsgiving.
 B 5-15. Prayer. a Not as Gentiles.
 b Your Father knoweth.
 c Pray 'Thy', 'Thy', 'Thy'.
 C 16-18. Fasting.
 A 19-24. Treasure.
 B 25-34. Anxiety. a The Gentiles seek.
 b Your heavenly Father knoweth.
 c Seek ye FIRST.

The first thing for us to notice is the fact that in the prayer which the Lord gave as a model for the believer 'seeks first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness' (cf. verses 10 and 33), and has the assurance that the

Father knows his needs before he asks. Instead of elaborating the opening words of the prayer, 'Our Father', with subdivisions upon 'Re-generation', etc., let us see that the real import is in the fact that the believer does not say 'my', 'me', but prays, Hallowed be THY name, THY kingdom come, THY will be done.

In the corresponding portion (verses 25 to 34) undue anxiety concerning food and drink and clothing is forbidden; the Gentiles seek these things; instead of so doing, the Lord says:

'Seek ye FIRST the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you'.

The only prayer for temporal needs in the model given by the Lord is the clause, 'Give us this day our daily bread'. The word which is translated 'daily' is *epiousios*, and apart from the one other occurrence in the parallel passage of Luke 11:3, this word is entirely unknown in either Biblical or Classical Greek - it seems to be a word invented by the Spirit of God to express His purpose. Literally we might translate it 'The bread which cometh down upon us'. We cannot believe it possible for any Jew in the days of Christ to have missed the allusion to the *manna* of the wilderness. It gives point to the prayer to notice this. Pilgrims journeying through the wilderness are here. They have no continuing city, but seek one to come. Their great prayer is for the coming of the kingdom. For the rest, just the daily manna will suffice until the land of promise shall be reached.

To have seen the Sermon on the Mount in the light of the wilderness, with its teaching concerning suffering and glory, endurance and crown, temptation and perfecting, would have saved many a page of useless argument as to the meaning of 'temptation' in this prayer, or whether the basis of the Sermon be 'law' or 'grace'. Future blessedness is held out as a 'reward' to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, who seek first the kingdom, who go on unto perfection.

Perhaps a few words upon the 'evil eye' of verses 22-24 may be appreciated. Edwin Hatch in his *Essays in Biblical Greek* under the word *poneros*, 'evil' gives as a secondary meaning 'grudging', 'niggard', and cites passages where 'the grudging eye', 'the eye of the miser', 'the niggard eye' are placed in antithesis to liberality. The Hebrew word for evil (*ra*) is usually translated *poneros*, but is sometimes translated *baskanos*. This use of *poneros* in the sense of 'niggardly' or 'grudging', especially in connection with the idea of the 'evil eye', throws a clear light upon a well-known passage of the Sermon, which if taken in its context will be seen to refer not to goodness or badness in general, but specially to the use of money:

'Lay not up ... treasures upon earth ... treasures in heaven ... where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light (lamp) of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single (liberal), thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil (grudging, *poneros*), thy whole body shall be full of darkness ... Ye cannot serve God and mammon' (Matt. 6:19-24).

Matthew 20:15, 'Is thine eye evil, because I am good?' may be rendered, 'Art thou envious at my being liberal?' This strong emphasis upon the snare of wealth brings the parallel of Matthew 19 closer. 'The strait gate' which few find and the 'eye of the needle' are the same.

One cannot have the niggard's eye, or lay up treasure on earth, or seek first the things of self, or walk the broad and easy road, if one seeks perfection and an entrance into the kingdom. Matthew 5 to 7, Hebrews, Philippians, and Revelation 2 and 3 may each have their distinct departments in the Divine Plan, but one great principle runs through them all.

Parallels with Philippians

We have sought to show that the Sermon on the Mount, while not the 'Laws of the Kingdom' or the 'Charter of the Church', gives exhortations and commands to those believers who in a period of rejection look forward to the kingdom, and give up all in their desire to be counted worthy to obtain an entrance and receive the reward.

It will be confirmatory evidence to show the parallels that exist with the epistle to the Philippians. We already know that Philippians is the epistle of the Prize. It stands to the church of the One Body in the same relationship as the Sermon on the Mount stands to the subject of the kingdom of heaven. While the sphere of these two parts of Scripture varies, the underlying principle is the same.

(1) *The Place of Self* - We observed that the believer is urged in Matthew 6 to 'seek first the kingdom of God', so in Philippians 2, the Apostle writes:

'Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others ... For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's' (Phil. 2:4,21).

(2) *Suffering, Rejoicing and Reward* - The Sermon on the Mount says:

‘Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven’ (Matt. 5:11,12).

Philippians says:

‘But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places ... some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds ... What then? ... I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice ... For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake’ (Phil. 1:12-18, 29).

(3) *Perfection, the Standard*

‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect’ (Matt. 5:48).

‘Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect ... Let us therefore, as many as would be perfect, be thus minded. According to a mark I press toward the prize’ (Phil. 3:12-15 Author’s translation).

(4) *Sonship should be manifest*

‘Love your enemies ... that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven’ (Matt. 5:44,45).

‘That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke’ (Phil. 2:15).

(5) *The light must shine*

‘Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven’ (Matt. 5:16).

‘Shine ye (A.V. margin) as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life’ (Phil. 2:15,16).

(6) *A spirit of yielding in contrast with self-assertion*

‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’ (Matt. 5:3),

‘Blessed are the meek’ (Matt. 5:5),

‘Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain’ (Matt. 5:39-41).

‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ... the form of God ... the form of a servant ... He humbled Himself’ (Phil. 2:5-8).

‘Let your moderation (yieldingness) be known unto all men’ (Phil. 4:5).

(7) *Anxiety over daily affairs*

‘Take no thought (*merimnao*) for your life’ (Matt. 6:25). ‘Take no thought for the morrow’ (Matt. 6:34).

‘Be careful (*merimnao*) for nothing’ (Phil. 4:6).

The verb *merimnao*, ‘to take anxious thought; be anxious’, occurs in the prison epistles only in Philippians. There in that epistle it occurs twice. Seen together they present the truth complete.

‘Be careful (anxious) for nothing’ (Phil. 4:6).

‘I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state (be anxious concerning your affairs). For all seek their own’ (Phil. 2:20,21) .

It is impossible to be anxious over self, if one seeks first the kingdom of God and the blessing of others. This spirit should be that of all who seek the prize.

(8) *Contrasted with the reward is destruction*

‘Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction (*apoleia*), and many there be which go in thereat’ (Matt. 7:13).

‘Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? ... depart from Me, ye that work iniquity’ (Matt. 7:22,23).

‘Many walk ... whose end is destruction’ (*apoleia*) (Phil. 3:18,19).

For further light on this meaning of destruction consider the bearing of 1 Corinthians 3:11-17, also Matthew 25:31-46, where entry into the kingdom is contrasted with *aionion* fire, ‘Depart from Me’.

(9) *A censorious spirit is to be shunned*

‘Judge not, that ye be not judged’ (Matt. 7:1).

‘Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?’ (Matt. 7:3).

‘In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves’ (Phil. 2:3).

‘Whatsoever things are true ... honest ... just ... if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on (impute) these things’ (Phil. 4:8).

If it were necessary, we could turn to the epistles to the Hebrews and of James for further parallels, but we feel the truth is sufficiently established, and space is valuable. While clearly seeing the place which the Sermon on the Mount occupies, let us beware of that supercilious spirit, that spiritual pride which, alas, sometimes contradicts the professed faith of those who ‘rightly divide the Word of truth’.

With the added light and direction we have now received by our study of the Sermon on the Mount, we feel that it is established beyond doubt that the Gospel of Matthew is concerned not with the Church of Christ, but with the Kingdom of the heavens, which kingdom embraces the throne of David and the wider inheritance of Abraham under the headship of Christ as the Son of David and Son of Abraham.

We will now deal with the Parables and Miracles recorded by Matthew, and note their dispensational character.

CHAPTER 2 THE PARABLES

(1)

The word; its meaning and dispensational setting

As the student of Scripture grows in grace and knowledge of the truth, things which once seemed trivial appear of great importance; passages which once he thought he ‘knew all about’ are approached with deepening humility, to be re-read and learned afresh. Among our earliest recollections, either as scholars in Sunday Schools or as members of Churches, will be those passages of Scripture known as ‘The Parables’. The time-worn definition, ‘An earthly story with a heavenly meaning’ is doubtless familiar to us all. Do we not begin to realize, however, that these parables contain teaching which our teachers never saw, and that the dispensational key, which has turned the lock of so many difficulties and opened doors into such treasures may be profitably applied to these ‘dark sayings’?

The first thing to do is to be sure of the meaning of the word. The word ‘parable’ has been taken over into the English tongue from the Greek word *parabole*. *Para* means ‘near’ or ‘beside’ and *bol* is from *ballo*, ‘I cast’ or ‘throw’. Literally it signifies something ‘cast beside’ another, and as applied to discourse it means a method of teaching which demands the use of similitude or comparison.

All the parables of Scripture are weighty and wise sayings. This may be gathered from the words of the proverb, ‘The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools’ (Prov. 26:7). *The Companion Bible* gives the meaning, ‘the clothes being lifted up expose the lame legs, so a fool exposes his folly in expounding a parable’ (See also Prov. 26:9). An American writer has given a very helpful translation of Proverbs. Chapter 1:2-6 reads thus:

‘To know wisdom and admonition: to put a *distinct* meaning into *discriminated* speeches: to accept clear sighted admonition is righteousness and judgment and right behaviour.

In order to give subtlety to the simple; to the child knowledge and thorough thought. The wise man will hear and increasingly acquire, and a man already become discerning will gain in capability to guide.

For putting a distinct meaning into a proverb or an enigma; into the words of the wise and their intricate sayings;

The fear of the Lord is the main knowledge, a wisdom and a discipline that fools despise'.

It is in this frame of mind that we approach these 'dark sayings' in the fear of God to learn their 'secrets'.

In Matthew 13:35 the Lord quotes from Psalm 78:2 in relation to His speaking in parables, and therefore we may expect to find some help in that Psalm to guide us to the right understanding of the purpose of the parable. The heading of the Psalm is 'Maschil of Asaph'. The Hebrew word *maschil* is from the word *sakal*, which means, 'to look at', 'to scrutinise', and the term Maschil means, 'an understanding arising from a deep consideration' (Neh. 8:8). The title of the Psalm prepares us for deep instruction:

'Give ear, O My people, to My law:

Incline your ears to the words of My mouth.

I will open My mouth in a *parable*:

I will utter *dark sayings* of old'.

The remaining portion of the Psalm is a rehearsal of the history of Israel from Moses to David, showing the inner reasons of their failures. Take for example, verses 9 and 10:

'The children of Ephraim, armed, carrying bows.

Turned back in the day of battle'.

Why?

'They kept not the covenant of God,

And refused to walk in His law'.

From this we may infer that a parable urges us to consider deeply the ways of God with His people, and to look for the hidden causes and workings which are veiled from the eyes of the uninstructed.

That a parable has some connection with a secret, a reference to Matthew 13 will prove. There for the first time in the New Testament do we read the word 'mystery' or 'secret' and there for the first time occurs the word 'parable'. Further, the Lord Jesus translates the words, 'I will utter dark sayings of old', by the words, 'I will utter things which have been kept *secret* since the overthrow (*katabole*) of the world' (Matt. 13:35).

The first parable in the Bible is one which concerns the people of Israel in relation to their separate calling as a distinct nation and peculiar people:

'And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied?' (Num. 23:7,8; so also 23:18; 24:3,15,20).

In Hebrews 9:9 and 11:19 we find the word translated, 'a figure'. A parable and a proverb are much alike. The parable of Matthew 15:13-15 might be termed a proverb. Indeed the word translated 'proverb' in Luke 4:23 is really 'parable'. The words, 'Physician, heal thyself' are called in the original a 'parable'. That a 'proverb' carried the same hidden teaching as did the 'parable and dark sayings' can be seen by referring to John 16:25,29:

'These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you *plainly* of the Father'.

In the Old Testament we have 'type', in the Gospels we have 'parable' and in the Epistles we have 'doctrine', as the more prominent features. The parables lead us to contemplate the hidden causes of the failure of Israel in relation to the kingdom and look forward to the time when all will be put right.

The first occurrence of a word very often decides its fundamental meaning. The first occurrence of the word parable in the New Testament is Matthew 13:3. It follows that chapter wherein culminated the rejection of the Messiah by the people in the land. He had been heralded as their Messiah and King. He had vindicated His claims by the fulfilment of numerous prophecies, both with regard to His Person and His works, and in chapter

12:6,41,42, although greater than the *Temple*, greater than the *prophet Jonah*, and greater than *king Solomon*, He yet is 'despised and rejected':

'The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side ... and He spake many things unto them in parables ... and the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why speakest Thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the *mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens*; ... therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias (Isaiah), 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 understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men 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' (Matt. 13:1-17).

Such is the setting for the first occurrence of the word parable in the New Testament. The parables were used when Israel manifested that the prophecy of Isaiah 6:10 was fulfilled in them. The parables were not used to make the teaching plainer, but to veil the teaching from the majority. The parables relate to the secrets of the kingdom. They teach things hitherto 'kept secret since the overthrow of the world' (Matt. 13:35). Prophets desired to see and hear these things, as Matthew 13:17 and 1 Peter 1:10-12 tell us:

'Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow' (1 Pet. 1:11).

Here, as in the majority of Old Testament prophecies, no break is made between the sufferings and the glories. No interval is allowed between 'the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God' (Isa. 61:2, cf. Luke 4:19). The rejection of God's King was only partly seen; the abeyance of the kingdom was a secret. Thus we may place the two passages together:

'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation (since the overthrow) of the world' (Matt. 13:35).

'Why speakest Thou unto them in parables? ... Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries (secrets) of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them it is not given' (Matt. 13:10,11).

Everything leads us to expect that just as in Psalm 78 we shall find in these parables some of the inner workings of God's counsels relative to His purposes in Israel, and that to introduce the doctrinal teaching of the gospel of the grace of God, or the dispensational teaching of the Mystery which is not a subject of revelation until over 30 years later (Eph. 3:1-10), will be to confound things which differ, and signally fail to rightly divide the Word of truth.

The parables are particularly dispensational in character. Their object is not to provide a moral lesson or a text for a gospel address. How many have gone astray by reason of this mischievous practice. The parable of the Prodigal Son serves those who have no desire for the retention of the atonement with a 'proof' text for the universal Fatherhood of God, and of the reception by Him of all who come, irrespective of the one way of acceptance - the sacrifice of Christ. The parable of the Unforgiving Servant is made to teach, in direct opposition to the doctrine of the epistles, that sins once forgiven may be re-imputed, or that a sinner once saved by grace can fall away again.

Let us remember the Scriptural settings of these parables, the reasons which drew them from the Lord Jesus, the dispensation in which they were uttered, and the people and kingdom about which they speak; we shall then have no need to be ashamed of our testimony.

Thus far we have sought to clear the way for the study of these parables. We shall next endeavour to present to the reader the arrangement of the parables of Matthew 13 and to enter into the teaching of these parables of the secrets of the kingdom of the heavens.

The Eight Parables of Matthew 13

To understand any passage or verse in the Bible we must take note of the context, otherwise, being ignorant of much that God has written for our guidance, we shall offer 'a vision out of our own heart' as the interpretation. In the first place, Matthew 13 comes in that section which is entirely taken up with the 'kingdom' before the Lord had uttered one word of the foundations of the gospel as we know it, namely, His

death and resurrection. This fact should deter us from too hastily assuming that in Matthew 13 we have an elaborate discourse concerning 'the gospel'.

In order to show that these parables come (1) in the kingdom section proper, and (2) before the Lord's revelation of His death and resurrection, we must repeat the structure of the Gospel already given:

A Matt. 1:1 to 3:12. Preparation.

B Matt. 3:16,17. Voice from heaven - 'My beloved Son'.

C Matt. 16:16. Peter's confession - 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'.

B Matt. 17:5. Voice out of the cloud - 'My beloved Son'.

C Matt. 26:63,64. The Lord's confession - 'The Christ, the Son of God'.

A Matt. 28. Conclusion.

The 'time' divisions of Matthew are twofold, agreeing with the twofold message from heaven, and confession on earth:

(1) *'From that time* Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (4:17).

(2) *'From that time* forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day' (16:21).

We can now see clearly that the parables of Matthew 13 come within the first section of Matthew's Gospel, which has for its subject exclusively 'the kingdom'.

In examining the book still further, we find that it reveals three main discourses, and a due appreciation of their place and teaching is of the utmost importance. They are as follows:

A Matt. 5 to 7.	On a mountain explained.	Precept	The kingdom	(Past)
B Matt. 13.	Out of the house rejected.	Parable	The kingdom	(Past and future)
A Matt. 24,25.	On a mountain set up.	Prophecy	The kingdom	(Future)

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus, as King, sat upon the mountain, and gave His laws and described the character of the subjects of His kingdom. In the prophetic chapters of Matthew 24 and 25 the Lord Jesus looks forward to the day when His kingdom shall be set up on earth with power and great glory. The interval between the two 'mountain' discourses is filled in by the rejection of the Lord by Israel, and the parables of the secrets of the kingdom. We may expect therefore, to find something to teach us the character and course of the 'kingdom of the heavens' during the period of the rejection of the King. One thing we must be quite clear about, and that is, we shall not find depicted a history of events which were to take place *after* the kingdom of the heavens became in abeyance.

These parables trace the progress of the gospel of the kingdom along its course through the period while the Lord was on the earth, and during the Acts of the Apostles. The present interval of the dispensation of the Mystery must of necessity be omitted, and the history of the kingdom be resumed again when God once more takes up His ancient people, for the interpretation of some of these parables takes us to the 'end of the age'.

Before we examine the parables in detail, we must examine them together. Some of our readers may be surprised to find us speaking of the EIGHT parables of Matthew 13. It has become almost sacred to prophetic students to speak of the seven parables of Matthew 13, so that we shall have to set out the complete arrangement in order to demonstrate the fact that the Lord gave eight parabolic or figurative utterances in connection with the 'mysteries (or secrets) of the kingdom'.

Structure of Matthew 13

A 1-9.	The SOWER. The sowing of the seed into four kinds of ground.	
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	They (Israel) <i>did not</i> understand.		The first
B 24-30. The TARES.	Good and bad together.		four
and	Separated at the harvest		parables
37-42.	(the end of the age); the bad	}	spoken
	are cast into a furnace of		outside
	fire, there shall be wailing		the house
	and gnashing of teeth.		to great
C 31,32. The MUSTARD TREE.	One Tree.		
multitudes.			
D 33. The LEAVEN.	Hid in three		
	measures of meal.		
D 44. The TREASURE.	Hid in a field.		
C 45,46. GOODLY PEARLS.	One pearl.		The last
B 47-50. The DRAG NET.	Good and bad together.		four
	Separated at the end of		parables
	the age; the bad are		spoken
	cast into a furnace	}	inside
	of fire, there shall		the house
	be wailing and		to the
	gnashing of teeth.		disciples.
	They (disciples) <i>did</i> understand.		
A 51,52. The SCRIBE.	The treasure opened to those		
	in the house.		

The harmony that exists between the component parts of this structure is quite evident to all. If we can see the disposition of any passage of Scripture, we are in possession of a help to its interpretation. Sometimes a word may have more than one meaning, and the balance in favour of either rendering may be fairly equal. If we can find its place in the structure, we shall often, by so doing, find its meaning also.

Look at the central pair of parables. The Leaven 'hidden' in three measures of meal finds its corresponding member in the Treasure 'hidden' in the field. The parable of the Tares finds its complement in the parable of the Drag Net. The parable of the Sower is balanced by that of the Scribe, and the Mustard Seed by the Pearl.

We have now considered the parables in their meaning and signification, and have also looked at the contextual setting of these parables of the secrets of the kingdom, so far as their place in the Gospel of Matthew is concerned. We must now examine the immediate cause of their utterance, and we shall then be ready to consider each parable in detail.

Let us go back as far as the commencement of chapter 11. John the Baptist had said, 'He that cometh after me is mightier than I'. He had seen the heavens open; he had heard the voice of God saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased'. But in the course of time John, for his faithfulness, was cast into prison, there to suffer not only agony of body, but of mind. Had he made a mistake? Why was he not liberated if this one was the Messiah? Why was the kingdom not set up? So John sent two of his disciples, who said, 'Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?' For answer the Lord replied, 'Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me'.

If the reader will turn to Isaiah 29:18,19; 35:5,6; and 42:1-7 he will see how this answer would tend to confirm the languishing forerunner. Everything was being done by the Saviour according to the Word and will of God, but unbelief was bringing this witness of the kingdom to a close, for a little further on, in Matthew 11:20, He began to 'upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, because they repented not'. It is evident that if the mighty works were rejected, the gospel or good news that the kingdom of the heavens had drawn nigh would be rejected also, and the cry, 'Repent and believe', would go unheeded.

The Lord Jesus, however, knew that this opposition was to be overruled to the accomplishment of God's ultimate purpose, and with the words, 'Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight', He awaited the end. It soon came, for in Matthew 12, we reach a climax. There the Lord Jesus is seen 'greater than the Temple'

(verse 6), 'greater than the prophet Jonah' (verse 41), 'greater than the king Solomon' (verse 42), and in all these capacities He is rejected. The reason for this rejection is given in verses 43-45.

The captivity of Babylon had cured the Jews of idolatry, but they were like a room 'empty, swept and garnished', inhabited by a spirit more evil than that which bound their idolatrous 'fathers'; the last state is worse than the first, for rejecting Christ they reached the climax sin. This leads on to Matthew 13, with its secrets or mysteries. Up to this point nothing had been secret but now the Saviour reveals to the hearing ear and seeing eye that the rejection of the King and His message was foreknown, that the efforts of the apostles themselves would meet with a similar fate, and that not until the end, when the Lord returns to take the kingdom and deliver Israel, will the sowing of the seed of the kingdom yield its bounteous harvest.

(2)

The Sower

Matthew 13:1-9,18-23.

We now approach the consideration of this initial parable. Initial, not only because it is the first in order of utterance, but because its interpretation supplies a model for the interpretation of all parables, 'Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?' (Mark 4:13).

John tells us that although he has recorded eight 'signs' to support the particular purpose of his Gospel (John 20:31), yet the number actually wrought by the Lord far exceeded this, so much so that 'if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written' (John 21:25). What is true concerning the Lord's works is also true concerning His words; each Gospel narrative gives a divinely inspired selection of His wonderful teaching. If this is so, what importance must be placed upon that miracle, parable or discourse which is repeated twice or even thrice! The parable of the Sower occurs in the three Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8). In each record we read of the four sowings, or four kinds of ground. It will be instructive to consider the various ways in which this parable has been recorded.

MATTHEW 13:4-9

'Some fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up'.

'Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth'.

'Forthwith they sprang 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'.

'Some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up, and choked them'.

'Other fell into

MARK 4:4-9

'Some fell by the wayside, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up'

'Some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth'.

'Immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away'.

'Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit'.

'Other fell on

LUKE 8:5-8

'Some fell by the wayside; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it'

'Some fell upon a rock'.

'As soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture'.

'Some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it'.

'Other fell on

good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred- fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear'.	good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred. And He said unto them, He that hath ears to hear let him hear'.	good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when He had said these things, He cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'.
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One of the differences between Matthew's account and that of Mark is that Matthew speaks always in the plural, 'they', 'them', whereas Mark speaks of the seed in the singular, 'it'. Luke adds the words, 'and it was trodden down', in the first sowing, and omits the reference to 'no depth of earth' and the effect of the sun, telling us that it withered because it lacked moisture. The addition of the words, 'with it', in Luke's account of the thorns is also suggestive.

In the interpretation of the parable, the following differences are noteworthy. We print them in tabular form to save space.

MATTHEW 13:10-23	MARK 4:10-20	LUKE 8:9-15
'The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven'.	'The mystery of the kingdom of God'.	'The mysteries of the kingdom of God'.
'The word of the kingdom'.	'The sower soweth the word'.	'The seed is the word of God'.
'The wicked one'.	'Satan'.	'The devil'.
'This is <i>he</i> which received seed by the wayside'.	'These are <i>they</i> by the wayside'.	'Those by the wayside'.
'He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended'.	<i>Similar to Matthew</i>	'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'.
'He also that received seed among the thorns ... the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the	<i>Similar to Matthew but add</i> 'the lusts of other things entering in'.	'And that which fell among thorns ... choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection'.

word, and he
becometh
unfruitful’.

fruit to perfection’.

‘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’.

‘And these are
they which are
sown on good
ground; such as
hear the word, and
receive it’.

‘But that on the
good ground are
they, which in an
honest and good
heart, having heard
the word, keep it,
and bring forth fruit
with patience’.

Such is the divine interpretation. We are not called upon to speculate, but to believe. Those to whom these words were first uttered knew the Scriptures of the Old Testament sufficiently well to follow the figurative allusions far more clearly and with greater suggestiveness than we are able to. Moreover, they had no epistle of church doctrine in their minds. We have, and because we will not discern between the things which differ, we introduce confusion into God’s Word by our traditional ideas. Let us keep church and kingdom separate; let us not read into Matthew 13 that which was not revealed until years after, then we shall be able to understand something of the ‘mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens’. The kingdom of God is wider in its scope than the kingdom of the heavens. The latter expression has reference to that Millennial kingdom, when the kingdom of this world shall be ruled by heaven’s King, when Daniel 2:44 shall be fulfilled; but the term, ‘the kingdom of God’, though wider than the kingdom of heaven, is not used in the Gospels to refer to the church of the present dispensation, for at that time the present dispensation was a secret hidden by God, whereas the secrets of Matthew 13 are to some extent explained.

There is no need for us to repeat that which we have stated in pages 1 to 7, for the exclusively Jewish and kingdom setting of Matthew 13 is evident to every candid reader (cf. Matt. 10:5,6; and Matt. 15:24, which are on either side of Matt. 13).

The parable tells us of the secret course of the purpose relative to the kingdom. It depicts the apparent failure of the early ministry, but shows in the fourth ground its fruitful consummation. All who are pictured here under the imagery of the various sowings are those who hear and receive the word of God, particularly the word of God relative to the kingdom (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:11). This cannot refer to the heathen nations, at least not until we reach the fourth ground; for during the ministry of Christ the word of the kingdom was confined to the limits of the Land of Promise:

‘Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matt. 10:5-7).

Perhaps we ought to note some things which the Lord does *not* say. He does *not* say, ‘The sower is the Son of man’; it is merely ‘a sower’ in the parable; and in the interpretation nothing is said of the sower other than the fact that ‘the sower soweth the word’. We have two expositions before us, both of which emphasize that the sower ‘was the Son of man’.

Again, it does *not* say, ‘the field is the *world*’. Luke tells us that the various sowings, in various kinds of ground, had reference to the *hearts* of those who heard the word. When we come to examine the parable of the Wheat and Tares, then we are distinctly told that the sower is the Son of man, and that the field is the world, but if we introduce these into the parable of the Sower, we spoil the intended teaching.

The ‘seed of the kingdom of heaven’ was sown by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the apostles during the Acts period; this ministry, as we know, was humanly speaking a failure, for although they proclaimed the near approach of the kingdom of heaven, that kingdom is now in abeyance. The kingdom purposes, however, cannot fail, hence prophecy clearly indicates a further preaching and sowing of this same gospel seed, which will be fruitful as depicted in the fourth ground. This is one of the ‘secrets’ or ‘mysteries’ of the kingdom of the heavens. Following hard upon the rejection of the Lord Himself (Matt. 12) comes the revelation of the

whole course of kingdom progress. The Lord, with wonderful fitness, depicts the conditions which were predominant in relation to the four periods of kingdom ministry.

The first ministry mentioned in the New Testament is that of John the Baptist. He preached the good news of the kingdom, and baptism unto remission of sins. Each ministry, however, had something of the four kinds of ground represented among its hearers, but the special characteristic of John's sowing was that it fell upon hearts which, like the wayside, had become hardened with continual treading and tradition, and consequently very few believed his message. Those who heard him 'understood not', and the Lord tells us that the Wicked One 'caught away that which was sown in their hearts'.

Before we proceed further it will be necessary to call attention to an interpretation of this parable which has a great deal of truth in it, but which may be pressed too far. There are some who tell us that this parable of the Sower does not refer so much to the word sown in the heart of the hearer, but to the environment in which the hearer (represented by the seed) is placed. We must not summarily dismiss this from our notice, inasmuch as there is a certain amount of truth in the statement; but, like so many things, it is not all true. If we use the Revised Version instead of the Authorized Version we shall see a little more clearly that the seed sown not only represents the word of the kingdom, but the children of the kingdom as well.

In Matthew 13:18-23 we have the Lord's own interpretation of the parable. Note the words in italics in the following extracts. 'This is *he* that was sown by the wayside'. 'And *he* that was sown upon rocky places, this is *he that heareth* the word'. 'And *he* that was sown among thorns, this is *he* etc'. 'And *he* that was sown upon the good ground, this is *he that heareth* the word'. The same intermingling is seen in Mark 4 and Luke 8. Nevertheless, both passages definitely tell us that the 'seed' is the 'word'. The primary meaning of the seed is certainly 'the word', for the Lord Himself says so. The inclusion of the hearer within the meaning is rather by implication than by definite statement. It appears, then, that *fully* to understand the parable we must allow its double application. When the application is to those who reject the word, then the seed sown is the word of the kingdom, and the grounds represent the characteristics of the hearers. When the application is to those who are really children of the kingdom, then their identity is lost in that of the seed sown, they are linked in type to the truth. Then, the various grounds speak not of the state of the heart of the hearers, but of their environments during the various phases of the history of events.

A characteristic example is found in the cases of Peter and Judas. Satan had dealings with each (Matt. 16:22,23; Luke 22:3,31). Peter denied the Lord with oaths and curses; Judas betrayed Him. Peter went out and wept bitterly; Judas went and hanged himself. Peter was a child of the kingdom, but for a while the thorns overcame him. Judas never was a child of the kingdom (John 6:70,71), he was one of the thorns, or, as in the next parable, one of the tares, and his heart is represented by the thorny ground itself.

It is evident that the great majority of the Pharisees, and indeed of the multitude that came forth to be baptized of John (Luke 3:7) did not understand the import of his message and baptism, for looking upon them he cried, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' Their trust was in 'Abraham their father', but John bade them 'bring forth fruit meet for repentance'. These multitudes and Pharisees, who would have submitted to the rite of baptism as some new ceremonial which pleased their ritualistic self-righteousness, were repulsed by the stern rebuke of John, and Satan, taking advantage of the moment, snatched the seed away, and occupied their heart the more for his own fell purposes, for later we find the same people, who boasted of being 'children of Abraham', called rather the 'children of the Wicked One' by the Lord in Matthew 13:38 (cf John 8:44).

There were stony ground hearers among the followers of John; of them it is written, 'Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth ... He was a burning and shining lamp; and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light'. These stony ground hearers heard the word, 'and anon with joy received it', yet they had no root, persecution for the sake of the word discovered their shallowness, and soon they were offended. It was for such that the Lord uttered the words, 'Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me' (Matt. 11:6).

The prominent characteristic of John's ministry was, 'to prepare the way of the Lord and make His paths straight'. It was hard work, with little apparent result. Two of his own followers proved to be hearers of the good ground variety, for on the second day of his proclamation, 'Behold, the Lamb of God', they followed the Lord, one of them being Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The first sowing of the parable of the Sower is peculiarly descriptive of the first preacher of the kingdom - John the Baptist.

Following immediately upon John's ministry was that of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord commenced His ministry with the same words as John used, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (Matt. 4:17 with

3:2). In association with Himself the Lord sent forth the Twelve (Matt. 10), and the Seventy (Luke 10). This ministry, looked at from the external standpoint, was not much more successful than that of John the Baptist.

The characteristics of the 'stony ground', the second sowing hearers, are seen everywhere. The stony ground hearers were shallow. The wayside hearers rejected the testimony of God against them, but the stony ground hearers received the word with joy - for a while! In Matthew 4:17-25 we have the preaching and its effect. 'His fame went throughout all Syria ... and there followed Him great multitudes'. Mark 12:37 supplies us with a statement which coincides with the character of the stony ground hearers. 'The common people heard him gladly'. 'He that received seed into the stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it, yet ... by and by he is offended'.

In John 6 we have a record of defection. After the Lord had uttered that marvellous word concerning Himself as the living bread, and how He came to give His life for the life of the world, we read, 'many therefore of *His disciples*, when they heard this, said, This is an hard saying, who can hear it?' 'From that time many of *His disciples* went back, and walked no more with Him'. In Luke 4:16-29 we have another illustration of this self-same spirit. After the Lord's discourse in the Synagogue we read, 'And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?' By the time He had finished His message to them, however, we read, 'And all they in the Synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong'.

Herod himself exhibited much the same character. 'And when Herod saw Jesus, he was *exceeding glad*: for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him ... And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought' (Luke 23:8-11). Matthew 21:1-19 furnishes us with another example of the shallowness of the hearers of the word during the ministry of the Lord. 'A very great multitude spread their garments in the way ... and the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest'. Within a few days, in the very same city, the multitude, urged by the chief priests and elders, cried out, 'Let Him be crucified!; His blood be on us, and on our children' (Matt. 27:19-25). Hence it is that in immediate relation to the ride into Jerusalem, and the shout of Hosanna, we read, 'And when He saw a fig tree in the way, He came to it, and found nothing thereon, *but leaves only*' (Matt. 21:19). It is interesting to note that the words 'withered away' of Matthew 21:19; 13:6; Mark 4:6; and Luke 8:6 are the same. Such, to a large extent, was the character of the heart of those who heard the gospel of the kingdom from the lips of the Son of God. Thus, while John's ministry is represented by the wayside hearers, the Lord's ministry is likened unto the stony ground hearers.

In immediate succession to the ministry of the Lord Jesus was the ministry of the Twelve in the Acts. This ministry is likened to the sowing of seed among thorns. Peter uses the key word of the gospel of the kingdom, 'Repent', and the kingdom ordinance, 'Be baptized' (Acts 2:38). The preaching of the word at Pentecost and after produced a deeper effect than had been evidenced during the 'Gospels' period. There was not so much of that spirit which characterized the wayside hearers, for the good seed found a place in many hearts, neither was the stony ground hearer alone represented. The trouble is seen among those who had 'tasted of the heavenly gift', and who had been 'partakers of holy spirit', and had 'tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come'. Hebrews 6 is a divine commentary upon the cause of failure during the Acts. The figure of the 'thorny ground' is actually repeated in Hebrews 6:8, 'But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected'. Luke tells us that the thorny ground hearers 'brought no fruit unto perfection'. We find the echo of this in Hebrews 6, 'Leaving ... Let us go on unto perfection'.

The epistle to the Hebrews was addressed to Jews who had received in some measure the seed of the kingdom, and had accepted the Lord Jesus as Messiah, but who were still 'zealous of the law' (Acts 21:20). The Jews failed to see the perfection that was to be found alone in Christ. 'Cares, riches and pleasures of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things' are referred to in Hebrews in such passages as 11:25,26, 'choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the *pleasures* of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater *riches* than the treasures in Egypt'. 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods' (10:34). 'Be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee' (13:5).

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5), and Simon who believed and was baptized (Acts 8:13), are examples of the growth of the thorns which eventually choked the good seed. Ananias and Sapphira particularly illustrate the 'thorny ground' hearers. They had believed the word, they had evidently been baptized and were recognized by

the apostles as members of the fellowship of believers, yet their sad history shows us that Matthew 13:22 and Hebrews 6 are commentaries upon the causes of failure during the Pentecostal dispensation. They brought no fruit to perfection. The command, 'Cut it down' - long delayed - at length was fulfilled; the olive tree of Abrahamic blessing and Jewish privilege was cut down, to remain in that condition until the end of the age. Then, after the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, 'all Israel shall be saved', ungodliness shall be turned away from Jacob by the Deliverer sent to them - the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 11:25,26).

This is represented by the 'good ground'. *This gospel of the kingdom* shall be preached in all the habitable world (*oikoumene* - a word relating to the kingdom) (Heb. 2:5), for a witness unto *all the nations*, and then shall the end come' (Matt. 24:14). This final witness leads on to the fulfilment of the commission of Matthew 28:19,20:

'Go ye therefore, and make *all nations* disciples, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the consummation of the age' (Author's translation).

The final sowing will be fruitful. 'Israel shall all be righteous' (Isa. 60:21), 'all Israel shall be saved' (Rom. 11:26), 'they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine' (Hosea 14:7). After the tribulation of the last days, the Lord 'will send those that escape unto the nations ... and they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles' (Isa. 66:19). This is the heart of the New Covenant.

From the days of old (Isa. 6:10), during the earthly ministry of the Lord (Matt. 13:14), and throughout the Acts of the apostles to its close (Acts 28:27), the heart of Israel had been hard, and had 'waxed gross' the 'lust of other things' had choked the word; but when the time comes for the final sowing, the Lord will send Elijah, who shall accomplish that which was foreshadowed by John the Baptist; he will make ready a People for the Lord.

