

The Secrets of the Parables

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By

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Abbreviations for Scripture quotes in this book:

CV – Concordant Version

NIV – New International Version

FT – Free Translation based on the CV and NIV texts

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## Introduction to the Parables

Master Jesus was the greatest Teacher to have ever walked this earth. Yet so much of what He spoke about has, throughout the centuries, been misunderstood by many of His followers, besides numerous others within the religious academic community. The primary reason for this lack of understanding by ‘the Church’ is the failure to observe the context of His teaching; that is, He was the Messiah promised through Israel’s prophets ministering to the Jewish people in the land of Palestine in the First Century AD. He was *not* sent to any other people of the world or any other land at that time (although the amazing news of Christ’s sacrificial death and resurrection was to later go out to the nations of the world via the Apostle Paul); and He spoke in accordance with the writings of the Hebrew prophets contained in the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures).

The above explanation for this misapprehension of Christ’s teaching might sound very obvious and a little simplistic, but it is astounding how many teachers and preachers within the Church have not truly understood these plain facts, and therefore much of what Jesus was really saying has been lost to the masses, and conveniently ignored or reinterpreted by others. This is especially the case when it comes to the parables that Christ taught.

Jesus was the Master at teaching others through parables. In the Keyword Concordance of the Concordant Literal New Testament, it says that the Greek word *parabole* means ‘beside-cast,’ “a statement which is ‘cast beside,’ or parallel to, its real spiritual significance, a figure of likeness in action.” That is to say, a parable is essentially a story or short narrative that uses familiar themes and objects to portray spiritual truths in a figurative manner. Nature or agriculture were common themes used by Jesus in His parables whereby the everyday working person could relate to the story, say, for example, that of a sower sowing seed in his field and the subsequent growth process of the seed.

These same themes are also found throughout the writings of the Hebrew prophets, where Israel is often figuratively portrayed as a vine, an olive tree and a fig tree, amongst other things. God used these common fruit trees and the various produce of the Promised Land to put across important truths to His people, and He even established seven Feasts or festivals at the various times of harvest from springtime through to autumn. Even these seven Feasts reveal the plan of God for Israel and the world when they are viewed typically.

Jesus, being the ultimate Hebrew Prophet, as well as being the promised Messiah and Son of God, continued with these nature themes in His teaching. The various laws and processes of nature that are all around us are full of spiritual meaning – and the reason for this is that, of course, God created it all, and sustains it all by His Spirit. But if we are to correctly understand the parables of Jesus, we need to keep the above in mind concerning the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Greek Scriptures (the New Testament) is essentially a continuation of, and a fulfillment of, the Hebrew Scriptures. The key to understanding and correctly interpreting the Scriptures is to be aware of two things:

1. God uses a pattern of sound, spiritual words to match spiritual things with spiritual words (1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 1:13; Psalm 21:6).

2. There is a correct way of cutting or dividing the word of truth, being aware of that which is natural (or terrestrial) and that which is supernatural (or celestial), and being aware of the fact that there are various Ages and Administrations within God's Eonian Plan and Purpose (2 Timothy 2:15; Ephesians 3:9-11).

If these principles are kept in mind and observed when studying Scripture, then, with the illumination of the Spirit, accurate deductions can be made in accordance with the truth that God is revealing through His Word.

## The Secrets of the Kingdom

Many of us are familiar with the classic parables that we learned in Sunday School or heard elsewhere, such as, The Good Samaritan, The Lost Sheep, The Wise and Foolish Builders, and many others. These parables were particularly concerned with teaching the people of Israel about the true nature of the Law of Moses, as well as showing them God's love and mercy, while at the same time revealing the moral righteousness and wisdom that is intimately linked with true faith in God.

These parables, and much of Jesus' metaphorical teaching, was to enlighten the people as to the true function of the Law and to instruct them to live in a righteous manner before God, while at the same time exposing the hypocrisy and wickedness of the religious leaders in what had become their dead religion of Rabbinic Judaism.

This is why Jesus told the people

“Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

(Matthew 5:20 NIV)

Notice here that there is such a thing as 'righteousness that is of law,' but the difference between this kind of outward law-righteousness and true faith-righteousness is that only faith-righteousness of the heart is acceptable to God (see also Paul's words in Philippians 3:4-9). The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is a classic example of Jesus' teaching on the subject, revealing the true righteousness of faith and humility that God accepts (represented in the attitude of the tax collector), while exposing and condemning the proud self-righteousness of faithless law-keeping (represented in the attitude of the Pharisee) (Luke 18:9-14).

