

The
PROPHETIC PARABLES
of
MATTHEW 13

FAITHFUL CLASSIC

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1. Forward

There is little room for wonder, though there is much for humiliation, at the widespread ignorance and error that now obtains among the people of God on many of the leading subjects of Prophecy. For almost fourteen centuries, as “Church-history” clearly shows, prophecy was neglected.

Those known as the “Church fathers”, with only one or two exceptions, like Origen, devoted their time to wrangling over doctrines and the ordinances; while prophecy was ignored. In view of 2 Peter 1:19 — “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place” — and the general neglect of prophecy for fourteen hundred years, those centuries have very aptly been termed “The Dark Ages” — dark because the light from the lamp of prophecy did not illumine them.

Nor was it much better when the Reformers came on the scene. God forbid that we should utter one word of criticism against those honored men of God, but their hands were more than full in preaching the Gospel to a people who were utterly ignorant of it, in translating the Scriptures into their own mother-tongues, and in expounding the great fundamentals of the Christian faith. So busily occupied were they in those good works, they had little or no time to give to the real study of prophecy itself. As a matter of fact, practically all that the Reformers saw in the prophetic portions of Scripture was the foretold judgment of God upon the Satanic system of the Papacy, out of which they had been mercifully delivered.

Those who have any knowledge at all of human nature can readily understand how it would be with men who had been cradled in Romanism and who later had, by the grace of God, been enabled to see its blasphemous errors. When they came to the prophecies of Scripture, their thinking was colored by Romanism, and consequently when they met with an object which was the predicted subject of God’s judgment, they viewed it through colored glasses. “Babylon” was the Papacy; the “Man of Sin” was the Pope; the “Beast” was Rome, and so on. The sad thing is that most of those who have followed the Reformers, instead of studying the prophecies of God’s Word for themselves, have done little more than echo what the Reformers before them said. In consequence, little or no advance has been made, and God’s people at large today have very little more light upon prophecy than had their forefathers of three hundred years ago.

There is, therefore, pressing need for all Christians to give at least part of the time they spend in reading the Scriptures to studying its predictions.

We purpose giving a series of studies on the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, which, in the writer’s judgment, is, from the standpoint of prophecy, the most important chapter of all the New Testament. There is much in God’s prophetic program which must necessarily remain dark until the parables of this chapter are thoroughly mastered. At present they are much misunderstood and misinterpreted.

It will be found that in Matthew 13:10,11 the Lord Jesus has designated these seven parables “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.”

This expression “the kingdom of heaven” comprehends in a brief form the contents of the whole chapter. This will be seen by a reference to vv. 24, 31, 33, etc., where it will be found that each of the last six parables begin with “the kingdom of heaven is like unto.” What is meant by this expression? There is perhaps no term in Scripture used so extensively, but which is so little understood. Though it is found in Matthew’s Gospel only, yet it occurs there no less than thirty-two times. Thus our interpretation of this expression affects a great deal of Scripture, and a correct definition of it supplies the first key to the understanding of Matthew 13; for it should be obvious to all that none can begin to understand its seven parables until they have obtained a right definition of that term.

There is the utmost confusion today and a fearful amount of misunderstanding concerning the scriptural purport of this expression, “the kingdom of heaven.” There are some who think that it refers to Heaven itself. There are others who understand it refers to that Church of which Christ is the Head. But there is one scripture in the New Testament which conclusively refutes both of these definitions. In Matthew 16:19 we find the Savior saying to Peter, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Most assuredly Christ did not give to Peter the keys of the Church; still less did He give to him the keys of Heaven itself. Then of what did He give Peter the keys? What does the reader understand by “the keys of the kingdom of heaven”? Could you give a simple and satisfactory explanation of this verse to a Romanist who came to you desiring help upon it? We have raised this point in order to show what a need there is for a careful inquiry and a close study of what this particular expression does not connote and what it does signify.

It is because the great majority of Christians, including most of their leaders and teachers, have no right understanding of this term — “the kingdom of heaven” — that they encounter so much in Matthew’s Gospel which is perplexing and puzzling to them. Let us refer to one other passage where this expression occurs so as to make more manifest the prevailing ignorance. In the opening verse of Matthew 22 we read, “And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king which made a marriage for his son”, etc.

Now go down to v. 11: “and when the king came in to see the guests he saw there (at the banquet itself) a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment?”

And he was speechless. Then said the king, Bind him hand and foot”, etc. How many of our readers are really satisfied with the explanations which they have heard or read of this passage? Our only object in calling attention to it now is to point out that it is one of the parables relating to “the kingdom of heaven”, and to show that until we obtain a correct definition of this expression there is not a little in Scripture which we shall never begin to understand.

Before we are ready to take up in detail the subject of “the kingdom of heaven” we need first to weigh the wider expression of “the kingdom of God”, and in considering this we must begin where Scripture begins, and that is in the Old Testament. In the remainder of this article we shall attempt nothing more than an outline of “the kingdom of God” in the Old Testament.

In contemplating “the kingdom of God” in the O. T. Scriptures great care must be taken to distinguish between two aspects of it. First, Scripture speaks of an unlimited kingdom of God, namely the sovereign rule of the Most High over all His vast dominions. Such scriptures as Daniel 4:34,35 refer to this aspect of His kingdom: “And I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that lives forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?”

This rule of God over all His creatures is universal, absolute, and eternal.

But Scripture also speaks of a limited kingdom, which is restricted both in its scope and time, which is neither eternal nor universal; and it is not until we learn to distinguish between these two separate aspects of the “kingdom of God” that we rightly divide the Word of truth and secure the key which unlocks quite a little of the Old Testament.

This second aspect of God’s kingdom is what may be termed the dispensational one: it is localized and temporal. This is God’s kingdom on earth, where His rule is publicly manifested over and is owned by men. It was first established among the children of Israel, when the Lord Himself was in their midst, when He made the mercy seat upon the ark His throne, and dwelt between the cherubim. That was God’s “kingdom” on earth. In Joshua 3:11,13 — a passage which takes us back to a point not long after Jehovah took up His dwelling in Israel’s midst — occurs a striking expression: “Behold the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passes over before you into Jordan..... and it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap.” It is to be carefully noted that here is the first time in Scripture that God assumed this title, and that here it was connected with the ark, and was assumed on the occasion of Israel’s passing through the Jordan: it was Jehovah formally taking possession of that land which He had given to His people. Had Israel remained in subjection to their King and obeyed His laws, not only would He have continued in their midst, but through them He would have governed the whole earth — as He will yet do in the Millennium. Proof of this is found in the fact that during the brief seasons they remained obedient, He overthrew their enemies and subdued the surrounding Gentiles.

But Israel waxed disobedient and rebelled against Jehovah their King. “And the Lord said unto Samuel, ‘Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them’” (1 Samuel 8:7).

For centuries after this the long sufferance of God continued to bear with them, but in the days of Ezekiel the Shekinah-glory — His manifested presence in their midst — departed. This is referred to in Ezekiel 10:18, “Then the glory of the Lord departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim”; and Ezekiel 11:23, “and the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city.”

First the Shekinah-glory left the ark in the holy place, then gradually receding, it left the temple, then going farther away it stood over the Mount of Olives, until it vanished from their sight. God had forsaken His earthly throne and dwelling-place.

Now at this point, God, in a dispensational way, assumed a new title. In 2 Chronicles 36:23 we read, “Thus saith Cyrus, king of Persia, all the kingdoms of the earth has the Lord God of heaven given me.”

So in the opening verses of Ezra we are told that this same Cyrus made a proclamation saying, “The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has charged me to build Him an house at Jerusalem.” These are the first occurrences of this Divine title in Scripture.

It is no mere casual expression, but the employment of it marked a great crisis and denoted a radical change in God’s dealings with the earth. It will be found that this is a characteristic title of God in those books which treat of the captivity of Israel. It emphasized the fact that, while His eternal throne can never be given up, God’s dispensational throne upon earth had been forsaken.

In the stead of His visible throne in Israel’s midst, God set up another throne upon earth, a throne which He delegated to men, and which was to continue throughout the times of the Gentiles — an expression which concerns the interval during which the Gentiles have dominion over Jerusalem. This is the theme and subject which is developed in the book of Daniel. In its second chapter, where we have recorded Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the Divine interpretation thereof, we

find that the prophetic significance of the great image furnished an outline of the history of the times of the Gentiles and the character of their rule over this earth (see vv. 37-39).

The prophetic dream of Nebuchadnezzar looked forward not only to the end of the four Gentile world-empires, but also beyond them, contemplating another and a future empire which would be totally different in character. In v. 44 we are told, "And in the days of these kings (the "kingdom" before referred to) shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all the kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." This was the fifth kingdom, the promised kingdom of Messiah. Further details concerning it are given in Daniel 7:13,14, "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him; His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" — compare Luke 19:12,15.

After Daniel, the voice of prophecy was soon silenced, and for four hundred years the people of Israel remained in a state of eager expectation, waiting for God to fulfill His promises. Next appeared John the Baptist, who took up the kingdom message just where the O. T. prophets had dropped it. In Matthew 3:1,2 we read, "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand — it was "at hand", because the King Himself was about to appear in the midst of the Jews. When John said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand", what do you suppose his Jewish hearers understood by that expression?

They had the whole of the O. T. in their hands, but that is all which they then had. Obviously, all their thoughts would naturally turn to that kingdom which the Son of Man was to receive in heaven at the hands of the Ancient of days.

It is to be noted that the Baptist's preaching was "in the wilderness of Judea." The position occupied by the Messiah's forerunner was a sad portend of the outcome of his mission. John appeared outside the temple, away from Jerusalem. And his message, "Repent ye", bore witness to Israel's sad spiritual condition — I do not need to say "Repent ye" to a people who are walking in communion with God. "Repent ye" was a word for those who were away from God.

Then appeared the One whom John heralded. The King Himself once more drew near to Israel on earth. He who had of old vacated His earthly throne and who had in the days of Ezekiel retired to heaven, and who from that time onwards became known as "The Lord God of heaven", had in matchless grace incarnated Himself in human form, and because He was now once more upon earth, because the King Himself was present in Israel's midst, the Kingdom was "at hand". Therefore, we are told in Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Both the "signs" (Matthew 11:4; 16:3) and the "powers" (Hebrews 2:3; 6:5) of the kingdom — the Messianic, earthly one — were displayed by Christ. Humanly speaking, everything was ready for the establishment of that which had been promised by Daniel. Nothing was wanting but this — loyal hearts to welcome and receive the Divine-King. But, alas! this was lacking: "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:11).

The steps of the Messiah's rejection are traced in Matthew 12, which we shall take up in our next chapter. Because Israel rejected their King, He temporarily rejected them, and therefore the setting up of His Messianic kingdom on this earth was postponed. The King would depart from this world and be absent for a lengthy season, before He returned again and set up His kingdom — see Luke 19:12,15. In the interval of His absence the "kingdom" takes another form. It is now His kingdom among the Gentiles, and is found wherever His authority is publicly owned; it is the sphere of Christian profession: in a word, Christendom.

2. Introduction

The thirteenth chapter of Matthew opens with these words “The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside.” This statement clearly looks back to the preceding chapter, where the Holy Spirit has traced for us the various steps in Israel’s rejection of their King. At the beginning of Matthew 12 we find the Pharisees challenging the disciples of Christ because they had plucked the ears of corn on the Sabbath day, which is followed by the Lord’s vindication of them. Next we are told, “Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him” (v. 14).

This is the first time that we read of anything like this in Matthew’s Gospel.

Next in vv. 22-24 we are told, “Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a demon, blind, and dumb; and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.”

Up to that point this was the most remarkable miracle that the Lord Jesus had performed, in fact, it was three miracles in one. Such an impression was produced upon those who witnessed it that we are told, “and all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David ?” — not “is not this the Son of God ?” but “the Son of David,” i.e., the Messiah Himself. Following this we are told, “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of the demons” — there they committed the sin for which there was no forgiveness.

Following our Lord’s sentence upon the Pharisees for their unpardonable blasphemy, we are next told, “Then certain of the scribes and the Pharisees answered, Master, we would see a sign from Thee” (v. 38).

His response was that the only sign which should be given to that evil and unfaithful generation should be that of “the sign of the prophet Jonah” — i.e., that after three days in the place of death the Servant of God should come forth and go unto the Gentiles. Following this, the Lord solemnly pronounced the coming judgment of Heaven upon that wicked generation, so that their last state should be worse than the first (vv. 43-45).

The chapter closes by telling us that while Christ yet talked to the people one said unto Him, “Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with Thee.” in reply, He asked, “Who is My mother? and who are My brethren?” Then He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples and said, “Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in Heaven, the same is My brother and sister, and mother” (vv. 46-50).

This was a severing of fleshly ties: it denoted the Savior’s break with Israel: it announced that henceforth He would only own as His kinsmen those who did the will of His Father which was in Heaven.

It will thus be seen that the opening words of Matthew 13 supply the first key to the interpretation of what follows. The parables of this chapter were spoken by Christ “the same day” as when the Pharisees had taken council together to destroy Him, as when they had committed the unpardonable sin, as when He had pronounced solemn judgment upon the Nation, and as when He had severed the fleshly ties which united Him to the Jews and had intimated that henceforth there should be a people united to Him by spiritual bonds. Thus the relation between Matthew 12 and Matthew 13 is that of cause to effect; in other words, Matthew makes known the cause which led up to Christ’s acting as He did in the thirteenth chapter: that cause was Israel’s rejection of their King and His rejection of them. His action in Matthew 13:1 was indicative of a great dispensational crisis, it was an anticipation of what is found developed at length in the books of Acts — God, temporarily, turning away from the Jews and turning unto the Gentiles. “The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside,” The “house” is the place of ordered relationship and natural ties. This was now left, Jesus “went out” of it! Symbolically, it was a confirmation of His own words at the close of Matthew 12: the link which had bound Him to the Jews was now severed. Christ’s next act was to take His place by the seaside. This also had a deep symbolical significance for those who had eyes to see. The “sea” speaks of fallen man in the restlessness and barrenness of nature, of man apart from God, and thus of the Gentiles (F. W. G.). If the reader will turn to Daniel 7:1,2; Revelation 17:15, etc., he will there find this figure defined. “And He spoke many things unto them in parables” (Matthew 13:3).

This marked a new departure in Christ’s method of teaching. The first twelve chapters of this Gospel will be searched in vain for any parables.

Hitherto Christ had instructed the people in plain language, using simple terms of speech; but now His message was veiled and His meaning hidden.

This explains what we are told in the tenth verse: “And the disciples came, and said unto Him, Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?” The disciples were surprised: not being accustomed to this form of teaching, they were at a loss to account for it here. The Lord’s answer to their question confirmed what we have said on v. 1. His answer is recorded in vv. 11-15: our Lord’s quotation there of the solemn words from Isaiah supplied further proof that the Nation had rejected their King. In consequence of this rejection He had taken a place of distance from them, as this new form of teaching plainly evidenced. It is a principle exemplified all through the Scriptures that, wherever parables or symbolic utterances were employed they are addressed to a people estranged from God — hence the absence of them in the Epistles.

Turning once more to Matthew 13:11, we find here the second important key which unlocks the contents of our present chapter. The Lord Himself there designates the seven parables “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” But before we proceed further let it be pointed out that the word “kingdom” does not primarily refer to territory. Webster’s first meaning

of this word is “royal authority, sovereign power, rule, dominion.” The term “kingdom” refers, directly, not to territory but authority, not to a locality but to sovereignty. Let us borrow a simple illustration. France was once a “kingdom,” but today it is a “republic.” Yet there has been no territorial change: the country is the same, and it is inhabited by the same race of people. It is no longer a “kingdom” for the simple reason that it no longer acknowledges the sovereign authority of any king; instead, it is governed by the public, and is therefore a “republic.” The public are the rulers, authority being vested in those whom they elect to office. Thus it will be seen from this simple illustration that the term “kingdom” looks not to a localised sphere of territory, but refers to the form of its government and speaks of the sovereignty of its ruler. Therefore the “kingdom of heaven” is not heaven itself, but a people who own the sovereign authority of heaven.

Further proof of what has been said above will be found in the Savior’s words to Peter as recorded in Matthew 16:19: “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” “Keys” speak of two things: they are the symbol of authority and they are for the purpose of opening something and giving admission and access. When I give to some person the key to my house he has the right of authority to enter it. In Revelation 1:18 Christ is spoken of as having “the keys of death and hades,” which means that He has complete authority over them. Now to Peter were “given” the keys of the kingdom of heaven, a delegated authority being in view. In the book of Acts the meaning of the Lord’s words to Peter are made plain.