'The upright in heart' of the Psalms, and the 'pure in heart' of the Sermon on the Mount, are those indicated in the final sowing of the seed of the kingdom. The promise to Israel is, 'I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh' (Ezek. 11:19). This is the blessing of the New Covenant, sealed by the blood of Christ by which alone the kingdom can be made secure (Jer. 31:31-40). In 2 Corinthians 3:3-6 we have the 'heart of flesh' contrasted with the 'heart of stone' in relation to the New Covenant.

The days shall come when Israel, now cast off, shall bring forth an hundred-fold. An handful of corn in the top of the mountains shall shake like Lebanon. It was towards this glorious consummation that the Lord Jesus looked as He reviewed the 'mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens'. He knew that His rejection would but subserve the mighty purpose of God. In due time He came to *die*, and in due time He will come to *reign*.

The parable of the Sower may supply us with many valuable lessons, but to discover the primary teaching is the object of this series. Let us bring the four sowings together, namely:

JOHN THE BAPTIST.	Wayside hearers.	'They seeing, see not, neither do they understand'.
THE LORD JESUS, THE TWELVE AND THE SEVENTY.	Stony ground hearers.	'Nothing but leaves ... it withered away'.
PETER AND THE TWELVE.	Thorny ground hearers.	'No fruit to perfection'. 'Riches, pleasures, the lust of other things' (Heb. 6).
THE FINAL WITNESS (Matt. 24:14).	Good ground hearers (the heart of the new Covenant).	'The honest and good heart'. 'Some

hundredfold’.

Parallel with this teaching of the Sower is the witness of the same truth in the parables of the Fig Tree (Luke 13) and the Great Supper (Luke 14). The primary teaching of these parables is not merely to supply a moral or spiritual lesson, but to depict the secret course of the mystery of the kingdom on through its apparent defeat to its glorious close.

The parables of Matthew 13 which follow supply further details, but have no new subject; all are connected with the rejection of Christ by Israel, and relate to the ‘mystery of the kingdom of the heavens’. We will now consider the parable of the Wheat and the Tares.

(3)

The Wheat and the Tares

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

In dealing with the Sower, we considered the course of the several ministries, or ‘sowings’, of the word of the kingdom. We saw how the various grounds depicted not only the state of the human heart universally, but the characteristic of the hearers at different points of the history of the kingdom proclamation. To meet the possible difficulty that might arise as to the reason why the gospel of the kingdom should be so long refused is the purpose of the next parable. The key words are ‘an enemy hath done this’. The scene is not changed, but the symbols are. We have a wheat field before the mind, as in the previous parable, but now we are definitely told that ‘the field is the world’. Further, the sower in this instance is ‘the Son of man’. Let us look at the parable before we consider its interpretation.

First consider its structure:

The Wheat and the Tares

a	A man sowed good seed.	<i>Statement</i>
b	Enemy sowed darnel.	<i>Enemy</i>
c	The blade sprung up.	<i>Growth</i>
d	Then appeared the darnel.	<i>Fruit</i>
a	Didst thou not sow good seed ?	<i>Question</i>
b	An enemy hath done this.	<i>Enemy</i>
c	Shall we gather the darnel?	<i>Growth</i>
d	Let both grow till harvest.	<i>Fruit.</i>

The very first thing which we must notice is that whereas the parable of the Sower occurs in the three Synoptic Gospels, the parable of the Tares is found only in Matthew. This enables us to see that this particular parable has *exclusive* reference to the kingdom of the heavens, and must not be applied to outside subjects.

Before going further we will set before the reader a rather more literal rendering than that of the Authorized Version or the Revised Version:

‘Another parable placed He before them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens hath become like a man sowing good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed darnel through the midst of the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the darnel also. Then the servants of the householder came near and said to him, Sir, was it not good seed thou didst sow in thy field, whence then hath it darnel? But he said unto them, A man that is an enemy did this. But the servants said unto him, Wilt thou therefore that we go and gather them together? But he said, No: lest at any time while gathering the darnel ye uproot along with it the wheat. Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the harvest season I will say unto the harvesters, gather together first the darnel, and bind it into bundles with a view to the burning it up; but the wheat bring together into my barn’.

Our first consideration must be to settle, if possible, the true meaning of the servants, the wheat, and the tares. Christ’s explanation, in answer to the disciples’ question concerning the parable, was as follows:

Parable	Interpretation
'He that sows the good seed	is the Son of man.
And the field	is the world.
And the good seed	are the sons of the kingdom.
And the darnel.....	are the sons of the evil one.
And the enemy that sowed them	is the devil.
And the harvest	is the consummation (<i>sunteleia</i>) of the age.
And the harvesters.....	are the Angels'.

'Just as, therefore, the darnel is gathered together, and by fire is burned, so will it be in the consummation of the age; The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they will gather together out of His kingdom all cause of offence (*skandalon* means more than a stumbling stone - literally it is "the catch of a trap"), and those that are doers of lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear'.

This is the inspired explanation of the parable. It does not deal with the gospel, but with the hearers of the gospel. In the parable of the Sower the seed typifies 'the word of the kingdom', while the ground represents the hearts of the various hearers. In the parable of the Tares the whole case is altered. The seed no longer represents the word, but the sons either of the kingdom, or of the wicked one. The ground no longer represents the hearts of the hearers, but the world. Commentaries are worse than valueless; they are positively harmful if they ignore the interpretation given by the Word of God itself.

The parable tells us that the *prime* cause of the defection and apostasy of Israel is to be seen in the attitude and work of Satan. Throughout the course of the ages Satan has sought to overthrow the purpose of God in Christ. The primeval promise of Genesis 3:14,15 introduces the reader to the conflict of the ages. 'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel'. The purpose of the ages centres in Christ (Eph. 3:11, Revised Version margin). The antagonism of Satan is directed against this purpose. Every step of the way this opposition is seen.

Adam and Eve are placed in the garden. Dominion is given them. They are tempted and fall, and if the penalty had fallen upon them, the coming of the seed must have been frustrated. Cain slays Abel, and God gives Seth 'instead', thereby showing that 'Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother because he was righteous', was the tool in the hand of Satan who sought to prevent the coming of the Seed. The irruption of the 'sons of God', and the corruption of the seed of man, ending in the flood (Gen. 6), was another attempt to prevent the coming of the Seed. As yet Satan did not know through which family of the descendants of Adam the promised Seed should come, so he sought to pollute the whole race. Immediately after the flood Noah utters a prophetic word, which pointed out Shem as the chosen one.

Soon Abraham is called, and the promise of the land and of the Seed is given to him. Satan now centres his attack upon this man and this land. Taking advantage of the delay mentioned in Genesis 11:31, the evil one peopled the land of Canaan with the Nephilim, the Giants, the sons of Anak, and the Rephaim. The reading of Genesis 11:31 with 12:5,6 is very solemn:

'And they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran. and dwelt there'.

'And they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came ... And the Canaanite was then in the land'.

The denial of Sarai both in Egypt and Gerar (Gen. 12:10-20, and 20:1-10) is connected with Sarai being taken into the harem of the monarch, and with divine interposition and warning. The repetition of these things is not merely to show Abraham's frailty, but to show the twofold attempt of Satan to contaminate the line of the Seed. Space will not allow us to trace the ever central attack through the long course of Israel's history. The massacre of the male children by Pharaoh is echoed by the same evil work of Herod. The parable of the Tares gives us the method adopted by Satan when he found that in spite of all his efforts the long promised Seed had come, and that the Messiah had proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom, and that some had received the message.

Referring back again to Genesis 3, we must notice that there are two seeds mentioned. The Seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Now as we translate the one, we must in all fairness translate the other.

Therefore, if the Seed of the woman is Christ, the seed of the Serpent is Antichrist; if moreover we may extend the term to include believers, so must we allow the term to include unbelievers. The parable before us exposes the policy of the wicked one. Change of purpose he does not know, but change of tactics he will ever allow so that he may draw nearer to his end.

Among those who were professedly the religious people of the day, and in their own estimation 'sons of the kingdom' were those who were really 'sons of the wicked one'.

Matthew 3 opens with the ministry of John the Baptist. The voice of the forerunner was heard:

'and Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the country round about the Jordan went forth unto him, and were being baptized in the river Jordan by him, openly confessing their sins' (Matt. 3:5,6 Author's translation).

By reason of the fact that John proclaimed that 'the kingdom of the heavens is at hand', all who came to be baptized were professedly those who desired a place in that long hoped-for kingdom. Here it is that we catch a glimpse of the Devil's seed, ready to be sown among the good wheat:

'But seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said unto them, Offspring of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the coming wrath?' (Matt. 3:7 Author's translation).

We must not be too hasty in concluding that these Pharisees and Sadducees all turned back; John immediately continued:

'Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance, and do not think to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father, for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham' (Matt. 3:8,9 Author's translation).

John warns them that though they may look so much like the wheat that it would be impossible to distinguish them then, yet when Christ came He would reveal the secrets of many hearts; the *fruit* would manifest which was wheat, and which was darnel, which were the sons of the kingdom, and which the sons of the wicked one. After referring to the exceeding greatness of Christ, John uses a figure which links this passage very suggestively with the parable before us:

'Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing-floor, and will gather together His wheat into the granary, but the chaff will He burn up with fire unquenchable' (Matt. 3:12 Author's translation).

Some may have heeded these stern words, but many we know refused the witness, and became the enemies of the Lord and His work. The words of John to the Pharisees and Sadducees find an echo in the words of Christ in later passages. In the very chapter which precedes this one of kingdom parables, and where the rejection of Christ reached a climax, we find reference to these 'tares', the seed of the wicked one. The subject (chap. 12:22-37) refers to Satan's kingdom, and in verses 33,34 the Lord says:

'Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or make the tree corrupt and its fruit corrupt. *For from the fruit the tree is known*' (Matt. 12:33 Author's translation).

This last sentence is entirely in harmony with the parable. The tares, or darnel, are the Arabian *zowan*, which grows among the corn. Even the native farmers cannot distinguish between the wheat and the tares with sufficient accuracy to enable them to weed out the latter. The moment, however, that the wheat and the *zowan* begin to head out, a child could distinguish between them.

Continuing the quotation of Chapter 12:34 we read:

'Offspring of vipers, how can ye speak good things, being wicked?' (Author's translation).

Again in Matthew 23:33 the Lord says:

'Serpents, offspring of vipers, how should ye flee away from the judgment of Gehenna?' (Author's translation).

In John 8:30-32 we have the two kinds of believers or disciples:

'As He was speaking these things, many believed on Him. Jesus said, therefore, unto the Jews who had believed on Him, If ye abide in My word, ye are *truly* My disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' (Author's translation).

The Lord Jesus 'needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man, for He knew what *was in man*' (John 2:25). His words, addressed to those who had believed, exposed their inner selves. 'They answered Him, seed of Abraham are we ... our father is Abraham'. Here we have a link with the 'offspring of vipers' (Matt. 3:7), and this is used by the Lord in His reply, 'Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye choose to be doing'. How soon the Lord's words divided the wheat from the tares! It is the same in John 6:59-71 :

'Many of His *disciples*, therefore, when they heard, said, This is a hard saying, who can hear it? ... There are some among you who do not believe; for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that did not believe, and who it was would deliver Him up ... Did not I make choice of you, the twelve, and yet from among you one is a devil' (Author's translation).

The servants could not distinguish the true from the false, but the Lord knew what was within before it developed its fruit.

Satan's attempt to spoil the kingdom purpose will fail, as all else of creature craft must do if directed against the Lord. The harvest time, however, has not yet taken place; that is reserved until the consummation of the age. Matthew 24:30,31 gives us the commencement of this great harvest:

'And they will see the Son of man coming upon the clouds of heaven, with great power and glory. *And He will send forth His angels* with a great trumpet, and they *shall gather together His chosen*' (Author's translation).

Much more could be said, but our space is limited. We believe that sufficient has been produced from Scripture to assist the student in arriving at a true understanding of this parable. The reader should bear in mind the opening words of the parable. 'The kingdom of the heavens *has become* like, etc.'. The phase which the kingdom *had taken* consequent upon Matthew 12 is here depicted. We shall deal with the closing words of the interpretation when we consider the corresponding parable of the Drag Net.

May we be thankful for every exhibition of divine knowledge, wisdom and love, over-ruling and defeating the enemy of truth, and may we ever seek to glorify the Lord our God by fruitful lives, shunning, as we would poison, any approximation to the dissembling and hypocritical spirit which is set forth under the figure of the 'darnel'.

(4)

The Mustard Tree

Matthew 13:31,32

A great deal of controversy has taken place concerning the true meaning of the mustard plant mentioned in this parable. Some maintain that it does not refer to the plant known to us as the mustard plant, but to another which is, strictly speaking, a tree. We are quite unable to enter into this argument where learned men and botanists disagree. For us, all that we need will be found in the Word itself, and to that we turn.

The statement of Matthew 13:31 'The kingdom of the heavens is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field', seems to indicate that we have brought before us a plant which would be naturally sown in fields, and disposes of the idea that it refers to a tree and not to the mustard plant - a herb. The difficulty which some have in the statement of verse 32, 'which indeed is the least of all seeds', is easily removed by supplying the ellipsis from verse 31. The seed is the least of all seeds which men sow in their fields.

Before considering the bearing of this parable upon the subject of the 'mysteries of the kingdom', we must refer to parallel uses of the figures here employed, in order to be 'thoroughly furnished'. The word *sinapi* (mustard) occurs but five times in the New Testament. Matthew 13:31, Mark 4:31, and Luke 13:19 are the passages wherein the parable of the mustard seed is found; the two other references are Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6, where the reference is to 'faith like unto a grain of mustard seed'. It would appear that this was a proverbial saying. When, today, we speak of a very nominal rent, we sometimes say, 'it is a mere peppercorn', and in like manner the mustard seed was used to denote any thing very small. Let us then fix the first point. The *smallness* of the seed must be remembered when considering the interpretation of the parable. The next thing that we must do is to see whether the Lord alluded to any Old Testament prophecies, parables or statements, for if He did the consideration of such passages must help greatly in the elucidation of the parable:

‘There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon’ (Psa. 72:16).

‘Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image ... and ... became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth’ (Dan. 2:34,35).

These two passages have reference to the smallness of the kingdom in its beginnings, and the greatness of the kingdom at its close. The first refers to Israel in the millennium, the second to the kingdom in relation to the Gentile and Satanic monarchies, which commence with Nebuchadnezzar and end with Antichrist:

‘I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. 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 thereof, and all flesh was fed of it’ (Dan. 4:10-12).

Daniel interprets the tree thus, ‘It is thou, O king’, referring to Nebuchadnezzar. There is close parallel here to the statement of the Lord, ‘The birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof’. Ezekiel 31:2-18 contains somewhat similar references to Pharaoh:

‘Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon ... All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs ...’.

The expression ‘the fowls of the air’, in the parable, would be better translated ‘the fowls of the heaven’; this establishes more closely the connection between the parable of the Mustard Tree and Daniel 4 and Ezekiel 31. ‘The fowls of the heaven’ are mentioned in Matthew 6:26; 8:20; 13:32; Mark 4:4,32; Luke 8:5; 9:58, and 13:19.

In the parable of the Sower as recorded by Matthew and Mark (R.V.), we simply read ‘the fowls’ came and devoured the seed. In Luke 8:5, however, we read, ‘the fowls of the heavens devoured it’. This helps us to see that those who devoured the seed which fell on the wayside are those who found a lodging place in the branches of the tree. Now the interpretation of the Sower is given by the Lord, and He declares that the action of the fowls is to illustrate the work of Satan; consequently we are driven to the conclusion that whatever aspect of the kingdom may be represented by the Mustard Tree, we must find place therein for Satan and his agents. It will be of service if we now compare the three records of this parable as given by Matthew, Mark and Luke:

MATTHEW 13:31,32	MARK 4:30-32	LUKE 13:18,19
‘Another parable put He before them saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is less than all seeds: but when grown is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and lodge among its branches’ (literal translation).	‘And He was saying How shall we liken the kingdom of God, or in what parable shall we compare it? As a grain of mustard seed, which when it is sown springeth up and becometh greater than all herbs, and produceth large branches, so that under the shade thereof the birds of the heaven may lodge’ (literal translation).	‘He went on to say therefore, Whereunto is the kingdom of God like? And whereunto shall I liken it? It is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and cast into his garden, and it grew and became a (great) tree and the birds of the heaven lodged among its branches’ (literal translation).

The words ‘How shall we liken?’ ‘Whereunto is the kingdom of God like?’ in Mark and Luke suggest that, humanly speaking, the analogy was difficult to frame. The kingdom history had taken such a strange turn that it needed great skill and choice of figures to illustrate the teaching.

The first thing we notice is the smallness of the grain of mustard seed. The kingdom purpose of God commenced with the call of one man, Abram, and his descendants. God definitely told Israel that the people cast out of Canaan were 'seven nations greater and mightier than thou' (Deut. 7:1). It is further said:

'The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people' (Deut. 7:7).

'Thy fathers went down into Egypt with *three score and ten persons*; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude' (Deut. 10:22).

Here we have the teaching of the words, 'less than all the seeds'. Let us now consider the growth of this small company of people. Deuteronomy 10:22 has already told us that the seventy sons became as the stars of heaven for multitude. This, however, was not permanent. In between the promise of the unconditional covenant made by God in Genesis 12, came the covenant of law and works of Sinai, 'All that the LORD hath spoken we will do'. Thus in Deuteronomy 27 and 28 we have blessings and cursings uttered with reference to the law. The curses are terrible, and tell us of the removal of all the privileges and blessings attaching to the chosen people. Among the judgments we note the following:

'And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God' (Deut. 28:62).

Those who are acquainted with the history of Israel know how all these things came to pass. First the ten tribes, and then the two, were removed from their land, and the dominion given to Nebuchadnezzar. With this man commenced the 'times of the Gentiles' - 'it became a tree'. These times must run their destined course before 'all Israel shall be saved' (Rom. 11:25,26). This the apostle declares to be a 'mystery', and indeed it is related to the 'mystery of the kingdom of the heavens' as recorded in Matthew 13.

The dominion handed over to Nebuchadnezzar went the same way as it did with Adam and with Israel. From the head of gold it degenerated by stages from silver to brass, from brass to iron, and from iron to clay. We know that Babylon was succeeded by Medo-Persia, which in its turn was succeeded by Greece. This we know not merely from history, but from Scripture (Dan. 8:18-27). The question as to whether Rome succeeded Greece may form a profitable consideration at some future time; what we know is that when the Lord Jesus was on earth:

'Satan showed Him the kingdoms of the world (*oikoumene*) in a moment of time; and the devil said unto Him, All this will I give Thee, and the glory of them (note "Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory"), for *unto me hath it been delivered*, and to whomsoever I will I give it' (Luke 4:5,6 Author's translation).

This brings us to the words of the parable again. 'The birds of the heavens lodged in its branches'. The parable of the Sower has settled the meaning of the birds - Satan and his agents. Daniel 10:13 and 20 show us that Satan had an emissary at the courts of Persia and Greece, a principality or power conducting affairs for the 'prince of this world'. Inasmuch as idolatry is allied to demons, it seems probable that the dominion given by God to the Gentiles was given up to Satan, who is seen in full possession in the days when the Lord Jesus was on earth.

The normal, or true kingdom growth, and the abnormal, or Gentile-Satanic development, may be better seen by viewing the parable as follows:

A ₁ 'The seed sown'. <i>Sowing.</i>	}	The kingdom viewed as
B ₁ 'Least of all'. Its beginning - small	}	
A ₂ 'When it is grown'. <i>Growing.</i>	}	from Abraham to its
B ₂ 'Greatest of herbs'. Its real end - great herb.	}	
A ₃ 'Becometh a tree'. <i>Becoming.</i>	}	final establishment.
B ₃ 'Fowls ... in branches' Its end under Gentiles.	}	
		The kingdom as it
		became during the
		'times of the Gentiles'.

Thus the small seed grew into a tree, and became a lodging place of Satan and his angels. No wonder then, that the preaching of the kingdom gospel was resisted and ended as it did. The Lord knew that the times of the Gentiles must run their course before the seed would be sown in good ground. Viewed in this light the parable was full of meaning to those anxious hearts who gathered around the Lord in the days of His rejection. Understanding this parable as a revelation of one of the 'secrets of the kingdom', they would be upheld in their, apparently, fruitless ministry.

In the next parable the Lord reveals the last factor in this sad history.

(5)

The Hidden Leaven and the Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:33,44

The parable of the Leaven is the last of the four spoken by the Lord outside the house. It reaches a climax and tells us what the end of the external history of the kingdom of the heavens will be, 'the whole was leavened'.

The parable occurs in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20,21. Matthew 13:33 says, 'Another parable spake He unto them; The kingdom of the heavens is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened'. Luke 13:20,21 says, 'And again He said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal until the whole was leavened'. The wording of the two passages is very similar. Luke adds the question, 'Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom?' and uses the expression, 'The kingdom of God', for 'The kingdom of the heavens'. The reader will remember that Luke and Mark prefix this question to the parable of the Mustard Tree, and its recurrence is suggestive of something parallel.

Before going further in our investigations we must consider the Scriptural meaning of the word 'leaven'. The word in Greek is *zume*, and occurs *thirteen* times in Scripture. The significance of thirteen is that of rebellion and the work of Satan. Practically all the titles of Satan are multiples of 13, and the suggestion that leaven is a type of evil is strengthened by this fact.

Let us notice how the word is used in other New Testament passages. In Matthew's Gospel the Lord uses it as a type of corrupt and corrupting doctrine. 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees ... 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' (Matt. 16:6-12). In Mark 8:15 we read, 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod'.

A further explanation is given of the meaning of the leaven of the Pharisees in Luke 12:1, 'Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, *which is hypocrisy*'. Scripture affords us therefore the plain statement that the Lord Jesus used the figure of leaven as a type of evil doctrine and hypocrisy. This of itself should be sufficient to dispose of the idea that the leaven in Matthew 13 is typical of the truth. Every occurrence of the word, moreover, whether in the New Testament or the Old Testament, bears out the fixed meaning of the symbol. The apostle Paul uses leaven as a figure in 1 Corinthians 5:6,7,8, and Galatians 5:9. He speaks of the 'leaven of *baseness and wickedness*', and contrasts it with 'the unleavened bread of *sincerity and truth*' (1 Cor. 5:8). The passage opens with the words, 'Know ye not that a little leaven doth leaven the whole lump? *Purge ye out the old leaven*', and ends with the words, '*Remove ye the wicked man* from among yourselves' (1 Cor. 5:6-13).

In Exodus 12:15 we read in connection with the Passover, 'Ye shall put away leaven out of your houses'. Exodus 34:25 and Leviticus 2:11 declare, 'Thou shalt not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven', and 'No meal offering, which ye shall bring unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven'. Here we see that both the sacrifice with blood, and the wonderful bloodless meal offering, must alike be free from leaven. Amos, speaking of Israel's sins, says, 'Come to Beth-el, and transgress ... and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven ... for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD' (Amos 4:4,5). Leaven is undoubtedly a type of evil as used by the Holy Spirit in the inspired Word.

What of the three measures of meal? They certainly cannot typify the corrupt human heart any more than the corrupting leaven can represent the blessed truth of God. Neither can the three measures of pure meal represent the 'Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Greek sections of Christendom'. If they do, then the Protestant expositors who are largely the supporters of this interpretation must confess that Rome is looked upon by the Lord in the same light as their own community, and will finally be 'leavened with the gospel' (to use their own

phraseology), like the Protestant and the Greek. Of course the answer will be that the measures of meal represent 'Christendom, the professing church', not the true church of Christ. This again yields another difficulty. Will 'Christendom, the professing church' be so 'leavened with the gospel' that at the end it will be true that 'the whole was leavened'? When the Son of man cometh, will He find a completely evangelized and believing Christendom? Facts of everyday life as well as prophecy testify to the exact opposite.

Can we find the Scriptural meaning of the three measures of meal? The word meal in the original is *aleuron*, and means by its etymology meal produced by grinding. The word occurs nowhere else in Scripture apart from the parable of the Leaven. In the Old Testament meal and fine flour were typical of the spotless purity of the offering of the Lord Jesus, and of the perfect character of the Word of truth. In Leviticus 2 we have the 'meat offering'. The word 'meat' is an old English word for food (we still say 'grace before meat'), but there is no flesh or blood in the 'meat offering' of Leviticus 2. The instructions given in the first verse tell us of the perfect purity of the offering; 'his offering shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon ... no meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven' (verse 11).

Meal was used by the prophet Elisha to counteract the 'death in the pot' caused by the 'wild vine' which had been gathered, symbolising the deliverance to be wrought by Christ (2 Kings 4:38-41). In Jeremiah 23 we have the Lord's severe indictment of the false prophets. 'They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD' (verse 16). 'The prophets ... that prophesy lies in my Name ... they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart' (verses 25, 26). 'I am against the prophets ... that steal my words ... that use (or smooth) their tongues, and say, *He saith*' (verses 30, 31). 'He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD' (verse 28). These passages must suffice to show that corn, meal, or fine flour typify the Word of God, living and written.

There is one other symbol to consider, and that is 'The woman'. In the preceding parables it is a man who sows the seed, but now the symbol changes. Students of the Scriptures are familiar with the fact that a woman is used many times to represent a system either good or bad. Thus we have 'that woman Jezebel' in Revelation 2:20, and she is seen very plainly hiding the 'leaven' in the meal. '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'. Here is corruption; this is the doctrine of Balaam as specified in verse 14. In Revelation 17:4,5 we have another woman:

'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 full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication. And upon her forehead was a name written, a secret. *Babylon the Great*, the mother of the harlots and the abominations of the earth' (Author's translation).

The interpretation given by God is that this woman 'is that great city' (verse 18), and Babylon, and all that Babylon stands for, is intended here - the great corrupter. The revival of Babylon forms part of Zechariah's prophecy. In chapter 5, under the figure of a lawless woman sitting in the midst of an ephah (a dry measure used for grain, etc.), the prophet depicts the return of wickedness to its original seat - 'to build it an house in the land of Shinar'. Many commentators look upon the woman as symbolising Rome. Romanism is certainly one of the polluted streams, but it is not the fountain head, for idolatry and its accompaniments were doing their deadly work before Rome was built, or Romanism founded. It is interesting to note the efforts now being put forward in Mesopotamia for the revival of this ancient seat of rebellion and corruption.

We have seen that leaven signifies corrupt doctrine. We have seen that the meal represents the perfect offering of Christ and the unadulterated Word of God, and we see that the woman has much to make us feel that Babylonianism is behind this corrupting work. In the parable of the Tares we see the enemy sowing his false seed; in the parable of the Mustard Tree he is found supported by the branches of the abnormal growth which typifies the Gentile epoch; and in the parable of the Leaven he is seen using that great system of corruption, of which he was the founder (Gen. 10), to leaven the pure meal of God.

Coming back to Matthew 13, we ask with the disciples, why is it that the kingdom of the heavens is delayed, and the King rejected? The answer is '*An enemy hath done this*'. He has sown his tares, he inhabits the tree, he leavens the truth.

We have already seen the connection between the leaven and the doctrine of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. Here is leaven enough for the *three* measures of meal. It will be found that this leaven has reference to the Word of God and the Person of Christ. In Matthew 16:6-12 the Lord warns His disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and *immediately* the Scripture records His question, 'Who do men

say that I, the Son of man, am?' Peter's wonderful confession is immediately followed by an attack of Satan, where the cause of the opposition is the revelation of the fact that the Lord Jesus must suffer, die and rise again. Peter's words, 'Be propitious to Thyself' (verse 22) savoured of men, and were instigated by Satan (verse 23).

The Lord had said, further, that the leaven of the Pharisees was hypocrisy. This leaven is exposed in Matthew 23:13, 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of the heavens against men'. This is why the King was rejected and the kingdom shut up. In Mark 7 the Lord again unveils their corrupting influence:

'Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men ... Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition' (Mark 7:6-9).

Space will not allow us to multiply examples, those given are sufficient to show the working of the leaven. The leaven was everywhere making its corrupting way. Distorted views obtained concerning (1) the Messiah, (2) the Kingdom and (3) the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus, standing in the midst of a people thus already corrupted, prophesied that this leavening would go on its evil course until the whole was leavened. 'When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?' The apostle Paul, writing in 2 Thessalonians 2 of the rise of Antichrist says:

'For the mystery of lawlessness already is inwardly working itself, only until He that restraineth become out of the midst, and then shall be revealed the lawless one ... because the love of the truth they did not welcome ... they believe the lie' (verses 7-11 Author's translation).

This brings us to the end, 'the whole was leavened'. This is the state of things as given in the book of the Revelation. The last parable of the external history of the course of the kingdom is sad indeed. The state of Israel at the 'time of the end' is deplorable, and may be summed up under the three heads, Pharisaic, Sadducean, and Herodian. Hypocrisy, infidelity and worldliness 'like unto Sodom and Gomorrah'.

We are thankful that this is not the end of these parables. There is another side of the question, there is the divine standpoint, there is the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will. This divine aspect is the common link between the next four parables spoken 'inside the house' to the disciples. These we must now consider. Before concluding this section shall we set out the history of the kingdom of the heavens so far as we have seen it at present?

The Sower

The ministries of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus, and the apostles during the 'Acts' were to a large extent, externally, failures, but there is yet to be a gloriously fruitful sowing when the time comes for the New Covenant to be put into operation.

The Tares

The reason for the delay in the setting up of the kingdom is discovered in the fact that an enemy is at work, and side by side with the true children of the kingdom are the children of the wicked one, but these are not removed until the end of the age.

The Mustard Tree

The next reason for the delay is that whereas the small seed of Israel should have flourished and filled the earth with fruit, the sovereignty changed hands, and was deposited with the Gentiles, beginning with Nebuchadnezzar, 'until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in'. This stage is marked by the words, 'it becometh a tree, and the fowls lodged in its branches'. That which should have been pre-eminently the kingdom of righteousness, becomes the habitation of Satan and his angels.

The Leaven

The third reason for delay is that the leaven of evil has been put into the meal of God's truth. This will work its course until the rise of Antichrist, and the complete corruption of the visible witness for God.

Thus we see that the Lord Jesus had no idea of the gradual uplifting of the masses and the permeating influence of the gospel. He saw that man had corrupted his way upon the earth, even as it was in the days of Noah. Hence it is that He uses the same words to represent the end. Blessed be God, that out of all this corruption and apostasy He will yet bring His treasure and display His grace. For this creation groans, and the study of this blessed aspect of the divine purpose shall now be our privilege.

We have considered the first four parables and discovered something of their bearing upon the course of the kingdom of the heavens. A division is now observable, emphasized alike by the structural arrangement, the teaching, and the different place in which they were spoken.

The Treasure

After the parable of the Leaven, the Lord dismissed the multitude, and went into the house. There He explained the parable of the Tares, and then proceeded to unfold the inner or Godward aspect of the kingdom in the four parables that followed. Their relation to each other may be summarized thus:

A THE TREASURE IN THE FIELD:

The nation of Israel as distinct from the nations.

B THE ONE BEAUTIFUL PEARL:

The remnant of Israel as distinct from the nation.

B THE MANY FISH:

The Gentile nations as distinct from Israel.

A THE TREASURE IN THE HOUSE:

Israel, viewed as a missionary nation, sent to the nations.

The first of this series (the Hid Treasure) is in direct contrast with the Hid Leaven. These four parables are found only in Matthew's Gospel. 'The kingdom of the heavens is like unto a treasure hid in the field, which a man finding, hid, and by reason of his joy, withdraweth and selleth whatsoever he hath, and buyeth that field'. Let us examine the terms of the parable in the light of the subject of the kingdom and the Scriptures relating thereto. Just before this parable the Lord had said, 'The field is the world', hence the field here (not 'a field' as the Authorized Version) means the world. In this world a treasure was hidden. What is the treasure?

Starting with Genesis 12, we have the inception of the special nation, separated and called to a higher glory than any other nation on the earth. When this people was redeemed from Egypt the Lord said to them, 'Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a *peculiar treasure* (*s'gullah*) unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation' (Exod. 19:5,6). No other nation has ever had such a calling or such a title. Deuteronomy 14:2 reads, 'The LORD hath chosen thee to be a *peculiar* (*s'gullah*) people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth'. Again, in Deuteronomy 26:18,19 we read, 'The LORD hath avouched thee this day to be His *peculiar* (*s'gullah*) people ... to make thee high above all nations ...'. In Psalm 135:4 we read, 'The LORD hath chosen ... Israel for His *peculiar treasure* (*s'gullah*)'. In Malachi 3:17 we read, 'And they shall be Mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels' (*s'gullah*). The 'jewels', or peculiar treasure, represent the whole nation of Israel, secured in their position of final blessing by the unchanging love of God (Mal. 3:10). But in the day of Israel's blessing one jewel brighter than the rest will be seen - the remnant of faithful ones during the days of Israel's sin and apostasy. This will be considered under the parable of the one Pearl. Psalm 83:3,4 supplies another name for Israel, 'Thy hidden ones', which should be considered in this connection.

The next item to notice is the statement, 'Which a man finding, *hid*'. The hidden treasure is hidden again until the day when the treasure is claimed. When the Lord Jesus came to this world He limited His ministry to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Israel could never qualify under law to be the treasure; they must be redeemed. They will never be a kingdom of priests by virtue of their own deeds, but solely upon the basis of redemption (cf. Rev. 1). Up till Matthew 16, the Lord had not spoken of His death, but in verse 21 He hides the treasure, and declares the great price which He is about to pay for its redemption. That death on the cross secured the treasure and the field. There the Lord Jesus gave His all.

In Luke 19:11-27 we have further light upon this hiding of the treasure. Lest any should think by His words that the kingdom was to be set up at once, the Lord said, 'A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return'. Thus the second hiding of the treasure is symbolical of the abeyance of

the kingdom. The day of manifestation is coming when the words will resound, 'The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign unto the ages of the ages' (Rev. 11:15). This parable declares that in spite of all opposition God's purpose for Israel and the kingdom will be fulfilled. This would comfort the hearts of the disciples. They would see how irresistible is the purpose of Him, Who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.

Thus has God declared His answer to the evil one. He had hidden his leaven, but the Lord had hidden His treasure. Soon the day will come when the Lord will remove the stain of sin and the corruption of the enemy: soon He will come to make up His jewels, and then shall Israel be a glorious diadem in the hand of their God.

(6)

The Pearl of Great Price

Matthew 13:45,46

It will be remembered that in our exposition of the parable of the Hid Treasure we drew attention to the difference which is made in Scripture between 'all Israel' and 'the Remnant'. It appears also in the above parable. Both refer to the people of God's choice - Israel, both are referred to under the figure either of a treasure or a pearl of great price. The very Jews who were 'enemies because of the gospel' were nevertheless 'beloved because of the fathers', but doubly precious in the sight of God has ever been that believing remnant from Abraham onwards. These are an election from among the elect, and these are dealt with in the parable of the Pearl:

'Again, the kingdom of the heavens is like unto a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, and, finding one very precious pearl, departing, he at once sold all things whatsoever he had and bought it' (Matt. 13:45,46 Author's translation).

Let us briefly consider the words used in this parable.

Merchant. The word is *emporos* in the original, giving us emporium, and occurs five times in the New Testament, once in the parable, and four times of the merchants connected with Babylon (Rev. 18).

Pearls. These are mentioned in the New Testament nine times. Two of these occurrences are in the parable, and five are in the Revelation. The harlot is seen decked with precious stones and pearls, but after her destruction the new Jerusalem, the holy city, is seen with its foundation of precious stones, and every gate a pearl. Merchants and pearls are connected with the two cities, and the two systems, the one being the devil's parody of the other.

The New Testament word for a pearl is *margarites*. Another word, not found in the New Testament, but closely resembling the Hebrew word translated 'rubies', is the word *pinna*. The Revised Version margin of Job 28:18 gives 'pearls' as an alternative reading. *Bochart* is very strong in his belief that the Hebrew word *peninim* (*rubies*) should be translated pearls. The price of wisdom (Job 28:18; Prov. 3:15) and the worth of a virtuous woman (Prov. 31:10) are placed above the value of *peninim* or Pearls.

Coming now to the meaning of the parable. Right down the ages since the time of Abraham there has been a faithful remnant. These will form one company at the end, and are spoken of as 'holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling', 'who died in faith, not having received the promise'. The reader should turn to the following passages before going further, to learn more concerning this remnant according to the election of grace. Isaiah 1:9; 7:3 (Shear-jashub, the name translated for us in 10:21 by the words 'the remnant shall return'); Isaiah 11:11,16; Ezekiel 9:4-6; 14:22; Joel 2:32 (compare the remnant on the day of Pentecost); Micah 2:12; Romans 9:27; 11:5.

The overcomers of the Apocalypse, the 144,000 sealed of the tribes of Israel, the various companies mentioned in Revelation 12:17; 14:1-5; 15:1-3 and 20:4 all seem to be part of this great company denominated by our Lord 'The Pearl of Great Price'. Pearls are compared with holiness in Matthew 7:6; the partakers of the heavenly calling are called 'holy brethren' (Heb. 3:1), and 'saints of the Most High' (Dan. 7:22). Pearls are compared with wisdom in the Old Testament and Daniel 12:3 tells us that 'they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars unto the age and beyond'. These are the seed of Abraham likened to the stars of heaven, the nation itself being likened to the sand of the sea shore. These wise ones 'understand' and 'instruct many' (Dan. 11:33); they are subjected to tribulation (Dan. 11:35) before they enter their glory. Wherever we see this elect remnant we find tribulation and suffering.