Now there is much that can be, and has been, gleaned from these aspects of Christ's teaching that can be applied to anyone, anywhere in the world, at anytime. Christ taught truth, as He is The Truth, and therefore His words, as we have them recorded in the first four books of the New Testament known as 'the Gospels,' are loaded with spiritual and figurative meaning on many levels of truth.

But if we are to gain an accurate understanding of the Master's teaching, especially that which He called *the secrets of the kingdom* hidden in many of His parables, then we need to observe very closely the Hebraic background and context of these parables in the overall light of His ministry to Israel. This does not necessarily mean that we need to grasp the Rabbinical

ideas that were prevalent at the time, although this kind of information can sometimes help to illuminate certain texts, but it means that we need a good understanding of the writings of the Hebrew prophets, and of God's plan for Israel and the nations revealed within them. This includes having some knowledge of the two roles of the Messiah/King, as well as knowing something about the covenants that God has covenanted with Israel, particularly the New Covenant. (These subjects are treated in detail in the section *The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed*).

One of the major reasons why the Jewish people had such a hard time understanding Jesus' teaching, even the really simple stuff, was because they were quite ignorant of the truth contained within their own Scriptures. This ignorance was largely due to the teachings and traditions of the Rabbis, Scribes, and their various representative sects within Judaism (such as the Pharisees and the Sadducees) who were suffocating the truth with their own interpretations and philosophies. They also thought that their repetitive reading of the Scriptures, as their religious duty, along with all sorts of intricate rituals, would give them a ticket into the kingdom, but they were greatly mistaken.

These were the very Scriptures that prophesied the coming of the Messiah, and yet He was the very One Whom they were now fiercely rejecting (John 5:39-40). This is why Jesus often sought to expose the religious leaders and to warn the people of their deceptive teaching, and He wasn't afraid to show His anger at their detestable ways, calling down woes upon them (Luke 11:37-54; Matthew 16:5-12; 23:1-39).

## Balance and the Bigger Picture

In a similar way to the ignorance of Israel, the majority of the 'secret kingdom' parables have been, and are, largely unknown by the Church (apart from the Parable of the Sower and maybe a few others) – or at least, their true meaning is unknown to most because of the traditions and philosophies of the religious leaders of Christendom, who are often floundering in a quagmire of man-made thought and interpretation.

This is true even within the new 'evangelical, charismatic' religion of Christianity that has arisen in more recent decades. A large percentage of preaching is focused on immature, fleshly things of the soul, masquerading as that which is 'spiritual and biblical,' - which is often delivered by the preacher in a way that whips up the crowd almost to an emotional frenzy, and could be better described as religious motivational speaking! – rather than on the mature, spiritual things of truth, accompanied by the real fruit of the Spirit, which includes meekness and self-control.

I'm not saying that all preaching and motivational speaking is wrong or misleading, but it needs to be done under the true inspiration and anointing of the Holy Spirit, with the main goal being that of building up the people of God, remembering also that correction is often needed, as well as encouragement.

On the other hand, there are those who focus solely on the spiritual aspects of the parables to be applied to us as individuals, and they neglect the other aspects of Christ's teaching that relates to God's plan for Israel and the nations. **We need both aspects to truly appreciate and understand the bigger picture.** Truth will always be **balanced** and will take into account both sides of the coin. Where this is not the case, and certain things are minimised or ignored for one reason or another, there is an imbalance and this inevitably leads to error.

Yet even so, this ignorance manifested by Israel and the Church shouldn't be too surprising really as Jesus Himself stated that He spoke to the people in parables so as to **hide the real meaning of His words from the masses so that only the *spiritual ones* among them could really understand what He was saying!** (See Matthew 13:10-17). He revealed the secrets of the kingdom only to His immediate disciples who were later to become His apostles and administrators of His Kingship, and who later taught the believing congregation in the land during Christ's absence. We have been given a glimpse of these secrets in the written accounts of the Gospels, and also in the teaching of the apostles contained within their letters.

All of this was to fulfill the scripture that says,

“I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden from of old.”

(Matthew 13:34-35 and Psalm 78:2).

It also fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah concerning Israel's partial blindness and deafness to the truth of God (Isaiah 6:9-10; see also Romans 11:7-10, 25). They would see and hear, yet they wouldn't really *spiritually* see or hear or understand the words of wisdom and truth that came through Jesus' parabolic teaching. It would be hidden from the majority of the nation, while only the remnant of the true Israel of God would hear, and they would be the ones to receive the long awaited kingdom promised through the ancient prophets.