In the second chapter of the Acts we find Peter using those “keys” on the day of Pentecost — opening the door of the kingdom to the Jews . In Acts 10 we find Peter using those “keys” again — giving admission to the Gentiles into the kingdom. It is very striking to weigh the details in the last mentioned: the particular Gentiles referred to were Cornelius and his household. Now in Acts 9 we read of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, and, as we know, he was the apostle to the Gentiles. Yet, when the Lord appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for one of His servants, it was not Paul but Peter that was invited, for it was the latter and not the former who held the “keys”! That which Peter gave admission into was not heaven nor was it the Church, but the sphere of Christian profession. Thus the language of Matthew 13:11 assures us that the parables which follow have respect unto Christendom, i.e., that sphere where the authority of heaven and the sovereignty of Christ are professedly owned. Before leaving Matthew 16:19, we may add that a successional and vested right in “St. Peter’s keys” is a manifest absurdity; for this reason: Peter left the door of the kingdom wide open!

The eleventh verse of Matthew 13 supplies yet another key, in the word “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” In Scripture the term “mystery” signifies a Divine secret made known by the Holy Spirit. This is confirmed by what is told us in verse 35, namely, that Christ was here uttering “things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” Thus, in these parables, Christ was making known that which was outside the scope of O.T. prediction, something which God had not made known to Israel through the prophets. This needs to be carefully noted, for it refutes the popular interpretation of these parables.

There are many who regard the parables of Matthew 13 as containing predictions of the ushering in of the Millennium: those of the Mustard-tree and the Leaven are regarded as being parallel with the promise that “the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.” But that statement is found in Isaiah 11:9: that was no “secret” in O.T. times! Therefore, none of the parables in Matthew can be treating of the same subject as Isaiah 11:9, or what is stated in v. 35 would not be true. No; Matthew 13 deals with something nowhere revealed in the O.T.; it is an entirely new revelation.

The number of parables here, seven, intimates that they furnish a complete outline or setting forth of something, and that something is the History of Christendom. What is in view in the first four parables is the sphere of human responsibility, and hence it is a picture of failure that is presented to us. In the first, only one out of the four castings of the good Seed yields any fruit. In the second, the crop as a whole is spoiled by the mingling of the tares among the wheat. In the third, the little mustard-seed develops into a great tree, whose branches afford shelter for the agents of Satan. In the fourth, the three measures of meal are, ultimately, completely corrupted by means of the leaven surreptitiously introduced into them.

Look where you will in Scripture, and it is the same: whenever God has committed anything to man as a responsible creature, he has failed. God placed Adam in Eden on the ground of human responsibility and he fell.

God gave to Noah the sword of magisterial authority and he failed to govern himself. God gave to Israel the law, and they broke it: before Moses came down from the mount they were worshipping the golden calf.

God instituted priesthood in Israel, and Aaron and his sons were duly consecrated to their office; but on the very first day, two of them offered strange fire and judgment fell upon them. God instituted kingship in Israel and failure was written large upon this. God endowed Nebuchadnezzar with power, but he became so bloated with self-importance that he made an image to himself and demanded that all should worship it. Nor has the Christian profession proven any exception. “Grievous wolves shall enter the flock after my departure,” said the apostle Paul (Acts 20), and they did.

The evil introduced by Satan at the beginning of this dispensation has never been eradicated, nor will it be till the harvest-time. Instead of things getting better, they will get worse — until Christ spews out (Revelation 3:16) the whole system which bears His name. But, blessed be His name, there is no failure with God. In spite of man’s failure and Satan’s opposition, He has been slowly but surely working out His eternal purpose. Acts 15:18 declares, “Known unto God are all

His works from the beginning of the world,” and a clear proof of this is given us in the unmistakable fulfillment of the prophetic parables of Matthew 13.

The seven parables of Matthew 13 divide into four and three, which is the usual division of a septenary series. The first four were spoken to the multitude on the seashore, the last three to the disciples inside the house.

Hence, the first four give us the external view in the history of Christendom, while the last three portray that which is more internal and spiritual. The first four are arranged in two pairs: the first — the wheat and the tares — giving us individual aspects; the second pair — the mustard tree and the corrupted meal — set forth the corporate view. Again: the first parable shows us a sowing, while the fifth and sixth show the resultant crop. The second parable also shows us a sowing, while the third and fourth give us the resultant crop. If it is asked, Why is the “crop” of the second sowing given before the harvest from the first? the answer is, It is ever the order of Scripture to give us first that which is natural, then that which is spiritual. In our next article we shall take up the parable of the Sower.

N.B. — For not a little in this chapter we are indebted to the writings of the late F. W. Grant.

3. The Parable of the Sower

“And He spoke many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow.” The careful reader will notice an omission here, namely, that this parable does not begin with the words “the kingdom of heaven is like unto.” This cannot be without some good reason, for that which is omitted from Holy Writ is oftentimes as meaningful as what is recorded. Each of the six parables which follow do begin with this clause.

The reason why it is left out at the beginning of the first is not difficult to account for. As we have shown in a previous article, “the kingdom of heaven” is an expression which, in the present dispensation, has reference to Christendom — the sphere of Christian profession, that circle where the sovereignty of Christ is publicly owned. But the “kingdom of heaven” did not assume this form until after Christ had returned to the Father. Thus, because this first parable contemplates the period of time covered by our Lord’s earthly ministry these words are appropriately omitted. The first parable forms an introduction to those which follow: it describes the work of Christ preparatory to the establishment of His kingdom among the Gentiles, though the principle of it is of wider application. “Behold, a sower went forth to sow.” In Mark 4:3 we find that this same parable is introduced by the words, “Hearken, behold, there went out a sower to sow.” This word “hearken” indicated that the Savior was about to communicate something of unusual importance. The figure He was using was so simple as to be almost unimpressive, so that there was a danger of His hearers regarding it as of little account; therefore the “Hearken!” “Behold” was also designed to arrest attention; it was a word bidding us to carefully ponder what follows.

The action of Christ at the beginning of this parable was both tragic and blessed. Speaking from the human side, it ought to have been, “A Reaper went forth to reap,” or “An Husbandman went forth to gather fruit.” For fifteen hundred years there had been a liberal sowing of the Seed in Israel, by Moses, David, the prophets, and last of all John the Baptist. But harvest for Jehovah there was not. Touchingly is this brought out in Isaiah 5: “My well-beloved has a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes” vv. 1, 2.

The blessedness of Christ’s action here is to be seen in His wondrous condescension and grace in stooping so low as to take the humble place of a “Sower,” hence the “Behold.” The words “went forth to sow,” or as Mark’s Gospel puts it “went out” were indicative of the great dispensational change which was soon to be introduced. There was no longer to be a planting of vines or fig-trees in Israel, but a going out of the mercy of God unto the Gentiles; therefore what we have here is the broadcast sowing of the Seed in the field at large, for as v. 38 tells us “the field is the world.” One great design of this opening parable is to teach us the measure of success which the Gospel would receive among the Gentiles. In other words, we are shown what the results of this broadcast sowing of the Seed would be. First of all, most of the ground upon which it fell would prove unfavorable: the hard, shallow, and thorny soils were uncongenial to productiveness. Second, external opposition would be encountered: the birds of the air would come and catch it away. Third, the sun would scorch, and that which was lacking in moisture at its roots would wither away. Only a fractional part of the Seed sown would yield any increase, and thus all expectations for the ultimate universal triumph of the Gospel were removed.

The plain teaching of our present parable should at once dissipate the optimistic but vain dreams of post-millennarians. It answers clearly and conclusively the following questions: What is to be the result of the broadcast sowing of the seed? Will all the world receive it and every part of the field produce fruit? Will the seed spring up and bear a universal harvest, so that not a single grain of it is lost? Our Savior explicitly tells us that the greater part of the seed produces no fruit, so that no world-wide conquests by the Gospel, in the Christianising of the race, are to be looked for. Nor was there any hint that, as the age progressed, there would be any change, and that later sowers would meet with greater success, so that the wayside, stony, and thorny ground hearers would cease to exist or would rarely be found. Instead of that, the Lord Himself has plainly warned us that instead of the fruitage from the Gospel showing an increase, there would be a marked decrease; for when speaking of the fruit borne He said, “which also bears fruit, and brings forth, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty” (v. 23).

These words are too plain to be misunderstood. We believe that the “hundred fold” had reference to the yield borne in the days of the apostles; the “sixty” at the time of the Reformation; the “thirty” the days in which we are now living. The history of the last nineteen centuries has witnessed the fulfillment of Christ’s prediction; only a fractional percentage in any land, city or village has responded to the Gospel !

Most of the details of this parable are concerned not with the Sower or the Seed, but with the various soils in which the Seed fell. In His interpretation the Lord Jesus explained the different soils as representing various classes of those who hear the Word. They are four in number, and may be classified as hard-hearted, shallow-hearted, half-hearted, and wholehearted.

It is important to see that in the parable Christ is speaking not from the standpoint of the divine counsels — for there can be no failure there — but from that of human accountability. What we have here is the Word of the kingdom addressed to man’s responsibility, the effect it has on him, and his response. Let us now look briefly at each class separately:

1. THE WAYSIDE HEARERS.

“And when He sowed, some fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up.... when any one hears the word of the kingdom and understands it not, then comes the wicked one, and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received Seed by the wayside” (vv. 4, 19).

Here, the heart which receives the Seed is unreceptive and unresponsive. It is like the public highway, hardened by the constant traffic of the world.

Though the Word is said to be “sown in his heart” it finds no real lodgment in it, and this is what makes it so solemn. The “engrafted word” is that which is received “with meekness,” and for this there must be a laying aside of “all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness” (James 1:21). It is at this point that the individual’s accountability comes in, the responsibility of the one who hears the Word.

It is to be noted that it is “when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and understands it not, then comes the wicked one and catches away that which was sown in his heart.” Those who hear the Word are responsible to “understand” it. It is true that the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, but he ought to; and that they are “foolishness unto him,” but it ought not so to be. As we are told in 1 Corinthians 8:2, “if any man think that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.” Understanding of the Word is obtained from God alone, and it is the responsibility of all who bear and read His Word to cry unto Him, “That which I see not, teach Thou me” (Job 34:32).

His promise is “the meek will He teach His way” (Psalm 25:9). But if there is no humbling of the heart before God, no seeking wisdom from above, then will there be no “understanding” of the Word; and the Devil will “catch away” that which we have heard or read: but we shall have only ourselves to blame!

2. THE STONY-GROUND HEARERS.

“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... He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he which hears the Word, and anon with joy receives it; yet has he not root in himself, but endures for awhile: for when tribulation or persecution arises because of the Word, by and by he is offended” (vv. 5, 6, 20, 21).

The type of ground that is here referred to, is that where the bed is of rock, with only a thin layer of earth over it. In this shallow soil the seed is received, but the growth is but superficial. Our Lord’s interpretation at once identifies the particular class of hearers which are here in view. At first they promise well, but later prove very disappointing. What we have here is lack of depth. The emotions have been moved, but the conscience has not been searched; there is a natural “joy” but no deep conviction or true repentance. When a Divine work of grace is wrought in a soul, the first effects of the Word upon it are not to produce peace and joy, but contrition, humility and sorrow.

The sad thing is, that today almost everything connected with modern evangelistic effort is calculated to produce just this very type of hearer.

The “bright singing,” the sentimentality of the hymns, the preacher’s appeals to the emotions, the demand of the churches for visible and quick “results,” produce nothing but superficial returns. Sinners are urged to make a prompt “decision,” are rushed to the “penitent form,” and then assured that all is well with them; and the poor deluded soul leaves with a false and evanescent “joy.” And the deplorable thing is that many of the Lord’s own people are supporting and fellowshiping this Christ dishonoring and soul-deceiving burlesque of true Gospel ministry. “But endures for awhile.” “This is the flesh at its fairest; capable of coming so near to the kingdom of God, and all the more manifesting its hopeless nature. There is the unbroken rock behind that never yields to the Word, and gives it no lodgment; and the class of hearers pictured here are born of the flesh only. Let things be outwardly favorable to profession, it is plain that the number of these may multiply largely, and may stick like dead leaves to a tree that has had no rough blast to shake them off. But life is none the more in them” (The Numerical Bible).

3. THE THORNY-GROUND HEARERS.

“And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them... He also that received seed among the thorns is he that hears the Word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word, and he becomes unfruitful” (vv. 7, 22).

In Mark 4:9 the “lusts of other things entering in” and in Luke 8:14 the “pleasures of this life” are named as additional hindrances represented by the “thorns.” Here it is not so much inward causes as it is external snares that render the third class of hearers unfruitful.

Thus the Lord has here made known what it is that, from the human side, makes so much of the Seed sown, unproductive. The reasons why the preaching of the Word does not produce a spiritual harvest in all who hear it are, first, the natural hardness of man’s heart and the resultant opposition of Satan; second, the superficiality of the flesh; third, the attractions and distractions of the world. These are the things which produce barrenness, and they are recorded for the Christian’s learning and warning. Thus too are the servants of Christ instructed what to expect, and informed what it is which will oppose their labors — the Devil, the flesh and the world.

4. THE GOOD-GROUND HEARERS.

“But other fell into good ground and brought forth fruit... He that received seed into the good ground is he that hears the Word, and understands it; which also bears fruit, and brings forth, some an hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty” (vv. 8,23).

It is to be carefully noted that when He was defining the good-ground hearer, Christ did not say “this is he in whom a Divine work of grace has been wrought,” or “whose heart has been made receptive by the operation of the Holy Spirit.” True it is that this must precede any sinner’s receiving the Word so that he becomes fruitful, yet, this is not the particular aspect of the Truth with which Christ is here dealing. As already stated, He is speaking here not of the accomplishment of God’s counsels, but from the standpoint of human responsibility.

What the Lord is here making known is, that which the hearer of the Word must himself seek grace to do, if he is to be fruitful. The supplementary accounts given of this parable by Mark and Luke must be carefully compared. In Luke 8:15 we are told, first, that that Word must be received “in an honest and good heart.” Second, that they “keep it.” And third, “bring forth fruit with patience.” Such are the conditions of fruitfulness: an unprejudiced mind and an open heart; understanding the Word received; holding it fast, perseverance.

In closing let us call attention to one or two practical lessons inculcated by this parable.

First , the preciousness of the Seed. If there were only one grain of wheat left in the world today, and it was lost, all the efforts of man could not reproduce it. Thus it is with the Word: were it taken from us all the wit and wisdom of man could not replace it. Then let us value, love, and. study it more.

Second , the inconspicuousness of the Sower. Scarcely anything at all is told us in the parable about Him, beyond the simple fact that He actually sowed the Seed. The emphasis is upon the Seed, the various kinds of soil and the obstacles to and conditions of fruitfulness. Why is this? Because the personality of the sower and the method of sowing are of secondary importance. A little child may drop a seed as effectively as a man; the wind may carry it, and accomplish as much as though an angel had planted it! All — not merely preachers only — may be “sowers.”

Third , the conditions of fruitfulness. There is much “rocky ground” in the garden of each of our souls: then despise not God’s hammer and ploughshare. There are many “thorns” in each of our lives which must be plucked up if there is to be more room for fruit! Finally, there needs to be much prayer for “understanding,” “patience,” and hiding of the Word in our hearts so that we shall “keep” it.

Fourth , the fullness of the parable. There are some who decry the idea that we should seek for a meaning to every detail in our Lord’s parables, and tell us we should be content with discovering its general significance. But such a loose conception is manifestly condemned by Christ’s own example. In His interpretation He gave a meaning to every detail; not only so, but by comparing the three accounts of this parable, we learn that the “thorns” represent at least four distinct things! How this shows us the need of carefully studying and prayerfully meditating upon every jot and tittle of Holy Writ!

4. The Parables of the Tares

This parable forms the second of the series, and its substance corresponds with the meaning of this numeral. One is the number of unity, for it stands alone, excluding all difference. But with two there is a difference, another.

This other may be either for good or evil. In its evil sense two stands for difference, contrast, and so, enmity. Two is the first number which may be divided, and hence it stands for division, conflict. If we refer back to the opening chapter of Scripture we find that it was on the second day's work that God "divided the light from the darkness, and the waters under the firmament from the waters above it." The second in any number of things generally has evil and enmity stamped upon it. Take the second statement in the Bible: the first one is "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth", but the second statement tells us "and the earth became without form and void." Thus it is with the seven parables of Matthew 13: the first one describes the work of Christ; the second the work of Satan!

The Parable of the Tares supplies an explanation of Christendom as it has existed all through these nineteen centuries, and as it is today; a mixed state of affairs; the true and the false side by side; Rome and her daughters masquerading under the guise of Christianity. The "field" represents the religious world, in which the wheat and the tares "grow together". This mixed state of affairs has resulted from the work of the enemy at the beginning of this dispensation, the effects of which are with us till this day.

This parable, like the former, also supplies a most conclusive refutation of the unscriptural dreams of post-millennarians. They believe that, through the preaching of the Gospel (under the blessing of God), the cause of Christ will extend, until the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. But Christ here explicitly declared that the wheat and the tares should "grow together until the harvest", which He defined as "the end of the age". He gave no hint that the "tares" would gradually die out, or that they would decrease in numbers; but announced that, at the end, they would be found in such quantity as to need binding "in bundles".

The connection between this parable and the former one is most marked.