The words of the epistles of Peter and James, so full of admonition and comfort to those of the dispersion who believed and who were passing through the 'fiery trial', were addressed to this remnant.

When we read in the book of the Revelation of 'The wife' and 'The bride', we have the two companies again who are in view in these parables as the Treasure and the Pearl. Israel's relationship to God is that of a wife who, being unfaithful, has been put away, but the return of Israel is to be like the taking back of the penitent wife, nay, so great is God's grace and love that He says it will be 'as a young man marrieth a virgin', even though in reality it will be the taking back again of an unfaithful wife (*see* Isa. 62:4,5 and Hos. 2:19,20 etc.). This relationship, which includes 'all Israel', is brought before us in Revelation 19 as the marriage of the Lamb, whose 'wife hath made herself ready'.

After the thousand years' reign, and in connection with the new heaven and the new earth, we read, 'And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (Rev. 21:2). In verses 9 and 10 we have this fact repeated. The inhabitants of this city are the partakers of the 'heavenly calling', who, like Abraham, desired a better country, that is an heavenly, and for them God hath prepared *a city*. It was this *heavenly calling* (which must be distinguished from the super-celestial calling of the dispensation of the Mystery), so plainly understood and believed by Abraham, that enabled him to be a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth, a sojourner in the land of *promise* as in a *strange* country, content with tents and no settled habitation, because he looked for *a city* which hath *the* foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Such as are children of faithful Abraham, not only according to the flesh, but according to the spirit, such constitute the bride and the pearl, an elect remnant out from an elect nation. Israel viewed as a whole is likened to a treasure and a wife. The remnant (which will include faithful believing Gentiles during the 'Acts' period) are viewed as a precious pearl and a bride. We may set this out more clearly as follows:

THE ELECT NATION	THE ELECT REMNANT
as distinct from the Nations.	as distinct from the Nation.
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A treasure.	A pearl.
A wife.	A bride.
Earthly calling, and city.	Heavenly calling, and city.
Seed like sand for multitude.	Seed like stars for multitude.

Once again we see how fully the Lord was meeting the disciples' need, by showing them the way in which God's purpose concerning Israel was to run its course, and how the very trials and hindrances would be made to contribute to the glorious end in view.

(7)

The Drag Net

Matthew 13:47-50

In the preceding parable we had the remnant of Israel likened to that which is the most valuable treasure of the sea, the pearl. We are now to consider two kinds of fish which are gathered from the sea, and to note their meaning. We have pointed out the fact that structurally and in subject the two parables of the Tares and the Drag Net are very similar. The tares indicate the hypocrites, the counterfeit, that which was sown by the Devil in imitation of the true wheat. We observed that this parable had a particular and primary application to Israel and the state of the kingdom.

The net draws to shore fish both 'good' and 'bad'. So far we see the parallel; the wheat and the tares being two kinds of grain, one good and one bad; the fish being of two kinds, the one good and the other bad. But here comes a noteworthy difference, for whereas it is evident that the tares were intended to counterfeit the wheat, there is not the slightest warrant for supposing that the 'bad' fish counterfeited the 'good'. Further, the wheat and the tares deal with two kinds of seed, whereas the net 'gathered of *every kind*'. Another point to be remembered is the different order given with regard to the separation of the two kinds. Let us carefully consider

the interpretation given by our Lord of these two related parables, noticing their points of contact and of divergence.

INTERPRETATION OF THE TARES (Matt. 13:37-43)

Spoken only to disciples

He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.

The field is the world.

The good seed are the sons of the kingdom.

The tares are the sons of the wicked one.

The enemy that sowed them is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age.

The reapers are the angels.

As the tares are gathered and burned, so shall it be at the end of the age:

The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall *gather out of His kingdom all things that offend*, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

INTERPRETATION OF THE DRAG NET (Matt. 13:49,50)

Spoken only to disciples

So shall it be at the end of the age:

The angels shall come forth, and *sever the wicked from among the just*, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

It will be observed that a more complete explanation is given of the Tares than of the Drag Net, and that in both cases the section dealing with the wicked receives most attention. The wheat and the tares are, the one sons of the kingdom, the other sons of the devil. The good and bad fish are not placed under either heading. Before considering the dispensational teaching of this parable, let us consider more carefully some of the figures that are used.

The Drag Net.- Scripture mentions three different nets:

- (1) The cast net (*diktuon*), cf. John 21:11.
- (2) The circular net (*amphiblestron*), cf. Matt. 4:18.
- (3) The drag net (*sagene*), only used in this parable.

The Fish. There are 40 different kinds of fish in the Sea of Galilee: of these there are two common kinds, one a good fish, the bream; the other a fish without scales, and therefore an abomination, having neither fins nor scales (Lev. 11:10), the flesh of which was salted and sold to the port of Rome, where it received the name of 'stinking sheat fish'.

The Sea. The sea is continually used as a type of the nations, particularly in a tumultuous state. 'The waters ... are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues' (Rev. 17:15).

Let us now look at the parable in the light of prophecy. The drawing of the net to shore at the end of the age is parallel with the gathering of the living nations to the land of Israel. Note, in the parable and in the prophecy, that the fish and the nations are living and not dead. This is not dealing with the judgment of those who are raised from the dead, but that of the living nations, whose relation with the kingdom is to be decided.

Scripture is emphatic upon the fact that towards the end of the age Jerusalem and the land of Israel shall become a 'burdensome stone to the nations'. The 'Eastern Question' gathers around Asia Minor, and the Powers of Europe jealously regard each other in reference to Jerusalem - the key to the East. Listen to the words of the Prophets:

'For, behold, in those days, and in that time, WHEN I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I WILL ALSO GATHER ALL NATIONS, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for My people and for My heritage Israel, whom they have *scattered* among the nations, and *parted My land*' (Joel 3:1,2).

'Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I WILL GATHER ALL NATIONS against Jerusalem to battle' (Zech. 14:1,2).

'My determination is to GATHER THE NATIONS, THAT I MAY ASSEMBLE THE KINGDOMS, to pour upon them Mine indignation' (Zeph. 3:8).

'Haste ye and come, ALL YE NATIONS round about, and gather yourselves together; thither cause THY MIGHTY ONES (i.e. the angels) TO COME DOWN, O LORD. Let the nations bestir themselves and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there will I SIT TO JUDGE ALL NATIONS round about' (Joel 3:11,12 Author's translation).

'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: and before Him shall be gathered ALL NATIONS: and He shall separate them' (Matt. 25:31,32).

As we read these prophecies it is abundantly manifested that the gathering of the nations is to be expected at the time of the end. Matthew 25 shows that the nations who have well treated the 'brethren' of the King shall enter into the kingdom, while the nations who have ill-treated the Jew are an offence, and are gathered out of that kingdom. Matthew 25 is *national*. As nations they enter the kingdom, or as nations they are debarred. It is quite contrary to the teaching of the passage to make the kind acts of the nations a basis for 'doing all things unto the Lord', for these nations did not *consciously* do what they did to Israel for Christ's sake at all; they only learn that when they stand before His throne.

The peculiar time of Israel's trouble, which is coming, will be a great temptation to all the nations to take advantage of the helplessness of this down-trodden people, but the Lord will reward that nation which acts kindly to His people. 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom'; 'the righteous into age-abiding life' (Matt. 25:34,46) is typified in the parable by the putting of the good fish into the vessels. 'Every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles' (Zech. 14:16).

These are the good fish of the parable. The nations who are thus blessed will have a blessed portion in the kingdom; many however, will forfeit their place when Satan is unbound at the end. Israel's pre-eminent position in the kingdom is emphasized in the parable of the Tares, for of them it adds, 'Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father'. Thus, at the end of the age there will be two siftings and two gatherings in connection with the kingdom. First from Israel itself (as indicated in the 'Tares') He shall thoroughly purge His floor - hypocrites and sons of the wicked one, those who say they are Jews and are not, but who are of the synagogue of Satan (Rev. 3:9) - and then from the nations round about as already seen in the quotations from the Prophets and Matthew 25.

These parables show us that great care is necessary in reading the Word that we do not overlook the divisions that are made among the various classes in the kingdom. We have the 'Treasure', Israel, as distinct from the nations. We have the 'One Pearl', the Remnant, as distinct from the nation. We have the good and bad fish, the division made among the nations themselves.

Evil shall not always reign. That kingdom so long looked for will come, and then shall begin the final step towards the goal - 'A new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness'.

(8)

The Scribe (or Householder)

Matthew 13:51,52

This parable brings us to the last of the series in Matthew 13, and like the first it does not commence with the formula, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto'.

The parable of the sower dealt rather with the ministry of the word of the kingdom, than with the kingdom itself, and the closing parable deals rather with the minister than the kingdom, the householder rather than the house.

This parable is preceded by a question, 'Have ye understood all these things?' and this question exactly corresponds (see structure, page 35) to the statement of the Lord concerning Israel as a nation, that they did not understand (Matt. 13:10-16).

In answer to the question of the Lord as to whether they had understood ALL THESE THINGS, the disciples reply, 'Yea, Lord', and upon this basis the last parable is uttered. We must at once confess that the disciples have the advantage over us, for although we believe that by the grace of God the exposition of these parables in our pages has been in harmony with His Word, we could not presume to say that we understand ALL THESE THINGS. There are many who are completely in error regarding these parables who do not blush to speak of 'Apostolic mistakes' whenever an action or word of an inspired apostle crosses *their* idea of the teaching of Scripture, but such would hardly dare to answer, as the apostles did. 'Yea, Lord'.

Let us first of all consider the words of the parable.

'Wherefore (or for this reason) every scribe disciplined into the kingdom of the heavens is like a man, an householder, who putteth forth out of his treasure things new and old' (Matt. 13:52 Author's translation).

It will be seen by the opening word 'wherefore' (or because of this) that the parable is connected with the claim of the disciples to have understood all the things which were intended to give them a complete history of the progress of the kingdom of the heavens. This emphasis upon the word 'understanding' not only contrasts the disciples with the nation, but leads us to consider other passages where a few amongst Israel will have understanding particularly at the time of the end, when these parables will reach their fulfilment.

Daniel, referring to the time of antichristian apostasy says:

'And they that *understand* among the people shall *instruct* many' (Dan. 11:33).

'And some of them of understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end' (Dan. 11:35).

'And they that be wise (margin, teachers) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament' (Dan. 12:3).

'Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried ... the wise shall understand' (Dan. 12:10).

These wise ones who have understanding have relation to the time of the end and particular reference to Israel and the kingdom. Hearing the word, and *understanding it*, is characteristic of the final and yet future sowing of the seed of the kingdom, as we have seen in considering Matthew 13:19,23. This understanding is not necessarily connected with education or ability of mind, but it is rather that understanding which comes from a heart acquaintance with the Word of God, and the Lord Himself. Thus the Psalmist could say, 'I have more understanding than all my teachers; *for* Thy testimonies are my meditation' (Psa. 119:99).

Those therefore who have such understanding are like a householder, and only such are here in question. The word householder is *oikodespotes*, and occurs twelve times in the New Testament. Four times it is rendered 'goodman of the house', and once 'goodman'. The first occurrence is in Matthew 10:25, and the last in Luke 22:11. It is bounded by the period covered by the gospel of the kingdom, and the number of its occurrences, namely, twelve, also links with it Israel and the kingdom. Such a scribe, such a householder, is said to be 'disciplined' into the kingdom of the heavens.

The word 'instructed', which we have rendered 'disciplined' occurs four times in the New Testament (Matt. 13:52; 27:57; 28:19; Acts 14:21), and is translated 'instructed', 'disciple', 'teach'. The marginal readings of Matthew 28:19 and Acts 14:21 suggest 'make disciples'. Matthew 28:19,20 looks forward to a future ministry when the sent ones of the Lord shall 'make nations disciples'. Matthew 28 says nothing about preaching the

gospel, although many thus misquote it. It speaks of 'discipling', 'baptizing', and 'teaching to observe' all things whatsoever the Lord Jesus had commanded them.

They who will be fitted for this wonderful ministry are before us in this parable. Before they can disciple all nations, they must have been 'discipled into the kingdom' themselves; they must be learners. Further, the parable does not say 'every one', but 'every *scribe*'. The scribe was one who had to do with the Word of God, the *grammateus*. No ordinary scribe, however, is here in view. The teacher must also be the learner. The scribe must also be the disciple. He must have the wide range of prophetic view as given in these parables of the mysteries of the kingdom before he can be likened to a householder.

The Scribes in the day of Christ were as degenerate as their fellows the Pharisees, and against them, equally with the Pharisees, the Lord uttered His solemn woes. Speaking of the passage, 'He taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes' a learned writer (Dean Farrar) says:

'The teaching of their Scribes was narrow, dogmatical, material; it was cold in manner, frivolous in matter, second-hand, and iterative in its very essence; with no freshness in it, no force, no fire; servile to all authority, opposed to all independence, at once erudite and foolish, at once contemptuous and mean; never passing a hair's breadth beyond the carefully watched boundary line of commentary and precedent; full of balanced inference, and orthodox hesitancy, and impossible literalism, intricate with legal pettiness, and labyrinthine system, elevating mere memory above genius, and repetition above originality, concerned only about Priests and Pharisees, in Temple and Synagogue, or School or Sanhedrim, and mostly occupied with things infinitely little. It was not indeed wholly devoid of moral significance, nor is it impossible to find here and there among the *debris* of it a noble thought, but it was occupied a thousandfold more with Levitical minutiae about mint and anise and cummin, and the length of fringes, and the breadth of phylacteries and the washing of cups and platters, and the particular quarter of a second when new moons and Sabbath days begin'.

Such were the Scribes of the days of Christ, and were it not uncharitable one might almost say that they seem still to have a following today.

The disciples of the Lord who heard His words and noted how different His speech and teaching were, how utterly opposed to the Scribes His manner and matter, would understand the clause, 'every Scribe who is *discipled into* the kingdom'. The Word of God was at the finger tips of these Scribes, but it never entered their hearts. Those contemplated in the parable knew that unless their righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees they could not enter into the kingdom of the heavens.

A day is coming when, not merely a few, but a whole nation shall be righteous. This synchronises with the fourth sowing of the first parable, the ministry under the New Covenant, when the stony heart will be removed, and a heart of flesh given, when the law shall be written in the heart and not on tables of stone, when the Scribe will be worthy of the name, and when he too will teach 'as one having authority' because he also has 'learned of Him'. Out of his treasure he will then bring things new and old. What these new and old things may be it is not for us to say with any definiteness. The contrast between the old and the new covenant, the old and new Jerusalem, the old and new heaven and earth will form mighty themes for the messengers of the Lord.

It would appear in the parable that the extent of this ministry is to be limited by the word 'householder', while in Matthew 28 in the wider sphere the command is to 'disciple all nations'.

We trust that some little light has been thrown upon these important parables, and as we pursue the theme of their fulfilment in the Revelation, and of the times in which their final heading up - the harvest - is set, we shall have continual reason to see that these parables are what the Lord indeed said they were, 'The mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens'.

(9)

Things which defile a man

Matthew 15:10-20.

We have now concluded our consideration of the parables of Matthew 13. As we have seen, these parables of the mysteries of the kingdom form a complete line of teaching by themselves. After this series of parables was concluded, the Lord Jesus revealed the fact that He must not only be rejected, but be crucified, die, and be raised again the third day. The parables of the second section accordingly take a somewhat different turn. One

parable is spoken after chapter 13 before the revelation of the Lord's death in Matthew 16. After this the second series of parables follows, ending in the prophetic words of Matthew 24 and 25. This series makes a complete set marked by a special aspect of dispensational teaching, just in the same way that the parables of Matthew 13 were marked by a special aspect of dispensational truth.

Before considering this group, however, we will look at the parable recorded in Matthew 15:10-20. It throws light upon the nature of the opposition, and the forces which were at work which had rejected the kingdom and finally would crucify the King. It arose out of the question of the Scribes and Pharisees concerning eating with unwashed hands. The Lord does not here, as He does in Matthew 23, fully and unreservedly strip off their mask of hypocrisy, for His hour had not yet come. In parable form, however, He enforces the lesson of the previous words addressed to the Scribes and Pharisees. These formalists were far more concerned about ceremonial washings than about fruit of heart love. The transgression of some minute point of rabbinical tradition was far more serious in their eyes than the breaking of the law of God.

In answer to the question, 'Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?' the Lord said, 'Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God *by your tradition?*'.

Opposition had been gathering, and many attempts to entrap the Lord had been made. His free intermingling with the publicans and sinners wounded the pride of the teachers of the law. His freedom regarding the sabbath was much resented and opposed. It appears that on some occasion the Pharisees had noticed that the disciples had not observed the tradition regarding washings before meals, and this supplied them with a weapon of attack.

The oral tradition laid particular emphasis upon these ceremonial ablutions. No doubt we have all heard of Rabbi Akiba, who when imprisoned and supplied with only enough water to maintain life, chose rather to perish with thirst and hunger, than to eat without the necessary washings. What a pitiable misconception! What a God these people had invented! We can imagine the feelings with which these men came down upon the disciples of the Lord with this charge. They did not expect the Lord to reveal the superficial nature of their teaching which He did so incisively by his reference to their despicable gloss in relation to 'the first commandment with promise'.

'Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias (Isaiah) prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they do worship Me (solemn words for all dispensations), teaching for doctrines the commandments of men' (Matt. 15:7-9).

Turning from these votaries of littleness, the Lord called the people together and said:

'Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man' (Matt. 15:10,11).

In these few words the Lord brushed aside the external and the ceremonial, establishing in their place the real and the essential. The record in Mark 7:15 should be compared:

'There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man'.

These words were sufficiently understood by the Pharisees to offend them, but the Lord in His reply shows how little He thought of man's judgment, 'Let them alone; they be blind leaders of the blind'. Peter now asks for an explanation of the parable and Matthew 15:16-20 contains the Lord's answer.

'And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? ... that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the *heart*; and they defile the man. For out of the *heart* proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defileth not a man'.

Mark gives one or two additional statements which are too important to pass over unnoticed:

'Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; *because it entereth not into his heart*' (Mark 7:18,19).

Thus the whole subject revolves around the words 'not into his *heart*' and 'out of the *heart*'. 'Their *heart* is far from Me'. The Authorized Version continues, 'but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, *purging all meats*'. The last clause has caused a great amount of unprofitable matter to be written. The true meaning is

given in the Revised Version, '*This He said, making all meats clean*', that is, abolishing for ever the scrupulosities of mere ceremonial distinctions. The list of evil things is different from that given in Matthew 15:

'Evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness' (Mark 7:21,22).

We now would draw attention to one or two important words and expressions used in this parable, and then show the light it casts upon the times and circumstances of this closing section of Matthew's Gospel.

DEFILED (*koinos*).— It must be remembered that the subject of defilement or uncleanness in this parable is *ceremonial*, it in no wise touches upon the desirability of having clean hands at meal times, neither does it teach that we may eat anything with impunity. If we perceive the truth nothing can make us ceremonially unclean, but some things may do us a great deal of harm physically. This word *koinos* has nothing whatever to do with uncleanness in a physical sense, it means defilement only in a ceremonial sense. The following are its occurrences:

KOINOS

'Defiled (that is to say unwashen) hands' (Mark 7:2).

'All things *common*' (Acts 2:44; 4:32).

'*Common* or unclean' (Acts 10:14,28; 11:8).

'There is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth anything to be *unclean*, to him it is *unclean*' (Rom. 14:14).

'The *common* faith' (Titus 1:4).

'An *unholy* thing' (Heb. 10:29).

'The *common* salvation' (Jude 3).

KOINOO

'Defile a man' (Matt. 15:11,18,20; Mark 7:15,18,20,23).

'Call not thou *common*' (Acts 10:15; 11:9).

'Brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath *polluted* this holy place' (Acts 21:28).

'Sprinkling the *unclean*' (Heb. 9:13).

'There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that *defileth*' (Rev. 21:27).

It will be seen by the above passages that the idea *defile* must be considered from the ceremonial standpoint. The apostle does not hesitate to speak of 'the common faith', not because there was anything unclean about it, but because it was not the exclusive possession of a *privileged few*, it being now proclaimed to the Gentile as well as to the Jew. The ceremonial ablutions were jealously guarded and observed not so much out of a desire for holiness or personal cleanliness, but out of a cramped, narrow and bigoted pride. To the Pharisaic mind there was but one class, 'the elect', all others were either 'Gentile dogs' or 'the people who know not the law' who are cursed. This narrow exclusive spirit was a fundamental cause of the great rejection, for in Matthew 23:13 the first woe uttered by our Lord in this chapter touches this very point:

'But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in'.

Luke 11:52 adds another weighty word:

'Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered'.

The reference to the 'blind guides' in Matthew 23:16 is a further link with Matthew 15. So also the sentiment of verses 23-27. The charge is very severe, and must have caused, as indeed we know it did, intense hatred. These men, who were so scrupulous about the outside as in Matthew 15, were within 'full of all uncleanness'.

HEART.— The way in which the Lord uses the word 'heart' is full of deep teaching. In the Beatitudes He had said, 'Blessed are the pure in heart', the word 'pure' being the Greek word *katharos*. The next time the Lord uses the word in Matthew is in direct continuance of this passage in chapter 5:

‘Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is *within* the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be *clean* also’ (Matt. 23:26).

The clean in heart, not the ceremonially and externally clean, not as the whitewashed sepulchres, these and these alone should see the kingdom. So superficial had become the ideas of men at the time of Christ, that He early disturbed the self-righteous complacency of those who thought that they were safe:

‘Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already *in his heart*’ (Matt. 5:27,28).

‘The tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of *the heart* the mouth speaketh’ (Matt. 12:33,34).

Thus the Lord would teach that just as the fruit of a tree indicates the nature of the tree itself, so the fruit of the lips will show the nature of the heart which gives that fruit origin. Once again, in answer to the Lawyer’s question, the Lord puts the heart in the first place:

‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *heart*, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind’ (Matt. 22:37).

Heart first, mind last. The mere intellectualism which always accompanies a pharisaical spirit is placed by its advocates foremost, while the heart is placed last. Not so, in the Lord’s estimate. He does not call upon us to quibble over the petty details which occupied the little minds of these formalists, but urges love of heart first and foremost.

The words of the Revised Version of Mark 7:19, ‘*This he said making all meats clean*’, should be noted. These words are the inspired comment upon the Lord’s teaching. It indicated the trend of His teaching, and the effect of His work. It lifted the one who believed Him above the sphere wherein such observances were of service. It entirely discountenanced the teaching of the Pharisees. The *spirit* of the lesson is echoed in an apocryphal addition to Luke 6:5 found in the *Codex Bezae*:

‘On the same day, seeing one working on the Sabbath, He said to him, O man, if indeed thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed, but if thou knowest not, thou art accursed, and a transgressor of the Law’.

Let us now examine the list of sins which the Lord said did defile a man, coming as they did out of the heart.

EVIL THOUGHTS.- The word ‘thought’ is *dialogismos*:

‘When Jesus perceived their *thoughts*, He answering said unto them, What *reason* ye in your hearts’ (Luke 5:22).

‘The scribes and Pharisees watched Him, whether He would heal on the Sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against Him. But He knew their *thoughts*’ (Luke 6:7,8).

So also Luke 2:35; 9:46,47; 24:38; and James 2:4.

The word ‘evil’ is *poneros*:

‘Wherefore think ye *evil* in your hearts?’ (Matt. 9:4).

‘O generation of vipers, how can ye (Pharisees, see verse 24), being *evil*, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh’ (Matt. 12:34).

‘An *evil* and adulterous generation’ (Matt. 12:39).

It seems fairly clear that the Lord had the Pharisees and Scribes in view when He uttered the words in the parable concerning evil thoughts.

MURDERS (*phonos*).- The word occurs in connection with Barabbas in Mark 15:7 and Luke 23:19,25.

‘Destroyed those *murderers*, and burned up their city’ (Matt. 22:7). Refer back to the related parable in Matthew 21:38,39 for the full force of this passage. Note verses 45 and 46, and 22:15, and see how the Pharisees realize that the Lord meant to indicate them under this awful title. Matthew 5:22 has already made it clear how ‘murder’ may be charged against these plotting enemies of the Lord. The Pharisees and Scribes are again charged with this foul crime in Matthew 23:31-39.

ADULTERIES (*moicheia*).- ‘The Scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery’ (John 8:3). These hypocrites were not concerned about the evil of the act (for they were guilty themselves, see verse 9); they simply desired to catch the Lord and involve Him in His words (verse 6). The exceeding looseness with which many of the Pharisees held the marriage tie, involved them in the sin of adultery before God (see Matt. 5:31,32 and 19:3-9). As with murder, so with adultery, the desire of the heart constituted guilt (see Matthew 5:27,28). On several occasions the Lord denounced these evil men as ‘a wicked and *adulterous* generation’ (see Matt. 12:39, and 16:4).

FORNICATIONS (*porneia*).- It is a remarkable fact that this plague figures more conspicuously in the Epistles and in the Revelation than in the Gospels. Once the enemies of the Lord use it (John 8:41), an insult which His holy nature must have felt keenly, but how gracious and calm was His reply! Although specific instances of this sin are not given in the Gospels we know the Lord sufficiently to imagine that He would not use a word so foul, unless He knew only too well that the charge was actually true. Its prominence in the Apocalypse, and the practical absence of adultery, throw a vivid light on the character of the last days.

THEFTS (*klope*).- This word occurs nowhere else except in the parallel passage of Mark. The cognate word *kleptes* (‘thief’) is used in John 10:1,8,10, and includes the Scribes and Pharisees, as the context shows.

The devouring of widows’ houses (Matt. 23:14; Mark 12:40; and Luke 20:47), the traditions (Matt. 15:5,6) and the turning of the House of Prayer into a den of thieves (Matt. 21:13), involve the Pharisees in this sin.

FALSE WITNESS.- This word in all its hideous nakedness is written against the ‘chief priests, and elders, and *all the council*’ (Matt. 26:59, see also Matt. 15:19) in relation to the deep-laid plot against the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the more significant when we consider the fact that these two passages contain all the occurrences of this word in the New Testament.

BLASPHEMY.- Mark 3:29 shows that the Scribes were guilty of the most unpardonable blasphemy.

We will not go through the list given in Mark, readers should make a study of the words there given. One thing is prominent in this parable. The Pharisees were guilty of breaking the very law in which they boasted so much. Listen to our Lord’s summary of the Law:

‘Jesus said (observe the order here and in Matt. 15), Thou shalt do no *murder*, Thou shalt not commit *adultery*, Thou shalt not *steal*, Thou shalt not bear *false witness*. Honour thy father and thy mother (cf Matt. 15:4-6); and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’ (Matt. 19:18,19).

How weak, how beggarly, the petty observances and mere trifling externals of the Pharisees appear, when seen from the standpoint of love. The apostle Paul, writing to the Romans, seems to have the pharisaical spirit before him. First in Romans 2 we read:

‘For wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself ... Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind (cf. Matt. 15:14), a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the FORM of knowledge and of the truth in the law (cf 2 Tim. 3:5). Thou therefore which TEACHEST another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that PREACHEST a man should not steal, *dost thou steal*? Thou that SAYEST a man should not commit adultery, *dost thou commit adultery*? thou that abhorrest idols, *dost thou commit sacrilege*? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law *dishonourest thou God* ... thee, who by the *letter* and *circumcision* dost transgress the law? (cf. Matt. 15:3). For he is not a Jew, which is one *outwardly* (see Matt. 23:28) ... circumcision is that of the HEART, in the spirit, and not in the letter (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6); whose praise is not of men, but of God’ (Rom. 2:1,17-23,27-29).

The sequel is found in Romans 13:8-10 :

‘Owe no man any thing, but to love another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’.

Returning to the parable of Matthew 15 with the knowledge we have now gained, do we not see that it foreshadowed that spirit which manifested itself in all its hollowness and sham, and whose loveless creed culminated in the basest acts that the world has ever witnessed.

The second set of parables in Matthew's Gospel becomes luminous in the light of this one. Into what a ditch these blind guides led that poor blinded people. The Lord disowns them, they were never planted by Him, they were sown by the Devil, they shall be rooted up (Matt. 13:29). They are the tares, *the children of the wicked one*. The burden of guilt rested chiefly upon the rulers and leaders of the people. They neither entered into the kingdom of the heavens themselves, nor allowed the common people, who desired to enter, to do so.

While it is of the utmost importance to realize the dispensational setting and bearing of this parable, it is essential to our joy and peace that we take to heart the solemn teaching for ourselves. May we remember that the mere observance of ceremonies is nothing. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Our walk is to be 'in love'. Let us take heed and beware of the 'leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees'.

(10)

The Five Parables of Matthew 16 to 22*

Having considered the important parable which threw such a lurid light upon the cause of Israel's failure, we pass on to another series of parables which have a peculiar relation to the second section of the Gospel according to Matthew.

It will be remembered that in Matthew the ministry of the Lord is divided into two sections by the words, 'from that time'.

'From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (4:17).

'From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day' (16:21).

Just as the parables of Matthew 13 are the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens, and have very special reference to the aspect of the Lord's ministry commenced at Matthew 4:17, so the series of parables contained in the second division of the Gospel have a special relation to the new aspect of truth opened up by the Lord in His words concerning His sufferings and death at the hands of the rulers of the people at Jerusalem. These are divinely given keys, to ignore which is fatal to a true understanding.

Now just as we saw that the eight parables of Matthew 13 had a very definite structure, so we shall see that the parables now under consideration have an orderly and suggestive arrangement.

The imagery is derived from three classes of people (1) servants (good and bad), (2) labourers and husbandmen in a vineyard, and (3) guests at a marriage. These were divinely chosen to set forth the state of the nation regarding their position before God, their failure and the consequences.

One of the features of these parables is that on the one hand they set forth the failure of the nation, whilst on the other they give a position to the outside publican and sinner which the exclusive ideas of the Jews would not allow. This is seen in the parable of the marriage feast (chapter 22), the two sons (chapter 21), and the wicked husbandman (chapter 21).

The Parables of Matthew 16 to 25

A 18:23-35. THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT ('The reckoning' *sunairo* *). 'Delivered to tormentors'.

B 20:1-16. THE HOUSEHOLDER AND VINEYARD. The Call of the Labourers:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 1. Early. | } Many
called,
but few
chosen. |
| 2. Third hour. | |
| 3. Sixth and ninth hours. | |
| 4. Eleventh hour. | |

C 21:28-32. TWO SONS AND VINEYARD.

Lesson, publicans and harlots enter the kingdom while many who claimed entrance were kept outside.

* The Author is dealing here with the first five parables shown in the structure on page 97. He then deals with the last four from page 121 onwards.

C 21:33-46. WICKED HUSBANDMEN AND VINEYARD. Lesson, kingdom taken from them and given to a fruitful nation.

B 22:1-14. THE MARRIAGE OF KING'S SON. The Call to the Guests:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. Bid those who were bidden. | } Many
called,
but few
chosen. |
| 2. Again tell them. | |
| 3. Go therefore to highways. | |
| 4. The wedding garment. | |

A 24:32 to 25:30. TWO KINDS OF SERVANTS.

a 24:32-44. The Fig Tree. 'Noah'. Coming as a thief while the goodman slept.
'Ye know not what hour the Son of man cometh'

b 24:45-51. The faithful and evil servants. The one made ruler, the other has his portion with the hypocrites.
'Weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

a 25:1-13. The wise and foolish virgins. 'Ye know neither the day nor the hour'.

b 25:14-30. The faithful and unprofitable servants ('The reckoning' *sunairo**). The one made ruler the other cast into outer darkness. 'Weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

(* The only occurrences of *sunairo* in the New Testament).

Matthew 23 says in plain words what this set of parables had taught in figure. The nation had degenerated into a wicked people. Viewed as sons they were rebellious and disobedient; as husbandmen in charge of their Lord's vineyard they were envious, murderers, and thought only of themselves; viewed as labourers they were discontented with their agreed wage; viewed as servants the majority were unfaithful and unprofitable. To their charge was laid the death of both the Lord's servants and of His Son (21:38; 23:34). The destruction of the city (Jerusalem) is plainly foretold, and the Gentileward movement of the Acts of the apostles is clearly shown. It is of the utmost importance that we keep the whole range of parables before us. We must keep the series of Matthew 13 in mind, and also the one parable in Matthew 15 which is both a link between the set of Matthew 13 and the set of Matthew 20 to 25, and a light which illuminates the character of the actors in this awful tragedy.

We will next commence a more detailed exposition of the first parable of this series.

(11)

The Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:23-35

We have learned that the series of parables which we are about to consider are linked together by a common theme, the disclosure of the temper and spirit of Israel and the causes which led up to their rejection of the Lord Jesus, and the rejection in turn of themselves from their position as an elect nation before God.

The parable was spoken in answer to Peter's question:

'Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?' (Matt. 18:21).

It seems that Peter felt the responsibility of the charge laid upon him. In Matthew 16:19 the Lord had said to him:

'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven ... and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven'.

The words are repeated in Matthew 18:18, the singular 'thou' being changed to the plural 'ye', and are there linked by the Lord to the question of forgiving an offending brother. Another link with the original commission to Peter as given in Matthew 16 is the reference to the church. Matthew 16:18 and 18:17 are the only references to the church (or *ekklesia*) in the Gospel of Matthew, and in both passages the reference is linked with this power of binding and loosing, and with the kingdom of the heavens.

It seems that Peter was not merely asking the question for his own private information, but was urged to inquire by reason of the great responsibility he felt at having the keys of the kingdom committed to him, and the power in a special manner of binding and loosing connected therewith. How long should he exercise forbearance and forgiveness? The Rabbis taught from Amos 1:3, etc., to forgive three times, and no more. This seems to receive some colour from the words of the Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 :

- (1) 'Between thee and him alone', then
- (2) 'If he will not hear, take with thee one or two more', then
- (3) 'If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican'.

Peter seemed to realize something of the new spirit, and ventures to put a tentative reply to his own question by saying, 'till seven times?' If Peter had any hesitancy in advancing beyond the tether of Rabbinical teaching it was entirely dispelled by the glorious fulness given in the Lord's answer, 'I say not unto thee, Until seven times, but, Until seventy times seven'. These words seem to refer back to two passages of Old Testament Scripture, both written during the times of the Gentiles, the one uttered before the nation of Israel had been formed, the other after they had been taken captive to Babylon.

The first reference is Genesis 4:24, 'If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold'. Lamech is often spoken of as arrogating to himself divine prerogatives; it may be, however, that he has been blamed by Commentators for that which he did not intend. Cain was protected by the Lord, a token was appointed for him in mercy (nearly everyone speaks of the 'brand of Cain' as though God set a mark upon him in wrath), the word *mark* in Genesis 4:15 being the word *token*, used of the *bow* in the clouds (Gen. 9:12), and of the *blood* of the passover (Exod. 12:13). Lamech seems to say to his wives, Be still, fear not, for if Cain who was a murderer was thus protected by a seven-fold avenging, surely I shall be avenged seven and seventy-fold; for the words relative to the slaying and wounding in verse 23 may indicate a query rather than state a fact. There seems to be an emphasis, markedly so in the case of Cain, of the great long-suffering and mercy of our gracious God.

The other reference to this seventy times seven is found in Daniel 9, and there in a light infinitely worse than that of Cain or of Lamech. The Lord intervenes and tells the anxious prophet that his prayers shall receive an abundant answer. Daniel had prayed for the forgiveness of his people (9:19), and in answer the man Gabriel is sent to reveal the future of his people to him. 'Seventy-sevens are severed off upon thy people and upon thy holy city'. Seventy-sevens - the period of time seems to convey also some lesson of the Lord's long-suffering and forbearance with his rebellious people. If ever a people could be expected to exercise forgiveness to others Israel surely should be the first, for have they not had extended to them untold forbearance from a long-suffering God? The Lord did not omit this from the kingdom prayer of Matthew 6. 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors' has a direct bearing upon the parable of the servant who, having been forgiven 'all that debt', would not forgive his fellow-servant who was his debtor to a much less extent. How many of our readers could say, without reference, what one clause of the Lord's prayer is immediately expanded after the conclusion of the petition? It is not the reference to hallowing the Name, nor the coming kingdom, but just this very clause:

'For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses'.

These words are echoed in the closing verse of Matthew 18. Here in this parable we have in all its hatefulness one of the factors of Israel's failure. They forgave not; they were not forgiven. Their measure of iniquity was filled up when in their implacable antagonism to the widening mercy of God they forbade the apostle Paul to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, and so wrath came upon them to the uttermost (1 Thess. 2:16).

This passage from 1 Thessalonians should be read with the parable before us, when the 'wrath to the uttermost' is echoed in the words, 'His lord was wroth', and 'till he should pay all that was due unto him'.

This last clause compels us to consider another passage in the Sermon on the Mount, that message calculated to reveal the failure of Israel's attempt at attaining a righteousness by law, and to bring them to repentance. In Matthew 5:22 the Lord says:

'But I say unto you (in contradistinction to what had been taught them), That whosoever is angry with his brother ... shall be in danger of (liable to) the judgment'.

The words 'without a cause' must be omitted; anger is to be 'put away', whether with or without a cause. Continuing the Lord said:

'Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Agree with thine adversary (prosecutor) quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him ... and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, *till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing*'.