The purpose of this book is to therefore help bring some illumination to the reader in regard to this neglected subject. We shall be focusing on the parables that concern the kingdom of God as promised to Israel in the Prophets, and the secrets that are revealed in them in relation to God's plan for this present age and the glorious age to come. For a detailed treatment of this Plan and the writings of the Hebrew prophets, see the section ***The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed***.

Before we go back in time and begin our journey through Jesus' ministry to take a look at the kingdom parables that He taught, we need to keep the following in mind to help us avoid a lot of misunderstanding.

## The Foundation: Justified Before God

In every administration of God, **real faith in God's Word** is the *gracious* ticket into the future kingdom of God. Yet it is also true to say that *acts of righteousness* are the standard whereby the true people of God will be accepted into the kingdom and be given eonian or age-abiding life (commonly mistranslated as *eternal* life. For further information see The Concordant Version).

It is always true that **faith and works complement one another**, and are two sides of the same coin, because without works, faith is dead. In other words, **real faith in God's words will produce righteous acts**. The whole letter of **James**, sent to the twelve tribes of Israel in the dispersion, is proclaiming this truth, especially in Chapter 2, and Paul is proclaiming the same thing in Romans 4. Paul and James may appear to be contradicting one another on the surface of things, but in truth they are both declaring that faith is the foundation for righteous acts.

**The foundational truth revealed throughout Scripture though is that we can only be justified, or made righteous, before God by simply believing that God alone can make us right with Himself!** For those of Israel under the Law, this meant that they should humbly acknowledge their mistakes (or sins) and accept the way of sacrifice that God had given them in accordance with the Old Covenant (Luke 18:9-14). Yet the rituals of the Old Covenant were only sufficient enough to cleanse the flesh. Only the institution of a New Covenant with a greater Sacrifice could fully cleanse the conscience in spirit (Hebrews 9).

Under the New Covenant, though, the sacrifice of the Messiah is the focal point of faith, and He is now the only Way to salvation or justification or becoming righteous before God, not only for Israel, but for all humanity (Acts 13:38-39; Galatians 3:1-14). But true faith in Christ Jesus will result in acts or works of righteousness, **but the works themselves do not make us righteous.** The ultimate truth is that it is *God Himself* Who is operating within His children to cause them to produce good works for His delight and their blessing (Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Now Jesus taught that the righteous law of the King must be obeyed, and the nation of Israel is still to serve Him under a yoke, although compared to the Old Covenant and the laws of men, His yoke is kindly and His burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30), but nevertheless, there is still a yoke and a burden. So plain obedience to the Law of the Messiah is commanded, which can be summed up in the command to love one another, as love is the complement of the law (John 15:9-17; Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:8-10). Nevertheless, there must be **clear continuing evidence (or fruit)** that one is a believer and a follower of the Messiah, otherwise entrance into the kingdom will be forbidden. Paul and the Twelve also taught this same truth (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Peter 1:10-11; 1 John 3:4-10).

In light of this, many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14); and small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only few find it, like searching for a secret passageway that is not that obvious (Matthew 7:13-14) – but the chosen ones are cleansed and regenerated as the true children of God, and they shall be granted entrance into the kingdom of the heavens at Messiah's return (John 10:27-29; 15:3, 15-16; 1 Peter 1:3-9, 22-23; 2 Peter 1:3-11; The whole letter of 1 John should be read in light of the above). **This is the faithful remnant of the spiritual Israel of God.**

## Paul's Ministry

Now Paul was chosen by God to proclaim a number of new truths or secrets through his evangel, the primary one being the revelation of the present secret Administration of Grace concerning the spiritual Body of Christ, where believing Jew and Gentile are at one in Christ (Ephesians 1-3). In this era of conciliation, there is abundant grace as God holds out His hand of friendship to all nations. There is much emphasis on salvation by the unadulterated grace of God, granted to us solely through faith alone and not from works of law. There are no specific rituals to be observed now in order for us to be saved. This message is especially for the nations, the Uncircumcision, who no longer need to go through Israel to draw near to God.

These new truths do not negate the teaching of Christ or the other apostles, and they are not a direct contrast either. Paul's calling and evangel were unique, and his teachings contain things that not even Peter and the other apostles were given to proclaim, but this does not mean (as some teach) that Peter, John and the others of the Circumcision didn't understand Paul's teaching, or that none of it applied to them as well, only that it wasn't for them to

proclaim it. They were set apart for the Circumcision believers, while Paul was set apart for the nations (Galatians 2:8-10).