The Sower of the good seed is the same, "the Son of Man"; the "field" is the same, "the world" (v. 38), i.e. the religious world. But there is one thing said about the "seed" here which is very striking. In v. 19 it is called "the word of the kingdom", while in v. 38 we read "the good seed are the children of the kingdom." Like produces like: the word of the kingdom produces sons of the kingdom: the fruit is according to the Seed!

The prominent thing in this second parable of the series is the Enemy and his work. Let us consider:

1. THE TIME WHEN HE WORKED.

This was "while men slept" (v. 25); that is, at nighttime. In other words, it was under cover of the darkness that the Devil sowed his tares! This is characteristic of Satan, for he hates the light: secrecy, stealth, dishonesty, are his favorite tactics. But mark you, the Sower Himself did not sleep: He slumbers not, neither is weary. Nor does Satan. He is ever on the alert, going about, "seeking whom he may devour." He is the personification of perpetual motion. "While men slept." The reference is to the unwatchful condition which soon developed among the Lord's people. The presence of the "tares" among the wheat was evidenced at a very early date. To the Thessalonians the apostle declared, "The mystery of iniquity does already work" (2 Thessalonians 2:18).

John had to say, "You have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists" (1 John 2:18).

Jude wrote, "There are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (v. 4).

To the Church at Pergamos Christ said, "I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam..... so hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes which thing I hate" (Revelation 2:14,15)

2. THE METHOD HE EMPLOYED.

First, we are told that the Son of Man sowed good seed in His field (vv. 24, 37)- Then we are informed that the Devil turned farmer (v. 25). Satan is no originating genius, but is ever an imitator. He produces counterfeits of the works of God. It is important for Christians to know this, so that they may be on their guard. If we study Scripture we shall not be ignorant of his devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). It is to be carefully noticed that as the Enemy mimicked Christ he sowed neither thorns nor thistles — had he done so his work had been easily detected, and there had been no difficulty in distinguishing the false from the true. No, he sowed "tares", or better, "darnel". This is a degenerate wheat, and so closely resembles the genuine article that the one cannot be distinguished from the other until harvesttime.

That the "servants of the householder" recognized the tares as soon as they sprang up does not conflict with our last statement, for it is the apostles who are here in view, and they were specially endowed with the Holy Spirit, and so had a greater measure of discernment than any since.

These "tares" are spurious Christians. When the "servants" first discovered what the enemy had done, they wanted to root out the tares (v. 28). But the Master forbade them, saying, "Nay; lest while you gather up the tares, you root up also the wheat with them" (v. 29). It is only when they are both fully ripe that the farmer can with safety separate them, for it is

not until then that it is seen there is no grain in the ears of the tares. Until the harvest time the tares present a fair picture to the eye. As these imitation blades, green and flourishing, grow side by side with the real wheat, there is every prospect of a bountiful yield. But appearances are deceptive, and much of the product will prove only a disappointment and mockery to those who have spent so much time and labor on their cultivation. "All is not gold that glitters." At the Harvest-time there is going to be a great disillusionment. Then it will appear that Christ's flock is a "little" one.

This parable, then, gives a remarkable expose of the methods employed by Satan. He seeks to destroy God's testimony on earth by introducing a spurious Christianity, a clever imitation of the real thing. And this parable reveals that he works from within: he sowed the "tares" among the wheat!

Satan has an imitation Gospel. This is clearly implied in the solemn warning given in Galatians 1:7-9. It is more plainly intimated in Corinthians 11, where we are told "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (vv. 13-15).

The principal agents of Satan are to be found, not in the drinking-houses or race-courses, etc., but in our seminaries and in the pulpits! These are not advocating lawlessness, but are preaching "righteousness"; but "being ignorant of God's righteousness" they are "going about to establish their own righteousness" (Romans 10:3). It is a mingling of Law and Gospel, and multitudes are deceived thereby.

Satan has an imitation Church. Christ is now building His Church, a Church which will include all the saved of this present dispensation, and none who are not members thereof will be saved. The Devil has caricatured this also. Romanism professes itself to be the "spouse of Christ", and her ministers insist there is no salvation to be found outside of their pale. They profess the name of Christ, and hold some of the great fundamentals of His teaching. But artfully mingled with these are the deadly errors of Paganism.

But so clever is the imitation, so subtly are the Scriptures appealed to in support of their pretensions, that millions are deluded by their soul destroying system. "There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

Satan will yet be permitted to bring forth an imitation Christ. This will be his masterpiece. Much is said in Scripture concerning him. He is the great antichrist. He will have power to work miracles; he will at first claim to be the true Christ come back to earth. Multitudes will be deceived by him so that all the world will wander after him (Revelation 13:4). Yes, the Devil sows "tares", imitation wheat — not thorns and thistles.

3. THE ENEMY'S SUCCESS.

It is to be observed that in this parable we do not read of any opposition or hindrances to the growth of the tares, like we did in the first parable concerning the wheat. No mention is here made of any soil uncongenial to the Devil's seed. There is no "wayside" ground, too hard for them to penetrate. There are no "thorns" to choke them, for they will thrive anywhere. There is no mention made of "fowls of the air" coming to catch them away. All external conditions and circumstances are favorable to the growth of this seed. No cultivation is needed; they will grow of themselves.

The enemy's success is plainly intimated by the prominence given to the "tares" in this parable. This comes out very clearly and most solemnly in v. 36. When Jesus had sent the multitude away, and had gone into the house with His disciples, they said, "Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field", not "the parable of the good seed and the tares" (see vv. 24, 25).

It is the tares and not the wheat which predominate and occupy the larger portion of the field. The mention of "bundles" in v. 30 bears out the same thought.

The Owner of the field forbade any interference with the tares. This is a point which has perplexed many. Why did the Lord permit the Enemy to sow his "tares"? And why has He permitted them for so long, to occupy the principal part of the field? In other words, Why has God allowed the Devil such long-continued freedom? This is not so difficult to answer as many may suppose. They overlook the fact that the leaders of this world rejected its rightful Sovereign; that the Jews preferred Barabbas. Having chosen a murderer in preference to the Lord of Life, both Jews and Gentiles have reaped what they sowed. The Devil was "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:14), and having refused the Savior, this great soul-destroyer has ruled over them ever since!

The time for this to be "the end of the world" (v. 39). There is no difficulty in this expression if we bear in mind that there is a world of time, as well as a world of matter. But if we understand it to signify the "end of the earth", or "world-system", then it is manifestly erroneous. Personally, we much prefer the marginal rendering of the R. V. — "consummation of the age".

The Greek word is not "*kosmos*", as in John 1:10, but "*aion*". To show that we are not altering the translation in order to suit our own views, turn to Hebrews 9:26: "But now once in the end of the world" has He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." What can be made of that? If by "world" be understood the earth, or the world-system, then it is a manifest absurdity, for that certainly did not "end" at the crucifixion of Christ. But if "aion" be rendered "age", there is no difficulty. Thus Matthew 13:39 should read, "The harvest is the end of the age"; there is another Age to follow this, namely, the Millennium. Further proof that the "harvest" referred to in Matthew 13:39 takes place at the end of this age, rather

than at the end of time, is found in Revelation 14:14,15, which synchronizes. After Revelation 14 is fulfilled comes Revelation 20:1-6, which treats of the Millennium.

Let us note now the order of its procedure. "In the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into My barn" (v. 30). The tares are gathered into "bundles" before the wheat is actually garnered. In spite of their promising and attractive appearance, everything which has not sprung from the Seed sown by the Son of man is ultimately to be consigned to the everlasting burnings: as He Himself declared, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13).

But what we would particularly direct attention to is the "gathering together" of the tares into bundles. There is no actual casting of them into the fire at this preliminary stage, no removal of them from the field. It is the separation of the tares in the field, so as to leave the "wheat" distinct, and ready for garnering. The wheat is gathered into the Barn before the tares are "burned" — sure proof of the removal of the saints from this scene prior to the descent of God's judgment of the world. The gathering of the wheat corresponds with 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.

As we survey current events in the light of Matthew 13:30 it is abundantly clear that the process of binding the tares into bundles is proceeding in various directions, and proceeding with amazing rapidity. In fact it is one of the most prominent of the "signs of the times".

Take the commercial world. The individual is fast becoming a non-entity, as most business men know to their sorrow. Co-operation, organization, amalgamation, are the order of the day. Trusts, combines, syndicates, unions, are the "bundles" into which the interests of industry are now being bound. "Gather the tares into bundles"; the Divine command has already gone forth !

Take the social world. Clubs, guilds, fraternities, are multiplied on every side. "Class distinctions" are more and more resented by the masses. Social barriers which have existed for centuries are rapidly being broken down; whilst in many countries, socialism and bolshevism — which aim at the destruction of individual enterprise — are seeking to gather all into one great State "bundle". Yes, the word "gather" the tares into bundles has already gone forth!

In the ecclesiastical sphere the same thing is equally noticeable and prominent. Interdenominational efforts and movements are multiplying.

Only last week in this city, on what is known as "good Friday", members and preachers from churches of four or five denominations met together, and held what they term the celebration of "the Lord's Supper" — and this in a church whose pastor is a pronounced modernist. What a farce! If some noted Evangelist comes to the city a "combined" meeting must be held.

The unification of Christendom is the ideal of many, and the goal for which her leaders are aiming. Protestantism is virtually a spent force, and the hindrances and obstacles against the Papacy yet gathering all Christendom under her wings are rapidly disappearing. Those who understand prophecy know well that it will not be long ere she attains that ambition for which she has so long worked, and that one huge ecclesiastical "bundle" will be formed. Yes, the command to "gather" the tares has gone forth!

The same principle is more and more regulating the diplomatic affairs of the earth. The leading "Powers" are working increasingly in conjunction and co-operation. Witness the demands for concerted action in connection with the ultimatum to China. The League of Nations is another movement in the direction of forming one more great "bundle". Yes, my readers, unless we are blind — and blind we certainly are, if we cannot see it — the binding of the tares into "bundles" is already going on before our very eyes: it has not only commenced, but is far advanced. Prophecy is daily becoming history. The next thing will be the removal of the wheat!

Let us now draw a few practical conclusions from this parable;

First, see here the worthlessness of "reform" movements and efforts. It is an idle dream that we can improve the world by gathering out noxious weeds — banish drunkenness and immorality, purify politics, etc. Men might as well attempt to purify the waters of the Dead Sea! The Lord has said, "Let both grow together till the harvest." Then do not waste your time on the cultivation of the tares. "Preach the Gospel" is our marching orders.

Second , what a solemn warning is here against unwatchfulness! It was "while men slept" that the Enemy came and sowed his tares. Beware of sloth and the relaxation of vigilance. Remember the words of Christ to His disciples, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:37). Heed the warning of Romans 13:11,12, — it is high time to awake out of sleep!

Third , mark Christ's love for His own. When forbidding the servants to root up the tares, He said, "Nay, lest while you gather up the tares, you root up also the wheat with them" (v. 29-). How much He must think of the "wheat": h e had rather the "tares" grow, than that a single blade of the wheat be injured!

Fourth , how terrible is our Lord's description of the ultimate doom of the wicked! "And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (v. 42). The "Furnace of Fire" is no mere superstition of the "dark ages", but a dread reality, as multitudes now living will yet discover to their eternal misery, it is the certain portion of all who continue to reject the Lord Jesus Christ. It is unspeakably solemn to note that the most awe-inspiring descriptions of Hell, to be found anywhere in the Bible, came from the lips of Love incarnate! It is to be carefully noted that whilst

Christ interpreted every figure in this parable, see vv. 38-40, the “fire” He did not explain. It is literal! O my reader, if you have not already done so, “Flee from the wrath to come” ere it be too late. Flee to Christ for refuge.

5. The Mustard Seed

“Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took, and sowed in His field: Which, indeed, is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (vv. 31, 32).

It should be evident to all, that our understanding of this parable hinges upon a correct interpretation of its three central figures: the mustard-seed, the great tree which sprang from it, and the “birds of the air” which came and lodged in its branches. What does each represent ?

Now there are few passages of Scripture which have suffered more at the hands of commentators than the third and fourth parables of Matthew 13. They have been turned completely upside down; that is to say, they have been made to mean the very opposite of what the Lord Jesus taught.

The main cause of this erroneous interpretation may be traced back to a wrong understanding of the expression “kingdom of heaven.” Those who have failed in their definition of this term are, necessarily, all at sea, when they come to the details of these parables.

The popular and current explanation of these parables is that they were meant to announce the glorious success of the Gospel. Thus, that of the mustard-seed is regarded as portraying the rapid extension of Christianity and the expansion of the Church of Christ. Beginning insignificantly and obscurely, its proportions have increased immensely, until ultimately it shall cover the earth. Let us first show how untenable and impossible this interpretation is:

First , it must be steadily borne in mind that these seven parables form part of one connected and complete discourse whose teaching must necessarily be consistent and harmonious throughout. Therefore, it is obvious that this third one cannot conflict with the teaching of the first two. In the first parable, instead of drawing a picture of a field in which the good Seed took root and flourished in every part of it, our Lord pointed out that most of its soil was unfavorable, and that only a fractional proportion bore an increase.

Moreover, instead of promising that the good-ground section of the field would yield greater and greater returns, He announced that there would be a decreasing harvest — “some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.” In the second parable, our Lord revealed the field as over-sown with “tares,” and declared that these should continue until the harvest-time, which He defined as “the end of the age.” This fixes beyond all doubt the evil consequences of the Enemy’s work, and positively forbids the expectation of a world won to Christ during this present dispensation, Christ plainly warned us that the evil effects of the Devil’s labors at the beginning of the age would never be repaired. The crop as a whole is spoiled! Thus this third parable cannot teach that the failure of things in the hands of men will be removed and reversed.

Second , the figure here selected by Christ should at once expose the fallacy of the popular interpretation. Surely our Lord would never have taken a mustard-seed, which afterwards became a “tree,” ever rooting itself deeper and deeper in the earth, to portray that people whose calling, hope, citizenship, and destiny is heavenly. Again and again He affirmed that His people were “not of the world.” Again, a great tree with its towering branches speaks of prominence and loftiness, but lowliness and suffering, not prominence and exaltation, are the present portion of the New Testament saints. The more any church of Christ climbs the ladder of worldly fame the more it sinks spiritually. That which is represented by this “tree” is not a people who are “strangers and pilgrims” down here, but a system whose roots lie deeply in the earth and which aims at greatness and expansion in the world.

Third , that which Christ here describes is a monstrosity. We are aware that this is denied by some, but our Lord’s own words are final. He tells us that when this mustard-seed is grown it is the “greatest among herbs, and becomes a tree” (v. 32). “Herbs” are an entirely different specie from trees.

That which distinguished them is that their stems never develop woody tissue, but live only long enough for the development of flowers and seeds.

But this “herb” became a “tree;” that is to say, it developed into something entirely foreign to its very nature and constitution. How strange that sober men should have deemed this unnatural growth, this abnormal production, a fitting symbol of the saints of God in their corporate form!

Some tell us that the soil of Palestine is a most congenial one for the growth of mustard, and that it is quite common for it to develop into goodly-sized shrubs. But cannot the very ones who advance this as an objection to the pre-millennial interpretation of this parable see that it forms an argument against what they contend for? Clearly the “field,” all through Matthew 13, is the world. Is, then, “the world” a favorable place for the growth of that kingdom which Christ solemnly and expressly said was “not of this world” (John 18:36)? Is this world, where the flesh and the Devil unite in opposing all that concerns Christ and His interests, a congenial soil for Christianity? Either the world must cease to be what it is — “the enemy of God” — or the Seed must change its character, before the one will be favorable to the other. And this is just what our parable does teach: the “herb” becomes a “tree.”

Fourth , the “birds” lodging in the branches of this tree makes altogether against the current interpretation. If Scripture be compared with Scripture it will be found that these “birds” symbolize Satan and his agents. Let not the reader

be turned aside by the fact that the “dove,” and in some passages the “eagle,” represents that which is good. That which we must now attempt to define is the actual word “birds,” or better, “fowls” — as the Greek word is rendered in v. 4. In Genesis 15:11 we are told that the “fowls came down upon the carcasses” (the bodies of the sacrifices) and that “Abram drove them away.” Here, beyond doubt, they prefigure the efforts of Satan to render null and void the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus; but this, the Father (foreshadowed in Abraham) has prevented.

Again, in Deuteronomy 28, where we have the curses which were to come upon Israel for their disobedience, we are told, “And thy carcass shall be meat unto all fowls of the air” (v. 26). The last time the term occurs in Scripture is in Revelation 18:2, where we are told that fallen Babylon becomes the “habitation of demons, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.” But we do not have to go outside of Matthew 13 itself to discover what Christ referred to under the figure of these “birds.” The Greek word in v. 32 is precisely the same as that which is rendered “fowls” in v. 4, which are explained in v. 19 as “the wicked.” How, then, can this great “tree” represent the true Church of Christ, while its branches afford shelter for the Devil and his emissaries?

Coming now to the positive side, if we let Scripture interpret Scripture, the great “tree” is easily identified. In Daniel 4:10-12 we read, “I saw, and behold a tree was 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 ends 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 heavens dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.”