Verses 22-26 of Matthew 5 must be considered together, the threefold punishment in verse 22, Judges, Sanhedrin, and Gehenna of Fire being balanced by the Judge, the Officer, and the Prison of verse 25. 'The uttermost farthing' is parallel to the words of the parable, 'all that was due'. These words are entirely out of place, nay, they are absolutely *untrue* the moment they are taken out of their dispensational setting, and are interpreted of the present time. Israel will pay to the uttermost farthing. They did not forgive, and the word is being fulfilled - they are not being forgiven. A day will come, however, when the prison shall be opened, when the Lord shall say that Israel has received double for all her sins (Isa. 40:2). There are many who repeat the words, 'forgive us our debts, *as* we forgive our debtors', who do not believe that the Lord intended to put this principle in operation. The parable of the unforgiving servant is also the parable of the unforgiven servant. The forgiveness granted is cancelled, and payment in full demanded. This is not evangelical doctrine, this is not the truth of the epistles of Paul, it is on an entirely different platform and under an entirely different economy.

We have considered the outlying context of the parable, rather than the parable itself; its interpretation is simple if we see its connection with Israel and the kingdom. As we consider the other parables of the series, further illustration will be given of the factors which contributed to Israel's rejection.

When the Lord Jesus was shamefully and cruelly crucified, even then He said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'. Forgiveness of 'all that debt' was proclaimed in the Acts to the very people guilty of the blood of Christ, but Israel did not enter into the blessing, the keys that unlocked the doors of the kingdom closed them again, the loosing was followed by binding, and Israel, scattered and homeless, have been delivered unto the tormentors until the Lord's own good time shall come.

Thanks be to God that the forgiveness granted under the dispensation of the grace of God cannot be rescinded; we are not forgiven *as* we forgive others. The teaching is reversed; we forgive others *because*, whether we forgive or not, God in Christ has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).

For the help of those who desire to take up the parable for detailed study the following outline may be of service:

Structure of Matthew 18:21-35

A 21,22. QUESTION REGARDING FORGIVENESS OF A BROTHER.

	1a THE KING (23-26).			
	The debt of 10,000 talents.			
B23-34.	Command to pay. Servant falls down, says			
Parable	'Have patience', and promises to pay all.			
applying the	1b FORGIVENESS (27). Moved with compassion,			
principle	looses servant and forgives debt.			
to the	2a THE SERVANT (28,29).			
dispensational	The debt of 100 pence.			
teaching	Taken by throat and payment demanded.			
concerning	Fellow servant falls down, says 'Have			
the kingdom	patience', and promises to pay all.			
of the	2b NO FORGIVENESS (30). Not moved with			
heavens, and	compassion. Casts fellow-servant into	showing the	prison	until
debt paid.				
principle	3a THE KING (32,33). Servant reminded that all			

of God's		his debt had been forgiven. 'I had pity'.		
dealings		3b FORGIVENESS RESCINDED (34).	with Israel.	
delivered to tormentors				Servant
		until payment made of all due.		

A 35. APPLICATION REGARDING FORGIVENESS OF A BROTHER.

(12)

The Householder and the Vineyard. The call of the Labourers

Matthew 20:1-16

When considering the first parable of this series, the Unforgiving Servant, we noticed that it was particularly addressed to Peter in answer to his question regarding the extent of forgiveness. The parable of the Householder and Vineyard is also addressed to Peter in reference to his question concerning the reward of service. This is indicated by the word 'For' with which the parable commences.

Looking back into chapter 19 we shall find the inspired introduction to the parable which it is essential to keep in mind. Chapter 19 records the fact that the Lord left Galilee and came to Judaea, and while there the Pharisees tempted Him with questions relating to divorce. The disciples were rather disconcerted by the Lord's answer to the Pharisees (verse 10), but the Lord told them that 'All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given ... He that is able to receive it, let him receive it' (verses 11,12). The disciples evidence their misunderstanding of the words of verse 12 by the fact next recorded that they rebuked those who brought little children to the Lord. The Lord disposed of this false deduction, blessed the little children and with them the ordinance of marriage which began to be questioned in the mind of the disciples, and departed.

He was then met by a rich man who desired to know what good thing he must do to have eternal life. It is not our purpose to enter into this passage here, other than to lodge a protest against the idea often read into it that the Lord meant to teach the doctrine of the Epistles - faith without works. The commandments are stated as the way to enter into life, and added to that He said, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow Me'. Nothing but the assumption that the Gospel of Matthew speaks in the same terms as the Pauline Epistles could have made men teach from this passage the doctrine of justification by faith without works. However, we pass on. The test was too severe for the young man, and the Lord said to His disciples:

'Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall enter with difficulty into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, 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' (Matt. 19:23,24 Author's translation).

Again the disciples are amazed at His teaching. If such as the rich young man should find difficulty amounting almost to an impossibility, then said they, 'Who then can be saved?' The elective element is again introduced, as in verse 11, by the words, 'with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'. Peter seems to have been turning the matter over in his mind. The young man had failed at the test of giving up all his possessions and following the Lord. It was a perfectly natural thing for Peter to think that at least he and his fellow disciples had the advantage here, for they had left all. He therefore turns to the Lord and says, 'Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee; WHAT SHALL WE HAVE THEREFORE?' This question, the manifestation of its spirit, and the needed rebuke is the one great feature of the parable, while the emphasis upon the sovereignty of grace as related to service and its reward is the other. The Lord is gracious in His reply. He fully recognizes what they had done and suffered, and He tells them of their reward first, adding afterwards words of warning, and illustrating His point by the parable under consideration:

'Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matt. 19:28).

After having said this much in answer to Peter's question, the Lord continues:

‘And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life’ (Matt. 19:29).

The hundredfold seems to indicate the highest, as may be seen in the ‘Sower’ (Matt. 13:23). There is no hint that a hundred-fold will be given for one amount of forsaking, and sixty-fold or thirty-fold for another, indeed the truth we all need to learn here is that *reward for service* and the opportunity to serve is as much an act of grace as salvation. Who among us will dare to say that we have ‘earned’ the ‘far more exceeding age-long weight of glory?’ We need to remember the words of Philippians 1:29, ‘For unto you it is *given in grace* in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake’. The very word translated ‘given’ here is translated ‘forgive’ elsewhere. We want to remember that after all our service, whatever it may be, we may still truthfully say we are but ‘unprofitable servants’.

The closing words of Matthew 19, ‘But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first’, are the point of the parable following, recurring at its conclusion with added emphasis on an elective principle, ‘So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen’ (Matt. 20:16). A comparison between the rich young man and the disciples who forsook all illustrates the difference between the ‘called’ and the ‘chosen’, the opportunity to serve being as much elective grace as salvation. Readers will notice that the parable of the Householder is balanced by the parable of the Marriage of the King’s Son, and among other points for comparison is this statement, ‘many are called, but few chosen’ (*see structure, page 97*). The one parable has to do with labourers; the other with guests. The one has to do with servants, particularly addressed to the apostles and after them to ‘every one that hath forsaken’, etc.; the other, addressed to the Pharisees, has to do with the nation of Israel and the invitation to the Marriage of the King’s Son.

Some have seen reference to Acts 2:15 in the ‘third hour’, to Acts 10:3,9 in the ‘sixth’ and ‘ninth’ hours. If there is any allusion to these events it would certainly indicate that those of Israel called early (Acts 2) would not receive more than such as Cornelius (Acts 10), or of those called at the eleventh hour, the overcomers of the seven churches of Revelation 2, 3 for example. Those who had worked all day would have been quite content with their penny had it not been for the graciousness displayed towards the last comers. The last to serve are also first to be paid and this again would teach that grace, not debt, is here operating. The words, ‘Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?’ are echoed in Romans 9:18-21, where the natural mind raises the question concerning the fairness of God’s dealings:

‘Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour (no honour)?’.

The parable is a rebuke to the bargaining spirit so prevalent among us. In our investigation of the purposes of God we must ever leave a margin for the truth supplied by the above passage. He is God. He has surely as much power as the potter. He will give ‘unto this last’ even as unto those who may seem by comparison to have merited more. It is only while we adopt the false system of ‘measuring ourselves by ourselves’ that we can feel any pride or satisfaction in our puny efforts, or of speaking of future rewards as though they were debts.

After speaking of His death and resurrection, the theme of the parable is again revived by the coming of the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping, and desiring a certain thing of Him. In response to the question, ‘What wilt thou?’ she said unto Him, ‘Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left, in Thy kingdom’. The Lord’s reply practically dismissed the request. They knew not what they asked. They may indeed suffer with Him, ‘but to sit on My right hand, and on My left, is not Mine to give, but for whom it is prepared of My Father’. If the reader will consider the parallel passages where this spirit is manifested, *e.g.*, Luke 22:24-30, he will see how humility in service is emphasized rather than the idea of earning a reward. There are other passages, indeed one in this very set of parables definitely gives the other side of the question, namely the parable of the Talents, where the one who has gained five talents and the one who has gained two receive precisely the same commendation, while the servant not using his talent has it taken away and given to the one that had ten in accord with the words, ‘For unto every one that hath shall be given’. This brings fresh lines of teaching before the mind. Again, in Luke 19, another principle is seen operating; he who had gained ten pounds

received authority over ten cities; he that had gained five pounds received authority over five cities, while the servant who had not used his money to profit is deprived of the pound, it being given to the one who had made ten pounds.

It must be noticed that these servants, even the one who lost all, are differentiated from 'those mine enemies' of Luke 19:27. 1 Corinthians 3:15, 'he shall suffer loss, but *he himself* shall be saved, yet so as by fire', and the parallel, should be noticed. It will be found that the 'servants' and 'enemies' brought together in the one parable of the pounds in Luke 19, are treated separately in the two corresponding parables of Matthew - the Labourers (20) and the Guests (22). The parable of Matthew 20 requires practically no explanation; it is easily read in the light of the context which we have sought to indicate. Its parallel and connection with the last verse of chapter 19 are of great importance, and as an aid to further study we suggest the following points of comparison.

- A 19:27. 'We have forsaken all, what shall we have therefore?'
- B 19:28. 'Ye shall sit on twelve thrones', etc.
- C 19:29. 'And every one that hath forsaken ... shall receive a hundred-fold'.
- D 19:30. 'Many first shall be last and the last first'.
- A 20:1-8. Hire of labourers.
- B 20:1-9. Agreement to pay a penny, or that which is right.
- C 20:14. 'I will give unto this last even as unto thee'.
- D 20:16. 'The last first, and first last. For many be called, but few chosen'.

(13)

The Two Sons and the Vineyard

Matthew 21:28-32

We have already pointed out that the central theme developed enlarged and illustrated in this set of parables is service with reference to the kingdom, and that sometimes it is viewed nationally, sometimes individually. Three parables use the illustration of the vineyard, but the vineyard as a place of service, not as a place of growth. In other words, the emphasis is not on the thought that those addressed are members *of* the true vine, but on those who are servants and labourers *in* the vineyard. In 20:1-16 the idea uppermost is the difference of service, yet the equality of the reward. In 21:28-32 it is not degrees of service, but the sharp contrast between serving or not serving, while in 21:33-46 the emphasis is the wickedness of serving oneself and of robbing God. It is of further importance to a true interpretation that we observe the close connection that is intended between the two parables in Matthew 21. This will be made evident by noticing the structure as follows:

Matthew 21:23-46

THE RELATION OF THE TWO PARABLES

- A 23. Chief Priests and Elders.
- B 23-25. **a** Question. 'By what authority?'
 - b** Question regarding John's baptism.
- C 26. **c** We fear the multitude.
 - d** All hold John as a prophet.
- D 28-32. **e** The Parable.
 - PARABLE OF **f** The Question - 'Whether of the twain?'
 - TWO SONS. **g** The Answer - 'They say unto Him,
 - The first'.
 - h** Jesus saith - Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom *before you*.
 - i** Statement concerning John's baptism.
- D 33-44. **e** The Parable.
 - PARABLE OF **f** The Question - 'What will he do?'

THE WICKED *g* The Answer - 'They say unto Him,
HUSBANDMEN He will destroy'.
 h Jesus saith - 'The kingdom of God taken
 from you and given to a people
 producing fruit'.
 i Question and statement regarding
 'The stone'.

A 45. Chief Priests and Pharisees.

B 45. Perception - 'He spake of them'.

C 46. *c* They feared the multitude.

d They held him as a prophet.

It will be observed that, like so many parables, this one of the Two Sons was given partly as a result of the questions of the chief priests and elders. They asked, 'By what authority, and who gave the authority' to the Lord to perform the miracles that attested His Messiahship. His reply took them back to the testimony of John the Baptist. We often lose sight of the prime object of John's baptism. Matthew 3 is devoted to the beginning of John's ministry, and the concluding verses show us that its goal was the manifesting of the Son of God. This is plainly expressed in the account given in John's Gospel. John 1:19-34 tells of the questions put to John by the Jews, and John's answers. John said:

'This is He concerning Whom I said, After me cometh a man, who has become before me, because He (was) before me. And I knew Him not, but in order that He might be made manifest to Israel, I am come baptizing in water ... He who sent me to baptize in water, He said unto me, Upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding upon Him, the same is He who baptizeth in holy spirit, and I have seen and testified that this One is the Son of God' (Author's translation).

John 1:35-51 gives us some examples of those who received this testimony. The Pharisees, however, set this counsel aside, not being baptized of John. Luke 7:29-35 shows us the two classes that are set forth under the image of the two sons:

'All the people that heard Him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the Lawyers frustrated the counsel of God with regard to themselves, being not baptized of him' (Author's translation).

The two sons in Luke 15 set forth the same people and lesson. We must be careful to keep within the limits of the divine Word. Much of our failure to understand the Word results from that mischievous practice of taking that which is true of the particular as true of the whole. Many words are addressed to '*this generation*'. Matthew 11:16, 'Whereunto shall I liken this *generation*?'; 12:39, 'an evil *generation* seeketh after a sign'; 12:41,42, 'The men of Nineveh, and the Queen of the South shall rise in judgment with this *generation*'; 12:45, 'The last state of that man is worse than the first; even so shall it be with this wicked *generation*'; 16:4, 'A wicked and adulterous *generation* seeketh after a sign'. So in Mark and Luke. In Luke 7:31, the Pharisees' attitude toward John the Baptist and the Lord is introduced by the words, 'Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this *generation*? and to what are they like?' In Luke the Pharisees are likened to peevish, refractory children. In Matthew 21 they are likened to a disobedient son.

'But how does this seem to you? A man had two sons: coming unto the first, he said, Son, go, today, work in my vineyard. And he answering said, I (will) do it, and went not. And coming unto the second he said the same. And he answering said, I will not; but afterwards repenting he went. Which of the two did the will of the father? They say, The latter. Jesus saith unto them, *Verily I say unto you, the tax collectors and the harlots go before you into the kingdom of God.* For John came unto you in a way of righteousness, and you believed him not; but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; but you having seen it, did not afterward repent so as to believe him' (Author's translation).

The difference between the words of Matthew 21:31, 'go before', and those of 21:41, 'miserably destroy', must be kept clear. 'Go before', as used by Matthew, never means going before to the *exclusion* of others, 2:9; 14:22;

21:9,31; 26:32 and 28:7 are all the occurrences of the word. There are other passages where more drastic words are used.

‘Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matt. 8:11,12).

A superficial reading may leave us with the idea that the message of Matthew 8:11,12 is practically the same as that of 21:31. This is not so, however. With the inspired precision of Holy Scripture, one passage says, ‘cast out’, the other says, ‘go before’. The one says, ‘the kingdom of *heaven*’, the other says, ‘the kingdom of *God*’.

Now, while the parallel passage of Luke 13:28 uses the words ‘kingdom of God’, we must not forget that Matthew uses the two expressions, and it is for us to observe the difference. Taking Matthew's witness as complete in itself, we may learn that, difficult as it may be for our limited knowledge to enable us to grasp it, a difference is intended. Matthew tells us that some of the children of the kingdom will be cast out of the kingdom of the *heavens*, but he does not say they will be cast out of the kingdom of *God*, but that the despised publicans will ‘go before’ them. The kingdom of God is infinitely wider than the kingdom of the heavens. The generation whose carcasses strewed the wilderness, who failed to enter into the land, may be used as an illustration of the distinction intended. They were cast out of the kingdom of heaven, but not necessarily out of the kingdom of God. For them Psalm 90 was written, and numbered with them was Moses himself, who though shut out of the land of promise, was not cast out of the wider sphere of God's love.

Repentance was the great emphatic note of John the Baptist and the Lord with reference to the kingdom of the heavens. Repentance involved *deeds* as well as *words*. To the Pharisees and Sadducees John had to say, ‘Bring forth therefore *fruits* worthy of repentance, and think not to say ...’ (Matt. 3:8,9). Here, as in the parable of the Two Sons, we have the contrast between ‘saying’ and ‘doing’. The omission from the parable of the penalty falling upon the unrepentant son is noteworthy. In other parables which are somewhat parallel, ‘outer darkness’ and ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ are spoken of. Here, a milder case is intended, ‘the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God *before* you’. To observe the distinction which Scripture draws between different *servants* is an important item in true interpretation. While many will not be *lost*, they shall *suffer loss*, and this parable of the Two Sons seems to have that aspect before it. This parable is not intended to teach the way of salvation, and failure to realize its primary setting, as in the case of most of the parables, has led to serious evangelical errors. We may all, nevertheless, take heed to the lesson and see to it that, by grace, we are not ‘hearers of the word only’, but doers also.

(14)

The Marriage of the King's Son

Matthew 22:1-14

It will be of service if we make an extract from the structure of the parables of Matthew 16 to 25 (page 97), and exhibit the correspondence that exists between the parable of the ‘Householder and Vineyard’ and that of the ‘Marriage of the King's Son’.

B 20:1-16 THE HOUSEHOLDER AND VINEYARD.
The Call of the Labourers:

(1) Early.	}	Many
(2) Third hour.		called,
(3) Sixth and ninth hours.		but few
(4) Eleventh hour.		chosen.

B 22:1-14 THE MARRIAGE OF KING'S SON.
The Call to the Guests:

(1) Bid those who were bidden.	}	Many
(2) Again tell them.		called,
(3) Go therefore to highways.		but few

(4) The wedding garment.) chosen.

It will be seen that we have something of a parallel, yet a contrast, for instead of a householder we have a certain king, and instead of labourers we have guests. The concluding words of each parable, however, are the same in the Authorized Version, 'Many called, but few chosen'. The retention of these words, however, in Matthew 20:16 is extremely doubtful, and we may be on more certain ground if we say that the closing words of the Parable of the Labourers are, 'So the last shall be first, and the first last', while the closing words of the Parable of the Marriage Feast are, 'For many are called, but few are chosen'.

The parable, like those which have already been considered, was addressed to the Pharisees (*cf.* 21:45, and 22:1). 'Jesus answered, and spake unto them *again* by parables'. It will be noticed, by the use of the word 'again', that in the Parables of the Householder, the Wicked Husbandmen, and the Marriage Feast, there is an emphasis upon the fact that an action was repeated.

20:5. 'Again, he went out about the sixth and ninth hour', after having hired two sets before.

21:36. 'Again, he sent other servants, more than the first', after the first messengers were beaten and killed.

22:4. 'Again he sent forth other servants', after the refusal to come to the feast.

This element of long-suffering and renewal of invitation is a feature that is essentially a part of the parable. Let us first of all examine the figures used, and then attempt with the knowledge gained to understand its import.

The characters introduced are, a king, his son, servants and guests. The parable centres upon a marriage feast. This parable contains the first reference to a marriage feast in the New Testament, and apart from this the word occurs but once more in Matthew, namely in 25:10. It is the same word that comes in Revelation 19:7,9, and is connected by the added word 'supper' of the latter verse to the parallel parable of Luke 14:16.

The king's son of course is Christ Himself, and the marriage feast is the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19). It will be seen that the servants of the king go out three times, twice to the same people, and once, after the destruction of their city, into the highways. Those to whom the servants went the first time are called, 'them that were bidden'. The expression is almost a title, and is rendered, 'the persons invited', by Darby. The chief thought is that the servants did not give the original invitation, but that it had been given already. They went out to invite them that had been invited. This message met with refusal. Again the king sent the message of invitation adding the words:

'Tell them that have been invited, behold, I have prepared my dinner, my bullocks and the fatlings having been killed, and all things are ready, come unto the marriage' (Matt. 22:4 Author's translation).

These added words are by no means accidental. These two invitations, together with their differences, give us in parable form the ministries that occupy the period commencing with John the Baptist and ending with the close of the Acts of the apostles. 'Them that were bidden' are the people of Israel. Readers of these pages will not need citations from the Scriptures to prove or to demonstrate this statement. John the Baptist, the last of the prophets according to the Old Testament order, announces the good news, 'The kingdom of the heavens hath drawn nigh', and further, is spoken of as 'The friend of the Bridegroom'. The Lord Himself, the twelve, and the seventy continue this witness. We know how sadly true the words of the parable are, 'they would not come'. The second invitation commences with the Acts of the apostles. There, Peter and the other apostles, and those associated ('them that heard Him', Heb. 2:3,4), went forth *again* with the invitation, this time being able to add, 'all things are ready'.

The message of Matthew differs from that of the Acts in this particular. Matthew 10 for instance shows us the servants going forth to proclaim the good news, but Matthew 16:21,22 makes it clear that those who carried that invitation could not have said 'all things are ready', for not only was Peter ignorant of the fact that the Lord must 'suffer ... and be killed, and be raised again the third day', but he even urged the Lord to abandon the idea. Peter's attitude in the Acts is very different. Every recorded address that he gives has the suffering, the death and the resurrection of the Lord as its basis:

'But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all His prophets, *that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled*. Repent ye therefore' (Acts 3:18,19).

The initial ministry, that of John the Baptist, was to '*prepare* the way of the Lord' (Matt. 3:3), '*prepare*' being the same word as '*ready*'. It was also '*to make ready* for the Lord a prepared people' (Luke 1:17). Note, not to make everyone ready, but to make ready a *prepared people*. In Revelation 19:7 we read:

'Let us rejoice and exult, and give Him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife has made herself *ready*' (Author's translation).

And in 21:2:

'And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heavens from God, *prepared* as a bride adorned for her husband' (Author's translation).

In the second ministry, that of the Acts of the apostles, the servants who gave the invitation could indeed lay emphasis upon the fact that all things were ready. 'But they neglected it'. The word translated 'made light of' is the word which occurs in Hebrews 2:3:

'How shall we escape if we have been negligent of so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord (the first invitation), and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him (the second invitation), God also bearing witness both with signs, and wonders, and with divers miracles, and distributions of holy spirit, according to His will?' (Author's translation).

This is the second invitation of the parable. That 'the signs, wonders, divers miracles, and distributions of the Holy Spirit' are to be read as equivalent to 'All things are ready', may be seen by reading Acts 2:1-4,22,23,43; 3:12-16; 4:9-12 (note the reference to the stone rejected by the builders, and Matthew 21:42, which immediately precedes the parable of the Marriage Feast), and 5:30.

What was the result of this added testimony? 'They neglected it'. The parable says that 'one went to his own field, and one unto his traffic'. Readers may remember that in the Parable of the Sower the third sowing indicated the ministry of the Acts (without necessarily precluding the thought that, at the end, all these sowings will be true of the period then). That third sowing 'fell among thorns, and the thorns choked them', which by interpretation means:

'That which among thorns being sown, this is he who hears the word and the cares of this age and the delusion of riches, choke the word and it (he) becomes unfruitful' (Matt. 13:22 Author's translation).

This same cause is expressed in the words, 'his own field', and 'his traffic'. Here is the divine statement as to the failure of the second invitation. This is not all, however. While some 'did not care for it', but preferred the things of this age, 'the rest' violently opposed. 'They seized the servants, insulted and killed them'. The Lord Jesus had told His disciples that if the world had hated Him, it would hate them, that He sent them forth as sheep amid wolves. That the days would come when they should be delivered up to be afflicted, hated and killed. This we find in measure in the Acts. Some were imprisoned (Acts 4:3; 5:18; 8:3; 9:1,13,21). Stephen was stoned (Acts 7:59); James was killed with the sword (Acts 12:2). At the first rejection, which culminated in the betrayal and brutal death of the Lord Jesus, the Lord in wondrous mercy withheld the punishment of which they themselves had thought themselves worthy (Matt. 21:41), and sent to those who were guilty of such sins the second ministry of pardon and invitation. The neglect of this 'so great salvation', accompanied by the ill-treatment of His servants, was not a second time passed over. This time they had 'crucified unto themselves afresh the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame', and 'that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned' (Heb. 6:8). They had 'trodden under foot the Son of God'. 'For if they escaped not who refused Him that spake *on earth* (first invitation), much more shall not we, if we turn away from Him that speaketh *from heaven*' (Heb. 12:25) (second invitation). And so we read:

'But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city' (Matt. 22:7).

Between verses 7 and 8 of Matthew 22 comes the dispensation of the Mystery, just as it comes between 'the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God'. When the Lord once again takes up the threads of this purpose, the words of verse 8 onwards become true. 'The wedding feast is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy'. Because of their rejection of the head stone of the corner, 'the kingdom of God will be taken from them, and given to a nation producing the fruits of it'. Because of their refusal and neglect they made

themselves 'unworthy' and failed. The day will come when they shall see those who have come from the east and the west, and from the north and the south, sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens, but themselves cast out. They knew not the day of their visitation. To no generation of Israel or of men had such exceptional favours been given. They proved unworthy, and forfeited their place. The day will come when the dispersed sons of Abraham will be gathered from the four corners of the earth to sit down in the kingdom. Those who so miserably failed during the two ministries of the Gospels and the Acts will be there, but not in a position of blessedness such as shall those who have thus been gathered in. Weeping and gnashing of teeth (terms that demand a separate study) accompany the vision they have. They were not worthy. It is interesting to note that the word *axios*, 'worthy', and the word *hetoimazo*, 'to make ready', occur prominently in Matthew and in Revelation. *Axios* occurs seven times in the Revelation. *Hetoimazo* occurs seven times in the Gospel of Matthew, and seven times in the Revelation. It seems that there is a connection between the being made ready, and the being worthy.

If we view the parable and its teaching from the standpoint of the Epistles of the Mystery, we shall be conscious of a difficulty to reconcile the very distinct aspects of truth presented. If we keep within the sphere of the *kingdom*, the teaching will be clear. In Matthew 10 the twelve who were sent forth were to enquire in each village for a 'worthy person', and a 'worthy house'. Verses 37,38 tell us what constituted 'worthiness'. *Axios* occurs seven times in the Acts. There we read that the Jews 'judged themselves to be *unworthy* of aionion life' to the blessing of the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-52; compare verse 51 with Matthew 10:14), and that Paul had echoed the words of John the Baptist (Matt.3:8) in urging 'fruit *worthy* of repentance' (Acts 26:20).

In Revelation 3:4 we read of some who shall walk with the Lord in white (robes), 'for they are worthy', and in 16:6 of some who shall have blood to drink because 'they are worthy'. Of similar import is Luke 7:4 and 12:48. It is evident from the usage of the word that it carries with it the idea of meriting or deserving. This is further substantiated by referring to the following:

'Those who are *accounted worthy* to obtain that age ...' (Luke 20:35 Author's translation).

'And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your heart be burdened with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of life, and that day come upon you unawares ... watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be *accounted worthy* to escape all these things ... and to stand before the Son of man' (Luke 21:34-36 Author's translation).

Here is a close parallel to the condition of heart indicated by 'the one to his own field, the other to his traffic', and 'the cares of this age, and the deceitfulness of riches'. Such attitude of mind is observed in the 'wicked servant' of Matthew 24:48-51, where the unexpected coming of the Lord, and the intemperance of the servant, are brought together. It will be observed further that the statement concerning the fate of the wicked servant is immediately followed by the words, 'Then shall the kingdom of the heavens be likened unto ten virgins', etc., which introduces under another set of figures the two classes of those who have entrance into the marriage feast in view. The same thought (unreadiness) is noticeable; it is *that and that alone* which distinguishes the two classes of virgins.

In the parable before us, those who finally are gathered together, who are found in the highways, are 'bad and good'; worthiness is no longer spoken of. These seem to be the elect, who are gathered together by the angels from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. A somewhat parallel change is seen in Luke 14:16-24, after the servants had been sent to say, 'Come, for all things are now ready', and those who were invited made various excuses of a shallow nature. The Lord is angry with them, and sends out first to the streets, and lanes *of the city*, and causes to be brought in the poor, the maimed, and the halt, and the blind, and subsequently sends as far as the highways and hedges, *compelling* them to come in. No worthiness attaches to these, neither are they invited, they are 'brought' and they are 'compelled'.

The scenes of the parable in Matthew 22 change at verse 11, and we are taken into the feast room. The King enters to see the guests, and observes one not clothed with a wedding garment. Upon being questioned as to his entry in that condition, the man is speechless. The King gives orders to his servants to bind him hand and foot, and to thrust him into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The reason that is given, and with which the parable closes, is, 'For there are many *invited*, but few *elected*'.

The wedding garment given by the King to all who were brought into the feast was an outward symbol of election. The Lord had said, 'Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of the heavens'. 'Fine linen is (or represents) the righteous acts of the saints' (Rev. 19:8). Peter says to the dispersion, 'Give all diligence, add to your faith ... give diligence to make your calling and election sure' (2 Pet. 1:5-11). Just as fruit is the sign of growth and life, so the wedding garment is the sign of election.

There are other aspects to be considered, and further truth to be discovered along this course which will be the more clearly understood by continuing the study of the parables rather than by attempting an exhaustive study of this one. By way of application, it is well for us, although having something very different from the marriage supper of the Lamb before us either as bride or guests, to remember the exhortation to 'walk worthy', and to note particularly the reference to 'reigning', a 'crown', and a 'prize' in the Prison Epistles.

(15)

The Barren Fig Tree

Matthew 24:32-51

We now approach the concluding set of parables in the Gospel of Matthew.

Two kinds of servants (Matt. 24:32 to 25:30).

A a 24:32-44. FIG TREE AND NOAH.

Coming as a thief while the goodman slept.

'Ye know not what hour your Lord doth come'.

b 24:45-51. THE FAITHFUL AND EVIL SERVANTS.

The one made ruler, the other has his portion with the hypocrites.-

'Weeping and gnashing of teeth'

a 25:1-13. THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS.

'Ye know neither the day nor the hour'.

b 25:14-30. THE FAITHFUL AND UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS.

The reckoning. The one made ruler, the other cast into outer darkness.-

'Weeping and gnashing of teeth'.

It will be observed that the first two parables are introductory and preparatory to the more important and detailed parables of chapter 25. The statement that follows the reference to the days of Noah, 'Ye know not what hour your Lord doth come', is echoed in the words that conclude the parable of the Ten Virgins, 'Ye know neither the day nor the hour'. So is it with the other pair. Let us then, while we examine 24:32-44, remember that it is providing a setting and preparing us for the parable of the Ten Virgins.

The parable divides itself into two parts, both parts leading up to the thought that the day and hour of the coming of the Son of man are not within the knowledge of man, and therefore watchfulness is imperative. This will be seen the better if we consider the structure of the parable as follows:

Matthew 24:32-42

A₁ 32-35. THE FIG. Its lessons concerning what may be known.

A₁ 32,33. a Branch tender, and puts forth leaves.

b Ye know that summer is near.

a When ye shall see all these things.

b Ye know that He is near at the doors.

B₁ 34,35. c This generation will not have passed away.

d Till all these things shall have come to pass.

c The heaven and the earth shall pass away.

d But My words shall not pass away.

B₁ 36. WHAT NO ONE KNOWS.

Luke's Gospel provides another reference which supplements the statements of Matthew.

The 'fruit' is explained by John the Baptist:

‘Bring forth therefore *fruits* meet *for repentance* ... and now also the *axe* is laid unto the root of the trees ...’ (Matt. 3:8,10).

As the days shorten, and the coming again of the Son of man draws near, the fig tree begins to show signs of life. The fig tree is putting forth its leaves. Once again eyes are turning to Jerusalem and Palestine. We may live to see great things transpiring in connection with Israel and the Holy Land. Luke 21:29 adds the words, 'Behold the fig tree, *and all the trees*'. This addition refers to the 'times of the Gentiles' of verse 24. The times of the Gentiles will 'be fulfilled' when Israel comes forth from its long night of rejection.

In Matthew 24:34 we read, ‘This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled’. The expression, ‘this generation’, must not be quickly disposed of as having reference only to those who lived during what we call the lifetime of a generation - it carries with it something more than length of time - it indicates *character* also.

Sixteen times do we read of 'this generation' in the Gospels, besides other expressions like, 'an evil generation'; 'adulterous and sinful *generation*'; the men of Nineveh and the queen of the south shall rise in judgment with this *generation*, and shall condemn it'; 'of this *generation* shall be required the blood of ALL the prophets which was shed from the foundation (or overthrow) of the world' (Matt. 23:34-36; Luke 11:49,50). This seems to indicate something more than a reference to those who were born and lived during the time of the Lord on earth. Hebrews 3:10 speaks of the Lord being grieved with 'that *generation*', and the reader will find many parallels in the Old Testament. Further, the words of Colossians 1:26; speaking of the mystery being hid 'from the ages, and from the *generations*', will help us further in seeing that the word has a wider meaning than the primary idea.

The words of verse 34, 'be fulfilled', should be rendered, 'begin to be', or 'may have begun to arise'. If we glance back to verses 29-31 we shall see what was to 'begin to arise'. The sun was to be darkened, the moon was not to give her light, the stars were to fall from heaven, the powers of the heavens were to be shaken. Some may say that these things have not yet taken place. True, but they 'began to arise', although cut off through Israel's failure. This may seem an assertion without foundation, but we believe a comparison of two passages of Scripture will help us.

The margins of most of our Bibles refer us back from Matthew 24:29 to Joel. In Joel 2:10,28-31, we read words very similar to those of Matthew 24:29. There, wonders shown in heaven have a prelude on earth. The spirit was to be poured out upon all flesh.

'Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come' (Joel 2:28-31).

Peter on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 positively declared that the outpouring of the Spirit then manifest was what had been prophesied by Joel. He not only quotes the references of Joel to the spiritual gifts, but makes a complete quotation concerning the whole of these wonders with reference to the sun, moon and stars. In all there are fourteen items. Seven of them have been fulfilled; seven of them await fulfilment. They will be fulfilled when Israel repents (Acts 3:19-21). The coming of the Son of man is preceded by these things.

The 'generation' of Matthew 24:34 is in view in Acts 2:40, 'Save yourselves from *this* untoward generation'. It is perfectly true therefore to say that the generation alive during the ministry of Christ, and during the period covered by the Acts, did not pass away without these things 'beginning to be'. They will be resumed when the time comes, and Revelation 1 goes on from Acts 2 and 3, the interval of Israel's rejection not being reckoned. Just as surely as the Lord could say, 'This generation shall not pass', so He could say, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away'.

'The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up' (2 Pet. 3:10).

Here the connection with Matthew 24:35 and 43 is evident, strengthened moreover by Peter's allusions to the Flood and to Noah.

Some men, not seeing the break that has come in the dispensational dealings of God, have said, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' They maintain, with wilful ignorance, that all things have continued right through without a break since the beginning of the creation. Their wilful ignorance of the interposition of judgment at Genesis 1:2, and again at the Flood, prevents them from seeing that once again the Lord has allowed a break to come in, in the unfolding of His purpose. 'The Lord is not slack concerning His promise'. The thousand years or so of Israel's blindness are but a day; the apostle Paul in all his epistles written after Acts 28, treats of the purpose of God in the long interval between Acts and Revelation.

Reader, the fig tree seems about to bud. If so, the present parenthetical dispensation draws near to its conclusion. While we see no prophetic word concerning this period in Matthew 24, yet by application we may learn the same insistent message, 'Watch therefore, for ye know not the hour'. We have considered the moral principle of the parable (the Fig Tree), and we will now consider the type (Noah and his days).

(16)

The Days of Noah

Matthew 24:37-41

In the study of the parable of the Fig Tree, we found that its teaching was echoed, not by another parable, but by reference to a typical event in history, 'As it was in the days of Noah'.

The book of Genesis gives a vivid picture of the days of Noah. Genesis 6 has been robbed of its significance by the failure to see that 'The sons of God' are not men but angels. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Psalm 29:1; 89:6; Daniel 3:25 (see verse 28), use this title of angels. The Septuagint of Genesis 6:2 renders the words 'sons of God' by 'angels'. Jude 6 makes it clear that some of the angels fell. What that fall involved is hinted in the same verse, 'they left their own *oiketerion*'. This word occurs again in 2 Corinthians 5:2 where it has reference to resurrection. Whether it means there a resurrection *body*, or a heavenly abode, we are not at the moment prepared to say.

In Jude 7 further light is given; the sin of the angels was 'in like manner' to the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Further, 1 Peter 3:20 and 2 Peter 2:5 link this fall with the days of Noah. The result of this unseemly irruption led on to the corruption and violence that necessitated the Flood. 'The giants', or as the Hebrew calls them, the nephilim, were monsters, and had to be destroyed first by the Flood, and afterwards by the sword of Israel. The sons of Anak were of the nephilim (Num. 13:33). The giant cities of Bashan, and the gigantic buildings still standing from antiquity testify to their skill and strength.