Peter says that Paul had written to the dispersed Jewish believers in Asia Minor (the letter to the Galatians was probably the one) and Peter admits that Paul's letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which *the unlearned and unstable are twisting*, as they do the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16). The Circumcision apostles were not among these unlearned ones, so they therefore understood most of what Paul was talking about, if not all of it.

Nevertheless, Paul reveals things that are only found in his letters, and these revelations were given to him through personal appearances of Christ. These secrets and his additional details of prophecy, along with specific instructions for believers of the nations, *were an extension of what Jesus and the Twelve had previously revealed, and was not something separate from them*. Instead, they complement one another.

The primary secret that Paul revealed was the Administration of Grace (Ephesians 3:2), which would occur during Israel's national rejection and partial blindness, in which God is calling out a people from all nations to complement the remnant of Israel chosen by grace, to co-rule with Christ in the future ages (Romans 11). This 'Body of Christ' is a Firstfruit of the ultimate destiny of ALL humanity, the Ecclesia of the Firstborn, the celestial Sons of God (James 1:18; Romans 8:23; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 14:4).

So the teaching of Christ and the other apostles needs to be viewed in the light of this further revelation, including the parables of Jesus. We shall find that the secrets of the kingdom that Christ spoke of dovetail perfectly into the secrets that were given to Paul. Paul's evangel gives us the bigger picture and fills up what was previously lacking.

This is why Jesus said the following to His disciples.

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

(John 16:12-13 NIV)

So there needs to be an adjustment in relation to any previous teaching by Christ and the Twelve to accord with the further revelation through Paul. They all complement one another and together they give us the full picture.

## The Nearness of the Kingdom

Yet in relation to the nearness of the kingdom and the return of the King, God's power and righteousness was manifested more powerfully. This occurred in the first century during the Acts era, even though, during that time, the nearness of the kingdom was gradually receding. Yet the time is coming (and I believe that it has already begun) when the kingdom will draw near again as the Administration of Grace draws to a close. Therefore the power of the Lord will gradually become more effective in His people again.

Now throughout Scripture, there are warnings given to the believing community in relation to how we should behave in accordance with God's will within any given administration, but these warnings are really for those who are *identified* with God's people, whether it be ancient Israel or the Christian Church, yet who are really the hypocrites amongst the people, for not all who are Israel are truly Israel, and the same applies to the Church (Romans 9:6). These are the ones who should truly fear the judgments of God and the possibility of 'falling aside' and 'of not receiving eonian life.'

The following words of Jesus are very revealing,

"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your Name, and in your Name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers (*'workers of lawlessness' CI!*)' "

(Matthew 7:19-23 NIV)

Now this is especially applicable to Israel, who received the blessings of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the New Covenant promised to them, and who were given the authority of operating under the banner of Christ's Name to herald the kingdom.

Many of them (which even included one of the Twelve Apostles, Judas Iscariot, who eventually betrayed Jesus) had been anointed to perform these signs in the Name of Jesus but they eventually proved by the fruit of their heart that they were unbelievers! They were unfruitful trees that were to be cut down and burned, that is, they will be severely judged, and will perish, and will be shut out of the kingdom in the ages to come. (Hebrews 6:4-12 is saying that these apostates, who have fallen aside after tasting the blessings of the Spirit and have returned to the Old Covenant, are the ones who cannot be brought back to repentance again in this age).

Now take note of Jesus' words in the above text. He says that these unbelievers call Him 'Lord,' and He doesn't deny their claims that they prophesied and drove out demons and performed miracles in His Name. Yet He says to them, 'I don't know you' or in other words, 'You have nothing to do with Me,' and then He calls them 'workers of lawlessness' and sends them away, basically denying them access to the kingdom. Now this also applies to the Church, amongst those who claim to be Christians, operating under the umbrella of Christ's Name, claiming to be a part of His Ecclesia (the out-called company), particularly as the end of the age draws near, when the heralding of the kingdom shall occur again in power with accompanying signs.

It has been the failure of the Church to distinguish between Paul's message and the Administration of Grace, and that of the Twelve and the heralding of the kingdom (with some even over-emphasising this distinction, causing division), that has tragically led to so much error and confusion amongst Christians, giving rise to all sorts of different teachings.