Who cannot fail to see that we have in this vision of Nebuchadnezzar the key to our parable? In Daniel 4:20-22 we have the inspired interpretation of the vision: “The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strongit is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong, for thy greatness is grown, and reaches unto heaven, and thy dominion to the ends of the earth.” Thus, the “tree” was a figure of a mighty earthly kingdom or empire.

Again, in Ezekiel 31 we have the same figure used: “Behold the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. Therefore, his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations” (vv. 3-6).

Thus a “tree,” whose wide-spreading branches afforded lodgment for birds, was a familiar Old Testament figure for a mighty kingdom which gave shelter to the nations. So it is in our parable. The “tree” symbolizes earthly greatness, worldly prominence, giving shelter to the nations.

The history of Christendom clearly confirms this. At the beginning, those who bore the name of Christ were but a despised handful. Judged by worldly standards, Christianity was unimportant and unworthy of serious consideration. Speaking generally, its adherents were not men of renown, culture, or worldly influence. There were few among the Lord’s “little flock” of outstanding genius or social prominence; for the most part, they were unlettered, obscure, and poor. For, “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, has God chosen, and things which are not, to bring to nought the things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

Nevertheless, though at first the cause of Christ on earth was so uninfluential and insignificant, it was an object of intense hatred to Satan. Against Christianity he vented the full force of his fiendish malignity. Every weapon in his arsenal was employed in the effort to exterminate it. He stirred up men in authority and moved emperors to issue cruel edicts. Property was confiscated, Christians captured, imprisoned, fined, tortured, slain. Mercilessly and ceaselessly did the Devil seek to blot out the name of Christ from the earth. But the more it was persecuted, the more Christianity flourished. As one of the early “fathers” put it, “The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.”

Finding that force was of no avail, the Enemy changed his tactics. Failing to intimidate as the roaring lion, he now sought to insinuate as the subtle serpent. Ceasing to attack from without, he now worked from within. In the first parable the assault was from without — the fowls of the air catching away the Seed. In the second parable his activities were from within — he sowed his tares among the wheat. In the third parable we are shown the effects of this. Satan now moved worldly men to seek membership in the churches of God. These soon caused the Truth to be watered down, discipline to be relaxed, that which repelled the world to be kept in the background, and what would appeal to the carnal mind to be made prominent. Instead of affections being set upon things above, they were fixed on things below. Soon Christianity ceased to be hated by the unregenerate: the gulf between the world and the “Church” was bridged.

Persecution ceased, and the professed cause of the despised and rejected Savior became popular. The distinctive truths of Christianity were abandoned, the Gospel was adulterated, the pilgrim character of professing saints ceased. More and more the wise and great of this world were attracted. By the fourth century the heads of the Roman Empire, instead of hating Christianity, perceived that it was a power for moral good in the governing of men, and so espoused it. In the days

of Constantine the so-called Church and the State united, and became a vast political-religious system. Mind you, the courts of Caesar had not changed their character, nor become like the little “upper room” in Jerusalem, where the lowly church of Christ, small as a grain of mustard, first assembled. It was professing Christianity which had changed. The lowly upper room had long been forsaken, and the honors of kings’ courts coveted. And God granted their fleshly desire — just as long before He had given Saul to apostate Israel when they forsook the path of separation and wished to be like the surrounding nations.

Under these changed circumstances professing Christianity soon became great in the earth. Caves and caverns as places of worship gave place to costly church-houses and ornate cathedrals. The ritual was celebrated with a corresponding pomp. Its gorgeous vestments, its imposing ceremonies, its pompous priesthood, all lured the unregenerate; and multitudes applied for baptism. More and more the leaders sought after temporal power, and more and more were their longings gratified. In consequence, worldly minded men were the ones who sought after and secured the highest offices. Hence we find the “birds,” the agents of Satan, lodging in the branches of the “tree”; they secured the positions of power and directed the activities of Christendom.

Thus we may discern in the first three parables of Matthew 13 a striking and sad forecast of the development of evil. In the first, the Devil caught away part of the good Seed. In the second, he is seen engaged in the work of imitation. Here, in the third, we are shown a corrupted Christianity affording him shelter.

N. B. — Several thoughts and expressions in this chapter have been borrowed from one by the late F. W. Grant.

6. The Leaven

“Another parable spoke he unto them: The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (v. 33).

In the mercy of God we are not left to any human opinions or authority, nor is the meaning of the parables of Matthew 13 open to argument.

Christ Himself explained for us the first two and the seventh, and it is obvious that the intervening four must be interpreted in strict accord with them. There is an unmistakable unity underlying the whole chapter. As there is a noticeable connection between the first two parables in relation to the beginning of the kingdom of heaven in its present form, so there is a close relation between the third and fourth which treat of its extension and corruption. The third gives us the external aspect or outward growth of the kingdom, the fourth reveals its internal aspect and secret corruption.

The popular interpretation of this parable regards the “leaven” as representing the Gospel and its power, the “woman” the Church. Here are the words of Dr. John Gill: “Leaven is everywhere else used in a bad sense... here it seems to be taken in a good sense, and the Gospel to be compared unto it.” The “woman,” he tells us, is “the church” or the ministers of the Gospel. Calvinists understand the “three measures of meal” to represent God’s elect; Arminians understand them to prefigure all mankind. The latter expound the parable as follows: As the result of the Gospel, and by means of its assimilating power, the mass of humanity is ultimately to be penetrated, affected, and blest. So firmly is this belief embedded in the minds of church-goers that it is hard for them to tear loose from it.

It is apparent at once that our understanding and interpretation of this parable turns upon a correct definition of the “leaven.” If this is a figure of the Gospel, and if the meal represents the human race, then it necessarily follows that, ultimately, all must be regenerated or at least reformed by the Evangel. But if the “leaven” is the symbol of corrupting evil, and the meal stands for the pure truth of God, and that this parable also supplies a picture of the Christian profession, then it necessarily follows that, ultimately, the truth of God is to be corrupted throughout Christendom. How are we to find out which of these is true? Only from the Holy Scriptures. Let us now examine the current interpretation of this parable in the light of the Word:

1. If the popular view is correct then, in this chapter, Christ flatly contradicts Himself. What He has said in the first three parables is dead against world- conversion or even world- reformation by means of Gospel preaching. In the first parable, instead of our Lord teaching that the good Seed would bear fruit in every part of the field, He declared that most of its ground would prove uncongenial and unproductive. Nor was there any hint that later “sowers” would find conditions improved; rather did He intimate that things would get worse. In the second parable the picture which He drew of the coming Harvest expressly forbids such a thought, and positively excludes the idea of world-conversion in this Age. In the third parable He predicted that Christendom would develop into such a monstrosity that the Devil’s agents would be afforded shelter in it and would rule over it. How then can this fourth parable teach the very opposite?
2. The post-millennial interpretation of this parable is flatly contradicted by what we are told in vv. 11, 35 of Matthew 13. There we learn that these parables are “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” “things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” Dr. Gill echoes the teaching of the Reformers, and they have been re-echoed by later Calvinists, affirming that the “leaven” represents the Gospel. But that cannot be. Whatever may or may not be prefigured, the “Gospel” is the last thing which could possibly be in view. For this reason: the Gospel was not an unrevealed secret in O.T. times. Galatians 3:8 declares that the Gospel was “preached unto Abraham.”
3. If the “leaven” represents the Gospel and the “meal” the human race, or, as Dr. Gill teaches, God’s elect in their natural condition, then the figure which Christ here employed is a faulty one. And this in three different respects.

First, in the way it works. How does “leaven” act? Why, it is simply placed in meal, and then it works of itself! That is all: just place it there, leave it alone, and it is bound to leaven the whole lump. But is that the way the Gospel works? Certainly not. Multitudes have received the Gospel, but it has had no effect upon them!

Second, in the actor here mentioned. It is a “woman” who places the leaven in the meal. But the Lord Jesus Christ has not committed His Gospel into the hands of women. There were none among the twelve, nor among the seventy whom he chose and sent forth. The preaching of the Gospel is a man’s job. The part allotted to the sisters, and an important part it is, is to hold up the hands of their ministering brethren by prayer and supplication.

Third, in the effects it produces. When leaven is placed into meal it causes it to swell, it puffs it up! Is that what the Gospel does when it enters human hearts? No indeed. It produces the very opposite effect. It humbles, it abases.

4. The popular interpretation is contradicted by the plain facts of history and by present-day experience. Were the current explanations true, then we should be forced to acknowledge that this prediction of Christ’s has failed in its accomplishment. The Gospel has now been preached for nineteen centuries, yet not a single nation or state, no,

nor even city, town or village, has been completely evangelized — let alone won to Christ! If the popular view is the correct one, then the Gospel is a colossal and tragic failure.

5. To make the “leaven” a figure of the Gospel and its power, of that which is good, is to contradict every other passage in Scripture where this figure is used. Christ was speaking to a Jewish audience, and with their knowledge of the O.T. Scriptures none of them would ever dream that He had reference to something that was good. With the Jews “leaven” was ever a figure of evil.

The first time that “leaven,” in its negative form, occurs in the Bible is in Genesis 19:3, where we are told that Lot “did bake unleavened bread” for the angels, and that “they did eat.” No doubt leavened bread was a common commodity in the wicked city of Sodom. Why then did not righteous Lot place some of it before the angels? Because he knew better.

He must have known that they, like Peter, allowed “nothing common or unclean” to pass their lips. They would receive nothing with the least semblance of evil in it. Many congregations today are not nearly so careful about their food — their soul-food. They will readily swallow any rubbish that is handed them from the pulpit, and the sad thing is that they will do so without any protest. Why do they not go to the preacher and say, Why don’t you give us the Bread of life?

In Exodus 12 it will be found that Jehovah commanded the Israelites to rigidly purge their houses of all “leaven” at the Passover season. Why was this if “leaven” is a type of that which is good? Exodus 34:25 tells us that God prohibited any “leaven” from accompanying offerings of blood. Leviticus 2:11 informs us that “leaven” was also excluded from every offering of the Lord made by fire.

This parable in Matthew 13 is not the only occasion when the Lord Jesus employed this figure. How did He use it elsewhere? In Matthew 16:11 we find Him saying to the disciples, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” There, it is plainly a figure of that which is evil. So in Luke 12:1 He said, “Be ware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy.” Would He then deliberately confuse His disciples by using it as the figure of good in Matthew 13?

The Holy Spirit has also used this same figure through the apostle Paul. In what manner? In 1 Corinthians 5:6,7 we read, “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump.”

Would they be told to “purge out” that which was good? The last passage in the N.T. in which “leaven” is mentioned is Galatians 5:7-9. Note there three things: first, it is called a “persuasion” — something which exerts a powerful and moving influence. Second, it hinders men “from obeying the truth.” Third, it is expressly said to be “not from Him which calleth you.” Thus, that which is a thing of fermentation — really, incipient putrefaction — is, throughout Scripture, uniformly a figure of corruption — -evil. It is remarkable that the word “leaven” occurs just thirteen times in the N.T., a number always associated with evil and the work of Satan.

Objectors have appealed to two passages in the O.T. where “leaven” is employed in a good sense. But when examined it will be found that they are only seeming exceptions. The first is in Leviticus 23:17. The two loaves presented unto the Lord at the Feast of Weeks were to be baked “with leaven.” But there is no difficulty here. The Feast of Weeks foreshadowed what is recorded in Acts 2, where the “first fruits” of this dispensation are seen. The two “loaves” prefigured saved Jews and Gentiles. Inasmuch as the old nature remains in those who are born again, the “leaven” was needed in the loaves which represented these believers. Whenever the typical bread represented Christ it must be unleavened, wherever it typified His people it must be leavened.

The second passage is in Amos 4:5, “Offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven.” This was the language of irony, which means it has a meaning the very opposite of what is said. You will sometimes hear a parent say to a willful child, You do that and I will deal with you! Does he mean for the child to actually do it? No, the very reverse. So it is in Amos 4:5: the preceding verse proves it — “Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifice every morning.” Clearly it is the language of irony.

6. Let us now consider the “three measures of meal.” Post-millennarians say that they represent the human race among whom the Gospel is working. If so, the “meal” is a figure of that which is evil. The human race is fallen, sinful, depraved; “the whole world lies in the Wicked one” (John 5:19). Nor is the usual explanation supplied by Calvinistic commentators any better. They say the “meal” stands for God’s elect in their natural state. But the analogy of faith is against them. Let our appeal be to the Scriptures. “And Abram hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth” (Genesis 18:6).

Did Abraham prepare for the Lord and His angels food out of that which symbolized evil? Note what is said in 1 Kings 17:14-16. God does not feed His servants on that which speaks of evil! Now where does “meal” for bread come from? Any child can answer: not from evil tares, but from good wheat. It is the product of the good Seed. Then that which is good, wholesome, nutritious, pure, can never be a figure of fallen and corrupt humanity.

In Genesis 18:6 the “three measures of meal” are a figure of Christ’s person, just as the “tender calf” in v. 7 which was killed and dressed prefigured His work. The meal is a type of Him who is the Corn of wheat (John 12:24) and the Bread of life. And thus in the language of N.T. symbolry the “meal” stands for the doctrine, of Christ.

7. The action of the “woman” in our parable exposes the error of the common interpretation. She “took,” not “received”; and hid the leaven in the meal. Is this the way in which the servants of God preach His Gospel? Is the evangel something to be whispered in secret? Does God bid His servants act stealthily? No. The Lord has said to them, “What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetop” (Matthew 11:27).

Writing to the Corinthians, and describing the character of his own ministry, the apostle Paul said, “We faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

But in our parable, the woman is acting dishonestly and deceitfully: she stealthily introduced a foreign and corrupting element into the meal. Her object was to effect its deterioration. If the reader will turn to Leviticus 2:11 he will find that this “woman” was doing the very thing which the Word of God forbade her; and he will also observe that she left out the oil, which was the very thing the Scriptures enjoined!

Let us now turn, briefly, to the positive side, and give what we believe is the true interpretation. As already stated, the “three measures of meal” stand for Christ as the food of His people: Christ as presented in the written Word, therefore, the doctrine of Christ. The “woman” refers, primarily, to the Papacy, and generally, to all corruptors of God’s truth.

Romanism has many “daughters.” It is most significant that the leading false cults in Christendom were originated by women. Modern Spiritualism was started in Boston, U.S.A., in 1848 by the Fox sisters. Seventh Day Adventism was founded by Mrs. White. Christian Science was organized by Mrs. Eddy. Theosophy was devised by Madame Blavatsky, and is now engineered by Mrs. Besant.

The “leaven” symbolizes the corrupting of God’s truth by the introduction of evil doctrine — compare Matthew 16:12. The unadulterated truth of God is too heavy for the natural man: the sovereignty of God, the helplessness of man, the awfulness of sin, the totality of human depravity, the eternal punishment of the wicked, are indigestible to the carnal mind.

Therefore, Rome and her “daughters” have introduced the lightening “leaven,” so as to make, what they hand out, more palatable to their dupes. And thus has history repeated itself. Of old God complained to Israel, “Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar” (Malachi 1:7). So today priestcraft and clericalism have corrupted the bread of God.

It is to be noted that the “three measures of meal” were not removed, nor was something else substituted in their place. Instead, a foreign element was mingled with it, an element which has slowly and gradually corrupted it. In 2 Thessalonians 2:4 the apostle Paul declared, “The mystery of iniquity does already work.” The leaven had started to act even then, and, as our Savior declared, it would work till “the whole was leavened.” How nearly this is the case today the majority of our readers are sadly aware.

There are but few places to which an hungry child of God can now go and receive pure Bread. But thank God there are still a few such places. While the Holy Spirit remains on earth amongst the saints, God’s truth will be proclaimed. While He is here, there is a hindering cause, preventing the “whole” from being “leavened.” But at the Rapture the Hinderer will be “taken out of the way” (2 Thessalonians 2:7), and then the “whole” will be completely leavened. The “salt” will be removed, and nothing will be left to stay universal corruption.

7. The Treasure

“Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; that which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field” (Matthew 13:44).

The common interpretation of this parable, both by Calvinists and Arminians, is as far removed from what I am fully assured is its true meaning as is the explanation they give of the earlier ones in Matthew 13. Dr. John Gill tells us that the treasure in this parable is “the Gospel,” that the field in which the treasure is hidden is “the Scriptures,” and that the man who sought and found the treasure is “an elect and awakened sinner.” It is amazing how such an exegete of the Scriptures, and a man so deeply taught of God, could wander so far astray when he came to this parable. In the first place, the “field” is mentioned in two of the preceding parables — the field in which the good Seed was sown, and the field that was over-sown by tares; and in v. 38 of this very chapter Christ has told us the field is the world. Then why should it be supposed that the field means something entirely different in this fifth parable of the same chapter? Again, we have already had a “man” before us in the first two parables — a man who sowed good Seed in his field (v. 24). The Lord Jesus Himself has told us who that man is: “He that sows the good seed is the Son of man” (v. 37). If, then, the man in the second parable represents the Son of man, why, in this fifth parable, without any word to the contrary, are we to understand Him to point to someone entirely different?