'And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created ... but Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God' (Gen. 6:7-9).

Not only was Noah a second Enoch in that he 'walked with God', but he, like Enoch, witnessed against the ungodliness of the people, and 'God took him' by means of the ark, as completely as He took Enoch by translation. The words 'perfect in his generations' should read 'uncontaminated as to his pedigree'. God had preserved the line from Adam through Noah from the awful Satanic attempt to prevent the coming Seed of the woman. But why all this? How does this help our understanding of Matthew 24? Scripture gives no uncertain sound regarding the activity of evil spirits and fallen angels during the time of the end. The apostle Paul tells us that 'in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing *spirits*, and doctrines of *demons*' (1 Tim. 4:1). Spirit and angelic interference are prominent in the book of the Revelation, for example, the unclean spirits, spirits of demons who work miracles and who gather the kings of the earth to their destruction (Rev. 16:13,14). This passage is immediately followed by the warning, 'Behold, I come as a thief, blessed is he that watcheth', and so is linked still more with Matthew 24. Parable, prophecy and type tell us of days that shall be 'as the days of Noah'.

The record given in Genesis 6, 7 and 8 is full of instruction. We will draw attention to one point more, namely, the marks of time:

- (1) Noah's age - 600 years (Gen. 7:6).
- (2) Forty days and nights the rain was upon the earth (Gen. 7:12).
- (3) The Ark rested in the seventh month (Gen. 8:4).
- (4) And on the 17th day of the month (Gen. 8:4).
- (5) The removal of the cover of the Ark was in the six hundred and FIRST year, in the FIRST month, the FIRST day of the month (Gen. 8:13).

The 600 years of Noah's life seem to indicate the end of man, six being the number of man. It is considered by many that the age of the world up to the coming again of Christ will be 6,000 years. The forty days and nights refer to a period of judgment and testing. The resting of the ark in the seventh month typifies the millennium, the thousand years, the 'rest' (*sabbatismos*) that remaineth unto the people of God. The 17th of the seventh month is the 17th of Nisan, three days after Passover, bringing us to the typical day of resurrection. The threefold emphasis on the word *first* in connection with the drying of the ground is very suggestive.

Not only shall the character of the times be similar, but the character of the people shall be the same, 'For as in the days that were before the Flood ...'. There we find men going about their affairs with absolute disregard of the warnings of Noah or the building of the ark. So we find that Scripture tells us that in the days that are coming men will be in the field, women at the mill; one shall be taken and the other left. Many expositors read this passage as though it teaches that the *one taken* is taken away for judgment, and the one left is left for blessing. A superficial connection is also seen between the 'taking away' by the Flood, and the being 'taken' by the invisible hand of God. This is not the meaning, however. Those taken are taken into the ark of the *parousia*, those left are left to the storms of tribulation.

The word used of the taking away by the Flood is the same used of depriving the unprofitable servant of his talent (Matt. 25:29). The other word, 'one shall be taken', means to take to one's self as a companion, and indicates the conferring of a favour. When the Lord selected Peter, James and John to view the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1), and to see the raising of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:40), or to witness the agony in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37), He used this word 'to take' in each case. Further, the point seems definitely settled by John 14:3, where the Lord says, 'I will *receive* you unto myself' (same word). Hence, in Matthew 24 one shall be received by the Lord; the other left. To be left is a term of judgment. 'Let them alone' was said of the blind guides (Matt. 15:14); 'left' as a desolate house (23:38); 'forsook' as did the disciples (26:56); and, in conjunction with 'to take', compare John 14:3 with 14:18, 'I will *receive*', 'I will not *leave* you comfortless'. The obvious conclusion is that those not taken will be left comfortless.

Revelation 12 brings before us in vision and symbol the same teaching as Matthew 24:40, and in our book *This Prophecy* we have shown clearly that the 'man child' does not refer to the birth and ascension of Christ. Revelation 2:26,27 gives a clue:

'He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power (authority) over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron'.

The institution of this authority takes place when the man child is caught up 'to God and His throne', for

'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne' (Rev. 3:21).

The words of Revelation 3:3,4 are also related to the same time and event:

'If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names ... they are worthy'.

The words of Luke 21:36 seem to refer to the same time and people:

'Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man'.

While the hope and the reward of the various bodies or callings of believers differ, there is a unity of principle regarding them that it is well for us to observe. 1 Thessalonians 4 speaks of the same period as Matthew 24, and 1 Thessalonians 5 equally warns against being found sleeping (cf. Mark 13:35,36), and speaks of the coming as like a thief in the night. We cannot shut our eyes to the conditions that are attached to the participation in the reward aspect of the believer's service (which is the aspect of Matthew 24 and 25). Matthew 24:42, Luke 21:36, and Revelation 3:3, 'Watch therefore', or as in the case of the householder and virgins, 'readiness' is the word. By confounding the hope with the prize, either of the church, or of the heavenly calling, or of Israel, a great deal of wrong teaching has arisen. One system maintains that by reason of grace all believers will of necessity escape the great tribulation; others, seeing a line of teaching urging watchfulness, readiness, and being accounted worthy, etc., say that some only will escape. These subjects are too great to be decided upon here. They demand a separate study.

It is important however to note that the parables that follow in chapter 25 emphasize the need of 'readiness' (verse 10), 'faithfulness' (verse 21), and 'kindness' (verse 40) as a prerequisite for entering the marriage feast, for being made ruler over many things, and for entering into the kingdom. These varying degrees and aspects are summed up in the word 'taken' (Matt. 24:40), and in the appointment of verse 47. The sad alternatives, outside the

marriage feast, outer darkness, and *aionion* fire, are summed up in the word 'left' (Matt. 24:40), and in the appointment of verse 51.

The hope and prize of the One Body (Ephesians 1 and Philippians 3) are nowhere in view in Matthew 24 or 25. Nevertheless, we do well to take heed to the words, 'What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch'.

(17)

The Faithful and the Evil Servants

Matthew 24:45-51

The structure given on page 97 shows that the faithful and the evil servants of Matthew 24:45-51 are balanced by the faithful and the unprofitable servants of Matthew 25:14-30. What we shall learn therefore in considering the closing verses of Matthew 24 will be of service when we examine the parallel parable in chapter 25.

We would call attention at the outset to the fact that in these parables *salvation* is not the theme. There is always a tendency to generalize where God has particularized. We see this with such subjects as the old idea of a general resurrection and a general judgment. We know there are many resurrections and several judgments in the future. The generalizing of all of the promises as though the 'Church' had a monopoly, and the generalizing of the varied sections of the purpose of the ages will likewise occur to us. We have not so clearly seen as yet, however, sufficient discrimination attempted by the majority in connection with the difference that Scripture makes regarding *salvation* and *service*. This is particularly noticeable in the way that the epistle to the Hebrews is treated. Its exhortations to continue steadfast to the end, and to endure; its invitation to come to the throne of grace to find *help in time of need*; its examples of faith, none of these has reference to the sinner needing salvation, but the saint needing perfecting. However, we cannot go into Hebrews here, but we have said so much because *service*, its reward or penalty, and not *salvation*, is the theme of these parables.

The figures introduced are 'a faithful and a wise servant', and an 'evil servant', but servants both. We cannot agree with the idea that the evil servant was one only in imagination and was not a servant at all. The structure of the parable is as follows:

Matthew 24:45-51

- | | | | |
|---|-----|--------------------------------|---|
| A | 45. | THE FAITHFUL AND WISE SERVANT. | |
| | B | 45-47. HIS DEEDS AND REWARD. | <p>a Made ruler over house.</p> <p>b Give meat.</p> <p>c Blessed, when lord cometh.</p> <p>b Found so doing.</p> <p>a Made ruler over all goods.</p> |
| A | 48. | THE EVIL SERVANT. | |
| | B | 48-51. HIS DEEDS AND PENALTY. | <p>d Says, lord delays coming.</p> <p>e Smites fellow servants.</p> <p>f Eats with drunken.</p> <p>d Lord comes unexpectedly.</p> <p>e Cut off.</p> <p>f Portion with hypocrites.</p> |

The close parallel between the deeds and the reward is worthy of note. The servant who as ruler is found 'so doing' faithfully, is rewarded by being 'made ruler' over many things. The servant who says in his heart, 'My lord delayeth his coming', is overtaken by the unexpected coming of his lord. He who 'smites' is himself 'cut off'. He who finds his companions 'with' the drunken, finds his portion 'with' the hypocrites. In all this we have the same truth that the apostle Paul gives in more than one epistle, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'. Galatians 6 shows that it is possible for a believer not only to sow to the spirit, but to sow to the flesh; not only to reap *aionion* life, but to reap corruption. Matthew 24 shows the same thing. The first servant is called both *faithful*

and *prudent*. These titles, united here in the one example, are subdivided in the following chapter. We have the *prudent* virgins, and the good and *faithful* servant.

It has been suggested that the words 'Who then' should be taken as a figure called *Metonymy*, this particular example being the Metonymy of the Subject, when the subject, the thing, is put for that which is connected with it. If this be so the *meaning*, though not the translation, would be, 'How blessed is the faithful and prudent servant', etc. A further thought is that by the use of this rather strange expression the Lord intimates that there will be few such when the Son of man cometh. A reference to Luke 12:41,42 may give yet further light. The Lord in verses 35-40 speaks a parable, using the figure of the watching, waiting servant. Peter then says to the Lord:

'Speakest Thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, *Who then* is that faithful and wise (prudent) steward, etc' (Luke 12:41,42).

This seems to say that if Peter and the rest of the apostles did not come within the meaning of the words, who then could? The parable is followed by a statement concerning the few stripes and the many stripes that will be apportioned to fit the case of the well-informed and the ill-informed servants. The *prudent* and the *foolish* are brought together first in Matthew at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in connection with obeying or disobeying the words that the Lord had uttered - words not addressed to sinners needing salvation as is evident throughout. Luke 16:8 brings before us the prudence of the unjust steward. *Phronimos*, 'prudent', and *phroneo*, 'to think' are related. The usage of this word *phroneo* in the prison epistles is very suggestive. For example, this word is absent from Ephesians and 2 Timothy, occurs once only in Colossians (3:2), but is found ten times in Philippians. Now Philippians is not dealing with *salvation*, but *service*, not a free gift, but a prize, and this accords with the usage of prudence in Matthew. Faithfulness comes out prominently in this connection. Luke 16:10 says:

'He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much'

And again in Luke 19:17 the parallel with Matthew 24 is clear. To the overcomer in the book of the Revelation come the words, 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life'. Those who overcome with the victorious Lamb are, like Him, 'faithful' (Rev. 17:14; 19:11). Faithfulness to the trust committed, prudence born of watching and waiting for the coming Lord, these are the two outstanding features of the servant who receives commendation. The being made ruler over all the Master's goods finds a ready parallel in the life of Joseph, as indeed does all that is stated of the faithful servant. The reference to being made ruler comes out again in Matthew 25. This time the servant is not initially given to rule, but subsequently as a reward for his faithful use of the five talents, or the two talents, he is made ruler over five or two cities, and equally enters into the joy of his Lord, Who 'for the joy that was set before Him endured a cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God'. To the same effect is Philippians 2:5-9:

'Let this mind (*phroneo*) be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; Who, ... humbled Himself ... wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him'.

The state of heart of the bad servant is reflected in such passages as 2 Peter 3:3-14, where the scoffing of those who walk after their own lusts regarding the coming of the Lord, the reference to the Flood (see 2:5) and 'being found of Him without spot' are suggestive parallels to Matthew 24. The state of drunkenness is also likened to the condition of unwatchfulness that shall overtake those who are in darkness: 'for they that be drunken are drunken in the night' (see 1 Thess. 5:1-11).

The fate of the evil servant is 'to be cut asunder'. The word literally means to be cut in half, and has the meaning 'cut in pieces' in the Old Testament. There is no doubt as to the word itself. The question, however, is what does it mean? Are we to understand that the Lord will literally cut His evil servants into pieces? The word 'cut asunder' is *dichotomeo*, and occurs only here and in Luke 12:46. *Dicha* enters into the word *dichazo*, which is rendered 'set at variance' in Matthew 10:35, although the word literally means 'to divide into two parts'. *Temno* means 'to cut' and *apotome* is the Septuagint rendering of the word 'smote off' in Judges 5:26 (*Codex Alex.*). This word undergoes a change in some of its usages in the New Testament, for in Romans 11:22 we find *apotomia* rendered 'severity', and *apotomos* in Titus 1:13 'sharply', 2 Corinthians 13:10 'sharpness'. The idea of 'cutting' here is figurative and not literal or physical. This seems to be the meaning in Matthew 24:51. The severity of the punishment is emphasized by the usage of such a word. Further, the evil servant's portion is to be with the hypocrites.

The original meaning of the word *hupokrinomai* was ‘to represent another person by acting’ as the ancient players did by speaking from behind a mask. It is an easy transition to the meaning, ‘to feign, pretend, dissemble’ (see Luke 20:20). Peter acted hypocritically (Gal. 2:13) by withdrawing himself from the Gentiles. None could have heard the stern denunciations of woe to the ‘Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites’, as recorded in chapter 23 and not feel the severity of the punishment intended in 24:51. The words so solemnly uttered at other times of threatened judgment follow, ‘there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’. This is said in relation to the children of the kingdom being cast into outer darkness in Matthew 8:12, and in connection with the casting of all that offends out of the kingdom into a furnace of fire, and also at the severing of the wicked from the just in Matthew 13:42,50. The same is said when the man without the wedding garment is cast into outer darkness (Matt. 22:13), and again in the judgment of the unprofitable servant (25:30).

The six references to the gnashing of teeth are closely related, and the order of their occurrence should be noted:

- A 8:12. Kingdom. Reference to Gentiles in place of Israel.
- B 13:42,50. Tares, fish, end of age, and coming of Son of man.
- A 22:13. Marriage. Reference to Gentiles in place of Israel.
- B 24:51; 25:30. Evil and unprofitable servant, end of age, coming of Son of man.

In all these references loss of position in the kingdom rather than loss of salvation is in view. Salvation as is evangelically understood had never been propounded when Matthew 8 and 13 were uttered, for the Lord had not said a word about His death and resurrection (Matt. 16:21). The kingdom had been preached. Entry into it had been explained. Warning had been uttered, and this parable shows that the fact of being a servant does not render such immune from very severe punishment and loss. To have a portion among the hypocrites, instead of entering the joy of the Lord; to find the gate shut and access to the wedding feast denied; this causes the weeping and gnashing of teeth. ‘Blessed are they who are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb’. These will be the ready ones. Even the Bride ‘makes herself ready’ (Rev. 19:7).

We shall learn more concerning this line of teaching when we examine Matthew 25. Let us remember that grace does not mean or lead to irresponsibility, but rather constrains unto faithfulness in the little time we have left for fellowship with His sufferings.

(18)

The Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

The parable of the Ten Virgins expands and further explains the need for watchfulness and readiness that has already been uttered in Matthew 24:42, where similar words are used to those with which the parable of the Virgins closes. It is most important in considering the structure, to observe the way in which the verbs made up of *erchomai*, ‘to come’ or ‘to go’ occur, not only because they subdivide the parable for us, but, as we shall see, they form an important link with the next parable and continue the line of teaching. The verbs are *exerchomai*, ‘to go forth’, and ‘to go out’; *aperchomai*, ‘to go away’; *eiserchomai*, ‘to go in’; and *erchomai*, ‘to come’. Any structure that misses out these pivotal words will fail to demonstrate, as a structure should, the essential teaching.

Matthew 25:1-13

- A₁ 1-12. The Parable. Wise and foolish virgins.
- A₂ 13. Watch, ye know not.

The Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-12)

- A₁ 1. The ten virgins ‘went forth’ to meet the Bridegroom
(*exerchomai*).
- B₁ 2-4. Where they differed.
 - a Five were prudent.
 - b Five were foolish.

- b** Foolish took no oil.
a Prudent took oil.
- C₁ 5. Where they were alike. They *all* slumbered and slept.
- A₂ 6. The ten virgins bidden to 'go forth' to meet the Bridegroom (*exerchomai*).
- C₂ 7. Where they were alike. They *all* arose and trimmed.
- B₂ 8,9. Where they differed. **a** The foolish ask for oil.
b The prudent refuse.
- A₃ 10. The five unready ones 'went away' to buy (*aperchomai*).
- B₃ 10. The *Bridegroom* 'came' (*erchomai*).
- C₃ 10. The door was *shut*.
- A₄ 10. The five ready ones 'went in' to the marriage (*eiserchomai*).
- B₄ 11. The *others* 'came' (*erchomai*).
- C₄ 11. *Open* to us.

The parable opens with a note of time - *then*. The loose way in which this word is used in English has prevented many from seeing this parable in its true place. It does not say that all through the history of the Christian Church this has been the state of affairs, but it says, 'Then, at that time, the kingdom of the heavens will become like ten virgins'. It is important to remember that the Lord is still answering the question of the disciples raised in 24:3. They asked, 'When?' and 'What?' 'When shall these things be?' and 'What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and (what shall be the sign) of the *suntelia* (that period which is the gathering point of all things just before the end, *telos*) of the age?'. Matthew 24 and 25 supply the answers to these questions.

The 'When' is answered in verses 5-14 by 'Then shall the end come', and in verse 21, 'Then shall be great tribulation'. The 'What' as to the sign of the Lord's coming is answered in verse 27 by, 'As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west', and in verses 27-31 fuller details of the effect in the heavens are given. These answer the question concerning the sign of His coming. The 'What' as to the ending of the age is answered in the parable of the Fig Tree and the type of Noah. The Lord expands this section in the parable we are considering, and so *The Ten Virgins* commences, 'Then will the kingdom of the heavens be likened unto ten virgins'. Then at that time, in the days when the fig tree has put forth its leaves, and the days of Noah are being re-enacted, *then* the kingdom of the heavens will be comparable to ten virgins who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. Notice the statements: they took their lamps; they went out with the express object of meeting the bridegroom. There is no suggestion that the five foolish virgins were not as earnest as the wise. There is no suggestion that they were hypocrites or unbelievers. The whole point is that they were *unready, unprepared* - a warning not to sinners, but rather to saints.

The change from servants to virgins is also suggestive. Revelation 14:4 shows that in the Scriptures the title virgin may be applied to either sex, and indicates chastity and purity. Further, as immorality will have reached a fearful depth and will constitute once more a part of the religion of the end time, a very real separation is evidenced by the word. Yet further, the word is in some measure equivalent to the Old Testament reference to Noah, who was 'perfect in his pedigree'. The virgins of Revelation 14 have the Father's name written in their foreheads, in strong contrast to the idolatrous worshippers of the beast who have the number of the beast in their right hand, or forehead (Rev. 13:16). The reference to the teaching of Balaam (Rev. 2:14), and Jezebel (Rev. 2:20), beside the fearful things said of the woman, Babylon, all point to the same end. The kingdom of the heavens at that time will be found only among a separate people who are 'virgins'. The point of the parable is not questioning their virginity, nor their intentions, but their failure, their failure to *watch*.

Not every one who is a subject of the kingdom of the heavens will enter into the marriage supper of the Lamb. They that are *ready* go in. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 we have the hope of the believers of that period set out, and it includes a 'meeting' of the Lord in the air. Chapter 5 immediately develops along the line of Matthew 24 and 25. There we read of the 'coming as a thief in the night'; there, as in the days of Noah, when they say peace and safety, sudden destruction is at hand and escape is impossible. Watchfulness is urged in contrast to sleeping and drinking, just as in Matthew 24. Further, life together with the Lord is in no wise connected with watchfulness or sleepiness, just as readiness or unreadiness in no wise alters the virginity of those who went out to meet the Lord. This

principle obtains also in the Prison Epistles. For *living* with Him depends upon having died with Him, whereas *reigning* with Him depends upon patiently enduring; if this be absent a denial of this reward must follow, although faithlessness on our part will never cause Him to deny Himself. Living with Him remains our unalterable privilege (2 Tim. 2:11,12). There are many who unhesitatingly take to themselves passages of Scripture, who seem to forget the *character* of those to whom the promises were made. Let those who lay claim to 1 Thessalonians 4 see to it that they have the qualities mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 1:3-8.

These virgins go out to meet 'The Bridegroom'. In Revelation 19, immediately upon the fall of Babylon, the marriage of the Lamb is announced. 'The marriage of the Lamb is come and His wife hath prepared herself'; then follows a statement as to the blessedness of those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. In Revelation 21:2 John says that he 'saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared (same word as "made ready" in 19:7) as a bride adorned for her husband'. This New Jerusalem has special relation not to saints in general, but to overcomers in particular; not to virgins as such, but to virgins who were 'prepared'. The epistle to the Hebrews treats of this class and this class only (as we may be able to show later), and to this class are addressed the words of Hebrews 12:18-24 which includes 'the heavenly Jerusalem', the 'city which hath the foundations' for which Abraham and others looked, endured, and overcame (Heb. 11:16). The virgins who go in to the marriage supper *are not the bride*; that is certain. They are differentiated in Revelation 19 and Psalm 45.

There is a close connection between the first and last discourses related in Matthew. Most of us know that the eight beatitudes of Matthew 5 are balanced by the eight woes of Matthew 23. At verse 13 of chapter 7, the subject turns to the question of 'entering' into the kingdom of the heavens, and the words 'I never knew you' of verses 21-23 are echoed, though not repeated as to actual words, in 25:12. This solemn statement in Matthew 7 is immediately followed by a 'likened' (so also Matt. 25:1) to a prudent and a foolish builder. Their prudence or their folly consisted in their obedience or disobedience to the Lord's words. The prudent virgins heeded the word 'watch'; the foolish did not. The wise and foolish builders figure in 1 Corinthians 3. There again the apostle Paul raises no doubt as to whether they are on the true foundation; what he is concerned about is 'how they build thereon'.

'If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: *but he himself shall be saved*; yet so as by fire' (1 Cor. 3:14,15).

The effect of the 'delay' is brought out in these parables. 'My Lord *delayeth* His coming' (*chronizo*). 'While the bridegroom *tarried*' (*chronizo*). 'After a long time' (*chronon polun*). This is the key to Hebrews 10, 11 and 12.

'For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not *tarry* (*chronizo*). Now the just shall *live* by faith ... these all *died* in faith not having received the promises ... they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly ... the recompense of the reward' (Heb. 10:37,38; 11:13,16,26).

The word 'ready' or 'prepared' is a connecting word in this context. 'All things were ready' (Matt. 22:4-8). 'Be ye also ready' (Matt. 24:44). 'They that were ready went in' (Matt. 25:10). 'Inherit the kingdom prepared for you' (Matt. 25:34). 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into the *aionion* fire, prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25:41).

A further link with the next parable is found in the repetition of *eiserchomai* and *aperchomai*. The one who received one talent went away (*aperchomai*) and hid the money. Those who were commended were bidden to enter into (*eiserchomai*) the joy of the Lord.

These words, as we have pointed out, are important words in the parable of the Virgins. If we may say so, the failure of the five foolish virgins may be attributable to thinking that their calling was EASY, while the failure of the servant with the one talent was because he felt his lot to be too HARD.

May we avoid both errors, and have spiritual understanding (or as the word means, 'a putting together') that we may see the combined truth of responsibility and sovereign grace, and so 'walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing'.

(19)

The Talents

Matthew 25:14-30

The last recorded parable of the Gospel of Matthew deals with reward or loss consequent upon service rendered to an absent Lord.

The parable opens much like the Sower, for in each case the formula, 'The kingdom of the heavens is like unto', is omitted. The first parable (for parable it is, see 13:18), starts with the words, 'Behold, the Sower went forth to sow'; the last with the words, 'For as a man travelling into a far country'. Both parables speak of results. There is the ground that produces no fruit, and the ground that does. Then again the fruitfulness varies, some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some an hundred-fold; this is exactly echoed in the parable before us. There is the unprofitable servant, there are the profitable ones. Their profitableness, though similar in ratio, is nevertheless different in amount, one produces five talents, the other two.

There is another comparison which we must remember. On page 97 is set out the structure of this second set of parables which commences with 18:23-35, the Wicked Servant, and introduces the word *sunairo*, 'to reckon', which occurs *nowhere else* except in the last parable of Matthew, which is the one at present under notice. This set of parables is bounded by the idea of *a reckoning with servants*, and comes in that section of Matthew where the public ministry of Christ becomes less, and the private ministry more, prominent. Moreover, in both parables there is a reference to 'talents'.

The parable of the Talents divides itself into three sections, the nobleman's prospective going, his absence, and return. Each action of the nobleman has a bearing upon his servants; to them in the first place the goods are delivered, in the second they trade with the goods or otherwise, and in the third they are rewarded or punished accordingly. This will be seen clearly if set out as follows:

Matthew 25:14-30

- A₁ 14. The journey contemplated.
- B₁ 15. The delivery of the goods to the servants.
- A₂ 15. The departure.
- B₂ 16-18. The use of the goods by the servants.
- A₃ 19. The return and the reckoning.
- B₃ 20-30. The reward or punishment of the servants.

It will be observed that the period of service is during the Lord's absence. The commission is given just before his departure, and the reward is given upon his return. At the close of each of the four Gospels, the soon departing Lord gives various commissions to His disciples. John shows in the difference between the ministry given to Peter and that given to himself a reflection of the words, 'according to his several ability'. We can readily see that the apostles who heard the Lord utter these parables would see their own place therein. To them perhaps were given the five talents, and mighty works were done by the apostles through the gifts of the Spirit during the period of their ministry. To others two talents were given. In 1 Corinthians 12 various gifts of the Spirit are enumerated, closing with the words, 'But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man *severally as He will*' (verse 11). In the parable the talents are divided '*according to his several ability*'.

With this parable it is helpful to read that of the Pounds in Luke 19. In this case one pound is given to each servant instead of a different amount to each as in the parable of the talents. Then, instead of saying, 'Lord, I have gained' so many talents, as in Matthew 25, the servant says, '*Thy pound hath gained*' ten or five pounds. In the case of the evil servant of Matthew 25, he digs in the earth and hides the lord's money, while in the parable of the Pounds he keeps it laid up in a napkin. Again, in each case the evil servant gives a similar excuse for his action. In Matthew 25, it is, 'I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; and I was afraid'. In Luke it is, 'I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow'.

In both parables the reply of the Lord is that the money ought to have been so used that he would have received his own with interest. In both is emphasized the principle, 'Unto every one that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him'. The parable of the Talents is followed by the judging of the *nations*, whereas the parable of the Pounds concludes with the judgment upon the *nation* 'which would not that I should reign over them'.

Let us consider some of the points a little. First, the difference between the amounts given. When the Lord divides his goods 'according to their several ability', the servants can say, '*I have gained five talents*', but when the Lord gives to each the same - one pound, the servant says, '*Thy pound hath gained*'. Here we have a twofold view that is most important for us to see clearly. The principle is stated doctrinally, and in higher connections, by Paul in Philippians 2:12,13, 'Work out your own salvation'; this is the talent aspect, the 'several ability', the '*I have gained*' position. 'For it is God which worketh in you', that is the one pound aspect, the '*Thy pound hath gained*', with no reference to the individual ability. The reference to 'gains' is not absent from Philippians either, but is really a vital part of its teaching. 'For me to live is Christ, and to die *gain*'; 'That I may *win* (have for my *gain*) Christ'; 'What things were *gain* to me'.

In both parables the unprofitable servant hides the money; the one in the earth, the other in a napkin. Matthew 5:14-16 says, 'Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid ... Let your light so shine'. This takes us again to Philippians 2 for there, immediately following the words already alluded to, 'work out your own salvation', the apostle says 'among whom ye shine as lights in the world', this being further connected with the wish, 'that I may rejoice in the day of Christ'. The apostle tells them that he desired fruit that may abound to their account (4:17).

There is food for thought in the repetition of the unprofitable servant's words that he knew his Lord 'reaped where he had not sown'. Although the light in which the servant saw this was wholly false, the fact itself does not appear to be so. The Lord does expect to reap where He has not sown, namely, through the loving service of His people. They, however, are only too conscious that this service is only possible 'as He works in'. The reward in each case is commensurate with the amount gained. No difference is made in the case of the one who could say, '*I have gained*', or the one who said, '*Thy pound hath gained*'. In each case they are made 'rulers', a reward peculiarly given to 'him that overcometh'. The words, 'make thee ruler' of Matthew 25:21 and 24:45-47 are the same, and emphasize the fact that the parable of the Talents is an expansion of the shorter parable. The word in Luke 19:17, 'have authority', is echoed in Revelation 2:26.

The words of Matthew 25:27 are of great moment. 'I should have received mine own *with interest*'. To this end the apostle wrote in Titus 2:10-14, 'That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things ... zealous of good works'; or in 1 Timothy 6:18,19; 'That they be rich in good works ... Laying up in store *for themselves* a good foundation against the time to come'. The punishment of the unprofitable servant is no more severe than that of the one who 'sows to the flesh', for Galatians 6:8 tells us, 'he shall of the flesh reap corruption', or of the one who, building upon the true foundation that which does not stand the test, suffers loss, and is saved so as by fire (1 Cor. 3). The unprofitable servant is still a servant, and is differentiated from 'the enemies' in Luke 19:27.

When we were considering the first parable we saw that the various sowings were reflections of the various ministries of the Lord and His apostles. There is therefore every likelihood that in this last parable, with its different talents, the apostles' ministries are in view. Although various parallels have been drawn between the five talents and the ministry of Peter, the two talents and that of the twelve, and the one talent and that of the teaching of the epistle to the Hebrews, we do not feel that we can do more than mention them, and prefer to leave the subject open.

In thus drawing this series to a close, we feel that the reader who has followed the argument and studied the passages will be at least clearer in his view as to the two great subjects of the two sets of parables, and while taking to himself many lessons and receiving much help, will see that to introduce 'the Church' into these parables is to miss their real testimony.

May we receive the application of the teaching of the parable of the Talents, and be enabled to fulfil it in the terms of the epistle to the Philippians.

CHAPTER 3
THE PROPHECY ON THE MOUNTAIN
The sunteleia. The times of refreshing
The presence of the Lord
Matthew 24 and 25

We have considered the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5 to 7) and the Parables given at the Seaside (Matt. 13). There now remains the Great Prophecy of Matthew 24 and 25 to be considered before bringing this survey of the Gospel to a close.

It will be understood that this examination of the Gospel of Matthew is not to be considered as a complete exposition of that Gospel, but as an exhibition of its salient features, so that the Parables of the Kingdom may be seen in the light of the Gospel as a whole. The Prophecy is introduced by the closing verses of Matthew 23:

‘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! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord’ (37-39).

We have here a quotation from Psalm 118:25,26:

‘Save now (Hosanna), I beseech thee, O LORD ...
Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD’.

The Hosanna quotation is found in Matthew 21:9. It is important to notice that the cry, ‘Blessed be He that cometh’ is closely associated with ‘the house of the Lord’. This adds point to the Lord’s words, ‘Your house is left unto you desolate’, and also provides a reason for the disciples’ remarks concerning the buildings of the temple. When the Lord told them that there should not be left one stone upon another; it is evident by their threefold question that this desolation was connected in their minds with the coming of the Lord.

The threefold question

This threefold question and its answer occupies the whole of Matthew 24 from verse 3:

‘And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us,

- (1) When shall these things be?
- (2) And what shall be the sign of Thy coming,
- (3) And of the end of the world (age)’?

In answering the disciples’ questions, the Lord deals with them in the reverse order:

- (1) The end of the age (4-24).
- (2) The sign of the coming (25-31).
- (3) When these things shall be (32-42).

The answer of the Lord as to the end of the age is two-fold. First, negative - ‘The end is not yet’; ‘all these are the beginning of sorrows’. Second, positive - ‘Then shall the end come’. Before going further we must notice that there are two words here translated ‘end’. In verse 3 it is *sunteleia*, in verses 6, 13 and 14 it is *telos*. The phrase ‘the *sunteleia* of the age’ occurs only in the Gospel of Matthew, whilst ‘the *sunteleia* of the ages’ occurs but once, viz., in Hebrews:

‘The harvest is the *end* of the age’ (Matt. 13:39).

‘So shall it be at the *end* of this age’ (Matt. 13:40,49).

‘The *end* of the age’ (Matt. 24:3).

‘Even unto the *end* of the age’ (Matt. 28:20).

‘Once in the *end* of the ages’ (Heb. 9:26).

The first occurrence connects the term with *the harvest*, and in this lies the explanation of the word, for the first occurrence of the same word in the Septuagint of Exodus 23:16 refers to the same period:

‘The feast of harvest, the firstfruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in the field: and the feast of ingathering (*sunteleia*), which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field’.

At first it may seem that there is a discrepancy between the Lord’s words in Matthew 13:39 and this passage. The Lord said that the harvest was the *sunteleia*, whereas Exodus 23 speaks of a feast of harvest, as distinct from the feast of the *sunteleia*. The answer is suggested by the presence of the word ‘firstfruits’, and by the particular kind of harvest in view - ‘which thou hast sown in the field’. A reference to Exodus 34:22, however, makes all plain: ‘Thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year’s end’.

Now, the disciples being Jews and taught in the law, knew the order of their feasts and much of their typical nature. Unless the reader has definitely studied the feasts of Israel he is at a disadvantage here, and before we can hope to appreciate the teaching of Matthew 24, we must supply the deficiency. There is one chapter in the law that sets out the feasts of Israel in their order, namely, Leviticus 23, and to that we must turn.

The feasts of the Lord

The sabbaths (Lev. 23:1-3). The first of the feasts to be mentioned is the weekly sabbath. This underlies the whole of God’s dealings with Israel. There are the following sabbaths mentioned:

SABBATH of *seven days* (Lev. 23:3).

SABBATH of *seven weeks* (Lev. 23:15).

SABBATH of *seven months* (Lev. 23:34).

SABBATH of *seven years* (Lev. 25:2-7).

SABBATH of *seven times seven years* (Lev. 25:8-17).

SABBATH of *seventy years* (Dan. 9:2), and finally the

SABBATH of *seventy times seven* (Dan. 9:24), in which the whole purpose of God for Israel shall be accomplished.

This emphasis is too insistent to be avoided. Underlying the whole history of Israel is this sabbatic element. From verse 4 of Leviticus 23 feasts ‘in their seasons’ are recorded, which also conform to the sabbatic character. We have, in verse 5, the feast of the *first* month detailed, and in verses 34 and 39 that of the *seventh* month described. Between these two all the other feasts are found, so that while Israel’s year had twelve months, with an intercalary thirteenth month at intervals, its typical year took note only of seven of these months

We must now tabulate the feasts in order to place the *sunteleia*:

- (1) THE SABBATH. Impressing the character of Israel’s typical history (See Heb. 4:9, Greek).
- (2) THE PASSOVER. Redemption, ‘out of ‘.
- (3) THE UNLEAVENED BREAD. The sheaf waved (Lev. 23:10). A firstfruits.
- (4) PENTECOST. Two wave loaves. Fifty days. Jubilee anticipated.

* * *

- (5) FEAST OF TRUMPETS. Joel 2:1 and 15; 1 Corinthians 15:52.
- (6) THE DAY OF ATONEMENT. Repentance (Lev. 23:28,29). Reconciliation and access.
- (7) TABERNACLES. The *sunteleia*. Harvest and ingathering. The eighth day stressed (Lev. 23:39).

While, experimentally, *we* must all begin with redemption - Passover, 'the first month of the year *to you*' (Exod. 12:2) - God begins with the Sabbath, and the purpose of the age is to restore that which is past.

Passover, Unleavened Bread, Pentecost and the Firstfruits have received their fulfilment (1 Cor. 5:7,8; Acts 2; 1 Cor. 15:20). Between Pentecost and Trumpets (Nos. 4 and 5 in the list above) is an interval of some months, with no feast to mark it, only a reference to 'the poor, and to the stranger' (Lev. 23:22). Here, in these silent months between Pentecost and Trumpets, is where the dispensation of the Mystery finds its place.

The Feast of Tabernacles, being the *sunteleia*, must be given a little closer attention. This feast celebrates both the harvests of 'the corn and the wine' (Deut. 16:13). At the return of the captivity under Ezra, and again under Nehemiah (Ezra 3:4 and Neh. 8:14) this feast was observed, and this is the feast picked out by God for annual observance by all the nations that are left after the coming of the Lord (Zech. 14:16-19). The association of 'tabernacles' and the coming of the Lord explains Peter's suggestion on the mount of Transfiguration, that he should make three tabernacles (Matt. 17:4).

After the detailed statement of Leviticus 23:34-36, the writer returns to the Feast of Tabernacles to give further particulars (verses 39-43), thus marking it as of great importance. Here we have the command to take boughs of trees and to dwell in booths or tabernacles. Here also is emphasised the 'eighth day' which is 'the last day, that great day of the feast' (John 7:2 and 37), when the Lord spake of the full outpouring of the Spirit - upon His own glorification - partially fulfilled at Pentecost, but awaiting His second coming for its complete fulfilment.