Some of these teachings, for example, are that a believer can lose their salvation and go to 'hell' if they do not remain obedient enough; or there's the teachings of the Word of Faith Movement and others that tell us that we can appropriate all the promises of Jesus so that we can pray for virtually anything, including healings and miracles, and it will be done, using Scripture like some kind of magic formula! This is divination and witchcraft! This promotes the almighty self rather than the true power of the Almighty God. There is only One Supreme Will in the whole universe, and He cannot be manipulated by man! (There maybe much truth being proclaimed through the Word of Faith teachers, but the emphasis of many of them, I believe, is incorrect).

Now the majority of the Church is ignorant of the fact that much of what Jesus said, **He said to His chosen Apostles and disciples of Israel in accordance with God's original plan for that nation.** They were commissioned for this purpose. Then later on, Christ chose Paul and gave him a unique message for all the nations in accordance with a new Administration of Grace. Nevertheless, the ultimate focus of all the Apostles is the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the New Covenant in Christ Jesus.

So with this in mind, let us now begin our journey through the kingdom parables of Jesus, which were spoken in accordance with the evangel of the kingdom as it was originally proclaimed to Israel, the Circumcision. Nevertheless, we shall also interpret these parables in light of Paul's teaching as well, and the whole of the New Testament.

# 1. The Sower

Jesus had already been ministering amongst the people for some time before He began revealing the secrets of the kingdom in specific parables. At the time that He spoke the parable of the Sower, the first of these 'secret' parables, the teachers of the law had shown their rejection of Him with the utmost blasphemy by claiming that the work of the Spirit of God through Him was the work of Satan and the kingdom of darkness (Matthew 12:22-37). They foolishly thought that the real power of God that they were witnessing through Jesus' miracles and exorcisms was that of the great Adversary, as though Jesus was some kind of shaman priest calling on the chief spirit of Beezeboul! But Jesus made it clear to them that He was the real Strong Man, the real plunderer/possessor who was able to tie up the lesser strong man Beelzeboul (meaning plunderer-possessor) and loot his house; that is, the spirits and bodies of those whom the enemy occupied.

Jesus also made a huge statement to the people at this time by declaring that His blood relations, such as His mother and brothers, were not as important as those who were spiritual family members (Matthew 12:46-50). He was telling the people not to focus on flesh and blood, but to give place to the Spirit. Jesus was not only the King and Messiah of Israel, born as a Jew under the Law, but He is the Son of God. The most important thing for the people was not their laying claim to being of Israel, according to the flesh, focusing on their endless genealogies as a token of their acceptance into the kingdom; but that of belonging to God through faith in His Son, and becoming a spiritual child of their heavenly Father. A spiritual Israelite or Jew was the true Israelite or Jew, first and foremost a true child of Abraham and of God (Romans 2:28-29; 4:11-12). Faithful obedience in spirit is what counts, and not fleshly ties.

## The Secrets

It was at this juncture in His ministry, in this kind of atmosphere, that Jesus began to expand His teaching by revealing to His disciples the secrets of the kingdom. Israel as a nation was already showing signs of rejecting their rightful King, Who was in fact Yahweh Himself, the very Word and Image of God! This rejection was to have huge implications for the future that would inevitably involve some adjustments in God's plan for His people. These alterations were not a lack of foresight on God's part, as He is never taken by surprise. Even Israel's rejection of their Messiah and their subsequent hardening as a nation is all part of the grand design of God's awesome plan. But humanly speaking, this progression of the plan needs to be worked out in time, through history, in human experience.

Yet the inevitable fact remains, as spoken so clearly by Paul, that even though Israel as a nation failed to receive their King, this does not mean that they are forever rejected, or that God's word or plan has failed (Romans 9:1-6; 11:1-2, 11). On the contrary, in the meantime it has given God the planned opportunity to shower His blessings of grace upon the nations until the era of Israel's greater repentance during the Latter Rains of the Spirit (which is already underway) (Romans 11:11-12). Many more are now being called to become Sons of God from amongst all nations so as to become the celestial Israel that will co-rule with Christ in the coming ages.

So because of this rejection, Jesus begins to close the door of the kingdom offered to Israel as a nation and starts to reveal the secret, unknown elements to the disciples in parables. Peter was later given the keys of the kingdom to open the door again for Israel on the Day of Pentecost at the coming of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 16:16-20; Acts 2:14-41), but the inevitable and eventual rejection of the Spirit's testimony through the Apostles by the leaders of the nation resulted in the door of the kingdom being shut tight until the conclusion of the age.