Against the popular interpretation of the parable we advance these objections: First, if in this parable the Lord Jesus was setting forth the way of salvation, teaching that earnestness and diligence are needed on the part of an awakened sinner if he is to reach the treasure and make it his own (which treasure is hidden from the dilatory and careless), then how strange it is that it was not spoken in the hearing of the multitude! Instead, we are told that Christ had sent the multitude away, had entered the house and spoke this parable to His disciples only. Second, in this parable the treasure is hid in “the field,” and, as we have seen, the field is the “world.” In what possible sense is Christ or the Gospel hidden in the world? In the third place, when the man had found this treasure he hid it again: “the which when a man has found, he hides.” If the treasure represents the Gospel and the field be the world, and if the man who is seeking the treasure be an awakened sinner, then our parable teaches that God requires the awakened sinner, after he has found peace and obtained salvation, to go out and hide it in the world! How absurd! Christ plainly told His disciples to let their light, so shine that men might see their good works and glorify their Father which is in heaven. In the fourth place, in the parable we are told that after this man had found the treasure and then hid it again, that he went and “sold all that he had” and “bought it.” What does an awakened sinner have to sell, and what is it that he purchases? Surely not the world! Such a loose interpretation may suit and satisfy lazy people who are too dilatory to carefully examine the parable for themselves, but it certainly will not do for those who, by the grace of God, have become prayerful and diligent students of the Word. We need hardly say that any interpretation that contains such absurdities must be promptly dismissed.

Now the first key to this parable is found in the fact that it was spoken by Christ after He had dismissed the multitudes and had taken His disciples into the house. This parable, unlike the four which precede it, was spoken to the disciples only. Those disciples must have been perplexed and dismayed at the gloomy picture which Christ had drawn of the form which His kingdom was going to assume in this world after His departure. He told them, or at least He had said in their hearing, that they would go forth and scatter the good Seed broadcast, but, with meager results. The sowing which had been begun by Him was to be continued by them, and He had warned them that, though there should be a broadcast sowing throughout the field, only a fractional portion of the good Seed would take root and bear fruit.

Second, He had said that the Devil would turn farmer and over-sow the field with tares. And they were forbidden to pluck them up: the tares and the wheat were to grow side by side until the harvest, and then the tares would be found in such quantities it would be necessary to bind them in “bundles!” Third, He had warned them that His professing cause on earth would develop so extensively and rapidly that it would be like a little mustard-seed growing up into a herb, ultimately becoming a tree, with wide-spreading branches; but that the Devil and his agents would find shelter in them; Fourth, He announced that into the meal, which was the emblem of His pure truth, a foreign and corrupting element would be introduced, stealthily and secretly, and the outcome should be that ultimately the whole of the meal would be leavened.

Yes, there was every reason for the poor disciples to be perplexed and dismayed. Then the Lord Jesus (it was just like Him), took them apart, and in the parables of the treasure and pearl He spoke words to reassure their hearts. He made known to them that, though the outward professing cause of Christianity upon earth would develop so tragically, yet there will be no failure on the part of God. He tells them there are two bodies, two elect peoples, who are inexpressibly precious in His sight, and that through them He will manifest the inexhaustible riches of His grace and glory — and that, in the two realms of His dominion — on the earth and in heaven. Two distinct elect companies, one the “treasure” hid in the field, symbolizing the literal nation of Israel; the other, the one “pearl,” symbolizing the one body which has a heavenly calling, destiny, citizenship, and inheritance. The order of these next two parables is this: “To the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” Therefore, the hidden treasure in the field, the symbol of Israel, is given before the pearl, which is the figure of the Church.

The second key which unlocks the parable before us, and the two which follow, is indicated in the way in which the Lord divided the whole series.

There are seven parables in all, and He divided them into four and three: the four being spoken by the seaside in the hearing of the multitudes, the last three being spoken inside the house to the disciples only. Four is the number of the earth, the world. God has stamped “four” upon it. There are four points to the compass; four seasons to earth’s year, and so on. Four then, is the number of the earth or the world; hence in the first four parables of Matthew 13 Christ has described the kingdom of heaven as it appears in the world, as it is manifested here on earth. Three is the number of the Holy Trinity, and therefore in the last three parables the kingdom is looked at from God’s viewpoint. We have God’s thoughts upon it, we are shown what God has in the kingdom — a hidden treasure, a pearl of great price.

With this somewhat lengthy introduction, let us take up the parable in detail. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field.” If scripture is allowed to interpret scripture there will be no difficulty whatever in discovering what this “hid treasure” actually and definitely signifies. Go back to Exodus 19:5, “Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice — it was the house of Jacob, the children of Israel that was addressed — and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is Mine” — corresponding with “the field” in which the “treasure” is found! Again “For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God and the Lord has chosen thee to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself” (Deuteronomy 14:2).

The Hebrew in this verse is the same as in Exodus 19:5. Again, “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance (that means their earthly portion), when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance” (Deuteronomy 32:8): that is. here, on earth, for the context is speaking solely about earthly things — the apportioning of the earth to the nations. Once more: “For the Lord has chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure” (Psalm 135:4).

These passages have no reference at all to the saints of this present dispensation, or to the church which is the body of Christ, but speak of the earthly Israel according to the flesh. They are God’s treasure on earth, His earthly elect people. Confirmation of this definition of the “treasure” in our parable, is found in the fact that never once in the twenty-one Epistles in the New Testament is the word “treasure” used of the Church! It is never applied to the saints of this present dispensation.

Now the first thing we are told in Matthew 13:44 about this treasure is that it was hid in a field, and the field was “the world” (see v. 38). This is precisely the condition in which God’s earthly elect people were found at the beginning of His dealings with them. The parable starts with the treasure hid in the field, and the Old Testament begins with Israel hidden in the field! Who was the father of Israel according to the flesh? Abraham. Go back to the starting-point in Abraham’s life. Where was he when God’s hand was first laid upon him? Was he living in separation from the idolatrous people around him? No, he was hidden away among them — one of them! Take a later point in their early history. After Abraham came Isaac, and after Isaac Jacob, for Esau was not in the elect line. Look at Jacob, away from the promised land, an exile in Padan-aram, working for an unprincipled godless Gentile — for that is virtually what he was. Look at Jacob there among all the servants of Laban, hidden — nothing to indicate that he was one of the high favorites of God.

Proceed a little further. Abraham’s and Jacob’s descendants have become a numerous progeny, until they number some two million souls. Where are they to be found? Working in the brick-kilns of Egypt, a company of slaves. What was there to distinguish them? What was there to denote that they were God’s peculiar treasure? Nothing, indeed: the treasure was “hidden.” That is where the parable begins, and that is where their history as a nation began — buried, as it were, amid the rubbish of Egypt. That is why we read. “And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possesseth it, and dwellest therein; that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shall put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place His name there....

And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father” (Deuteronomy 26:1,5).

Yes, the treasure was hidden in the field at the beginning. From Isaiah 51:1,2, we learn how, at a later point in the history of Israel, God reminded them of their lowly origin, of the humble start that they had as a people: “Hearken to Me, you that follow after righteousness, you that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence you are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence you are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bear you.” One other passage on this point: “For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness” (Deuteronomy 32:10).

There is their lowly origin mentioned again: the treasure was “hid,” buried in the field.

Coming back to our text let us turn to the second detail in it: “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found.” That is the next point, the finding of the treasure. That is so very simple it needs no interpretation. The “man” here is Christ Himself — as the “man” is Christ in v. 24, see v. 37; and in the parable that follows, v. 45. The “finding” of the “treasure” by Christ refers to the days of His earthly ministry. We are told in John 1:11, “He came unto His own;” that does not mean His own spiritually, for we read that “His own received Him not.” It was His

own people according to the flesh. As He said to the Canaanitish woman in Matthew 15:24, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Christ, the Man, came to Israel, the Jews. His ministry was confined unto them. The "treasure" was "found" — it was no longer hidden when Christ came here. The Jewish nation was not as it was in the days of Moses in Egypt. The sons of Jacob were in their own land.

They had their own temple; the priesthood was still intact. And it was to them, this Man, Christ, came. "Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides." There is a distinct step in each clause.

He "hides" it. That is the most solemn word in the chapter, with the one exception of the furnace of fire. Remember what was before us in the 12th of Matthew, which furnishes the key to the 13th. In Matthew 12 Christ presented Himself to the Jews and the Jews rejected Him, and because of their rejection He rejected them, pronounced sentence of doom upon them — the evil spirit coming back and taking with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, "Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation."

Then at the close of the chapter Christ intimated He would no longer acknowledge any bond or tie, any kinship except a spiritual one — "Whosoever shall do the will of My Father": it was Christ severing the link which, according to the flesh, bound Him to Israel. So here in the parable: first we have the treasure hid in the field: that was Israel's condition at the beginning of their national history in Old Testament times. Second, we have the Man coming to the treasure: that was the earthly ministry of Christ. Third, we have the treasure hid once more: that was Christ's rejection of Israel. The "hiding" of the treasure referred to the last dispersion and scattering of the Jews throughout the whole earth. And, so effectually has He "hidden" the treasure that ten out of the twelve tribes are still lost! Yes, they are hidden, so securely hidden that no man to this day knows where they are!

One passage of Scripture in proof of what we have said above on Christ's "hiding" Israel: "For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end" (Deuteronomy 32:28,29).

How often is a sermon preached on this as though it applied to every man on earth, and his "latter end" is made to mean his deathbed! But the "latter end" here is of the nation of Israel, and it is the latter end of their history on this earth. Now read the next verse: "How shall one chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up!" Yes, they "sold" Him for thirty pieces of silver. But "whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap," and God delivered them into the hands of the Gentiles! Their Rock "sold" them, and "the Lord shut them up." That is parallel with the treasure "hidden" again.

They are "shut up." When a thing is shut up you cannot see it, it is hidden from sight.

Consider now the fourth point in our text: which is the most puzzling detail in the parable. Look at it closely: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man has found, he hides, and for joy thereof goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field." The purchase is made after the treasure had been "hidden," and, as we have seen, the hiding of the treasure had respect to Christ's judgment upon Israel and His dispersion of them throughout the earth. Turn now to John 11:51,52: "And this he spoke not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied."

What did he prophesy? "That Jesus should die for" — for whom? — "for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that He also should gather together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad." Now what could be plainer than that? We have two distinct objects there, two distinct companies — "that nation" and also the gathering together in one of "the children of God" that are scattered abroad. The gathering together in one of the children of God that are scattered abroad is what God is doing in this present dispensation, taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name, and gathering them together into one Body. That is what we have in the sixth parable — one pearl. But before that, we are told here in John 11:51, He also died for "that nation." This is what you have in the fifth parable, the earthly people, hid in the field, the world, the earth. This is God's earthly elect, "that nation." In the sixth parable, the pearl, you have His heavenly elect people, the one body.

But we are told in the parable that "for joy thereof He goes and sells all that He has and buys that field." Turn to 2 Peter 2:1, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them."

These false teachers are reprobates, yet this very verse says the Lord bought them. Many have created their own difficulty there in failing to distinguish between ransoming and redeeming. The Lord has "bought" the world, but He has not "redeemed" the world. There is a big difference between the two things. The first Adam was placed at the head of the world: God said "Have thou dominion over all": and he lost it, he forfeited it; the Devil wrested it from his hands: and the last Adam, as man — "the second Man from heaven" — needed to purchase that which Adam had lost; therefore He bought the field. He has bought the whole world, but He has not redeemed it. Particular redemption is for God's elect only, but ransoming, purchasing, is much wider. He bought the field — "Denying the Lord that bought them" — you cannot get away from it. Now, then, He bought the field also because of the treasure that was hidden in it. The treasure in the field is Israel. The man in the parable is Christ. He went and sold all that He had. He who was rich became poor, and bought the field.

Now that is mentioned after the re-hiding of the treasure in the field for this reason: the Jews do not enter into the value and the benefits of Christ's atonement until after this age is over. It is not until the Millennium that Israel will enjoy the benefits of that purchase of His. He bought the field because of the treasure that was in it, and that is why the purchasing of the field is mentioned after the re-hiding of the treasure in it.

To summarize. First, we have the treasure hid in the field: that takes us back to the beginning of Israel's history as a nation. Second, we have the Man finding that treasure; that is Christ coming to this earth and confining His message to the Jews in Palestine. Third, we have the Man hiding the treasure; that is Christ's judgment upon Israel because of their rejection of Him referring to their dispersion abroad throughout the earth. Fourth, we have the Man purchasing the treasure and the whole field in which it was found, referring to the death of Christ. Now, have you noticed there is a fifth point omitted? — the logical completion of the parable would be the Man actually possessing the treasure that He purchased. He hid it, then He purchased it. Logically, the parable needs this to complete it — the Man owning and possessing the treasure. Why is that left out? Because it lies outside the scope of Matthew 13. This chapter, dealing with the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven," has to do with the history of Christendom. It describes the cause of Christ on this earth during the period of His absence, and therefore there is nothing in this parable about the restoration of Israel and the Lord possessing His earthly treasure, because that comes after this dispensation is over, after the history of Christendom has been wound up, after the new age has been inaugurated, namely, the Millennium! How perfect is Scripture in its omissions! For passages treating of Christ's recovery and possession of the treasure see Amos 9:14,15; Acts 15:17. In due time the Jews shall be manifested as God's peculiar "treasure" on "earth" — see Isaiah 62:1-4.

8. The Pearl

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matthew 13:45,46).

First of all, let us deal briefly with the popular and current interpretation of this parable. When we say “popular” we mean, particularly, that which has been given out principally (though not exclusively) by Arminians. The general conception of its meaning is this! Christianity is likened unto one who earnestly desired and diligently sought salvation. Ultimately his efforts were rewarded by his finding Christ, the Pearl of great price. Having found Him, as presented in the Gospel, the sinner sold all that he had: that is to say, he forsook all that the flesh held dear, he abandoned his worldly companions, he surrendered his will, he dedicated his life to God; and in that way, secured his salvation. The awful thing is that this interpretation is the one which, substantially, is given out almost everywhere throughout Christendom today. That is what is taught in the great majority of the denominational Sunday School periodicals. During the last twenty years I have examined scores of Sunday School teachers’ aids in which an exposition of this parable has been found. The one which I have just given is an outline of that which has commonly been advanced.

Now, against that popular interpretation let us name three or four objections which are fatal to it. First, we are told this parable teaches that the sinner earnestly and diligently seeks salvation. But the truth is there has never been a single sinner on this earth who took the initiative in seeking salvation. The sinner ought to seek salvation, for he needs it badly enough.

He ought to seek it, for God commands him so to do: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord.” “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found,” is His command; but fallen man, the sinner in his natural state, never does and never will seek the Lord or His salvation.

How was it with the first sinner? When Adam sinned, and in the cool of the evening of that first awful day, the voice of the Lord was heard rolling down the avenues of Eden; what did he do? Did he hasten to the Lord and cast himself at His feet and cry for mercy? No, he did not seek the Lord at all; he fled. The first sinner did not “seek” God — the Lord sought him: “Adam, where art thou?” And it has ever been thus. How was it with Abraham? There is nothing whatever in Scripture to indicate that Abraham sought God; there is not a little to the contrary. He himself was a heathen, his parents idolaters worshiping other gods — as the last chapter of Joshua tells us — and the Lord suddenly appeared to him in that heathen city.

Abraham had not been seeking God; it was God who sought him. And thus it has been all through the piece. When the Savior came here He declared, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

But perhaps there are some saying in themselves, “I cannot deny my own experience; I know quite well there was as a time when ‘I sought the Lord.’” We do not deny it; what we would call attention to is, there was something before that. What caused you to “seek” the Lord? Ah, the truth is, you sought Him because He first sought you — just as truly as you love Him because He first loved you. It is not the sheep that seeks the Shepherd; it is the Shepherd who seeks the sheep; and having sought the sheep, He creates in the heart of that sheep a desire after Himself, then it begins to seek Him.

Thus, to make this parable teach that the natural man, an unconverted sinner, is seeking Christ, “the Pearl of great price,” is to repudiate Scripture and to dishonor the grace of God. In Romans 3:11 are these words, and they are final: “There is none that seeks after God.” No, there is not one. There are multitudes that seek after pleasure, and seek after wealth, but there is none that seeks after “God.” He is the great Seeker. Oh that He may seek out some poor, needy souls now, and show them their need of Him, and create in their hearts a longing after Himself. O Spirit of God seek out Thine own.

In the second place, we are told in the popular interpretation of this parable that, having sought and found Christ, the Pearl of great price, the sinner sells all that he has and buys it, But that cannot be, because the sinner has nothing to sell! Righteousness he has none, for Isaiah 64:6 says that all our righteousnesses are as “filthy rags.” Goodness he has none, for Romans 3:12 tells us “There is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Faith he has none, for that is God’s “gift” (Ephesians 2:8). The sinner has nothing to sell. The popular view of this parable turns God’s truth upside down, for He declares that salvation is without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1).