The 'eighth day' brings us to resurrection. The tabernacles speak of true 'peace and safety', and all these typical observances are covered by the word *sunteleia* used by the disciples when they came to the Lord with their question: 'What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and the *end* of the age?' That 'end' they knew was harvest, ingathering, rejoicing, peace; all inseparable from the coming of the Lord. Until He is 'glorified' that 'consummation' devoutly to be wished is as unattainable as Utopia, a mirage, the will o'-the-wisp of politicians and reformers who have not grasped the essential relation between 'the times of refreshing' and 'the presence of the Lord'. That wholesome lesson it is hoped we have learned. And now, having some understanding of what the question of Matthew 24:3 includes and implies, we can give more earnest heed to the answers that follow.

The Lord's threefold answer as to 'When' and 'What'

(Matt. 24)

Having seen the Scriptural meaning of the 'end', and its type in the Feast of Tabernacles, we now proceed to the continuation of the Lord's answers to His disciples' questions. In verses 4-24 He takes up this question of the 'end'. The first and last words in this section deal with *deception*:

'And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, ... and shall deceive many' (verses 4,5).

'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' (verse 24).

Following this opening warning concerning the false Christs, the Lord tells of the features indicative of the beginning of sorrows, but adds, 'The end is not yet'. Verses 6-14 are occupied with the characteristic features that lead up to the 'end' (*telos*):

Negative.- 'The end is not yet' (verse 6).

Explanatory.- 'All these are the beginning of sorrows' (verse 8).

Exhortative.- 'Endure to the end ... be saved' (verse 13).

Positive.- 'Then shall the end come' (verse 14).

As with the prophecies of the Old Testament, such as Isaiah, Daniel, and Zechariah, 'the nations' are involved in this period of the 'end'. Wars and rumours of wars, with nation rising against nation, form part of the beginning of sorrows. Hatred by all nations, yet the preaching of the gospel to all nations for a witness, ushers in the end.

The 'end' is marked by 'tribulation' in two phases. Firstly, during the 'beginning of sorrows', the Lord says: 'They shall deliver you up to be *tribulated*' (Gk. afflicted, as in verses 21 and 29). Secondly, there comes 'great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world till now, no, nor ever shall be' (verse 21).

We may now visualise the outstanding features of this first answer:

- A 24:4,5. Warning against deception by false Christs.
- B 24:6-14. The beginning of sorrows. 'Endure', 'saved'.
- B 24:15-22. The tribulation in full course. 'Shortened', 'saved'.
- A 24:23,24. Warning against deception by false Christs.

Intermingled with the conflict of nations we have famines, pestilences, and earthquakes, as signs of the beginning of sorrows. A gleam of hope is found in these passages of gloom in the word 'sorrow'. *Odin* and *odino* speak, not of sorrow in general, but pains in one particular, 'pains that issue in birth'. There are altogether seven occurrences:

'Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the *pains* of death' (Acts 2:24).

'As *travail* upon a woman with child' (1 Thess. 5:3).

(and in all the other references, viz., Mark 13:8; Gal. 4:19,27; and Rev. 12:2).

This last reference is illuminated by Matthew 24, and sends back light in return. The birth pains of Revelation 12:2 are followed by the rise of the beast and the false prophet, and the war on the saints of chapter 13. There also, in Revelation 13, is the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet.

The sign of the coming

Passing from the question of the 'end', the Lord comes to the related question of 'the sign of coming'. This, too, is introduced by warnings against deception. The two foci of this second answer are found in verses 24 and 30,31:

'Signs and wonders ... if ... possible ... deceive the very elect' (Matt. 24:24).

'The sign of the Son of man in heaven ... gather ... His elect' (Matt. 24:30,31).

The false signs and wonders are described in Revelation 13 and 2 Thessalonians 2:

'And he doeth great *wonders* ... and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles' (Rev. 13:13,14).

'And then shall that Wicked (one) be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming (*parousia*): even him, whose coming (*parousia*) is after the working of Satan ... with all deceivableness of unrighteousness ...' (2 Thess. 2:8-10).

By referring to Hebrews 2:4 we shall see how close is the parody of Satan:

'God also bearing them witness, both with *signs* and *wonders*, and with divers *miracles*, and gifts of holy spirit' (Heb. 2:4 Author's translation).

'After the working of Satan, with all *power and signs* and *wonders* of the lie' (2 Thess. 2:9 Author's translation).

Moreover, both the Lord and the false Christ are to have a *parousia*, as the word is for 'coming'.

Not only are there these two signs, but there are also two gatherings:

'For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together (*sunago*)' (Matt. 24:28).

'He shall send His angels with a trumpet and a great voice (a Hebraism possibly, but suggestive of 1 Thess. 4:16), and shall gather together (*episunago*) His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other' (Matt. 24:31 Author's translation).

None need be deceived. Look at the difference between some pettifogging, 'Behold, He is in the desert' or 'Behold, He is in the secret chambers', and the world-wide, open, and manifest shining 'from the east even unto the west'. Or again, the actual gathering together of the elect 'from one end of heaven to the other'. Russellism* has deceived its followers by saying that the Millennium has already dawned, and that Christ has already come in secret. The very sign of the times! There will be no true possibility of saying, 'Lo, here' or 'Lo, there', for neither the beast nor the false prophet can cause the sun to be darkened, nor the moon to cease to give her light, neither can they cause the stars to fall from heaven nor the powers of the heaven to be shaken. And these things are the *immediate forerunners of the Lord*, 'And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven' (Matt. 24:30).

The structure of the second answer concerning the 'sign of His coming' may be set out as follows:

- A 24:24. The false signs.
- B 24:26,27. Not 'in the secret place', but like the lightning, etc.
- C 24:28. The gathering. Eagles, carcase.
- B 24:29. Sun, moon, stars.
- A 24:30. The sign of the Son of man.
- C 24:30. The gathering. Angels, elect.

As one considers the warnings given in this passage, one wonders what will be the outcome of much that goes by the name of Pentecostalism today. Believing men and women are agonising in prayer for 'signs and wonders'. What will they do when the signs suddenly appear? It is blessed to know that the very elect will not be finally deceived, but some will come perilously near to it.

The Second Coming 'dated'!

The close of the answer to the question concerning the 'sign' merges into the third answer, which deals with the question: 'When shall these things be'? We say, the Second Coming is dated, yet we would not be misunderstood. We feel called upon to repudiate all attempts to fix a date for the coming of the Lord, whether by computations of dates from Scripture, the year-day theory, or from the so-called Divine chronology of the Great Pyramid:

'But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only' (Matt. 24:36).

'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power' (Acts 1:7).

Such definite statements of Scripture are sufficient. Yet we can say, in one sense, that the coming of Christ is dated. This the passage in Matthew 24:29 does for us: 'Immediately *after* the tribulation of those days'. Those who 'wait for God's Son from heaven', who wait for 'the Lord Himself to descend from heaven with a shout, voice and trumpet' (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:16, with Matt. 24:31, margin), who wait 'the gathering together unto Him' (*episunago*, 2 Thess. 2:1,2 with Matt. 24:31) cannot scripturally contemplate escaping the Great Tribulation if they should be 'alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord'. For in Matthew 24 and in 1 and 2 Thessalonians the same coming (*parousia*) is in view, with all its accompaniments.

A further hint as to time is given by the Lord in verses 32 and 33:

'Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it (or He) is near, even at the doors' (Matt. 24:32,33).

While we may not attempt to forecast the day and the hour, we should learn the parable of the fig tree. The fig stands for Israel in one of its aspects, as the vine and the olive in others. The key to prophecy has always been Israel

* Now The Jehovah's Witness Movement. Ed.

and Jerusalem. The return of Israel to Palestine has ceased to be a possible event in the future; it is already taking place before our eyes, and under the protection of the British flag (written in 1930).

The Lord follows His Word with regard to the time with a reference to Noah and the suddenness of the flood, saying:

‘So shall also the coming of the Son of man be’ (Matt. 24:39).

This note is again sounded in the reference to the two women grinding at the mill, and the two men in the field. Luke’s addition: ‘In that night there shall be two men in one bed’ (Luke 17:34) completes the whole day and night. Working in the field represents the day time, grinding at the mill the early hours of the morning, and sleeping in the bed the night. The parable of the Virgins likewise speaks of this same thing, concluding, as it does, with words almost identical with Matthew 24:42:

‘Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh’ (Matt. 25:13).

The one thing that appears from the various passages that deal with the question, ‘When shall these things be’? is that the Lord *did not tell them*. What He did was to urge readiness because the day and the hour were unrevealed.

Before concluding this section on Matthew 24 we draw attention to some of the passages of Old Testament Scriptures cited, or alluded to by the Lord, which but confirm the growing conviction that the coming of Christ as revealed in Matthew 24, is entirely connected with Israel:

- (1) Matthew 24:7.- Citation Isaiah 19:2.- ‘Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom’.

Isaiah 19:3 says that as a result of this upheaval of kingdoms ‘they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to wizards’. These will introduce ‘the signs and wonders and miracles of the lie’, and lead the world into the tragedy of the end. It behoves those who have eyes opened to see, to avoid the slightest approach to these things of darkness.

- (2) Matthew 24:15.- Citation Daniel 9:27.- ‘The abomination of desolation’.

This ‘desolation’ must be connected with 23:38, ‘Your house is left unto you *desolate*’. It is most clearly associated with Israel - see the whole of Daniel 9.

- (3) Matthew 24:21.- Citation Daniel 12:1.- ‘Then shall be great tribulation’.

A comparison of these two passages will prove that they refer to the one event.

- (4) Matthew 24:24.- Reference Isaiah 8:18.- ‘Signs and wonders’.

There are ‘signs and wonders’ that are spoken of in the Scriptures, and these will be fulfilled as surely as those signs that accompanied the Messiah’s first advent (Matt. 11:4-6). In Isaiah 8 there is the great contrast between the God-given signs and wonders, and the result of the efforts of wizards that peep and mutter, and which seek unto the dead (*see also* Isa. 19:3).

- (5) Matthew 24:29.- Citation Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4.- ‘Sun be darkened. Moon shall not give her light. Stars shall fall’.

Isaiah 13:9-13 declares that this shall be in the day of the Lord, which shall be characterized by wrath and fierce anger. The passage connects it with the fall of Babylon in verse 19, as in Isaiah 34:5,6 it is connected with wrath upon Idumea.

- (6) Matthew 24:30.- Citation Zechariah 12:10-12.- ‘The tribes of the land mourn’.

There shall be a national mourning for the death of Christ, the great fulfilment of the day of atonement, which will be followed by the blessed ingathering, or *sunteleia*.

- (7) Matthew 24:30.- Citation Daniel 7:13.- ‘The Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory’.

To read this citation in its context in Daniel 7:9-14 is to see that the coming of the Lord, as set forth in Matthew 24, has no reference to 'the church',* but is entirely connected with the kingdom and its restoration to Israel, for it 'shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High' (Dan. 7:27).

Little is needed for our present purpose to complete the survey of the teaching of Matthew 24 and 25 - the bulk of chapter 25 being taken up by the two parables, the Ten Virgins and the Talents, which parables have already formed part of our study (see pages 136 to 146). If we now show that the two chapters form a complete whole, we shall then be ready to pass to the remaining study in the Gospel according to Matthew namely, the miracles.

Matthew 24 and 25

- A **a** 24:1-30. THE SON OF MAN. 'The Coming'.
- b** 24:31. THE GATHERING. The elect (*Israel*).
- B **c** 24:32-41. PARABLE. Fig tree and Noah.
- d** 24:42-44. WARNING. 'Watch therefore'.
- e** 24:45-51. PARABLE. Servant.
- B **c** 25:1-12. PARABLE. Ten Virgins.
- d** 25:13. WARNING. 'Watch therefore'.
- e** 25:14-30. PARABLE. Servants.
- A **a** 25:31. THE SON OF MAN. 'When He shall come'.
- b** 25:32-46. THE GATHERING. The nations (*Gentiles*).

We must now retrace our steps, retaining in our memory what we have seen both regarding the dispensational place of the Parables, together with the teaching of Matthew as a whole, and apply ourselves to the new investigation, namely, the Miracles of the Gospel according to Matthew, and their dispensational importance.

. D . CHAPTER 4

THE MIRACLES

(1)

Introduction

We have seen that the Parables have a definite dispensational bearing, and read in the light of their context are a great help in understanding the true purport of the Gospel according to Matthew.

We now turn to the recorded miracles of the same Gospel and shall find them equally illuminating as we perceive them to be 'powers of the age to come', and shadows of the unfolding purpose of God.

It may be as well here if we notice the Scriptural words and expressions used for miracles in the New Testament:

Dunamis. An act of power. The English dynamo, dynamite and dynamics have power as their dominant note.

Semeion. A sign. Used chiefly by John.

* The author is referring here to The Church which is His Body of Ephesians 1:22,23. Ed.

- Teras.* A wonder, a prodigy, something which strikes terror. John 4:48 and Acts 2:22 are the only references to Christ, the remaining fourteen occurrences are used of false Christs, the apostles, and Moses.
- Ergon.* A work. The miracles are spoken of as the *work* of God, good *works*, and *works* which none other man did.
- Eudoxia.* Glorious things (Luke 13:17).
- Paradoxia.* Strange things (Luke 5:26).
- Thaumasia.* Wonderful things (Matt. 21:15).

Many of the miracles of Christ were miracles of healing. Never did He work a miracle of judgment upon a son of man. The withered fig tree and the destruction of the herd of swine are the nearest approaches to miracles of judgment, but in neither case did they touch a human being. On the contrary, the blind receive their sight, the dumb speak, the deaf hear, lepers are cleansed, and infirmities are cured. Even the dead are brought back to life again, thousands are fed with a few loaves and fishes, and the marriage at Cana is graced by His miraculous provision. The winds and waves obey the voice of the Lord, the fish of the sea yield themselves to the net, or to pay the tribute at His command; demons and evil spirits are cast out, and the possessed set free. On two occasions the Lord passed through a crowd unseen.

The first record of miracles in the Gospels is that of Matthew 4:23,24:

‘And Jesus went about all Galilee, TEACHING in their synagogues, and PREACHING the gospel of the kingdom, and HEALING all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils (demons), and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; AND HE HEALED THEM’.

The result of these mighty works was that:

‘there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan’.

A glance at the map shows that thus early in the Lord’s ministry His mighty works were known through the length and breadth of the land. It is important to observe the setting in which these miracles were wrought. The miracles were not mere exhibitions of power, neither were they performed to strike terror into the observers, for they were all of one character, viz., miracles of healing, and attracted followers from all parts of the country. The miracles formed a supplement, to TEACHING and PREACHING. The last reference to miracles in the Gospel narratives says the same thing, ‘and they went forth, and PREACHED everywhere, the Lord WORKING with them, and confirming the WORD with signs following’ (Mark 16:20). Again, in Matthew 10, we find the same connection ‘As ye go, PREACH, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils (demons)’. Yet again the necessary association of preaching and miracles is implied in Matthew 11, ‘He departed thence to TEACH and to PREACH in their cities. Now when John had heard in prison the WORKS of Christ ...’. The object (or at least a prominent object) with which the miracles were wrought is given in Matthew 11:20, ‘Then began He to upbraid the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done, *because they repented not*’. The close connection between miracles and the testimony is also indicated in Matthew 13:58, ‘He did not many mighty works there *because of their unbelief*’. Matthew 9:35 presents a practical repetition of Matthew 4:23, as the reader can observe, and should he read in connection with the commission of Matthew 10.

One of the characteristic accompaniments of the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom was the *presence* of miracles. One of the characteristic features of the preaching of the mystery is the *absence* of miracles. We might notice the extent of the miraculous healing given in Matthew 4:23,24, ‘healing *all manner* of sickness and *all manner* of disease’; ‘all sick people that were taken with *divers* diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with *devils* (demons), and those which were *lunatick*, and those that had the *palsy*; and He healed them’. The details are given more fully as the narrative advances, and when we see the complete list of the mighty works that are recorded in the Gospels we shall begin to realise what a confirmation is given to His ministry; and when we add to that the testimony of John 21:25, ‘there are also many other things which Jesus DID, the which, if they should

be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written', the confirmation of His Messiahship must have been overwhelming. Yet they crucified Him! Yet they repented not! What a testimony then to the nature of the human heart.

(2)

The Leper, the Centurion's Servant, and Peter's Wife's Mother

Matthew 8:1-15

After the record of Matthew 4:23,24, which we considered on page 161, the Lord ascended a mountain and *taught*. Teaching begins the chapter and teaching is the last thing spoken of in Matthew 7:28,29, viz., 'sayings', 'doctrine (or teaching)', and 'taught as one having authority'. Mighty words on the mountain are immediately followed by mighty works in the valley, 'When He was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him, and behold there came a leper'. The three miracles that are recorded in Matthew 8:1-15 are suggestive of much teaching.

1-4. THE LEPER.	Israel.	The Lord <i>touched</i> Him.
5-13. THE CENTURION'S SERVANT.	Gentile.	Healing at a distance. Faith compared with that of Israel.
14,15. PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER.	A Woman.	The Lord <i>touched</i> her.

The Pharisee in his prayer thanked God that he was not born (1) a Gentile, (2) a Slave, or (3) a Woman, which position of 'splendid isolation' is gloriously done away 'in Christ' for Galatians 3:28 shows that there is:

- (1) Neither Jew nor Greek .. The Gentile
- (2) Neither bond nor free .. The Slave
- (3) Neither male nor female .. The Woman.

Here in these three opening miracles the Lord breaks through many traditional barriers; He touched a *Leper*! He healed a *Gentile*! He healed a *Woman*! There is a dispensational lesson here which the reader should observe, as well as a moral one. Both the leper and the woman were healed by personal contact; the Gentile, however, was healed at a distance. The peculiarity comes out again in Matthew 15:21-28; in both cases, too, reference is made to the *great* faith of the Gentile.

Going back again to the first of these miracles, let us see for what the leper prayed. 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me *clean*'. The response equally insists upon the same thought, 'immediately his leprosy was *cleansed*'. The command that followed still keeps cleansing uppermost, 'Show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them'.

Leviticus 14 contains the intensely instructive 'Law of the leper in the day of his cleansing'. Christ dying and rising again is clearly set forth; the cleansed leper is atoned for by the blood, and re-consecrated by the oil. Here in the leper may be seen Israel's condition before God, 'no soundness, but wounds, bruises and putrifying sores'. The leper's condition cut him off from worship and service, rendering him quite unfit for any act of ministry in any shape or form; such was Israel - Israel that was destined to be a kingdom of Priests, Israel of whom the Gentile will yet say, 'They are the ministers unto our God'; Israel - a leper!

The two questions that appear in this miracle are those concerning the Lord's power and will. Of the Lord's power the leper had no doubt, 'If thou *wilt*, thou *canst*'. The Lord alone could decide the question of willingness, and He did so, saying, 'I will, be thou clean'. Think for a moment of a mere man, confronted by the awful plague of leprosy, daring to say, 'I *will*'. The One before whose will leprosy flees away at a word, who can say, 'Be thou clean', is the same One who uttered the words recorded in Genesis 1, 'Let there be light, and there was light'. The miracle is full of prophetic hope for the uncleansed nation. He who was and is their Messiah is both *able* ('Thou

canst'), and *willing* ('I will'), and in God's good time the leper will be cleansed, and receive the anointing oil of re-consecration.

After Israel's cleansing will follow that of the Gentiles; this is the consistent theme of prophecy, type and doctrine, e.g., Galatians 3:13,14 :

'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law ... that the blessing of Abraham might come on *the Gentiles* through Jesus Christ'.

'Saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall *all the kindreds* of the earth be blessed. Unto *you* first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities' (Acts 3:25,26).

The cleansing of the leper by personal touch is followed by the healing of the centurion's servant by a word spoken at a distance. The Lord is no sooner acquainted with the servant's condition, than the gracious willingness is again made manifest. Before the request is actually made the Lord said, 'I will come and heal him'; then follows an exhibition of faith so great that it is written of the Lord that He *marvelled!* On one other occasion only is it recorded that the Lord 'marvelled', but then it was at the 'unbelief' of those who were of His own country, and kin, and house (Mark 6:6).

The words of the centurion reveal how clearly he recognised the Lord as the *Sent One*. All who see Him thus will be brought to the same estimate of themselves, 'I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof'. Then come the words of faith that caused the Lord to marvel, 'but speak *the word only*, and my servant shall be healed'. What a contrast with another military Gentile - Naaman, who said, 'Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and move his hand up and down over the place' (Author's translation).

Great faith can dispense with all means and accessories, and can rely on 'the word only'. It was faith indeed on the leper's part to say to the Lord, 'if Thou wilt, Thou canst', but it was greater faith for the centurion to dare to decline the personal visit of the Lord, and rest confidently in His spoken word. We suggest that he recognised Christ as the Sent One, because of his added explanation. He said more than the Authorized Version records; not merely did he say, 'for I am a man under authority', but he said, 'for I *also* am a man under authority'. The fact that he was under authority gave authority to his words; he said to a soldier, 'Go, and he goeth', and the authority under which he himself was placed gave, in its turn, all the weight to his commands. So with the Lord, He spoke not His own words, but the Father's; the works He did He declared were not His, but the Father's who sent Him. The whole of John's Gospel rings with the fact that Christ was the Sent One. The healing of the centurion's servant was John 5:24 in tableau:

'He that heareth My word ("speak the word only"), and believeth on Him that sent Me ("for I *also* am a man under authority"), hath everlasting life'.

The words of Christ that follow show that the miracle was connected, in some way at least, with teaching:

'I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matt. 8:11,12).

The centurion's faith was real and strong, for the Lord said:

'Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour' (Matt. 8:13).

The parallel record in Luke 7:1-10 should be read. *The Companion Bible* considers this a second miracle of healing, suggesting that the Lord had blessed the centurion before (Matt. 8:12,13), i.e. before the calling of the twelve in Matthew 10:1, etc. The second healing of the centurion's *bondman* took place *after* the calling of the twelve (Luke 6:13-16). It must be remembered that Matthew selects his items with a view to the object of his Gospel, and nowhere claims that historical order is maintained. Luke claims that he writes 'in order', but even Luke does not slavishly follow a mere time sequence. Many have found a 'discrepancy' in the fact that whereas Matthew

5:7 was evidently spoken on a mountain, Luke 6:17 says that a body of teaching of exactly the same character was spoken 'in the plain'. 'There', says the critic, 'the narrative is contradictory; one says a mountain, the other a plain'. Others, to avoid the difficulty, say (and with truth), that the Lord could have repeated His teaching again elsewhere. The whole controversy is dispelled by looking at the original, and using just simple common sense. First as to the mountain, Matthew 5:1 says:

'And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him'.

Luke 6:12 says:

'And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles'.

This passage supplements Matthew's record. Matthew evidently had no reason to say why the Lord went up the mountain, except that it was because of the multitude. The multitudes which followed Him were from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judaea, and beyond Jordan, according to Matthew; they were from all Judaea, Jerusalem, the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, according to Luke. Both records are true, each gives his own account which does not contradict, but complements the other.

Now as to the plain. The actual words are *este epi topou pedinou*, which rendered literally are, 'He on a level place'. These words are only another way of saying, 'and when He was set'; no one could address a company of people upon the oblique slopes of a mountain side, but coming down a little way until He reached 'a level place' such as is often to be found at any height, He could then address them comfortably. The contradiction therefore vanishes, as does the need for two separate occasions when the actual facts are considered. Both Matthew and Luke record the entrance of the Lord, after this 'Sermon on the Mount', into Capernaum. Matthew adds the miracle of the leper, and both record the miracle of the centurion's servant. What Matthew speaks of as being simply the words of the centurion without mediators, Luke explains in fuller detail. The reason why the centurion spoke of his unworthiness appears in Luke's account, because there it is recorded that the elders of the Jews had said that he was worthy for whom He should do this.

In verse 3 of Luke 7 the word 'sent' is *apostello*, sent away, the sender remaining behind. In verse 6 it is *pempo*, to send with. The word 'saying' [*legon*] indicates that the centurion is personally present and speaking to the Lord. It seems more reasonable that we should have the variations of one event, than that on two separate occasions the Lord should utter a similar lengthy address, then enter Capernaum, then be asked to heal the centurion's servant, be answered in exactly the same way, and marvel for the second time at the great faith evidenced. Then as to the calling of the twelve, Luke 6:13-16 positively states that after that night of prayer the Lord chose the twelve, whereas Matthew 10:1 says that He called unto Him the twelve disciples, without stating when He had chosen them. The only reason why these two passages should have been confounded is the fact that the names of the twelve are given at length.

The healing of Peter's wife's mother could easily be misunderstood in the same way. In reading Matthew's account we should naturally assume that the miracle took place after the healing of the centurion's servant, but both Mark and Luke place it considerably earlier (*cf.*, Mark 1:29 and Luke 4:38). The fact that Peter's house was in Capernaum (Luke 4:31-38) links this miracle with the others that were associated with Capernaum, and Matthew, without pretending to keep to historical order, has grouped them together. The Lord again *touched* the object of His compassion, and this time the restored one arose and ministered unto Him.

So will Israel in the day of her healing, and so may we since He put forth His grace to us.

(3)

The Twelve Miracles that precede Rejection

Matthew 8 to 12

Twelve separate miracles are recorded by Matthew. Eight separate signs are recorded by John. Evidently therefore the writers of these 'Gospels' made a choice of the event to suit the purpose of their respective narratives.

We know that twelve is associated with Israel, and with government. Let us look at these twelve miracles together, and notice anything that will help us to see what their special purpose may be:

- (1) THE LEPER CLEANSED (8:2).
- (2) CENTURION'S SERVANT (8:5).
- (3) PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER (8:14).
COLLECTIVE MIRACLES (8:16), and Old Testament quotation (8:17): 'That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bear our sicknesses' (Isa. 53:4).
- (4) THE STORM (8:24).
- (5) THE DEMONS (8:28).
- (6) PALSIED MAN. SINS FORGIVEN. (9:2). Brought by others. Old Testament quotation, 'Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice' (9:13, cf. Hos. 6:6).
- (7) RULER'S DAUGHTER (9:18).
- (8) ISSUE OF BLOOD (9:22).
- (9) BLIND MEN (9:27).
- (10) DUMB DEMON (9:32). Brought by others.
COLLECTIVE MIRACLES (9:35) and Old Testament quotation (9:36): 'As sheep having no shepherd' (Zech. 10:2).
- (11) WITHERED HAND (12:13).
COLLECTIVE MIRACLES (12:15), and Old Testament quotation (12:17-21): 'that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Behold My servant, Whom I have chosen; My beloved, in Whom My soul is well pleased: I will put My spirit upon Him, and He shall show judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in His name shall the Gentiles trust' (Isa. 42:1).
- (12) BLIND AND DUMB DEMON (12:22). The people's enquiry, 'Is not this the Son OF DAVID?' (12:23).
The Pharisees' objection, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebub' (12:24).

The first three miracles touch the orders of human society, which would make a direct appeal to the Jew.

THE LEPER, representing Israel: Their uncleanness removed.

THE CENTURION'S SERVANT, representing the Gentiles: Healed at a distance.

PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER. A woman: Very little esteemed so far as spiritual things were concerned.

The Old Testament quotation that follows these three miracles shows that the healing of these diseases was part of the Lord's work as the suffering Messiah. 'He was acquainted with grief', for He hath 'carried our sorrows' as well as borne our sins.

As in the case of the woman who touched the Lord, virtue went out of Him when He thus bore the sickness of sin stricken Israel. This will sufficiently account for the Lord's sound sleep in the ship. Mark's account is very full here. The Lord, after a strenuous period of service, said to His disciples, 'Let us pass over unto the other side. And when *they* (not He) had sent away the multitude, *they took Him even as He was* in the ship' Mark 4:35,36). Oh, wondrous weakness, oh, mighty condescension! 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save' (Mark 15:31).

No miracle did the Lord work throughout His course to spare Himself. Thus it was that, being wearied, He was fast asleep on a pillow, while the storm began to swamp the ship. The effect of the stilling of the storm upon the disciples was to make them exclaim, 'What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him'.

We do not feel that it would be profitable to enter into a detailed discussion concerning the question as to whether this miracle is different from that recorded in Mark 4 and Luke 8. The only Gospel narrative that claims to have set out the events 'in order' is that written by Luke. The other writers use what events serve their purpose, without of necessity pledging that the sequence is always historical. Such a statement, however, as that this miracle of Matthew 8 was *before* the calling of the twelve, and that the other was *after* that event is misleading. By the calling of the twelve in Matthew we can only suppose Matthew 10 to be meant. Now Matthew 10 speaks of that time when the Lord called unto Him His twelve disciples to give them power over unclean spirits, and sent them

forth to preach. This is exactly parallel with the record in Mark 6:7-13 and Luke 9:1-6, and all three passages come after the miracle of the stilling of the tempest.

The references in Mark 3:13-19 and Luke 6:13-16 refer to a prior nomination, and this is moreover suggested in Matthew 10:2; 'Now these are the names'. Not that this passage (Matthew 10) is to be taken as the same as Mark 3. Matthew does not record the parallel for this earlier call. Then again, the storm is followed in Matthew 8 by the healing of two possessed of demons. They cry, 'What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?' Then follows the remarkable request that they should be permitted to enter the herd of swine, which rush into the sea and perish. The result was that the people besought Him to depart from their coast. The same thing happens immediately after the miracle of the tempest in Mark 4. Matthew calls the place, 'the country of the Gergesenes', Mark 'the country of the Gadarenes', while Luke adds, 'which was over against Galilee', but this is explanation, not contradiction. It seems more difficult to believe that on two separate occasions, within a short while of each other, there arose two storms, that the disciples in both cases were afraid and cried for help, that the Lord in both cases was asleep, that He rebuked their little faith, that on both occasions they express their astonishment, using similar words, and that the two separate miracles on the sea were each followed by the healing of the demon-possessed, the demons confessing Christ - and referring to their torment, and in each case asking to be permitted to enter a herd of swine, which were killed in the sea. If the slight differences in the narratives are to be taken as signs that a different event is being recorded, then we shall have to make three separate miracles, for the reader can easily find differences between the two narratives of Mark and Luke.

Let us not miss the point of these great powers and signs. The Lord was demonstrating His Messiahship. The world of the physical, the elemental and the spirit were beneath His control. At a touch leprosy vanishes. At a word sickness departs. At a rebuke the storm subsides. At the word 'go' the demons enter the herd of swine. A yet fuller and deeper power is exhibited in the next miracle, which closes another series; *His power over sin*. What is it to us if He can heal the body and cannot heal the deadly wound of sin?

In Christ is no mere wonder-worker, but God's appointed Saviour, Whose redemption shall make universal what was the peculiar possession of the few. These miracles were 'powers of the world to come'. Christ shall reign not only in the world of sense, but also of spirit; all things in heaven and earth, yea and under the earth, shall own His sway. All this is set forth in these wondrous works. So it was that when they brought to the Lord the sick of the palsy He took the opportunity of declaring His greater power.

Mark places this miracle before the miracles of the storm and of the swine (Mark 2), nevertheless it is one and the same event. Luke's order is equally very different from either Matthew or Mark; nevertheless one miracle is thereby intended.

The healing of the palsied man and the forgiving of his sins very much resemble the opening miracle of Peter's Pentecostal ministry, and his application of it to the salvation of the nation (Acts 3; 4:1-12). While the faith of the palsied man is presumed, this miracle is another instance of the efficacy of the faith of others on behalf of the sufferers. There is no indication that the centurion's servant exercised faith, neither is there that the Syrophenician woman's daughter believed.

Knowing what we do of the Person and work of Christ, the fact that He should say, 'Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee', does not strike us as it did those who heard the words actually uttered. The Scribes immediately said, 'This man blasphemeth'. Mark 2:7 records that they said, 'Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?' Luke tells us that the Scribes and Pharisees were present and began to reason in their hearts. Thus the little differences need no solving, the miracle is one.

The Lord does not hesitate to call their thoughts 'evil'. This of itself testifies to the abundant proofs He had already given that He was the Sent One of God. Nicodemus - Pharisee, member of the Sanhedrin, 'the teacher' of Israel - bore witness that such was the case; 'Rabbi, we know that Thou art *a teacher come from God*: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him'. For a man uncommissioned to stand up and say, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee', would be indeed 'blasphemy'. The question does not touch the Person of Christ in His official capacity. As the Sent One He had power on earth to forgive sins, and the signs and wonders were His credentials. He will however demonstrate His commission and authority yet once more. The reasoning of the Lord is invincible. It is certainly easier to SAY, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee', than to SAY, 'Arise and walk', for while none

can test the fulfilment or otherwise of the first statement, all can witness the second. There are many today who pronounce the forgiveness of sins and wield a tremendous power over the ignorant and the superstitious, who could not meet this challenge. So the Lord of glory stooped again in long-suffering gentleness:

‘But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power (authority) on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house’ (Matt. 9:6,7).

The result according to Matthew was, ‘When the multitude saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such authority unto men’. Mark says, ‘they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, we never saw it on this fashion’. Luke’s record is, ‘They were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today’.

Each Gospel records the calling of Matthew immediately after this miracle. Each records that at the feast that followed the Lord said, ‘They that be whole need not a physician; but they that are sick ... for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance’. Thus, as in the miracle, the physical shadows forth the spiritual.

(4)

The Culmination of Israel’s Rejection

Matthew 9

This third group (Nos. 6 to 9, page 169) contains four miracles. Two are wrought upon women, and two upon men.

In the first group (Nos. 1 to 3, page 169) the domain of ceremonial LAW had been entered when the Saviour, in spite of the law of Moses, touched the leper. National exclusiveness had received a shock when the Gentile centurion’s prayer was heard and his faith recognized as greater than any exhibited in Israel. The unnatural despising of woman in the estimation of the orthodox Jew received a rebuff when the Lord deigned, *unasked*, to cure Peter’s wife’s mother.

The domain of SIN was entered, and spirit forces compelled to recognize their Master in the second group.

The third group brings the Lord face to face with DEATH. A ruler comes, and worshipping Him says, ‘My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live’. What a stupendous request! yet see how naturally the Lord receives it. ‘And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did His disciples’. He even allows Himself to be intercepted on the way to heal another sufferer. The woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years (Israel’s number coming out again) is another example of Israel’s condition. Her complaint would render her unfit to attend the house of God. It was recognised by tradition as a sufficient ground for divorce; it placed her outside the pale of society generally. She was, in effect, in much the same position as the leper. Yet she dared to contemplate touching the fringe of the Saviour’s garment! Something must have told her that no defilement could adhere to Him. Had He not touched lepers? Was He not even now going by request to touch the very dead? How closely He came to the suffering world. How wonderful, beyond thought, that He, the holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, could so mingle with them as to appear in the eyes of the unsanctified as a friend of publicans and sinners, in a sense lower than the Scriptural one! There is often more of the unsympathetic Pharisee about our ideas and practice of ‘separation’ than that of the Lord Jesus Christ, the true Holy One of God.

Faith appears in some miracles very prominently; in others it is not mentioned. The faith of the centurion called forth the words of Christ, ‘Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel’. There does not appear any room for faith in the case of Peter’s wife’s mother. It was evidently possessed by the leper, for his ‘if’ was merely a question of ‘will’ not of ‘can’.

The mention of ‘faith’ in the storm is one of rebuke - ‘O ye of little faith’. Faith does not figure in the miracle of the two demon-possessed. The faith which is expressly mentioned in the account of the healing and forgiving of the man sick of the palsy is the faith of those who brought him (9:2). To the woman whose issue of blood was healed the Lord said, ‘Thy faith hath made thee whole’. No one can question the faith of the ruler, but the word does not appear. In the next miracle, that of the blind men, faith is prominent, and the cure was conditional upon it.

The references to faith in this Gospel are subject to a definite arrangement, and as some of the passages are directly concerned with the miracles, we will give the order for the sake of future study.

Faith

- A 8:10. Great faith; outside Israel. Man for servant.
- B 9:2. Their faith. Led to forgiveness.
- C 9:22. Thy faith. *Exeranthé* (dried up, Mark 5:29).
- D 9:29. According to faith. Eyes of blind opened.

HERE COMES REJECTION (Chapters 12, 13).

- A 15:28. Great faith; outside Israel. Woman for daughter.
- B 17:20. As mustard seed. Luke 17:6 links with forgiveness.
- C 21:21. Remove mountains. *Exeranthé* (withered, verse 20).
- D 23:23,24. Pharisees omit faith. Blind guides.

There is a lesson in all this. It is surely intentional that the two first occasions on which faith is mentioned concern Gentiles seeking blessing for others: in one case so markedly as to cause the Lord to marvel, and in both cases to remark upon the greatness of the faith exhibited. Yet the Lord would not deny the faith that was as small even as a grain of mustard seed. His final charge against the blind guides of Israel who were leading them quickly into the ditch of rejection and unrepentance, was that they omitted, among other weighty matters, 'faith'. If the faith even of others was blessed by the Lord, how much more the faith of the individual! And so the last miracle that speaks of faith, before the crisis (Matt. 12), makes healing conditional upon faith.

Two blind men address the Lord by His kingdom (the true dispensational) title, the title which Israel should have recognized and believed. 'Thou Son of David, have mercy on us'. Seven times in Matthew's Gospel is the Lord addressed as the Son of David, this being the first occasion. Here at last comes the confession that in their midst stands Israel's long-promised King. Would the eyes of this nation be opened to see Him? or would He have to say that the words of the prophet were fulfilled, 'their eyes they have closed'. Therefore, not for the individual's sake, but because of the typical value of all the miracles, the Lord replies:

'Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you' (Matt. 9:28,29).

This is what might have happened nationally, but faith was absent. The persistent unbelief brought the evidences of the Messiah's presence to an end (Matt. 13:58). Therefore it was that the Lord straitly charged the two blind men, 'See that no man know it'.

The last miracle of the miracles in the fourth group makes the rulers of Israel speak out their antagonism. A demon-possessed man, rendered by his possession blind and dumb, is cured, and the multitudes marvel, saying, 'It was never so seen in Israel'. Then comes the Pharisees' blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Look at chapter 12:22-32. The healing of another demoniac caused the people to say, 'Is not this the Son of David?' Again the Pharisees immediately counteract the impression by saying, 'This fellow doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons'. The Lord in reply, after showing the folly of their argument says:

'But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, THEN, *the Kingdom of God* is come unto you ... wherefore I say unto you ... the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men ... neither in this age, nor the one about to be' (Matt. 12:28-32 Author's translation).

Herein is the supreme responsibility for the rejection of God's evidences, a subject that again comes prominently forward in the Gospel of John.

We retrace our steps a little to observe the gathering opposition and the development of events, the healing of the man with the withered hand. The word here for 'withered' is akin to that used of the fig tree that withered. Christ stood ready to heal their barrenness and withered unfruitfulness, but they chose the dust-dry pettiness of Sabbath-day observances, even contemplating the murder of the very Lord of the Sabbath. In the previous cases,

when others interpose it has been for the purpose of obtaining blessing for the sufferer. Here, the man with the withered hand is brought forward, not for any love for him or sympathy with his affliction, but that he may provide a bait to catch the Lord of life and glory.

The Rabbis had taught that there was 'no Sabbatism in the Temple'. The Lord could have appealed to this, but He preferred to take a simpler and wider view, and asked, in fact, whether a man was not of more value than a sheep. That which God had given as a 'delight', they in their withered barrenness made the symbol of all that was exclusive, narrow and formal. The way in which their leaders had fenced the observation of the Sabbath with the most minute and ridiculous restrictions blinded them to the spiritual significance of the day. We shall find that much of the opposition of the Pharisees was related to the Lord's attitude to their conception of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees now take counsel against the Lord as to how they might destroy Him. What perversity is this! His every act had left behind Him mercy, peace, health, thankfulness, life from the dead, sight for the blind, yea, the forgiveness of sins - yet they hated Him, these scrupulous Sabbath-keepers.

Then follows the quotation which at last speaks of the Gentiles (Isa. 42:1-6). With this quotation, Isaiah 49:3-7 should be read. There the close connection between Israel's rejection of the Lord, and the blessing of the Gentiles is seen. One of His titles there is 'Him whom the nation abhorreth'! We have already looked at the closing miracle. The last words indicate the possibility that Israel may receive the Lord as the Son of David. Here the Pharisees interpose their blasphemous statement, and Israel sinks into unrepentance and blindness.

The miracles keep pace with the theme. Each Gospel writer chooses or rejects in accordance with the special object of his narrative, and this is by far the most important aspect in which to view the miracles. They can be safely considered in a detached and undispensational manner afterwards, but that is not our present purpose.

(5)

The Miracles of the Rejection

Matthew 13 to 21

We have traced the ever deepening character of the evidences given to the Messiah by the miracles which are recorded. Things physical and temporal, things spiritual and eternal, come within their scope. We notice the cumulative character of the effect produced:

'His fame went throughout all Syria ... and there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan' (Matt. 4:24,25).

The emphasis here is mainly on the geographical extent of the evidence. It included practically all the land then occupied by the people of Israel.

The disciples themselves are the next to exhibit their impressions, marvelling and saying, 'What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey Him!' When the multitude witnessed the miracle of the healing of the sick of the palsy, 'They marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men'. As a result of His raising the ruler's daughter from the dead, 'The fame thereof went abroad into all that land'. As a result of the disobedience of the blind men who were healed to the Lord's injunction, the fame of the Lord was spread abroad in all that country. When the dumb man possessed with a demon was cured, the multitudes marvelled, saying, 'It was never seen so in Israel'.

Then follows the commission of the twelve (chapter 10), who received from the Lord power over unclean spirits, and to heal all manner of sickness and disease. Their power was very full: 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons'. Their testimony was widespread. John in prison heard of the works of Christ, and was confirmed in the belief that these were indeed His evidences (11:1-6).

After the healing of the blind and dumb demoniac, 'the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David?' This in the eyes of the Pharisees was a perilous question, so that they reiterated their blasphemy that the Christ of God was in league with Satan.

We first of all find it touched upon in 9:34, 'The Pharisees said, He casteth out demons by the prince of demons'; and no comment is passed. In 12:24 we discover it to have gathered strength, and then the Lord exposes their thoughts, and brings to bear upon them the fact that the kingdom of God had come unto them. Will it be believed that after all the signs and wonders which the Lord had given, miracles for which He had become famous throughout the length and breadth of the land, these insolent rulers of this age have the temerity to say, 'Master we would SEE A SIGN from thee' (12:38)? The Lord's answer indicates that the time for showing signs is passed. The next great sign shall be that of His resurrection.

We shall observe the same order in the Gospel of John. Seven out of the eight signs come in the first half of the Gospel. Then come chapters 13 to 17, where the Lord is with His own, and the eighth and concluding sign is that which follows His resurrection.

The parables of the mysteries of the kingdom (Matt. 13) follow the Lord's rejection, and the miracles that follow are a complete set by themselves. The first reference to miracles after the great rejection (chapters 12 and 13) is of a negative character: 'He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief' (13:58).

We will look at the whole series, however, before we consider any in detail:

The Miracles after the rejection

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| A ₁ 13:58. | Not many because of unbelief. |
| B ₁ C a | 14:14. Many healed. |
| | b 14:15-21. 5,000 fed. |
| SEVEN | D 14:22-33. The Sea. |
| MIRACLES | E 14:36. Perfectly whole. |
| | D 15:21-28. The Woman of Canaan. |
| C a | 15:29-31. Many healed. |
| | b 15:32-39. 4,000 fed. |
| A ₂ 16:1-4. | The demand for a sign refused.- No sign but that of the prophet Jonah. |
| B ₂ | F 17:14-21. Lunatic. Faith remove mountains. |
| | G 17:27. Tribute. Kingdom not yet come. (19:2. Multitudes healed). |
| SEVEN | H 20:30. Blind. Son of David. |
| MIRACLES | H 21:1,2. Colt. Thy King cometh. |
| | G 21:14. Blind and Lame. Son of David. |
| | F 21:19. Fig tree withered. Faith to remove mountains. |
| A ₃ 27:42-44. | Demand for evidential miracle refused. |
| B ₃ 27:52 to 28:8. | THE SIGN OF JONAH. |

The first set of seven miracles does not partake so much of the character of signs as of miracles of compassion. 'He went about doing good. And Jesus ... was moved with compassion' (14:14). The feeding of the 5,000 resembles the feeding of the 4,000, and there again the Lord says, 'I have compassion on the multitude'.

The second series of seven begins to foreshadow the development of events. Immediately after the glory of the Transfiguration, the Lord deals with a difficult case of demon possession, and makes reference to a faith capable of removing mountains. Then follows the miracle of the tribute money and its question:

'Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto Him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for Me and thee' (Matt. 17:25-27).

Has the reader observed one great difference between the miracles performed before the twelfth chapter and those after it? In the case of those that are detailed in the first half of Matthew, Christ works them entirely alone. A change comes with this new series.

The disciples are the ones first addressed with regard to the feeding of the 5,000. 'Jesus said unto them, they need not depart, give ye them to eat'. While the disciples were utterly unable to comply with the task, they have an ample share in its outworking. Peter evidently began to realize that the working of miracles in conjunction with the Lord was now expected, for he asks the Lord to bid him come to Him upon the water!

The repetition of the feeding of the 5,000 by the feeding of the 4,000 seemed intentional, but the disciples did not at the time appear to grasp the Lord's purpose. The Lord rebukes both lack of memory and lack of faith as to these two miracles (16:5-12). He rebukes the lack of faith again when the disciples confessed their inability to cast out the demon (chapter 17), and reminds them that prayer and fasting were essentials. Peter shares, however humbly, in the miracle of the tribute money; the disciples take a part in the miracle of the colt, and when the disciples marvelled at the withering of the fig tree, they are again reminded of the faith which removes mountains. There is a reason for this, 'Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to My Father', said the Lord, and Mark 16 closes with the words, 'The Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following'. These are therefore all indications of the coming dispensation of Pentecost. All was now awaiting that sign of all signs, *the sign of the prophet Jonah*.

The references to the coming of the King, and the Hosannas to the Son of David, again indicate how near the common people were to accepting the Lord as the Messiah. What a shocking charge lies at the door of their spiritual rulers, who instructed them to choose Barabbas instead of Christ! How soon will this piece of history be repeated on a grander scale? The spiritist activity seems to indicate that the Lord is near.

There are two miracles which we reserve for more detailed consideration owing to their bearing upon the dispensational outlook, namely, that of the woman of Canaan, and that of the withered Fig Tree. These we will now deal with.

(6)

Two Miracles of Dispensational Importance

Matthew 15:21-28, and 21:19

All the miracles, as well as all the parables, have a definite dispensational character, but the two we select in this article have that character in a very prominent way. The first of the two took place near the close of the Lord's ministry as the Son of David, the second near the close of His ministry as the Son of Abraham. Soon after working the first miracle the Lord began to speak of His approaching death, while soon after the second He was led away to be crucified. A simple outline of the miracle of Matthew 15:21-28 is as follows:

- A₁ Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David.
- B₁ But He answered her not a word.
- A₂ Send her away; for she crieth after us.
- B₂ But He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
- A₃ Lord, help me.
- B₃ But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.
- A₄ Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs.
- B₄ Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith.

The woman was a woman of Canaan, a Gentile, a Syrophenician by nation (Mark 7:26), and she approached the Lord, calling Him by His title, 'Son of David'. Now as Son of David He came to be King, 'King of the Jews' (Matt. 2:2; 27:37,42). This sovereignty was primarily of an exclusive character. The promise to David regarding his throne will be fulfilled in Christ, and in its primary interpretation it has no place for any nation but Israel. When the

kingdom is established and that King is reigning, then world-wide blessing will result. So it was that the Saviour, Who so often was moved with compassion as He contemplated fallen and suffering man, 'answered her not a word'.

His reply to the disciples' request reveals the reason of this strange silence, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel'. These words, to weak faith, would have sounded as the death-knell of hope. The woman however penetrated the reply, and learned its lesson. As Son of David He could do nothing for her; she must therefore drop that title and approach Him simply as *Lord*; she had no right in Him as Son of David such as Israel had. 'Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord help me'. This request draws from the Lord a personal answer, but what will He say? Will he grant her request? 'He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to *kunaria*' (little dogs). At first sight this answer seems as forbidding as the former one. Israel were the lost *sheep*, what had He, their shepherd, to do with *dogs*? Israel were the children of the house; surely it was not right to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs?

The faith of this woman enabled her to believe that what He spoke to her was absolute truth, and she seized upon the word He had used for *dogs*. As the reader will know, the dog is a term of reproach throughout the east, and is a symbol of all that is depraved, forsaken, and cast out, *e.g.*, 'without are dogs'. The Lord in His reply said '*little dogs*', or, as we say, *puppies*. The rule regarding the dog has an exception in the case of the little puppy; children in the east, like children in the west, like to pet and fondle the little puppies, and for a short time they are allowed inside the house. 'Truth, Lord', replies the woman, 'yet the puppies eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table'. She knew that the exclusiveness of the Lord's ministry to Israel was not for any mean or narrow reason; a saved Israel will be saved not for their own sake, but that all the families of the earth may be blessed in them.

The twofold aspect of this phase of God's dealings is emphasized in Romans 15:8,9, 'Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers' - this is an exclusive ministry to Israel with reference to promises made in the past - 'and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy' - this follows as the designed sequence. So it was that the woman sought the crumbs. She gave Israel their rightful place; they were *the Masters* (the very same word twice rendered 'Lord'). She was but a little dog; *they* sat at the table and she could only expect the crumbs. As soon as this was recognized, blessing came.

How vital to this woman's case was a correct appreciation of dispensational truth! How many today are perplexed because the Lord answers not a word, simply because they are asking amiss! The miracle clearly shows us what was the relationship between Israel and the nations at the time of the Lord's earthly ministry. In Romans 11 the figure changes to that of *wild olive branches grafted into the true olive*. In Ephesians 2 it further changes to the *creation of one new man*. Which shall we believe, the Scriptures, or those who speak against 'dispensational' truth?

The second miracle has also a dispensational character. Here is a symbol of Israel as a nation, the fig tree. The fig, the vine, and the olive represent Israel in various capacities:

'And when He saw one single fig tree by the way, He came to it, and found nothing thereon, but LEAVES ONLY, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever, and immediately the fig tree was withered' (Author's translation).

In the prophecy of Luke the Lord separates the fig tree from all others - 'Behold the fig tree, and all the trees' (Luke 21:29-31). The sign of the Lord's return is found in the budding of the nation, and all the nations; a day is coming when 'Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the earth with fruit' (Isa. 27:6). At the time, however, when the miracle was performed, the Lord found 'leaves only'. The crowd had spread their garments in the road, had cut down branches from the trees and scattered them on the road; they had shouted saying, 'Hosanna to the Son of David'; but it was 'leaves only'. The same crowd within a few days were prevailed upon to cry, 'Away with Him, crucify Him'. The Lord had foretold this in Matthew 13:5,6:

'Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away'.

The Hosannas were *leaves only*; fruit depends upon root. The scorching sun indicates persecution:

‘He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by (immediately) he is offended’ (Matt. 13:20,21).

The fig tree and those hearers on stony ground withered. Such was the parable of Israel; they began to cumber the earth; soon the word would go forth, ‘Cut it down’. Israel will bring forth no fruit until the age (translated ‘for ever’).

It is deeply suggestive to us all to note the fact that the only miracle of judgment which the Lord performed was upon a tree. Never did He work such upon a human being. The only other occasion where anything resembling a judgment might be found is the case of the swine which were choked. Yet here it was the swine, not the men, who were drowned.

Thus these two miracles, taken together, speak of the blessing going out to the Gentiles, and of the cutting off, for the time being, of an unfruitful people. In this case there are lessons for all to learn, lessons not rendered the less pointed by seeing them in their true dispensational perspective.

. D . CHAPTER 5

THE DISPENSATIONAL PLACE OF JOHN’S GOSPEL

Foreword

In order to complete our survey of the miracles that are recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, it will be necessary to consider those that are found in the Gospel according to John. We shall find upon examination that John uses the term ‘sign’ instead of ‘miracle’, and this will be considered in its place. We found it necessary to possess an idea of the Gospel of Matthew as a whole, before we could attempt to understand the import of the parables or miracles therein recorded, and we shall find it equally necessary to see the Gospel according to John in its true dispensational character before we can hope to perceive the import of those ‘signs’ that he was inspired to select and record.

We therefore preface our study of these signs by an examination of the purpose for which this fourth Gospel was written, giving particular attention to any indication that it may give of the people to whom it is primarily addressed, and what particular calling is in view.

While we believe that THE dispensation of the present period covered by Israel’s blindness is that entrusted to Paul and called in Ephesians 3:9 (R.V.), ‘The dispensation of the mystery’, we realize that there are other callings still in progress, and believe that they can be reduced to three main groups:

- (1) Those who believe the revelation of the mystery. These find their calling set out in ‘the Prison Epistles’.
- (2) Those whose salvation and doctrine is based upon the great epistle to the Romans.
- (3) The great number of believers today whose ‘gospel’ is John 3:16, whose comfort is in John 14, who if not the ‘Bride’ have great affinity with bridal conditions, and who may be among the ‘Guests’ of the marriage feast. These who may be ‘The other sheep’ sought by the Lord are the ones who are particularly addressed by John.

Such as are included in the second group are often in a preparatory state, and pass on into the fuller light of the mystery as the truth becomes known to them.

Romans 6 lays the great foundation upon which the mystery is built. It reveals the identification of the believer with Christ - the truth that we have been crucified with Christ, that we have died with Him, been buried, quickened and raised with Him. This great doctrinal foundation is necessary for the added dispensational feature of Ephesians 2 - ‘seated with Him’.

In the present study we have not the second but the third group before us, the widest circle of believers. What is their calling? What is their place in the present dispensation? What is the word for them? Before seeking a Scriptural answer to these questions, it will be necessary to consider briefly one or two possible objections and

suggestions. In view of past misunderstanding, we also wish to make it plain in dealing with these that no individual writer is in mind.

What is the exact position of the great company of believers who are called during the dispensation of the mystery, and yet are not of it? Are they enjoying the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant? Are they in the same position and calling as the pentecostal church? Do they come under the new covenant?

“(1) Are believers today enjoying the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant?”

We do not believe that the covenant with Abraham is in force today, for as a covenant is dependent upon the keeping of its terms, and as this covenant has special reference to a land and a nation, both of which have been for the time being virtually set aside, the operation of the covenant is impossible, except in some spiritualized sense.

The terms of the covenant of God with Abraham are as follows:

‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed’ (Gen. 12:1-3).

Here we have a land and a nation vitally connected with the outflow of blessing to other nations.

To Isaac this covenant was repeated (Gen. 26:3), as it was subsequently to Jacob (Gen. 28:3,4). In each case the *land*, as well as the *seed*, forms an integral part of it.

In the fulness of time Christ is born, and Matthew writes his Gospel showing that the Christ is the Son of David and of Abraham (Matt. 1:1). Zacharias, filled with Holy Spirit, refers to the fulfilment of the covenant made with Abraham (Luke 1:68-79), and Peter, upon the renewed calling of Israel to repentance, makes it very plain that the Gentiles can only enjoy the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant upon the fulfilment of its conditions:

‘Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities’ (Acts 3:25,26).

The epistle to the Galatians makes it plain that justification by faith, and sonship, belong to the believing Gentile as to the believing Jew, but it also most emphatically repeats the sentiment of Acts 3:25,26:

‘Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law ... that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 3:13,14).

Israel was the appointed channel through whom would flow the blessing of Abraham to all nations. While they remained *a nation in their land*, even though they were not all truly converted, the Gentiles were able to partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree (Rom. 11), but when Israel were set aside in blindness and unbelief (Acts 28:22-31), and subsequently scattered among all nations and temporarily dispossessed of their land, it became obvious that the full enjoyment of the Abrahamic blessing must be postponed until the day when ‘all Israel’ shall be saved, their ‘receiving back’ bringing with it ‘life’ (Rom. 11:15-26).

(2) Are believers today enjoying the blessings of Pentecost and the conditions and status of 1 Corinthians 12?

In Galatians 3:14 ‘the promise of the Spirit’ is directly connected with the coming of the blessing of Abraham upon the Gentiles, and while Israel remained a nation in their own land, these spiritual gifts were enjoyed and partaken of by the Gentile churches. We are not left in doubt, however, as to the purpose of God in thus allowing the Gentiles to anticipate that day which could only come with Israel’s conversion.

‘In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear Me, saith the Lord’ (1 Cor. 14:21).

The Gentile believers were reminded that they had been grafted into the stock of the true olive, contrary to nature, with the express purpose of ‘provoking to emulation’ and ‘provoking to jealousy’ the people of Israel. Israel,

however, were not provoked to emulation. Isaiah 6:10, quoted by the apostle in Acts 28, showed that the olive tree of Israel was cut down. It is true that Isaiah 6:13 prophesies that, though cut down, it will yet sprout again; that in God's good time 'all Israel' shall be saved, but this does not take place until 'the fulness of the Gentiles' has come in. (The words, 'cast their leaves' in Isaiah 6:13 should be rendered, 'are felled').

Romans 11 makes it plain that in the first instance the olive tree was entirely Israelitish. At the time of writing that epistle 'some' only of the natural branches had been broken off, but during the present time there does not exist the counterpart of this olive tree, that is, an Israelitish calling with a smaller Gentile addition. Today Israel does not count. Only a false spirituality can attempt to prove that the olive tree now stands. During this present time Gentiles are blessed without association with Israel. Should anyone interpose the suggestion that Gentile believers are still blessed by the Scriptures which came through Israel, are still saved by that salvation which is 'of the Jews', are still accepted in Him Who is of the seed of David, and therefore are still partaking of the root and fatness of the olive tree, we would reply that this, if allowed, proves too much, for the epistles of the mystery, though distinct and peculiar, are necessarily linked with *all* that has gone before, and so the mystery itself could be 'proved' to be a continuation of Romans 11, as some actually interpret Ephesians 2:19.

It throws light upon Romans 11 and the dispensational position of the Gentile during the Acts period, to remember that Paul is not employing fiction when he speaks of the unusual action of grafting a wild branch upon a cultivated stock, for at the time the apostle was writing it was a process actually used to 'provoke' the flagging fruitfulness of an aged olive tree. The enjoyment by the Gentiles of spiritual gifts, 'the fatness of the olive tree', during this time was not because the blessing that will result from the promise to Abraham was then actually flowing out to all nations, but because the Gentiles were being used to 'provoke to jealousy and emulation' the fast-failing olive tree of Israel. But Israel did not respond, they did not repent, and in due course were set aside.

If the position of the believing Gentiles is truly described as a graft into the olive tree, it follows that when at Acts 28 the tree was cut down, a very drastic change must have come over the world of Gentile believers. Pentecostal conditions will be resumed only when the time for Israel's restoration draws near, and in consequence the present interval is marked by other characteristics.

This brief note is, of course, entirely inadequate as an examination of this second position, but we write for those who are fully acquainted with the whole argument. The bearing of 1 Corinthians 12 also is important, and it is obvious to all who have eyes to see and who refuse to accept substitutes for realities that the conditions of 1 Corinthians 12 do not exist today.

(3) Are believers today blessed under the terms of the New Covenant?

Equally with the covenant made with Abraham, this covenant, while finding in Christ the complete ratification of all its terms, nevertheless necessitates a restored Israel as a nation before the Lord. This can be seen by reading the original terms of the new covenant given in Jeremiah 31:27-40.

The new covenant was in operation during the Acts, as 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 indicate, but, like the covenant with Abraham, its full outflow awaits the day when all Israel shall be saved.

(4) Are believers in Christ who do not believe the revelation of the Mystery, necessarily 'Christendom'?

This is difficult to answer, for 'Christendom' is not a Scriptural name, and consequently we can never be sure that we use it exactly as another may intend. Speaking broadly, Christendom stands for that great mass of professing Christians, largely leavened with false doctrine, and finally developing into the apostasy that precedes the end. Accepting this definition, we are compelled to say that it would be most uncharitable as well as untrue unceremoniously to sweep aside all those men of God who fail to see the truth of the mystery, and who indeed are sometimes antagonistic to it. Just as it was not necessarily true during the Acts that if Paul was right Peter was wrong, so it does not follow that every believer today should be a believer of the truth of the mystery - he cannot be unless chosen of the Lord, and his calling and election may place him in an entirely different company. This, of course, remains to be proved.

(5) Are all believers today members of the church which is His body, whether they know it or not?

To refute this position we should have to reprint the bulk of the last thirty-five years' witness concerning the dispensation of the mystery. We cannot find justification for assuming that any believer is a member of the body of Christ unless he believes the Word of God given to make that blessed position known. As that word is found in the testimony of the Lord's prisoner, and is the revelation of a mystery, membership of that body will be manifested by belief of the truth revealed concerning it, as surely as salvation is manifested by the belief of the gospel.

Without, therefore, pretending to have given anything more than a cursory glance at these varied views, we proceed to the examination of Scripture to discover whether there has been written a book, an epistle, or section of the New Testament that embraces all the peculiar conditions that characterize the outer circle of faith among Gentiles today.

The ministry for the many. An eightfold proof

What are these peculiar conditions?

- (1) During the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus, He limited Himself to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and at the close commanded His disciples to go into all the world. One of the conditions that belong to the present enquiry is that the message shall be pre-eminently *world-wide*.
- (2) It is evident to the most casual reader that the bulk of the Bible was written for Jews. The present condition, however, demands a book that shall give evidence that non-Jewish readers are in view.
- (3) The Gospel of Matthew does not speak of the rejection of Christ by Israel until chapter 12; Paul's earlier epistles give considerable prominence to Israel, whilst Peter at Pentecost calls upon the nation to repent and be saved. The book we seek should take it for granted, or should early state that Christ was rejected by Israel, and that its message is addressed to those who have believed after that rejection has reached its climax.
- (4) The Lord's Supper is directly connected with 'the new covenant' (Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25), so that the message we seek will of necessity omit this feast of remembrance, seeing that its terms cannot be put into operation until Israel as a nation are restored (Jer. 31).
- (5) The present position of the Lord Jesus is that of ascension, ascribed to Him in the prison epistles, and we must find our message in a book giving due prominence to this exalted position.
- (6) The epistles of the mystery do not speak of Christ as the Son of Abraham, or the Son of man, but go back behind all these to the wondrous title of the Image of the invisible God, Who is, moreover, the Creator of all things visible and invisible. This revelation of His Person will colour the message that is addressed to the outer circle today.
- (7) We shall find in that message the great desire expressed by the Lord that, though He was rejected by His own, the world might yet believe and know that He was the Sent One of God.
- (8) There will be an indication that the gift of 'miracles' possessed by the church, as at Corinth, no longer obtains.

By common consent the Gospel according to John was written when Paul's ministry was finished, and corresponds fully to the conditions suggested above, as well as to many more to be entered into later. Let us for the present, however, confine ourselves to noticing how John's Gospel deals with these peculiar conditions.

(1) The World

'The *world* was made by Him' (John 1:10).

'The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the *world*'

(John 1:29).

‘For God so loved the *world*, that He gave His only begotten Son’ (John 3:16).

‘The Christ, the Saviour of the *world*’ (John 4:42).

‘Giveth life unto the *world*’ (John 6:33).

‘I am the light of the *world*’ (John 9:5).

These and many more come immediately to the mind, and it is common knowledge with students of the Word that John’s Gospel is pre-eminently the presentation of Christ to the world.

Kosmos (world) occurs in Matthew’s Gospel nine times, in Mark three times, in Luke three times, but in John it occurs about seventy-nine times. Matthew’s Gospel tells us concerning the Lord that He was called ‘Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins’ (Matt. 1:21). Luke’s Gospel records the Lord’s instructions to His disciples that ‘remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem’ (Luke 24:47). John, however, speaks of ‘sin’, not ‘sins’, ‘the sin of the *world*’.

The reader will remember the wide scope in the standpoint of the first epistle of John: ‘He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole *world*’ (1 John 2:2). John’s Epistles account for another twenty-one occurrences of *kosmos*, so that out of a total of one hundred and eighty-eight occurrences in the whole New Testament, John’s Gospel and Epistles use one hundred of them. If we seek for a message that has the world in view, can we find one more suitable than this Gospel according to John?

(2) Not written for Jews

Our next condition was that the matter should be tested not only by the positive address to the world, but by parallel internal evidence that Jews were definitely not in the writer’s mind. Every Jew knew the purpose of the six water pots at the wedding feast of Cana, but John informs us that they were ‘after the manner of the Jews’ (John 2:6). Every Jew knew the history and import of the Passover, but John writes: ‘The Jew’s Passover was at hand; ‘the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh’; ‘the Jews’ Passover was nigh at hand’ (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55). Added to these are the further informative statements: ‘There was a feast of the Jews’ (5:1), ‘the Jews’ feast of tabernacles’ (7:2). Again, note John 10:22: ‘It was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, *and it was winter*’, which is as though we should write, ‘It was Christmas day in London, *and it was winter*’.

Further, what Jewish reader of John’s Gospel, though he lived at the ends of the earth, would need the explanation given in 4:9: ‘for Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans’? Would a Jewish reader need the added interpretation given to the name of the pool of Siloam - ‘which is by interpretation, Sent’ (John 9:7)? Would they not know too, the meaning of the name Cephas, ‘stone’? (John 1:42).

We have abundant evidence therefore that John wrote his Gospel with the world of non-Jewish readers specially in view.

(3) The Rejection

The message that fits the wider circle of believers during the present time must recognize the fact that the Lord was rejected by His own people. This we find at the very forefront of the Gospel by John: ‘He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him ...’ (John 1:11,12). Here it is evident that the ‘many’ who received Him are a different company from ‘His Own’ who received Him not. Matthew’s Gospel waits until the twelfth chapter before rejection is reached, but John opens with it. There is a foreshadowing of Acts 28 at the close of John 9: ‘For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind’. The critical passage (Isa 6:10) is quoted immediately after the warning to walk while the light lasts, lest darkness came upon them, and towards the close of the passage came the solemn words: ‘He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath One that judgeth him’ (John 12:48).

It will be remembered that where Matthew quotes Isaiah 6:10, we find the parables of the kingdom of heaven, which, while revealing the interval of failure and corruption, nevertheless look forward to the day when, under the new covenant, the word of the kingdom shall be received in an honest and good heart (Jer. 31:27-33). The quotation

of Isaiah 6:10 in John 12 is not accompanied by the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but focuses attention upon the rejection of the Lord by His own people.

(4) The Lord's Supper

It is not our purpose to discuss the vital association of the Lord's Supper with the new covenant - that can be seen both in Matthew 26 and 1 Corinthians 11. The terms and parties of the covenant are distinctly set out in Jeremiah 31 and repeated in Hebrews 8. It is not a matter for discussion but of believing what God has said. The Gospel according to John makes no mention of the Lord's Supper, and the omission is as eloquent as the non-Jewish and world-wide evidences already brought forward. During the Acts period Gentile churches observed this feast of remembrance, but with the setting aside of the covenant people, the covenant feast was discontinued, and John, who was present and knew all about it, was as inspired to *omit* it as Matthew, Mark and Luke were inspired to include it.

(5) The ascended Lord

Paul's prison ministry is impossible apart from the ascension 'far above all'. Matthew's record ends without reference to the ascension; Mark and Luke close their accounts with it, but John speaks of it as early as the third chapter: 'And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven' (John 3:13). Again, in John 6, the Jews objected to the Lord's statement that He was the true bread that came down from heaven saying: 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He saith, I came down from heaven?' (John 6:42). Also, when the disciples were offended with His teaching He said: 'What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before?' (John 6:62). It is John alone who tells us the Lord's first message after His resurrection, and that He ascended to the Father on that first day of the week, forty days before the visible ascension from the Mount of Olives. 'Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God' (John 20:17).

The reader should add to the above the passages which use the phrase: 'Because I go unto the Father', and similar expressions.

(6) 'The image of the invisible God ... the Creator'

John's Gospel is distinguished from the Synoptics by the opening words:

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... All things were made by Him ... No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, Which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him' (John 1:1-18).

'Before Abraham was, I am' (John 8:58).

Here also, in close harmony with the standpoint of the dispensation of the mystery, are the wondrous words of John 17:24 :

'Father, I will that they also, whom Thou has given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world'.

True, beholding this glory, and being manifested with Him in glory, having this body of humiliation fashioned like unto the body of His glory (Col. 3:4 and Phil. 3:21) are very different; yet if there is a circle of believers, called into blessing during this parenthetical period, but not constituting the body, it is appropriate that their blessings should in some way be associated with the ascended Christ, and the glory that was His before the world was. The distinction to be observed between the glory of John 17:24 and that of the epistles of the mystery must be considered elsewhere, for it is too great a subject for the present survey.

(7) The prayer that the world may know

If the standpoint of John's Gospel be as we have indicated, we can understand the burden of the Lord's prayer in John 17, in which He asks that though 'His own' refused Him as the Sent One, yet that the world might believe, and that the world might know that the Father had sent Him.

(8) Discontinuance of the word 'miracle'

The word usually translated 'miracle' (*dunamis*) is entirely absent from John's Gospel, and in its place we have a series of 'signs'.

While the unity of the body is not mentioned in John, there is a unity which is very close. This and many other items of importance must be reviewed later, but we trust that the result of these studies will be not only a deeper appreciation of the supreme blessedness of the calling that places us 'far above all' at the right hand of God, but further ability to speak with no uncertain sound to saints and sinners, who while giving no evidence of being destined to this high calling, yet cannot, by reason of the dispensational conditions in which they find themselves, yield faith or obedience to pentecostal and new covenant messages.

INCLUDE PMS006GK.DOC.D.CHAPTER 6

THE EIGHT SIGNS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

(1)

The Purpose of their Selection

The miracles recorded by John in his Gospel are fewer in number than those recorded by Matthew. They are selected for a different purpose, which is explained in John 20:30,31. Like those in Matthew they are dispensational in character, but where the miracles of Matthew's Gospel relate very particularly to the King and the kingdom, the miracles of John's Gospel reveal the failure of Israel to perceive that Jesus was the Messiah!

John never employs the word *dunamis* 'mighty work', and only once uses the word *teras*, 'wonder', or 'miracle' (John 4:48), where it is linked with 'signs'. *Semeion*, sign, is the word which John uses in his Gospel, and which again in another form meets us in the opening words of the Apocalypse - 'He sent and SIGNified it'. We are not to look at the signs recorded by John as exhibitions of power, but rather to seek to discover what they signify. That there is a designed selection is evident for six of the eight are not recorded by Matthew, Mark or Luke. Further, while eight are recorded, John bears testimony that 'many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book' (20:30; 21:25).

We are not left in doubt as to the inspired purpose for which these eight signs are recorded, for John himself gives the fullest explanation:

'But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His Name' (20:31).

The eight signs recorded, therefore, are set before us with this twofold object, and not these signs only, but practically every sentence in the narrative is written either to give some further detail concerning the person of Christ as the Son of God, or to show the nature of believing and receiving life, or rejecting and passing into condemnation. *The Companion Bible* in Appendix 176 sets out in very full detail the correspondence which exists between these different signs. The reader is referred to that for details; a mere summary of the structure must suffice us here:

The Eight Signs

A 2:1-11. THE MARRIAGE IN CANA. The third day. No wine.

GLORY MANIFESTED.

- B 4:46-50. THE RULER'S SON. After two days.
AT THE POINT OF DEATH.
- C 5:1-47. THE IMPOTENT MAN. Pool Bethesda 38 years.
Sabbath. SIN.
- D 6:1-14. THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND.
MANY WENT BACK.
- D 6:15-21. THE WALKING ON THE SEA.
MANY of the people BELIEVED.
- C 9:1-41. THE MAN BORN BLIND. Pool Siloam.
From birth. Sabbath. SIN.
- B 11:1-44. THE SISTERS' BROTHER. Two days.
LAZARUS IS DEAD.
- A 21:1-14. THE DRAUGHT OF FISHES. The third time. No meat
LORD MAGNIFIED.

It is important to remember that the Gospel of John is divided into two sections, each commencing with a reference to 'His own':

- (1) 'He came to *His own*, and *His own* received Him not' (1:11).
- (2) 'Jesus having loved *His own* ... Loved them unto the end' (13:1).

The first twelve chapters are devoted to His public ministry which ended in rejection. Then public ministry ceases, and the Lord spends the time instructing His own. The signs are restricted to the first twelve chapters, with the one exception which occurs after His resurrection. Besides this the occurrences of the word *semeion* are restricted also. Of the seventeen occurrences sixteen occur between chapters 2 and 12, the remaining occurrence being at 20:30. The effect of the signs is traced through these twelve chapters, and the effect - reception or rejection - is repeatedly given:

'Many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles (signs) which He did' (2:23).

'Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles (signs) that Thou doest, except God be with Him' (3:2).

'Then ... when they had seen the miracle (sign) ... said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world' (6:14).

'Many of the people believed on Him, and said, When Christ (the Messiah) cometh, will He do more miracles (signs) than these which this man hath done?' (7:31).

The last three references before the end of the public witness are sad in their revelation of the open-eyed denials of the rulers of Israel:

'Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles (signs). If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him ... then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put Him to death' (11:47-53).

'For this cause the people also met Him, for that they heard that He had done this miracle (sign). The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after Him' (12:18,19).

'But though He had done so many miracles (signs) before them, YET THEY BELIEVED NOT ON HIM' (12:37).

Then follows the quotation from Isaiah 6, a passage of crisis and national rejection here as in Matthew 13 and Acts 28.

In accordance with the purpose for which they are recorded, these eight signs are linked up very intimately with the whole book, while the record is divided into compartments that emphasize the lessons for us in a graphic manner. Before the first sign is recorded comes the wonderful introduction of chapter 1. Its testimony that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is as unique as it is emphatic. We believe the true reading of John 1:13 to be, 'Who was

born', referring to Christ, not 'which were born' referring to the believer (*see The Companion Bible in loco*). Christ was the One Who was born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. So verse 14 continues, 'and the Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld His glory'. What kind of glory? Kingly? Priestly? No, 'the glory AS OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN from beside the Father, full of true grace'. The witness of John the Baptist is given with great clearness:

'I knew Him not: but that He should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water ... and I saw, and bare record that THIS IS THE SON OF GOD' (31-34).

The testimony of Andrew is next given: 'We have found THE MESSIAH' (41). Nathanael concludes the witness of the chapter with the words, 'Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God' (49). Then comes the first sign. Immediately before the second sign comes the meeting of the Lord with the woman of Samaria. What is her testimony?

'I know that Messias cometh ... Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee I AM HE ... The woman ... saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: IS NOT THIS THE CHRIST? ... Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world' (John 4:25-42).