In the third place, to say that the sinner sells all that he has and buys the one pearl of great price — buys Christ — is positively awful! What a travesty! What a blasphemy! If there is one thing taught more clearly than anything else in Holy Writ, it is that salvation cannot be purchased by man: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:5). “The gift of God is eternal life” (Romans 6:23’). If it is a “gift” it is not to be sold or bartered.

Let us give now what we believe is the true interpretation of this parable. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman.” The “man” referred to is Christ, as He is all through this chapter. The “man” that sowed the good Seed in the field in the first parable is Christ. The “man” referred to in v. 24 at the beginning of the second parable is Christ, and the “man” in this parable, the “merchantman,” is the Lord Jesus. Now, notice five things concerning this “man.”

First, he desired this goodly pearl: “the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls: who when he had found one pearl of great price went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” The parable begins by intimating that the Merchantman had set His heart upon this pearl. The pearl represents His church in its entirety, and that people, that church, the Lord Jesus desired. This is something which altogether passes our comprehension. What was there in us poor, fallen, depraved, sinful creatures to awaken His desire? “What was there in us That could merit esteem, Or give the Creator delight? ‘Twas even thus, Father!

We ever must sing, For so it seemed good in Thy sight.”

That is the only reason.

Now let us turn to two or three scriptures which bear out this thought — Christ’s desire for a people. “So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty” (Psalm 45:11). O wonder of wonders, that He, the King, should greatly desire poor, sinful worms of the earth! In the light of that, recall those blessed words of His in John 14 — how they lay bare the very heart of the Savior — “Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” How that speaks forth His love for His own people! How precious they must be in His sight! “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again” — beautiful as that place may be, perfect as that place is, it does not satisfy the longing of His heart until that place is occupied by those for whom it is prepared. “I will go and prepare a place for you, and if I go.... I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” How that tells out the intense desire of the heart of Christ which will not be satisfied until He has His own blood-bought people around Himself! Compare Ephesians 5:25; Revelation 3:20!

The parable then begins by intimating the desire of Christ for this “pearl.” The second thing is that He regarded this pearl as being of “great price.” That is what has staggered so many of the commentators. Even Mr. Spurgeon used to think that such language could never be true of poor sinners of the earth, that it could only be appropriate of the Christ of God.

It is staggering — that not only should Christ desire you and me, but that we should be of “great price” in His sight! It only illustrates what we are told in Isaiah 55: “My thoughts are not your thoughts.... as the heavens are higher than the earth....so are My thoughts than your thoughts.”

Yes, they are. Would any redeemed sinner have formed such a conception in his own mind if God’s Word had never so told us — that we were of “great price” in His sight? No, I am sure none of us would; for God’s people are not of “great price” in their own sight, let alone the sight of the Lord Himself. O think of it, that we were of “great price” in His sight!

There is an intimation of this in that wonderful 8th chapter of Proverbs, where we are taken back into the eternal counsels of God, and are permitted to witness something of the relationship that existed between the Father and the Son before earth’s foundations were laid: “Then I was by Him as One brought up with Him: And I was daily His delight.” And then in the 31st verse we read the words of Christ, spoken prophetically or in anticipation: “My delights were with the children of men.” “My delights” :

O my brethren and sisters in Christ, not only were we present in His thoughts, not only did we stand before His mind in the eternity of the past, but His heart was fixed on us; His affections went out to us. We were His “delights” even then. “My delights are with the sons of men.” It may be asked, “Can you understand that?” And we say, No, dear friends, we cannot: our poor little minds are altogether inadequate for rising to such a level: we can only bow in wonderment and worship where we cannot understand.

In the third place, we are told that the Merchantman not only desired this pearl, and esteemed it of so great value, but He sold all that He had — words easily uttered, I am afraid sometimes glibly spoken. If our minds were incapable of rising to the level of the thought that has just been expressed, who amongst us is capable of gauging what it meant for the Lord of glory, the Creator of the universe, to sell all that He had? He who was rich for your sakes became poor — poorer than any of us have ever been; much poorer. So poor that He occupied a manger — that one day we might occupy a mansion. So poor that He had not where to lay His head — in order that you and I, who are amongst His favored ones, might rest our heads forever on His sacred bosom. “He who was rich for your sakes became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich.”

In the fourth place, this Merchantman sought the pearl. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking.” This points a contrast from what was before us in the preceding parable. In the fifth parable the treasure was “found”: in the case of the pearl it was “sought.” The distinction appropriately expresses the difference between God’s earthly election, the Jews; and God’s heavenly election, which are, for the most part, gathered out from the Gentiles (Acts 15:14). Turn to Ephesians 2:17; “And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.”

Were not all sinners “far off” from Him? Were there any sinners that were “nigh” to Him? In one sense, No. In another sense, Yes. Spiritually all of Adam’s race were “far off” from Him, yet dispensationally the Jews were “nigh,” and the Gentiles were “far off”; but they both needed the word of peace preached to them. He preached “peace to you which were far off (that is, the Gentiles) and to them that were nigh” (that is, the Jews).

Hence, in the first of these two parables the treasure was “found”; it did not need “seeking!” It was already in the land when the Christ of God became incarnate: the Jews were already there in outward covenant relationship with God — with

the Word of God in their hands, the temple of God in their midst, and so on. But in the next parable, where the Gentiles are in view, they not only had to be “found,” but they needed to be “sought!” They were “afar off” from God in every way. O the minute accuracy of Scripture!

Now notice in the next place, the Merchantman bought the “pearl.” There is no need to enlarge on that, except perhaps to quote 1 Peter 1:18,19. “...not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

It was at the Cross that He bought the pearl, and the price that He paid was His own precious blood.

Let us now consider the “pearl” itself, and admire the accuracy, beauty, and fullness of this figure that Christ selected for portraying His Church.

First, notice its unity. “A Merchantman was seeking goodly pearls, and when he had found one pearl of great price.” Let us observe, however, that this Merchantman had several pearls. He was seeking goodly pearls, and, of course, if He sought them He found each one. Yes, Christ has several pearls. There are quite a number of distinct companies among His redeemed. The Old Testament saints is one, and so on. But attention is here focussed on “one pearl” in particular: the unity of God’s saints of this present dispensation is what is referred to. “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, for we are all one” (Galatians 3:28). Now, it is a significant fact that a pearl is the only gem whose unity cannot be broken without destroying it. I may take a diamond and cut it into two, then I have two diamonds. I may take a lump of gold and divide it into two, and I have two lumps of gold. But if I take a pearl and cut it into two, I have nothing; I have destroyed it! A pearl significantly stands for the unity of the saints of this present dispensation.

In the second place, a pearl is the product of a living creature, and it is the only gem that is. Not only so, but it is the result of suffering. Away down in the ocean’s depths there lives a little animal encased in a shell; we call it an oyster. One day a foreign substance, a grain of sand, intrudes, and pierces its side. Now, God has endowed that animal with the faculty of self-preservation, like He has all others of His creatures, and it throws out, exudes, a slimy substance called nacre and covers the wound, repeating the process again and again. One layer after another of that nacre or mother of pearl is cast out by that little animal on the wound in its side, until ultimately there is built up what eventuates in a pearl. So that a pearl is the product of suffering. How wonderful the figure! How accurate the emblem! The Church, the saints of this dispensation, are the fruitage of the travail of Christ’s soul. The pearl, we may say, is the answer to the injury that was inflicted upon the animal. In other words, it is the offending particle that ultimately becomes the object of beauty: that which injured the oyster becomes the precious gem. The very thing that injured the animal, the little grain of sand that intruded, is ultimately clothed with a beauty that is not its own and covered with the comeliness of the one that it injured.

How manifestly is the Author of the Bible and the Savior of our souls the Regulator of everything in nature. Yes, He saw to it, when He created the oyster, that it should furnish an appropriate type and figure of His Church.

In the third place, the pearl is an object that is formed slowly and gradually. It does not come into existence in a single day. There is a tedious process of waiting while the pearl is being slowly but surely formed. And so it has been with the Church. For nineteen centuries now that, of which the pearl is the figure and type, has been in process of formation by the power and grace of God. Just as the oyster covered the wound in its side and that which pierced it with one layer after another of the beautiful nacre, constantly repeating the process, so out of each generation of men on earth God has called a few and added them to that Church which He is now building for His Son.

In the fourth place, notice the lowly origin of that which is a type of the Church. That beautiful pearl originally had its home in the depths of the sea, amid its mire and filth, for that is where oysters congregate. They are the scavengers of the ocean. Down in the ocean’s depths, amidst the mire, is that precious gem being formed. What a lowly origin! Yes, and that is to remind us, and to humble us with the remembrance of it, that we, who have by sovereign grace been made members of Christ, had by nature our origin in the filth and mire and ruin of the fall. Compare Ephesians 2:11,12.

In the fifth place, the pearl, as it is being formed down there in the ocean’s depths, is not seen by the eye of man. It is a secret formation; none but God witnesses its building up. In like manner, that Church which Christ is now building, that body of His which is now in process of formation, is unknown and unseen by the world. I am not speaking of the visible churches, I am talking about that Church, which is now being built (see Ephesians 2:21; 4:16, etc.), and which as it is being formed, like the oyster, is unseen by the eye of man. Your life is hid with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). Significant, too, is the fact that just as the pearl is found not in the mines of earth, but in the sea, so the Church of this dispensation is composed mainly of Gentiles — the “waters” figuring such, see Revelation 17:15.

In the sixth place, we learn from this figure that in the eyes of God that Church is an object of value and beauty. That little object, hidden from the eyes of men, is being fashioned into a precious gem, which shall yet reflect the light of heaven and become an object of beauty and admiration in the eyes of all who see it. Turn to 2 Thessalonians 1:10, “When He shall come to be glorified in His saints (not only in Himself), and to be admired in all them that believe.” That is speaking in the language of the pearl.

First, the Lord Jesus will “present to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but it shall be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27); second, when He returns to the earth itself, He will bring with him

His complete and beautified Church and it will be an object of admiration to all who behold it. To a wondering universe Christ will yet display His glorified Church.

In the seventh place, see how in the figure Christ here selected, we have an intimation of the honorable and exalted future that the Church is yet to enjoy. That little object in the ocean's depths, unseen by the eye of men, which is being gradually built up, ultimately has a position and a place in the diadem of the king. That is the destiny of the pearl of great price: it becomes the jewel of royalty; for this it has been made. And so we are told, "When Christ, our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

And again, "That in the ages to come (that is yet future) He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us" (Ephesians 2:7).

Ah, my friends, many of God's people today may be poor and despised and hated by the prominent and great of this world, but just as surely as the pearl of great price of lowly origin ultimately in a position of dignity and honor and glory, so those who now are last shall be first.

In closing, let me sum up in two words of practical application. First, to the unconverted. O my unsaved friend, let this parable show you once and for all the utter impossibility and the needlessness of attempting to purchase your salvation, of seeking to win God's approval by some works and doings of your own. The pearl in this parable is not a Savior whom the sinner has to "buy." "By grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.... not of works lest any man should boast."

And what is the word to those of us who by the grace of God have been saved? This: the pearl has been purchased by Christ: we are the purchased property of another! You are not your own, but "bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20). To what extent is that Divine truth regulating our lives? How far is that fact dominating our daily walk? We are not our own; we belong to Christ! Do we realize that? Are we living day by day as though we realized it? Does our walk manifest it? Not our own — the property of another! Then should we not say, "For me to live is Christ?" Can any of us truthfully say it? "For me to live is Christ?" Is it true that I have only one aim, only one desire, only one ambition; all my efforts concentrated on the honoring, obeying, magnifying of Christ? O my friends, the poor preacher cannot honestly say it. By the grace of God he may say that is his desire. But O how far short he comes of attaining to it in his daily life. May God help all His people to realize in their souls that they are not their own: no longer free, no longer have the right to plan their own life, to say what they will do or what they will not do: no longer any whatever — the purchased property of Another. Our answer to that ought to be, "For to me to live is Christ." O may Divine, enabling grace be granted to us so to live!

9. The Dragnet

“Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind” (Matthew 13:47-50) We have previously pointed out that it is of first importance to carefully note the manner and method in which these seven parables are arranged, for their order supplies a key to their interpretation. The first one stands by itself, being distinguished from the other six which follow by the omission of the opening clause “the kingdom of heaven is like unto.” The first parable is not a similitude of the kingdom of heaven; the last six are. The first parable treats of a preparatory work, done prior to the introduction of the kingdom of heaven in its present form; that introductory work being the broadcast sowing of the seed. first by the Lord Himself, afterwards by the apostles.

The six parables which follow are plainly divided into two threes. The first three were spoken by the Lord from the ship in the hearing of the multitude by the seaside, and therefore they give us the more public aspect of the kingdom of heaven in its present form — the kingdom of heaven in this world as it is seen by men. The last three parables were not spoken to the multitude nor were they uttered by the seashore, but were spoken by the Lord to the disciples only, and that within the house; intimating that they treat of the internal and hidden aspects of the kingdom of heaven, that which is not manifested before men in this world. So that the last three parables speak from the standpoint of God’s counsels.

The first of the last three is the parable of the treasure hid in the field, a man for joy thereof buying the field — principally for the sake of the treasure that was hidden therein. The next parable, that of the pearl, also sought, desired, and purchased by the same man, the merchantman. Those two objects, the treasure and the pearl, intimate that there are two elect companies, dear unto God and precious unto His Son, purchased by Him: one an earthly people, the other a heavenly; through whom the wondrous riches of Divine grace and glory will yet be made manifest in the two great divisions of God’s dominions — heaven and earth. The earthly people, spoken of under the figure of the treasure. being Israel, the literal Israel; the heavenly people, spoken of under the figure of the pearl, looking forward to the time when the body of Christ will be completed and He shall present to Himself a glorious Church. The order of these two parables, then, is, “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” — the treasure coming before the pearl.

But if these seven parables give us a prophetic outline of the course of Christendom, that is the history of the Christian profession throughout this dispensation, during the time of Christ’s absence from the earth, one more parable is needed to complete the picture. The last parable is in one sense an amplification of the sixth. In the sixth parable there is only one man at work, one agent acting — the Merchant-man. He is the one who does all in connection with the pearl. But while it is true the Merchant-man, the Lord Jesus Christ. is the principal worker in connection with the gathering out of the saints during this dispensation, in His condescending grace He does not work alone. He has been pleased to call His own saints to have a part with Him in the prosecution of this work, in the accomplishing of God’s counsels, in the gathering out of His elect people. Consequently. when we come to this seventh parable, for the first time, the number of the pronoun is changed. Notice this in v. 47: “Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net. that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore” — not “he” but “they.” That is the first time we have “they” in the parables. Illustrations of what is thereby denoted are found in the Gospels in connection with Christ’s miracles.

Take the first one that He performed — the turning of water into wine.

This is a sermon in action. His mother came to Him and said, “They have no wine.” Their own wine had given out. Now “wine” in Scripture is the symbol of joy — not exclusively, but that is one of its essential significations. “They have no wine.” Christ alone can impart real joy to the heart; but in the working of the miracle He used servants. He said to the servants, “Fill the waterpots.” He said to the servants, “Draw it forth.” He said to the servants, Convey it to “the master of the feast.” He deigned to use them, and in their obedience they became workers together with Him in the performing of that miracle.

Take again the feeding of the multitude. There was the famishing crowd: they had no food. Here was the Lord Jesus Christ. A few loaves and fishes were placed in His hands, and under His miraculous working-power those loaves and fishes were made to feed the hungry multitude. But what was the method that He followed? He did not hand the food directly to the crowd; He first gave to the disciples, and they distributed to the multitude.

So that (we say it reverently) between the Lord Jesus Christ and the multitudes, and the wine and food, there is need of consecrated servants, to first receive from Him and then to hand out to others. Therefore we may see that if these seven parables furnish an outline of the history of this present dispensation, it is necessary to complete the picture by showing us that the Lord Jesus, in His condescending grace, uses others to the accomplishing of God’s purpose and the executing of His counsels.

Now the details of this parable are so few in number and so simple that it seems they hardly call for explanation. First of all, there is the “net.”

Second, there is the “sea” into which the net is cast. Third, there are the “fishermen” themselves — they gather in. And fourth, there are the “fish” that are enclosed in the net. It should be plain to all that the “net” itself is a symbol of the

Gospel, the proclaiming and presenting Christ to the responsibility of men. Second, the “sea” into which the net is cast has the same meaning that it has in the first verse of the chapter: it stands for the nations as such, the Gentiles, and that is why the “sea” is here once more mentioned — because that which is specially characteristic of the present dispensation, in contradistinction from the dispensation that preceded it and the one which shall yet follow, is God’s mercy turning unto the Gentiles: therefore we have the figure of the “sea” once more. The “fishermen,” those who cast the net into the sea, are the Lord’s gossellers, the evangelists, the preachers of the Word. That is clear by comparing Scripture with Scripture: in Matthew 4:19 and in Luke 5 the Lord Jesus said to His first disciples, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men,” it is His own figure for His evangelists.