Then follow the second and third signs. The third sign is followed by bitter opposition. What was the chief feature of the opposition? Not only was it because the Lord had healed the man on the Sabbath day (5:16) but 'because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that GOD WAS HIS FATHER, making himself equal with God'. In the verses that follow, the word 'Son' with reference to Christ occurs no less than ten times, and the Father thirteen times. Between the central pair, the fourth and fifth signs, come the words, 'This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world' (6:14). At the conclusion of the controversy which follows the fifth sign, stand Peter's memorable words:

'We believe and are sure that *Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God*' (6:69).

The crowd voice the common feeling in chapter 7:

'Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? Howbeit ... when Christ cometh, will He do more miracles (signs) than these which this man hath done? ... Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ ... there was a division among the people because of Him' (26,27,31,40,41,43).

Chapter 8 concludes with the stupendous claim of Christ, 'before Abraham was I AM'. Then comes the sixth sign. The gradual illumination of the blind man's heart and mind is beautifully set forth in the record. His first confession was, 'He is a prophet' (9:17). As a result of his loyalty to the Lord who had blessed him, 'they cast him out'. Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and when He had found him, He said unto him, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' We might have expected anything but this, some word of sympathy, some word of cheer, but no. the Lord of life desires this soul to believe and live:

'He answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him' (9:36-38).

The last sign before rejection now draws near, and the Jews come to the Lord and say, 'If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly'; as a result of His answer we read:

'Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him ... for blasphemy; and because that Thou, being a man, makest Thyself God ... because I said, I am the Son of God' (10:31-36).

The seventh sign contains Martha's confession:

'I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world' (11:27),

and ends with the plot against the Lord's life. With the next chapter the first part of John's Gospel concludes, testifying to the blindness of Israel's heart, and to the glorious Person Who had been so fully set forth as the Son of God. For when Isaiah beheld the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, before Whom the Seraphim veiled their faces as they cried, 'Holy, holy, holy, Jehovah of hosts', the Scripture declares that:

'These things said Esaias (Isaiah), when he saw His glory, and spake of Him' (12:41).

A long interval comes between the seventh and eighth signs. The great High-Priestly prayer of John 17, where come the words, 'glorify Thy Son', still sustains the theme. Even the choice of Barabbas emphasizes it, for the name means 'son of a father'. When Pilate declared that he found no fault in Christ, the Jews answered him:

'We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself *the Son of God*' (19:7).

Thomas's belated but full confession immediately precedes the final sign - 'My Lord and my God'.

Such is the setting of these signs. May every reader experience the joy of faith as we behold this wondrous record of the Father, and increasingly seek to honour the Son as we honour the Father, for He is worthy.

(2)

The Marriage in Cana

John 2:1-11

We have seen that the signs selected by John have as their common object '*That ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His Name*'. Our task is therefore simplified. Instead of seeking in each sign to find out its purport, we have only to seek the peculiar part it plays in the illumination of this double purpose. The first sign is recorded in chapter 2:1-11, and took place at Cana of Galilee.

We have already observed that the eight signs are in the form of an introversion, the first corresponding with the eighth. There are many items that correspond, but of chief importance are the confessions of Nathanael: 'Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel', and of Thomas: 'My Lord and my God'.

The *place* in both signs is Galilee. There is also a reference to the 'third' day and the 'third' time. Wine is provided in the one case, and food in the other. In the first sign we read, 'They have no wine'; in the last they had 'caught nothing', and had 'no meat'.

In the first we have six water pots; in the eighth 153 fishes. In both there is a command, 'Fill the water pots', 'Cast the net', which is obeyed in each case. The verb 'to bring' or 'to bear' (*phero*) occurs in both signs: 'And they bear it'; 'Bring of the fish'. The verb 'to manifest' (*phaneroo*) also occurs in both signs. In the first His glory is manifested; in the last Himself. The value of such details is that they emphasize for us the important part of the sign, and indicate what part of the incident constitutes the 'sign', and what the accidental setting.

The title of Christ which immediately precedes the record of the first sign is 'The Son of man'. Nathanael had confessed Him, 'The Son of God'. The Lord Himself refers to Himself as the 'Son of man'. This title carries with it the idea of rule and dominion forfeited by the first man. The title occurs twelve times in the Gospel, which is suggestive of its association with Israel.

If we read the narrative of this sign without reference to the preceding chapter, we shall begin talking about the 'third' day, and its type, resurrection. If, however, we pause to ask what the primary meaning of the words of 2:1 may be, light will be thrown upon its true typical character. The words, 'And the third day', indicate a continuance of reckoning. In chapter 1 we read of four successive days, which link up the waning ministry of John the Baptist with the opening ministry of the Lord.

'The day following' (1:43); 'The next day' (1:35); 'The next day' (1:29). Now, as 1:29 says, 'The *next* day', 1:19-28 must include the day previous. This gives us four days in all. The first day is the day of John's confession, when he took no honour to himself but ascribed greatness to the coming Messiah. The second day John sees Jesus and says, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world', and also contrasts his baptism with that of the Lord's. He concludes this second day's testimony with the words, 'I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God'. The third day John again says of Christ, 'Behold the Lamb of God'. This results in two of his disciples following the Lord. One of these proves to be Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, who first found his own brother Simon, and said, 'We have found the Messiah, that is, the Christ'. The fourth day the Lord goes into Galilee and calls Philip; Philip finds Nathanael, and Nathanael confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, and King of Israel.

The marriage in Cana was therefore the *seventh* day of this record. This is typical. Here we have millennial anticipations. Here the opening scene is a marriage, just as Revelation 19 introduces Revelation 20 with the 'Marriage supper of the Lamb'. As the Lamb of God He had already been heralded, though for the time His glory must be veiled. Some of the disciples of Christ who were invited with Him had been disciples of John the Baptist. It would be necessary to teach them that a dispensational change was indicated by the personal ministry of the Messiah. Weddings and wine are quite foreign to the witness of John the Baptist. They harmonize with the message of Christ. John is the friend of the Bridegroom, but Christ is the Bridegroom Himself.

The instruments of the miracle were the six water pots, 'after the manner of the purifying of the Jews'. Again the new dispensational note is struck. That which was Old Testament ritual is changed into the pledge of millennial joy. He, the Son of man and Son of God, has come, in order that all types shall have their completion, and all promises their fulfilment.

His first miracle 'manifested forth His glory'. It is not a miracle merely of compassion or mercy. It foreshadows coming glory. 'His hour was not yet come' (2:4); and although that hour must come wherein the Son of man must be lifted up, nevertheless glory must follow, for so it is written. The last miracle before His own death and resurrection was at the tomb at Bethany. Here, however, in this opening sign He manifests His glory at a marriage; His glory was manifested in that He supplied their lack. They had 'no wine'. We are not told what effect this sign had upon the guests, or the bride and bridegroom. We are told, 'His disciples believed on Him'.

This sign has been recorded in order that we might believe:

- (1) That Jesus is the Christ.
- (2) That He is the Son of God.
- (3) That believing we might have life through His name.

The miracles which He did were the evidence of His Messiahship. This we have already seen in Matthew's Gospel. They are further given to reveal Him as the Son of God. This one, in particular, is a miracle of creation. What is ordinarily accomplished by the slow process of vegetable growth and development is here performed instantaneously at a word from Him. To believe Him is to receive life. Here life is indicated, 'more abundantly'. Not water for purifying, but wine that maketh glad the heart of God and man. We are perfectly certain it was not the wine that is a mocker, that biteth like a serpent, respecting which Scripture itself testifies, 'whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise'.

(3)

The Nobleman's Son

John 4:46-50

The first and last signs bring before us the nation's need. There is a failure of supply which can only be met by their Messiah. The second and seventh signs emphasize sickness and death, death being mentioned in these two alone.

The first sign was given on the seventh day of the record. In the second sign restoration takes place 'at the seventh hour'. Seven disciples figure in the last sign (21:2). We shall find this element emphasized still more in the signs that follow. It is a genuine part of the symbolism. The nation's restoration to joy and the marriage feast will take place in the sabbath that is coming, the seven thousand years of this world's history. So likewise will their being received back as alive from the dead.

Possibly, if the words of verse 43 stood alone, no symbolic meaning would be attached to them, but they appear again in the corresponding seventh sign, and unitedly compel one to think of Hosea 6:1-3, viz.:

'After two days will He revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight' (Hos. 6:2).

The passages are:

'After two days He departed' (John 4:43).

'He abode two days ... after that saith He to His disciples, Let us go into Judaea again' (11:6,7).

This period prophetically covers the approximate 2,000 years of Israel's death as a nation, and indicates the millennium as the day of Israel's revival and new life. To the same period refer the words of Hosea 13:14:

'I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction'.

The apostle Paul, speaking of Israel's failure as a nation, says:

'If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but LIFE FROM THE DEAD?' (Rom. 11:15).

Twice does the nobleman use the words 'come down' to the Lord. This may be simply common usage, it may be strictly topographical; it may nevertheless be a part of the sign itself. Over and over again in this Gospel the Lord refers to Himself as the bread which *came down* from heaven. Israel's great cry in the day of deliverance will be:

'Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest *come down*' (Isa. 64:1).

Israel at the point of death will have no hope of deliverance except from above.

We must however be careful to note the great difference between the second and seventh signs, as well as the correspondence that exists between them. In the case of the nobleman's son, *healing* is the word, whereas in the case of Lazarus, *resurrection* is the one essential. In the second sign the child is 'at the point of death', dying of a 'fever'.

The verb 'to heal' occurs but three times in John's Gospel (4:47; 5:13 and 12:40). The last reference is at a dispensational crisis, and is found in the quotation of Isaiah 6:10, a passage fraught with solemn importance. Healing in John's Gospel means not only the physical cure, but the spiritual healing of the nation. Immediately before this quotation is made, the seventh sign has been given. 'Lazarus is DEAD'. No longer a nation 'at the point of death' needing healing is set forth, but a nation dead and buried, needing nothing less than resurrection. In Acts 3:11 the word 'to heal' reappears with the renewed preaching of repentance. Once more Isaiah 6:10 is quoted in Acts 28:27; this time finally. The time for healing is past, death has come, and Israel must await the hour when it shall hear the voice of the Son of God.

In five out of the eight signs the Lord speaks the word only, and does not touch the subject. There is an emphasis on the power of His word. In the first sign He simply says, 'Fill the waterpots with water'; 'Draw out now'. In the second, 'Go thy way, thy son liveth'; and the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him. In the third, in contrast to the complaint of the impotent man that he had no one to put him into the pool, come the words, 'Rise, take up thy bed, and walk'. This is followed by the wondrous words:

'For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will ... He that heareth My word ... hath everlasting life ... the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth' (5:21-29).

This truth is fully set forth in the raising of Lazarus. Here again we see a second setting forth of the Messiahship of Jesus, and perceive the power of life which abides in His name, and which is received by faith.

(4)

The Impotent Man

John 5:1-47

We saw that death was confined to the second and seventh signs, and we shall now see that sin is spoken of only in the third and sixth. It will be observed, moreover, that the second pair of signs intensifies the subject.

In both the third and sixth signs we have a pool, a long standing case, and the Sabbath day. Further, the nature of the spiritual infirmity and blindness is suggested by the reference in each case to the *words* of Moses and the *works* of the Father. Both signs were given at Jerusalem. The pool in the third sign is called 'Bethesda'. The pool in the

sixth is called 'Siloam'. In both cases a reference is made to either the language or the meaning of the name 'which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda', 'Siloam, which is by interpretation, Sent'. Bethesda means 'the house of mercy', and here in this sign mercy is seen and heard. Whether the troubling of the water by an angel is to be taken as Scriptural truth, or whether we have here the record of a popular idea, makes no difference to the value of the story. Israel as a nation were guarded, redeemed, led, taught, and punished by the instrumentality of the angels, but the world to come, of which the apostle Paul speaks in Hebrews 2, has not been subjected to angels.

Among the many impotent folk who anxiously awaited the troubling of the water was a man who had been in a state of helpless infirmity for thirty-eight years. If the reader consults *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 50. vii (2,3), he will see that this is the actual period of the wandering of Israel in the wilderness, which wandering was a punishment for their sin of unbelief. The impotent man is a type of Israel shut out from the promised land, cut off from the *aionion* life. To this man comes the word of power:

'Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath' (John 5:8,9).

The epistle to the Hebrews deals with the actual historic wandering in the wilderness, and speaks of the 'rest' that remaineth, which rest is a *sabbatismos* (see Heb. 3, 4). Here we have therefore at the pool of Bethesda the type of Israel's restoration. The man who was healed being cross-questioned by the Jews, confessed that he did not know who his benefactor might be. This is paralleled in the sixth sign, where the neighbours and the Pharisees cross-question the man concerning his benefactor. Commencing with 'a man that is called Jesus', he is led on at length to the confession that Jesus was the 'Son of God'.

We shall see the prophetic significance of the sixth sign later, but it is already obvious to any student of the prophets that in both of these signs Israel's restoration is set forth. The bigotry and hatred manifested over the 'desecration' of the Sabbath revealed the utter darkness of the minds of these leaders of the people.

Let us spend a moment to survey the Lord's doings on the Sabbath. In Matthew 12:1-8, where the word first occurs, the Lord shows how vastly different was his understanding of the Sabbath from the strait-laced formal conception of the Pharisees. Out of this controversy comes the first great truth that we do well ever to keep in mind, viz., 'The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day'.

The next truth to emerge from the crafty questioning of the Pharisees is that it is lawful 'to *do good* on the Sabbath'. Mark in his Gospel adds one item that must not be omitted here:

'The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath' (Mark 2:27,28).

If we glance back again to Matthew 12 we shall see that this latter sentence is there connected with 'mercy, and not sacrifice'; in other words, the Sabbath is the day of healing, of mercy, of the beneficial effect of the redemption made by Christ. It is fitting therefore that the impotent man should be healed at the 'House of Mercy'. We shall see also how fitting the pool of Siloam was when we come to the sixth sign. Luke, while recording the incident of Matthew 12, gives a further illustration of the importance of the Sabbath (Luke 13:10-16).

A woman bound by Satan for eighteen years is loosed from her bond on the Sabbath day. The Lord gives special emphasis to the fact that the woman who was 'made straight' was a 'daughter of Abraham'. The Millennium is the day in which the seed of Abraham shall be delivered from the long-standing bondage of Satan, when they shall be healed, when their blindness shall give place to sight, when they that are in their graves shall hear the voice that awoke Lazarus (the seventh sign), when the marriage feast shall be set, and the 'new wine in the Father's kingdom' shall be tasted with joy, when the 153 fishes shall all be gathered to the shore with net unbroken.

In John 5:17 the Lord refers to the Father's works, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work'. The meaning of this statement is that up till the ministry of Christ, the Father had wrought for Israel, 'hitherto' meaning 'until now'. From the commencement of the ministry of the Son, the Father wrought through Him. This truth comes out again in John 9:4, 'I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day'. The testimony of Moses is also referred to in both signs:

‘There is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?’ (John 5:45-47).

The Pharisees confess in chapter 9:29 :

‘We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence He is’.

Had Israel really believed Moses, they would have known when Christ presented Himself ‘whence He is’, and their thirty-eight years of wilderness wandering would have ended, and the Sabbath of blessing, the kingdom of heaven which ‘is at hand’, would have dawned. As it was, blindness total and complete is found in the parallel sign. Thus all these signs testify. ‘No wine’ is echoed by the absolute ‘caught nothing’ (chap. 21). ‘The *point* of death’ is echoed by ‘dead and buried’ (chap. 11). The thirty-eight years of infirmity are exchanged for blindness from birth (chap. 9).

A prophetic meaning attaches to the words of Christ when He found the man in the temple, ‘Behold, thou art made whole: *sin no more*, lest a worse thing come unto thee’ (John 5:14). There will be some who will sin even during the Millennium, and a worse punishment than wandering and dying in the wilderness will befall them. The Millennium must not be confounded with the New Creation. The seventh day is the *last* day of the week, not the first. The New Creation follows the age of the Kingdom, and in that new day sin and sorrow shall be found no more.

The first set of signs indicates *what might have been* had Israel repented. The second set indicates *what did and will take place*, for Israel has now entered into blindness and death, from which nothing can save them but the personal advent of their long-rejected Messiah.

(5)

Feeding of Five Thousand, and Jesus Walking on the Sea

The Central Signs (John 6)

The signs already considered have been indicative of Israel’s condition, and prophetic of the nation’s restoration. The fourth sign (feeding of five thousand) reveals the way in which this restoration will be accomplished, and leads on to a crisis. It is the last of the series.

The feast of the Jews which is mentioned in the sign is suggestive (‘The passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh’), for here we shall read of the blood of Christ without which no man shall have life. Both of these central signs take place after the Lord had ascended into a mountain. Israel’s restoration is connected with the Mount of Olives both in the prophets (Zech. 14:4), the Lord’s own prophecy (Matt. 24:3), and the angel’s announcement (Acts 1:12).

The Lord to test Philip asked him, ‘Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat’. He replies that ‘Two hundred pennyworth would not be sufficient to provide every one with a little’. Andrew remarks ‘There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes’, but adds, ‘what are they among so many?’ Clearly ‘buying’ or ‘sharing’ will not go far, for there are over 5,000 hungry people to feed. The Lord now says, ‘Make the men sit down’, and then begins, after giving thanks, to distribute the loaves to the disciples. When all had eaten ‘as much as they would’ twelve baskets were filled with the fragments that remained ‘over and above’. The apostles were thereby also provided with a full supply of food. The effect of this sign upon the multitude was to make them say, ‘This is of a truth that prophet which should come into the world’, and they contemplated taking Christ by force and making Him King. ‘When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force, to make Him a King, He departed again into a mountain Himself alone’.

Here we reach a point of great dispensational importance. Nothing is clearer than the testimony of Scripture that Christ came to be King of Israel, yet when the multitude contemplated making Him King, the Lord withdrew Himself. The reason is to be found in their motive which is exposed in the sequel. The fourth and fifth signs are so linked together that we cannot proceed to that sequel without dealing with the parallel sign. The night drew on, and the disciples entered a boat and ‘went over the sea toward Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus was not come to

them'. Presently the sea began to rise by reason of a great wind that blew. The other Gospels testify to the dangerous character of these storms that sweep the inland seas. About half way across the lake they saw the Lord walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship. This was the first time the Lord had used any miraculous power in His own case. Here we have an anticipation of the Lord as the risen One. In John 20:19 after resurrection, closed doors were no barrier to the spiritual body of the risen Christ. Here as He walked upon the sea this power is foreshadowed.

The disciples were afraid, but the Lord reassures them by crying out, 'It is I; be not afraid'. The actual words of Christ were far more impressive than these. In John 8:58 He said, 'Before Abraham was, I AM'. Here in John 6:20 He uses *identical language* 'I AM, be not afraid'. Here is the true significance of the sign. He that must save Israel, Who alone can satisfy their need, is the 'I AM' Who in the days of Egypt originated the first passover and is here about to fulfil that wondrous type. To tread upon the waves of the sea according to Job 9:8 is a sign of Deity, and would be so interpreted by all who knew the Old Testament Scriptures. When Israel look upon Him Whom they pierced, and testify of the redeeming power of His blood, they will also say, 'This is our GOD, we have waited for Him'. The rising sea and the great wind will be found in Revelation 13 and Daniel 7. The four winds of heaven when they strive upon the great sea will bring about the day of Jacob's trouble, yet as the prophet says, 'He shall be saved out of it', saved, as signified here, by the personal coming in the midst of their danger of the Lord Jesus Christ, the I AM of the Old Testament.

The people who had been fed follow after the Lord, and are rebuked for merely seeking the 'loaves and fishes'. The Lord points them to the meat that endureth unto *aionion* life. Then follows the discourse on the Manna, and the blessed fact that Christ Himself is 'that bread of life'. He goes deeper: 'the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world'. Yet further he adds, 'Except ye ... drink His blood, ye have no life in you'. Many of the disciples when they heard this said, 'This is a hard saying; who can hear it?' When He followed this by emphasizing the elective character of God's purpose (verse 65) 'many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him'. Then comes the climax. To the twelve the Lord says, 'Will ye also go away?' and Simon Peter bears abundant testimony that he, at least, has learned *the* lesson of the signs:

'Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of *aionion* life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God' (John 6:68,69).

Thus the central pair of signs turn from Israel's need to the person of the Messiah Himself, their only hope.

Each set of four signs is complete however in itself. This is quite compatible with the existing correspondence already pointed out on page 203 of this volume. Briefly they may be set out thus:

ISRAEL'S	A	No wine.- Fully supplied.
CONDITION AT	B	At the point of death.- Seventh hour.
THE	B	Thirty-eight years.- Sabbath.
FIRST ADVENT.	A	No bread.- Fully supplied.
		Present interval.
ISRAEL'S	A	The Sea.- I AM.
CONDITION AT	B	The born blind receive sight.
THE	B	The dead and buried receive life.
SECOND ADVENT.	A	The Sea.- It is the LORD.

(6)

The Man Born Blind

John 9

With this miracle we commence the corresponding signs of the second series. The healing of the man born blind echoes the healing of the impotent man who had been in that case for 38 years. In this sign however we are dealing with a type of Israel after the rejection of the Lord had taken place. We have already drawn attention to the intensifying of the conditions of the second set of signs. As this is important, and may have been missed, we give again the following figure:

Before Rejection.

No Wine.
At the point of death.
Impotent for thirty-eight
years.

After Rejection.

Caught and had nothing.
Dead and buried.
Blind from birth.

While the Lord tells His disciples that the cause of the man's blindness was neither his own sin nor that of his parents, the dispensational application is found in the closing words of the chapter:

'For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. And some of the Pharisees which were with Him heard these words, and said unto Him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye would have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth' (John 9:39-41).

We observed in our consideration of the corresponding sign that John is careful to tell us what the name of the pool (*Bethesda*) was in the Hebrew tongue. Something similar occurs again in this sign. 'Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, *Sent*). He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing' (verse 7). The narrative of this remarkable cure is held up half way for the sake of the meaning of a name. That name therefore must have a bearing upon the meaning of the sign, otherwise the parenthesis is unwarranted.

SENT. Is the reader aware that around this word the whole of the Gospel of John is written? that *the* sin of Israel was the rejection of the Sent One, just as their salvation will be found in His reception. As the two words rendered 'sent' occur some sixty times, we can only give an indication of their usage:

- 'He whom God hath *sent* speaketh the words of God' (John 3:34).
- 'He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that *sent* Me' (John 5:24).
- 'The works ... bear witness of Me, that the Father hath *sent* Me' (John 5:36).
- 'I came ... to do ... the will of Him that *sent* Me' (John 6:38-40).
- 'My doctrine is not mine, but His that *sent* Me' (John 7:16).

In chapters 8 to 17 the word recurs. In that impressive chapter 17 the word comes seven times:

'And this is *aionion* life, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou hast *sent*' (John 17:3).

No one but the Sent One can give life to the dead, or sight to the blind. We find in the next sign that the Lord, beside the tomb, audibly addressed the Father because of the people that stood by, saying 'that they may believe that Thou has *sent* Me' (11:42). There was much division among the people over this miracle. Wilful rejection is now evident. 'If any man did confess that He was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue' (9:22).

The questions which were put to the man born blind were used to lead him on in the truth. First he says, 'The man that is called Jesus, etc.' (verse 11). Then upon being more directly questioned he answered, 'He is a prophet' (17). Upon the third interrogation the man waxes warm, 'I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples? ... if this man were not of God, He could do nothing' (27-33). This could not be tolerated. 'Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out' (34). As in the parallel sign, the Lord finds the man a second time, and the great revelation is made. 'And when He had found him, He said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? ... Lord I believe. And he worshipped Him' (35-38). This is immediately followed by the reference to judgment, sin, and blindness, already quoted.

There is significance in the fact that the blind man was cast out before he believed that Jesus was the Son of God. The nation as such denied this truth. Only a few and an outcast few saw this light of life. It is also highly suggestive

that the same word is used for the action of the Pharisees, and of the Lord. 'They *cast him* out' (9:34). 'When He *putteth forth* His own sheep' (10:4). The Lord overrules the wrath of men. They may cast out, but the Good Shepherd will use their action as a *putting forth* of His own sheep.

Returning for a moment to the body of the narrative, we cannot but feel the sincerity of the testimony of verse 25. The Pharisees said, 'We *know* that this man is a sinner' (24). The blind man replied, 'Whether He be a sinner or no, I know not: *one thing I know*, that, whereas I was blind, now I see' (25). The man's theology was perhaps lamentably crude. Yet he knows 'one thing'. We in our turn may not be able to answer all the questions which tradition, hatred, or ignorance may put to us; but 'one thing' we know too. Here is a fixed, subjective, personal commencement. This is not creed, but conviction, not theology, but truth, not so much light, as it is life. If there is an element of vagueness in the words, 'A (The) man that is called Jesus' in verse 11, there is none in the concluding portion of the statement, 'I went and washed, and I received sight'. His knowledge of the Person of his Saviour grows constantly upwards from 'The man that is called Jesus' to 'a prophet', 'a man of God' to the 'Son of God' and 'Lord'. His sight was immediately and completely given. He did not, as one on another occasion, 'see men as trees walking', he 'came seeing'.

If we collect the testimony of Scripture concerning the blindness of Israel, and consider the testimony alongside of this sign, we shall see much that is parallel and prophetic. Let us praise God for the revelation given concerning the duration of this condition:

'Blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved' (Rom. 11:25,26).

(7)

The Raising of Lazarus

John 11

We reach, in this seventh sign, the lowest depths of Israel's night. In the parallel sign - the second (4:46-54) - the nobleman's son was 'at the point of death', and the cry was, 'Come down ere my child die'. In this sign death has come, 'Lazarus is dead', and the cry is 'Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died'. While the second sign shows the national life almost flickering out, the seventh shows life extinct.

In the sign of the healing of the blind man the Lord said that the man was not born blind because of his own sin or that of his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. In the seventh sign a somewhat similar expression occurs:

'This sickness is not with a view to death merely (free rendering of *pros*), but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby' (11:4).

In all the eight signs there is some element of test; something that necessitates faith apart from sight or evidences:

- (1) THE MARRIAGE AT CANA.- Woman, what have I to do with thee? (2:4).
- (2) THE NOBLEMAN'S SON.- Except ye see signs and wonders (4:48).
- (3) THE IMPOTENT MAN.- Wilt thou be made whole? (5:6).
- (4) THE FEEDING OF THE 5,000.- Whence shall we buy bread? (6:5).
- (5) THE WALKING ON THE SEA.- Jesus had not yet come (6:17).
- (6) THE MAN BORN BLIND.- The works of God manifested (9:3).
- (7) THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.- Not unto death, but for the glory of God (11:4).
- (8) THE DRAUGHT OF FISHES.- Have ye any meat? (21:5).

It is not always possible to understand the reasons for the many dispensational dealings of God, but one thing we know, that whatever the outward appearance may seem, He abides faithful; He is still the God of love.

This is prominently brought forward in this seventh sign. We know from other sources of the love that existed between the Lord and the family at Bethany. In this chapter before us, we are told, 'Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus'; but instead of continuing, 'Therefore as soon as He heard of Lazarus' sickness, He hastened to his bedside and healed him', we read the following strange sequence, 'When He had heard *therefore* that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was'. All through those days one prayer was uppermost in the sisters' mind and heart. 'If only the Lord would come'. Separately, each sister utters her heart's burden when she did meet the Lord. 'Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died' (11:21,32). Those 'two days' may have a variety of individual interpretations, but most know something of their anxiety and despair. Dispensationally too Israel will say:

'After two days He will revive us: in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight' (Hos. 6:2).

There is an ever widening circle of influence exhibited in the development of the sign. Starting from the centre of all, we have the glory of God, and the extreme circumference reaches to 'the people that stand by'. This may be the better seen as follows:

- (1) The glory of God (11:4).
- (2) The glorifying of the Son of God (11:4).
- (3) The faith of the disciples (11:15).
- (4) The faith of Martha (11:25-27,40).
- (5) The people that stood by (11:42).
- (6) Many of the Jews (11:45).

When Martha met the Lord, she said:

'Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee' (John 11:21,22).

Vaguely Martha seemed to feel that even now, in some strange way, she need not abandon hope. When the Lord put her unshaped thoughts before her in the simple words, 'Thy brother shall rise again', Martha's faith recoiled, as it were, for she said, 'I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection *at the last day*'. This was not, however, the secret hope that had prompted her first words. The Lord recalls her mind from the 'last day' to Himself, and the present. Knowing something of the feeling of human helplessness in the presence of death, we can in some small degree appreciate the majesty and the triumph of the Lord's reply to Martha:

'I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?' (John 11:25,26).

The Gospel of John contains a wondrous series of statements made by Christ characterised by the expression 'I am'. In Himself the Lord Jesus is the great 'I AM'.

'Before Abraham was, *I AM*' (8:58).

'*I AM*; be not afraid' (6:20).

To the woman of Samaria the Lord revealed himself:

'*I* that speak unto you *AM*' (4:26)

To the Jews the Lord said:

'If ye believe not that *I AM* ye shall die in your sins' (8:24).

'When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that *I AM*' (8:28).

At the time of the betrayal, the Lord again refers to this great title (13:19); and in the garden of Gethsemane the mere utterance of the words caused those who were about to take Him to fall backwards (18:5,6).

To His people this great title takes more concrete form. There are seven avenues of blessing through which the believer draws upon the Saviour as the great *I AM*:

- (1) I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE (6:35).
- (2) I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD (8:12).
- (3) I AM THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP (10:7).
- (4) I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD (10:11).
- (5) I AM THE RESURRECTION, AND THE LIFE (11:25).
- (6) I AM THE TRUE AND LIVING WAY (14:6).
- (7) I AM THE TRUE VINE (15:1).

The Lord's title as revealed to Martha is twofold, and refers to the two classes of believers that must come under the beneficent effects of His mighty power.

- (1) To the *dead* believer, He is the RESURRECTION.
- (2) To the believer who is *alive* at His coming, He is the LIFE.

No words could indicate more clearly the Lord's consciousness of triumph than these; yet what condescension! What lowly sympathy is exhibited in that smallest of verses, 'Jesus wept'! (verse 35). Though He is indeed a great High Priest, yet He is not untouched with the feeling of our infirmities. When Martha interposed with the fact that Lazarus had been dead four days, the Lord said, 'Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?'

Christ was raised by the 'glory of the Father' (Rom. 6:4). It is a great pity that some, not seeing the close relationship between the 'glory' and the 'resurrection' render the words of Ephesians 1:17, 'the glorious Father'. We must retain the rendering, 'The Father of glory', seeing how closely it is connected with the exceeding greatness of the power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. The Lord had already said:

'The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth' (John 5:28,29).

And here before the grave of Lazarus He gave a foretaste of that blessed day:

'Lazarus, come forth! and the dead man came forth' (11:43,44 Author's translation).

The last sign given by the Lord before His sufferings is the sign of Israel's restoration. Romans 11:15 says:

'For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?'

Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones also looks forward to that same blessed day. Indeed, there is no blessing that can be enjoyed in its fulness apart from resurrection. The blessings of our pilgrimage are foretastes of coming glory. The life that is life indeed is future.

While we may not range ourselves with those whose hope is defined in John 5:29, may we nevertheless ever remember that our 'blessed hope' can never be realised apart from Him who is the Resurrection and the Life.

(8)

The Miraculous Draught of Fishes

The One Sign following Resurrection (John 21:1-14)

In the first sign the Lord manifested (*phaneroo*) His glory; in the last He manifested Himself, 'shewed' (21:14) being *phaneroo*. In the first sign we read, 'They have no wine' (2:3); in the last that 'they caught nothing', and had nothing (21:3,5).

There is a dispensational reason for this correspondence of subject. What the Lord came to do at His first advent, He will fully accomplish at His second. Resurrection is the master key of the Bible. Quite apart from human guilt, it was the purpose of God to establish a kingdom, with His Son as King, and when the intruding element of sin has been removed that purpose will be brought to a consummation. That is the teaching of the first

and the eighth signs. The fresh start follows the Lord's own resurrection, and in the numerical sequence of the signs it follows the seventh, which sees the raising of Lazarus.

Two confessors of the faith are in immediate contextual connection with the first and last signs - Nathanael and Thomas. Nathanael was told by Philip that they had found the Messiah, but Nathanael objected that no good thing could come out of Nazareth. Philip's argument was, 'Come and see' (1:46). Thomas was told by the disciples that they had seen the Lord, but Thomas objected that he would not believe their statement apart from actually seeing the wound prints themselves (20:25). When Nathanael was convinced, his confession went farther than that of any of the others at that time. 'Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel' (1:49). So Thomas, when he did see the Lord, went beyond the confession of Peter himself saying, 'My Lord and my God' (John 20:28).

Nathanael was an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile, but he was not a representative of the nation. Alas, a truer picture of the apostate nation is found in the blinded Jew of Acts 13, to whom Paul addressed the words, 'O full of all *subtilty*' (same word as 'guile'). There were but few Nathanaels. Thomas represents the redeemed and awakened nation, who shall indeed 'look upon Him whom they pierced', and shall confess 'Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him', and this confession, like that of Thomas, comes after resurrection, for the verse before says, 'He will swallow up death in victory' (Isa. 25:8,9).

Closely associated with the eight signs is an unfolding of the titles of Christ. At the beginning, just before the first sign, His disciples spoke of Him as Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph, the Messiah. Nathanael's confession, as it were, adjusts the focus and He is seen as the Son of God and the King of Israel. From His own lips now comes the title, the Son of man.

The sign of walking on the sea reveals Him as the 'I AM' (6:20), while the feeding of the 5,000 leads on to the title, 'The bread of life' (6:35). In the sign of the man born blind (chap. 9) Christ is revealed as the Sent One, and immediately following the confession of the man born blind comes the title, 'The Good Shepherd' (10:11). At the raising of Lazarus is revealed that blessed and majestic title, 'The Resurrection and the Life' (11:25). Thomas's confession, 'My Lord and my God' (20:28), and that of the disciples, 'It was the Lord' (21:12), round off the wondrous list. The signs were wrought with the object that they might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God; and that believing they might have life through His Name (20:31). Each sign contributes something to our knowledge and understanding of the Christ.

One item in the final sign has always presented a difficulty, and that is the number of fish brought to land, viz., 153. The number is too definite to pass by. It must have a meaning. From earliest days men have displayed a varied ingenuity in explaining the meaning of this number. Dr. E. W. Bullinger, in *Number in Scripture* draws attention to the fact that the gematria of the Hebrew words *Beni Ha-Elohim*, 'Sons of God', is exactly 153. It is also suggestive that the gematria of the word 'fishes' *ichthues*, and 'the net' *to diktoun*, are both 1,224 or 8 x 153. If we may be allowed to see any teaching in these facts, the final sign emphasises the certainty that all who have been given to Christ by the Father shall come to Him, the presence of the 8 in the words 'fishes' and 'the net' occurring in the 8th sign emphasising resurrection. Appendix 176 of *The Companion Bible*, speaking of the first and last signs, says:

'When Messiah gives joy to the nation, it will be filled "up to the brim" (2:7 cf. Isa. 9:2-7. John 21:11); and when He fills the Land with restored Israel in resurrection, it will be to the last one (Ezek. 37:12-14). For in the eighth sign Messiah was the Caller, signifying that He will be the Gatherer' (Jer. 31:10).

Lieut.-Col. F. Roberts has presented another interpretation which amplifies the foregoing. He has drawn up a list of those who are recorded to have had direct blessing from Christ, and this list totals 153 individual cases. We will not attempt to repeat the list, but it may be consulted by any interested in *Number in Scripture*. Peter and the other disciples were to be fishers of men. The Risen Christ stood by them. Their net should not break, and they should lose none. In their own strength they would toil all night and catch nothing, but upon His word they should let down their net, and catch a net full.

POSTSCRIPT

We have now considered The Parables, Miracles and Signs of the Gospels according to Matthew and John, and believe that sufficient evidence is now before the reader to enable him to perceive that the parables of Matthew

primarily deal with two aspects of the 'kingdom', and that the miracles equally with the parables belong to the same phase of the purpose of the ages. We have seen also the peculiar purpose behind the selection of the eight signs in John, and have considered the scope of both the Gospels of Matthew and of John.

There remains the opening of the heart and understanding which is the prerogative of the Lord alone, but the prayers of all those concerned with the publication of this volume go with it, that many a reader may be impelled, after reading what has been written, to seek more fully to know the truth as it pertains to the present time, and particularly for the Gentiles today.

The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven we saw turned upon Israel's rejection of the Lord, *in the land*, while THE MYSTERY of the present dispensation turns upon Israel's blindness as recorded *in Acts* 28, when the hope of Israel was temporarily suspended, the olive tree cut down, and the nation became 'Lo-ammi', 'Not My people'.

In Matthew 13 the Lord uttered things that had been kept secret *from* the foundation of the world (Matt. 13:35). In Ephesians the apostle reveals a secret purpose that had been made and hid *before* the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; see also Col. 1:26).

If the Lord could say of these earthly things, 'Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men 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' (Matt. 13:16,17), how much more can we say, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ' and rejoice in that superlative revelation that even principalities and powers in heavenly places are learning through the church the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 1:3; 3:10).

'HE THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR'.

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