Now very briefly let us call attention to seven things connected with the parable. The first thing that has impressed us in studying it is this: the inconspicuousness of the fishermen. Observe that in the 47th verse they are not even mentioned: “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind,” while in the 48th verse Christ just refers to them as “they”: “Which when it was full, they drew to shore.” That is all that is said about them. How inconspicuous they are! In other words, those who have been so highly honored by God, and (it is an infinitely higher honor to be a servant of Christ than to be King of the British Empire) to have a part in the casting of this net into the sea, are here hidden from view, nothing is said about them, except they are just referred to once as “they.” O how that rebukes and condemns the preacher-worship of the day! Turn for a moment to 1 Corinthians 3: beginning at v. 4: — “For while one says, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom you believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that plants anything neither he that waters.” Do we realize that, my brethren? Do you realize that the one whom God has called to minister to you, is himself nothing — nothing at all, merely an empty vessel, that, unless the Lord comes, will soon crumble away to dust! But He, the One who deigns to bless, who places His treasure in earthen vessels, He is everything. O my brethren and sisters, it has impressed me deeply in studying this parable that the fishermen are hidden from sight. They are inconspicuous, they are mere nothings that God can dispense with as easily as He can use them. Do not imagine that the prosperity of any church depends upon the presence of some particular man in the pulpit. The Lord is not only able to continue and prosper His work, but to do so a hundredfold more without the most gifted preacher if He so pleases. The instrument is nothing. How that rebukes the preacher-worship of the day!

May Almighty God deliver His people from it. May God in His grace (for He is a jealous God, who will not share His glory with another), preserve His people from giving any of the honor and glory to the mere instrument, the whole of which is due and belongs alone to Him. Just as surely as you begin to honor and glorify the instrument, the blessing of God will depart.

Heed well this first point in our parable: the fishermen were hidden from sight. May they be hidden from sight in all the churches of God.

Secondly, the object before the fishermen in casting the net into the sea and drawing it forth again. This was simply to gather good fish. That was their one aim and design, the 48th verse shows that — “which when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good fish into vessels.”

It is true there were also some bad fish in the net, but these they cast away.

It is the good fish they were out for. Now, while it is true the servant of God is under marching orders to “preach the gospel to every creature,” nevertheless, that which he must ever keep steadily before him, those whom he must perseveringly seek out, and those he is called to minister unto, are God’s elect. Though the servant of God is sent forth to preach the Gospel to all who come under the sound of his voice, yet he is not sent to draw a bow at a venture. God has not sent him forth so that the success of his labors is made dependent upon the caprice of man or the response of his will. No, the primary purpose of God in raising up His servants and sending them forth is, the good of His own elect. And that end is to be kept in view by those whom God calls upon to engage in His service, whether that work be in the mission-field or in the Sunday School class or in district visitation. God has called you to seek out those whom He has marked out from all eternity — the “good fish”.

There are two Scriptures I want to refer to from the Epistles of Paul which bring both of these aspects before us. First, 1 Corinthians 9:22, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” In a general way that means this: Paul was carrying out his Divinely given commission and preaching the Gospel to every creature — the net was cast into the sea at large. Paul was made all things to all men. He welcomed an opportunity to preach the Gospel to the poor; but he did not miss an opportunity to preach God’s Word to the prominent and eminent as well.

He was primarily, “the apostle to the Gentiles” (Romans 11:13), yet how often he preached to the Jews! He was made all things to all men.

That is one side: that is the casting of the net “into-the-sea’ aspect.

Now turn to 2 Timothy 2:10, which is a verse many Arminians do not seem to know is in the Bible at all; those who have been brought up under “Freewill” teaching need to look at it closely. These were the words of the apostle Paul in connection with his own ministry: “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus.” That was the object before the apostle’s heart, that was the goal that he had in view.

That was the aim of his ministry, that was what enabled him to endure such a great fight of afflictions. He endured all things “for the elect’s sake.” How that gives the aspect of the Gospel work portrayed in our parable! There is first the broadcasting of the net into the sea at large, and there is secondly the particular design in so doing. The purpose of it is to gather out the “good fish.” So while you and I are called upon to preach the Gospel to every creature, let us not lose sight of the fact that God’s purpose and our submission to it is the seeking out of the good fish, praying that God will use us to find His hidden ones. For, observe that, at first, God’s elect are hidden from His servants, like the “good fish” in the sea; but as we labor in the Gospel they become manifest — they are seen in the “net!”

In the third place, we are told that the net gathered in of every kind.

Coming back to Matthew 13:47, the last part of the verse: “that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind.” Others besides “good fish” were enclosed. This reminds us once more that the main thing which is in view in our chapter is the Christian profession. Here we are shown the effects of Gospel preaching. Here we behold the results of the net being cast into the sea at large — the world-wide proclamation of the Gospel and the universal presentation of Christ unto men. The result is that there is a mixed profession. The net gathers in “of every kind.” Just as at the beginning of the age there were the wheat and tares, so at the end of the age (to which this parable conducts us) there are bad fish as well as good.

Now in the fourth place, the fact that this net gathered in bad fishes as well as good ones was no reflection upon the skill of the fishermen. But on the other hand, they were responsible to distinguish between the good and the bad fish after they had entered the net, and they were responsible to separate the one from the other. That is an essential and important part of the work and duty of God’s servants — to discriminate, to distinguish between the good and the bad fish. Mark it carefully: “which when it was full, (that is, the net) they drew to shore, and (what?) sat down” (v. 8).

They sat down before they did anything with the fish. Before they attempted to do any sorting out and separating, they sat down: which indicates that this aspect of their work requires time, care, deliberation!

Now notice also in verse 48: “They gathered the good fish into vessels, but cast the bad away.” That is all that the fishermen did with the bad; just cast them away. They had got into the net, but they were rejected. They would have nothing further to do with them. Nothing else is required of the fishermen, but just to cast them away. Such was Christ’s word in Matthew 15:13, where the disciples came to Him and were speaking about the Pharisees, He said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone.” It is not our business to do the rooting up; just leave them alone, that is all; have no fellowship with them. Turn to Romans 16:17, “Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned” — imprison them, torture them, burn them? No, God has never told His people, or His professing people, to do any such thing. Even if Rome were right in her doctrines, Scripture absolutely condemns her practices. How has she acted towards those who have differed from her doctrine? Here is what Scripture says, “Brethren mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them.”

That is all! Give them a wide berth; separate yourselves from them; have nothing to do with them, avoid them. Do you avoid them? If some man comes to the City with a great reputation, and the newspapers announce that he is teaching this, that, and the other and huge crowds are being drawn, and a lot of people tell you he is such a nice man, yet you know he is teaching contrary to the doctrine that you have received; what do you do? Do you “avoid” him? I am afraid some of you don’t. Many need this word. “Avoid them!” See also 2 John 10!

In the fifth place. These fishermen were to distinguish and discriminate between the good and the bad fish. Though they are not to be blamed for the entrance of the “bad” fish into the “net” — being under the waters they could not see what sort of fish entered; yet they have a responsibility concerning them once the net is drawn to land: then they are exposed to sight. It is not long before a professing Christian makes it manifest whether or not he has been really born again. It is concerning this God holds His servants responsible.

Perhaps some will ask, How are they able to do it? In what way are God’s servants to distinguish the good fish from the bad? Has God left them to their own discretion in the matter? No, my friends. We need not lean unto our own understanding in anything. The Scriptures have been given that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works, and in them God Himself has described the very marks by which we can distinguish good fish from bad!

Turn for a moment to Leviticus 11:9, “These shall you eat of all that are in the waters, whatsoever has fins, and scales, in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall you eat. And all that have not fins and scales in the seas and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you.”

Do you suppose that these verses contain nothing more than instructions to the Hebrews about their diet 3,000 years ago? Do you imagine that God has recorded in His eternal Word something with no other significance and importance than the mere regulating of the table of the Israelites in the past? I trust that by this time most of you have learned that there is a spiritual significance and value to everything in Scripture. There is not time now to expound this, but concerning the good fish there were two things, fins and scales — fins to propel them through the waters and aid their motion; scales to protect, to shield them from the pressure and action of the waters as they passed swiftly through them. Can you interpret it? God has given His people two things: armor to protect them, and also an inward power to propel them

through the waters of this world. Those who give evidence of having on them the armor of light (Romans 13:12; Ephesians 6:13-17), corresponding to the “scales;” and those who make it manifest they are swimming against (instead of floating down with) the tide of this world, furnish proof that they are “good fish.”

In the sixth place, it should be carefully noted that the work of the fishermen did not cease when they drew the net to land. Something else yet remained for them to do. Look again at the parable: “Which when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good fish into” — a vessel? It does not say so; but “they gathered the good fish into vessels.” Why? The work of the fishermen was not completed when they gathered the fish into the net, nor was it finished when they had separated the good from the bad: the good ones must be gathered into “vessels.” Surely that does not need interpreting. The “good” fish represent believers; their being “gathered” speaks of association together — fellowship; while the “vessels” tell of separation from the world.

I have only time now to mention the last point without elaborating — If this parable is studied closely it will be found that vv. 49 and 59 present two difficulties — those who have not studied it, will not have felt their force: “So shall it be at the end of the world (or of the age): the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just.” In the parable itself the work is done by the fishermen: but in the interpretation of the parable the work is done by “angels.” Again, in the parable itself the good fish are separated from the bad, but when you come to the interpretation, the order is reversed: “they shall sever the wicked from among the just.”

So that in the interpretation the bad are separated from the good — the very opposite of the order in v. 48. For the present we leave these two points with you.

10. Review

We have endeavored to show in our exposition of Matthew 13 that the prophetic parables found therein contain an outline sketch of the history of Christendom, i.e., the circle of profession, that sphere where the authority of Christ is nominally owned. That which is in view, particularly in the first four parables, is the circle of human responsibility, and therefore it is a picture of failure which is presented to us. Look where you will, it is always the same; whenever God has committed anything to man as a responsible creature, he has failed in his trust.

God placed Adam in Eden on the ground of human responsibility — that is, on probation; and he fell. God gave to Noah the sword of magisterial authority, but he failed to govern himself. God committed to Israel the law, and they broke it: before Moses came down from the mount they had set up the calf and were worshipping it. God instituted priesthood in Israel, in the tribe of Levi, and Aaron and his sons were duly consecrated to their office; yet on the very next day two of Aaron's sons offered strange fire, and judgment fell upon them. God instituted kingship in Israel, and that also was a sorry failure, as the books of Kings and Chronicles bear witness.

God endowed Nebuchadnezzar with great power and it turned his head: he became so bloated with his own self-importance that he made an image to himself and demanded that all should worship it.

And the Christian profession has been no exception. Paul announced that after his departure "grievous wolves should enter the flock," and they did.

The evil introduction by Satan at the beginning of this dispensation has never been eradicated, nor will it be till harvest-time. Instead of things getting better, Scripture explicitly declares they will become "worse and worse"; until Christ will "spew out" the whole system that bears His name.

The seven parables of Matthew 13 divide into four and three, the usual division of a septenary series. The first four were spoken to the multitude on the seashore; the last three to the disciples within the house. Hence, the first four give us the external view of the history of Christendom; the last three treating of that which is internal or spiritual. The first four are arranged in two pairs, the first two giving us the individual aspect of things, the wheat and tares. The second pair set forth that which is collective and corporate, the mustard-tree and the leaven.

Again: the first parable shows us a "sowing"; the fifth and sixth reveal the resultant crop. In like manner, the second parable also shows us a "sowing," while the third and fourth describe the harvest which springs from it. Should it be asked, Why is the crop from the second sowing mentioned before that of the first? The answer is, this is in keeping with God's invariable method: "Howbeit, that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (1 Corinthians 15:46).

Cain was born before Abel, Ishmael before Isaac, Esau before Jacob. The nation of Egypt existed before Israel; Saul came to the throne before David, and so on.

Let us now briefly review the details of these parables. The first represents our Lord still here upon earth, in Servant-form, scattering broadcast the Seed of the kingdom. It intimates the ratio of the Gospel's success, and forewarns us that only a fractional portion thereof produces abiding results.

It makes known, from the human side, the various hindrances which render most of the Seed unfertile. Thus, this parable plainly repudiates the popular delusion which supposes that this age will yet witness a universal reception of the Gospel; it positively forbids any expectation of a millennium brought about by human enterprise or the labors of Christ's servants. It declares that as the result of the opposition of the devil, the flesh and the world, most of the Seed is either caught away or choked, and general barrenness is the result. Nor is there any hint at the close of the parable that such opposition would cease or that the yield would increase; instead, the Lord affirmed that it would decrease from an hundred-fold down to thirty-fold.

The history of the last nineteen centuries has fully corroborated the teaching of this parable and made manifest the fulfillment of Christ's prediction. Only a fractional proportion of people in any land, state, city, or village really receive the Gospel! Not only is this true in general throughout the world, but it applies with equal force to the religious sphere. Where is the church to-day which can carry on its work if the faithful minority were removed ?

The second parable carries us forward to a point after Christ's ascension, and shows us dual forces at work in Christendom. These "dual forces" are named in vv. 24, 25. They are Christ (through His servants) sowing His "good Seed" and the Devil sowing his "tares." Through the unwatchfulness of the Lord's servants, while "men slept," the Enemy got in his work, and as the result the crop in the field, as a whole, is spoiled, and is to continue thus to the end of the age.

Some have experienced a difficulty in v. 27. In view of the fact that the "tares" so closely resemble the wheat that the one cannot be distinguished from the other till harvest-time, how was it that their presence was detected at such an early date? The difficulty is more imaginary than real.

Note the difference between what is said in v. 25 and v. 27: in the former it was "men" that slept: in the latter, it was the "servants" who discovered the presence of the tares. These "servants" obviously refer to the apostles, who were

endowed with the Holy Spirit to an extent that none others have been, and therefore possessed a discernment which none others have had since then.

But though the “tares” were detected, orders were given that they must not be removed; they were to “grow together” with the wheat until the harvest.

It is a great pity that many with more zeal than knowledge have ignored this command of Christ’s. This word of His at once exposes the uselessness, worthlessness, and unscripturalness of “reform” movements and efforts. Men have indulged the idle dream that they could improve the world by ridding it of noxious weeds: in other words, by the banishment of drunkenness and immorality, and the purifying of politics—as well might they attempt to purify the waters of the Dead Sea! Christ said, “Let both grow”; do not waste time in seeking to get rid of the “tares.” “Preach the Gospel to every creature” is our marching-order, and due attention to it will leave no time for seeking to root up weeds! Finally, it is blessed to note that the Enemy can neither injure the wheat nor prevent the garnering of it. The sowing of his tares was by God’s permission.

The third parable carries us beyond the days of the apostles and anticipated the time when the outward character of professing Christianity underwent a radical change. That which had hitherto been despised, had become popular; that which was so insignificant in the world, assumed huge proportions. But instead of this being a great blessing, it was a fearful curse. So far from its being a triumph for the Gospel, it evidenced a victory of Satan. The little mustard-seed developed into a monstrosity, and produced that which gave shelter for the agents of the Devil. Instead of living as strangers and pilgrims here, professing Christians took part in politics and sought to reform the State. Instead of having as their hope the returning Christ, they sought to improve the world, and to such an extent did they imagine they had succeeded, it was announced that the millennium had commenced.

The parable of the leaven presents to us something still more tragic. Just as the mustard-tree depicted the outward corruption of the Christian profession, this fourth parable shows us the inward corruption of it. Into the “meal,” which represents the pure doctrine of Christ, a foreign element was stealthily introduced. This was designed to make the food of God’s people lighter and more palatable to the world; but it corrupted the same.

The Lord announced that this evil process would continue until the whole was leavened. This cannot be completely realized while the Holy Spirit remains on earth; but how nearly this prophecy has become history shows us how very close at hand must be the time when He will take His departure.

But though these four parables give us a sad picture of the unfaithfulness of men, there has been no failure with God. That cannot be. In spite of all the breakdown in human responsibility, and notwithstanding Satan’s opposition, God has been slowly but surely working out His “eternal purpose.” “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world,” says Acts 15:18, and clear and abundant proof of this is furnished here in Matthew 13.

The fifth and the sixth parables bring before us the gracious and blessed work of Christ, securing for Himself two Objects which are inexpressibly precious to Him, namely, the “treasure” hid in the field and the “pearl” from the sea; which represent redeemed Israel and the Church of the present dispensation. This gives us the brighter side of things, and shows that, notwithstanding Satan’s Divinely-permitted success, Christ shall yet “see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11).

In connection with the next parable there remain two points to be considered: first, Christ’s interpretation of it, which is found in vv. 49, 50.

The careful reader will observe that this contains a principle similar to that found in connection with the interpretation of the second parable which is given in vv. 41-43. In the parable (itself) of the tares Christ went no farther than what actually takes place here on earth, see v. 30; the state in the next world of those represented by the tares is not revealed. But in the interpretation of this parable, which Christ gave to His disciples, their future destiny was made known, see vv. 39-43. Thus the interpretation carries us farther than do the details of the parable itself. This principle is also exemplified in a number of symbolic prophecies: Daniel 7 supplies a notable illustration — the explanations there given going beyond the symbols used.

It is thus in the seventh parable. In vv. 47, 48 the final destiny of neither the good nor the bad fish is given. Neither in the parable of the Tares nor of the Net does the execution of judgment form part of the parable itself.

The reason of this is not far to seek. These parables all treat of the present dispensation, while the churches are on earth: God’s judgment will descend after they have gone. Hence, in the parable itself the “tares” are left in the field (v. 30); and in the last parable the “bad fish” are left on the shore, that is, on earth (v. 48). This is clear from the fact that the “vessels” into which the “good fish are gathered” are on earth. The execution of judgment upon the “tares” and on the “bad fish” occurs at a later date, and this was indicated by Christ Himself, in His giving the interpretation separately and after the parable itself.

In further confirmation of what has just been said, it is to be noted that, the fishermen have nothing to do with the work of judgment. As Christ declared “at the end of the age (which will be more than seven years after the Rapture) the angels shall come forth.” etc. (v. 49). Thus it is the “angels” who execute God’s judgment — compare carefully Revelation 7:1, 8:1, 16:1, etc.

One other point connected with the last parable must be noted. In v. 49 we are told that “the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just.” This is the very opposite of what the fishermen do in v. 48: they, first, gather the good fish into vessels, and then cast the bad away. In both the parable of the Tares and of the Net the “angels” are occupied with the wicked. The “just” in v. 49 refer to the godly Jewish remnant who will be on earth, after the Church has been removed just before at the end of this age.

The very fact that Matt 13 contains seven parables intimates that we have here a complete something, and that is, the history of the Christian profession on earth. In the prophetic outline presented by Christ, the salient points and principal epochs in this history are noticed. In the first, which is introductory, the earthly ministry of Christ is in view. The second, describes what took place in the days of the apostles. The third, brings us down to the fourth century, when the little mustard-seed became a great “tree,” which pointed to the union between the State and professing Christianity in the days of Constantine. The fourth takes us to the end of the sixth century, and forecast the rise of the Papacy, the woman corrupting the meal.

After the fourth parable there is a manifest break: the Lord leaving the seaside and retiring within the house: thus He was hidden from the multitude! Marvelously and accurately does this correspond with the history of Christendom, for, following the establishment of Romanism, came the Dark Ages, when the multitudes were forsaken by Christ. After the break, come the next two parables spoken to the disciples only. These forecast the great Reformation in the days of Luther, Calvin, etc. Most significant is it that the central object in each is Christ seeking that which was hidden and bringing it to light. That which He first unearthed was the “treasure” hid in a field. How manifestly this found its parallel in the recovery of the precious Word of God which had for so long been kept back from the people! The parable of the “one pearl” anticipated the recovery of the blessed truth of the oneness in Christ of all God’s people.

The seventh parable, as its position in the series indicates, treats of conditions at the close of this dispensation. In the light of this, how very significant are the words at the end of v. 47: “A net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind.” No efforts are now being spared to attract fish of “every kind” into the various denominational “nets,” and everything that would tend to frighten or keep away worldlings is carefully avoided. In modern “church” services there is something to suit the tastes and meet the needs of all, except the true children of God! Social, economic, and diplomatic problems and issues are discussed to satisfy the political mind.

Worldly amusements are introduced to attract the lovers of pleasure.

Grand organs are put in and professional vocalists engaged to soothe and charm the aesthetic. Dramatic speakers, so-called “Evangelists,” who are but religious showmen, are employed to please the sensation-monger. In short, everything that can please the flesh has been brought into the churches to draw the crowds and thus catch fish of “every sort.” Sad it is that so much time, money, and energy are wasted in such misguided and God-dishonoring efforts. Sinners do not need amusing and cheering, but showing their lost condition. The business of the ministers of the Gospel is not to tickle ears, but to preach that which, by the Spirit’s application, will touch hearts and search consciences. Their duty is to make manifest the character of God, the awfulness of sin, the certainty of its punishment, and to bid their perishing hearers, “Flee from the wrath to come.”

The next thing to happen will be the removal of God’s saints from the earth, and their translation to heaven: see 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.

Following this, after a brief interval, God will pour out His judgments upon the wicked, and then shall “the angels come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (vv. 49, 50).

These verses will then receive a solemn and literal fulfillment. After this “then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (v. 43), i.e., the upper or heavenly department of Christ’s millennial kingdom — John 1:51 implies the two spheres of the Messiah’s Kingdom. May the Lord grant that each reader of these articles shall “find mercy of the Lord in that day” (2 Timothy 1:18).

The Prophetic Scope of Matthew 24

The prophetic discourse of Christ found in Matthew 24 and 25 was delivered by Him in private to a few of His disciples less than a week before the Crucifixion. He had left the Temple for the last time. His public ministry was completed. He had announced to the leaders of the nation that, “your house is left unto you desolate,” and had declared, “You shall not see Me henceforth, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord.”

As Christ left the Temple, accompanied by His disciples, they, no doubt, awed and puzzled by what He had just said, directed His attention to the magnificent buildings of the Temple, particularly to the massive stones of which they were constructed, saying, “Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!” (Mark 13:1 and compare John 2:20).

To which He responded, “See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2).

Then, as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, in full sight of the City and Temple, the disciples asked, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world ?” (Matthew 24:3).

Each of the first three Gospels supply us with an inspired account of our Lord’s prophetic discourse, but it is only by diligently comparing them and noting their differences that we can discover the scope and design of each, for there is no mere repetition in Scripture. Luke’s account differs from Matthew’s and Mark’s in two important respects – what is related and what is omitted. Matthew’s account is based upon a threefold question, see Matthew 24:3; whereas Luke’s is based upon a twofold question, see Luke 21:7. It is most important that the student should carefully note the omission of any reference to Christ’s “coming” in Luke’s account. The second main difference is connected with the time for “fleeing”. In Matthew 24:15,16 we read, “When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand), then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains.”

Whereas in Luke 21:20,21 we read. “And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains.” That part of our Lord’s prophetic discourse recorded in Luke 21 (to the middle of v. 24) was all fulfilled by the year A.D. 70. First, Jerusalem was invested by Cestius Gallus, who was repulsed. Later, it was attacked by Titus, the emperor’s son, who was successful. But between the two sieglements, there is good reason to believe that, all Christians “fled,” and that none of them perished in Jerusalem. Luke’s “sign” is past, Matthew’s is yet future.

It is most important to observe that in Matthew 24 no reference is made to the destruction of Jerusalem after v. 2; while, on the other hand, in Luke 21 no reference at all is made to “the abomination of desolation.” Now the first thing to do in taking up the study of Matthew 24 is to pay careful attention to its context, namely chapter 23. There, a sevenfold “woe” is uttered, and solemn sentence of doom is pronounced by the Lord Jesus upon the apostate nation of Israel. This is found in vv. 34-38, closing with those fearful words, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” Then the Lord added, “For I say unto you, you shall not see Me henceforth, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord” (v. 39).

This last verse is most important. The “coming” of Christ which is there referred to is not His descent into the air to catch up the Church, but His return to the earth unto the people of Israel. It is this which supplies the key to Matthew 24:3, and shows that everything in Matthew 24 is yet future and is wholly Jewish. “And Jesus went out, and departed from the Temple” (v 1).

Mark the first word of this verse: the “and” denotes that what follows gives a continuation, without any break, of that which is recorded in the closing verses of chapter 23. It supplies a solemn confirmation of what was there announced: “Your house is left unto you desolate” is verified by the words “And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple.” “And His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, see ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (vv. 1, 2).

This foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, or more specifically, the razing of the Temple. It is most important to observe that this was said before the prophetic discourse of Christ’s which is recorded in Matthew 24:4 and onwards. “And as He sat upon the Mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be?” (v. 3).

That this question was asked separately from “And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?” or “age,” shows plainly that the “when shall these things be?” referred specifically to the overthrow of the Temple, which implied the destruction of the City. It is to be noted that only Luke records Christ’s answer to that question, see Luke 21:20-24. This part of our Lord’s prediction Matthew was guided to omit. “And what shall be the sign of Thy coming?” (v. 3). What did the disciples have in mind when they asked this question? Surely there cannot be the slightest difficulty for us now to discover the true answer. So far as the inspired records go, up to this point the Lord had said nothing whatever to

His disciples about His going to the Father's house to prepare a place for His people, and of His coming again to receive them "unto Himself." No hint whatever had been given of His future descent into the air for the purpose of removing His saints from this earth. Therefore this aspect of the Lord's "coming" could not have been in the mind of the disciples at that time. It should be obvious to every honest heart and impartial mind that when they asked, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?" they had before them what He had just said to the nation of Israel, namely, "You shall not see Me henceforth, till you shall say, Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 21:9); which was His coming back to the earth,. One other thing enables us to fix the meaning of this question of the disciples, "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?" No "signs" are now given to or for those whose calling is a heavenly one. How could there be, when of them it is written, "we walk by faith, not by sight"? (2 Corinthians 5:7). God's people today are not to be looking for "signs," but listening for a sound, namely, the "shout" of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16)! "And of the end of the age?" To what "age" did the disciples refer? Surely there can be only one answer: that associated with Christ's "coming" to the earth itself. It should be carefully borne in mind that this question was asked by the disciples, as Jews, before the Cross, before the Christian dispensation began. It is of the greatest importance that this fact should be kept before us, for a mistake on that point necessarily involves an erroneous interpretation of what follows. If we remember that at this time the apostles had no thought of (or, at any rate, no real belief in) Christ's death and resurrection, it should help us to see that the Christian "age" could not have been in their minds. They were Jews , in spirit, hopes, expectations — the very first verse of Matthew 24 (following right after Matthew 23:38) more than hints at that. It is failure at this very point which has led so many to imagine that Matthew 24 teaches that "the Church" will pass through the great Tribulation.

It is to be carefully observed that in His answer the Lord referred the disciples to Daniel: "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place" (v. 15).

It is interesting to note that the expressions "the end" or "time of the end" occur in Daniel just thirteen times, and that they are found nowhere else in the Old Testament. These expressions refer to the unfulfilled 70th "week" of Daniel 9:24-27, which brings to a close Israel's national servitude under Gentile domination. The new "Age" will be introduced by the second advent of the Messiah to this earth and the consequent placing of Israel at the head of the nations. References to that "Age" are found in Hebrews 2:5, 6:5. Thus the disciples rightly connected the "end of the age" with the "Coming" of Christ; for His return to this earth and the ending of the "Age," i.e., the "Times of the Gentiles" synchronize. What is so important to note is that in Matthew 23:39 Christ did not connect His "coming" with the destruction of Jerusalem and the overthrow of the Temple, but with the glorious epoch of Israel's national conversion. "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (vv. 4, 5).

The Lord was here addressing His disciples as the representatives of the godly Jewish remnant of the future. Matthew does not record Christ's answer to their first question, that being given in Luke. There is nothing at all in Matthew 24 parallel with Luke 21:20. Nor is there anything in it which falls, directly, within the scope of the Christian dispensation. The whole of this parenthetical dispensation is ignored, coming in as it does between the 69th and 70th "weeks" of Daniel 9. Verses 4-14 of Matthew 24 treat of the first half of the 70th "week"; vv. 15-30 of its second half. Though vv. 4-7 describe conditions which have obtained, more or less, all through the centuries of this Christian era, yet will they appear in a much more intensified form during the Tribulation period.

Fuller and further details concerning the time covered by Christ's prophetic discourse in Matthew 24 are furnished in the Revelation, the major portion of that book treating of the same period. At the close of this present dispensation Christendom is spewed out (Revelation 3), the saints are raptured (Revelation 4:1), and then the united company of the redeemed are seen in Heaven worshipping God (Revelation 4:4-11).

Following this, the Lamb as the "Lion" of the "tribe of Judah" takes "the book" (Revelation 5), and Israel at once appears on the scene. As soon as the "seals" of that book are broken we find that which corresponds exactly with what we have in Matthew 24. Marvelous, minute, and many are the parallels between the two chapters. At a few of them only shall we now glance. "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:4,5).

This was the first part of the Lord's reply to the questions asked by His disciples. "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four living creatures saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer" (Revelation 6:1,2).

These words picture the Anti-christ deceiving men, posing as the true Christ — of Revelation 19:11. "And you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not troubled: for all must come to pass, but the end (i.e. of the 70th "week") is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matthew 24:6,7) "And when He had opened the second seal I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword" (Revelation 6:3,4).

Thus the contents of the second seal correspond exactly with the second part of Christ's prophecy. "And there shall be famines" (Matthew 24:7). "And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse (the color of famine, see Lamentations 4:8; 5:10); and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst, of the four living creatures say, A measure of wheat for a penny (a day's wage, see Matthew 20:2) and three measures of barley for a penny" (Revelation 6:5,6). "And pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Matthew 24:7). "And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with Him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth" (Revelation 6:7,8). "All these are the beginnings of sorrows" or "birth-pangs" (Matthew 24:8).

These "birth-pangs" are the travail which shall yet precede the birth of a regenerated Israel. If the reader desires to trace out the remaining correspondences between the two chapters let him compare Matthew 24:8-28 with Revelation 6:9-11; and then Matthew 24:29,30 with Revelation 6:12-17.

Passing on now to v. 15: "When you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, whoso readeth let him understand." This is the point which marks the division between the two halves of the 70th "week"; compare Daniel 9:27.

These words were addressed by Christ to His apostles, but the "ye" need occasion no difficulty. The Lord was speaking to them as Jews, as the representatives of those who shall be on earth at the time these things are fulfilled. That this is not a "begging of the question" should be clear by a reference to Matthew 23:39: the word "Ye" there was spoken to the scribes and pharisees as the representatives of the Nation both present and future, that is, of the nation as a unit. A similar instance is found in Thessalonians 4:17, "Then we which are alive." The apostle did not say "they," but addressed those Thessalonian saints, including himself, as the representatives of all believers who shall be alive on the earth at the Lord's coming in the air.

The "abomination of desolation" is the image of Anti-christ (Revelation 13) which will yet be set up in the re-built Temple at Jerusalem. The reference here in Matthew 24:15 is not to the defiling of the Temple by Titus, as Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11 clearly show. It is in "the midst of the week" that "sacrifice and oblation" are made to cease. It is then that the pseudo-Christ will throw off his mask and appear as an opposing Christ, demanding that Divine honors shall be paid to him alone: an Old Testament type of this is found in Daniel 3:1-7. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake (i.e. the sake of the godly Jewish remnant) those days shall be shortened" (Matthew 24:21,22) The double reference to "those days," and there is a third one in v. 19, finds its interpretation in the "when you therefore shall see the abomination of desolation" of v. 15. It was not the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus of which Christ here spoke. His words in v. 22 are clearly parallel with Daniel 12:1, "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which stands for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book" i.e., God's "elect" among the Jews. Thus the "great tribulation" of Matthew 24:21 instead of referring to the time when Jerusalem was destroyed and Israel dispersed, speaks of that which shall immediately precede the day when they shall be "delivered." "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there, believe not" (Matthew 24:23).

This has in view the time when the Man of Sin shall sit in the Temple of God "showing himself that he is God" (2 Thessalonians 2:3,4). "For as the lightning comes out of the east, and shines even unto the west; so shall the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:27).

Never once is this title of Christ's used in any of the Pauline (Epistles which are addressed to the members of the Body of Christ. We are waiting the call of "God's Son" (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10). "For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matthew 24:28).

The "carcass" refers to the apostate mass of Israel; the "eagles" are the symbols of Divine judgment: see Deuteronomy 28:26, Ezekiel 39: 17, Revelation 19:17. "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matthew 24:34).

With this should be carefully compared Matthew 12:43-45. Not only would not the Jewish nation ("generation") pass away, but it would not cease as a "wicked generation." But when Matthew 24 has been completely fulfilled then that "wicked generation" shall "pass away," and be followed by a new Nation: see Psalm 22:30,31; 102:18; Deuteronomy 32:5,20.

The reference to "the days of Noah" in vv, 37-39 are in striking accord with the rest of this prophetic discourse, and at once fix the scope thereof.

First, Noah lived at the very close of the antediluvian age: so Matthew 24 describes conditions at the very end of the Jewish age. Second, Noah and his house were saved through a great and sore judgment of God: so an elect Jewish remnant will be preserved through the great Tribulation (Revelation 12:6,14). Third, Noah and his house came forth from the ark

on to an earth which had been swept clean by the besom of destruction, and entered into a new Age: so the godly Jewish remnant pass through the great tribulation, and from them will spring millennial Israel. Fourth, judgment consumed the ungodly: "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be." But how blessed for the Christian to remember that before the Flood began, Enoch — type of the Church — was translated! May this blessed hope be the stay of our hearts, and the purifying power for our walk. May we, instead of looking for "signs," be listening for that Sound of all sounds; instead of dreading the swiftly approaching Tribulation, be found praising God that we shall be high above it all; instead of studying the character of Mussolini or others to find in them marks of the Man of Sin, may we be "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).