(This closing of the door occurred when the words of that fateful prophecy of Isaiah that had been spoken by Jesus were uttered again, this time by the apostle Paul when he met the leaders of the Jews in Rome (Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 13:13-15; Acts 28:17-29). The nation of Israel had rejected the testimony of Christ both in the land of Palestine and outside of it, and their 40-year era of probation was then closing).

The secrets that Christ spoke of through the following parables primarily revealed one thing - that there would be an extended period of time, during Christ's absence, when the evangel of the kingdom would be proclaimed throughout the world through His Ecclesia or assembly (often rendered as 'Church'), right up to the conclusion of the age and the era of His return. **That is, a spiritual form of the kingdom of the heavens would be present on the earth instead through the coming of the Holy Spirit**, the blessings of which had been promised in the New Covenant, and the Apostles and the Ecclesia (the called out ones) would represent Christ on the earth during His absence (Acts 2:14-47; 3:11-26).

The Greek word *musterion*, which is often translated as *mystery*, is more correctly termed a *secret*. It was often used of those who were initiated into some kind of esoteric teaching, particularly as it relates to the ancient cult of the Babylonian mysteries and the doctrines of the Gnostics. In Scripture though, it refers to truth which had previously been kept hidden, but that has now been revealed to those of spiritual understanding. The apostle Paul uses this word *musterion* the most and he also clarifies the correct scriptural definition that Jesus Himself had previously revealed (see Colossians 1:26-27; Matthew 13:10-13).

## The Seed of the Word

So let us now take a look at this first parable known as The Sower that began to reveal the secrets of the kingdom. Jesus spoke this parable to the crowds that had gathered along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee while He sat in a boat. It can be found in Matthew 13:3-23, Mark 4:2-20 and Luke 8:4-15.

“A sower went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, **some fell beside the road**, and the birds came and ate it up. **Some fell on rocky places**, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil did not have much depth. But when the sun came up, they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered. **Other seed fell among thorns**, and the thorns grew up and choked them. **Still other seed fell on ideal soil**, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

(Matthew 13:3-9 FT)

So here we have a simple narrative of a sower sowing his grain seed in his field and the various places where the seed falls. So what does this mean? Well, we are not left to guess at what Jesus was saying here because we are later told exactly what it means. The disciples didn't know what it all meant so they came to Jesus to ask Him why He spoke to the people in parables. Before He gave them the meaning of the parable, He told them this,

**“The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of the heavens has been given to you, but not to them.** For anyone who has shall be given more, and he shall have an abundance, yet anyone who does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. This is why I am speaking to them in parables, though seeing, they are not seeing, and though hearing, they are not hearing, neither are they understanding. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, that is saying,

‘In hearing, you will be hearing, and may by no means be understanding, and seeing, you will be seeing, and may by no means be perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused, they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they may perceive with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart, and they may be turning around, and I shall be healing them.’”

(Matthew 13:11-15 FT)

## Knowledge of the Secrets

So Jesus then tells them plainly that they were the privileged ones who were to receive the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom, which would mean that as future teachers and administrators of the word, they would have the new treasures of the secrets, as well as the old treasures of the writings of the prophets to give to the believing community or ecclesia (Matthew 13:52). On the other hand, the mass of the people would not understand.

Amongst those of Israel who had been given positions of authority and those who had some knowledge of the Divine Oracles, if they had faith, they would receive more and have an abundance of truth. But those without faith would lose what they already had, and be left with nothing. This is the clear line that Jesus draws between those of Israel who were the spiritual ones (who would be blessed even more with what He had to give them) and those who were not of real faith, the mere religious unbelieving ones (and even their part in the privileged nation, that which they had, would be taken away from them).

Then He states that the reason that He was speaking to the people in parables was to fulfil the words of the prophet Isaiah (6:9-10) concerning Israel’s lack of spiritual perception. **Jesus deliberately used parables to hide the truth from the masses!** Now that’s quite a revelation, don’t you think! Here we have one of many examples throughout Scripture of God’s absolute sovereignty in the realm of faith and spiritual enlightenment. One can only receive faith and spiritual perception by the Spirit of God in accordance with God’s supreme choosing. But the great thing about God’s way of teaching is that when you begin to see things in spirit, parables and allegories, and all manner of metaphors from the world around us, come alive in an exciting array of colour and depth of meaning. It’s a whole new world!

## Spiritual Perception

“Yet happy are your eyes, for they are seeing, and your ears, for they are hearing. For verily am I saying to you, that many prophets and righteous men yearn to perceive what you are seeing, and they do not perceive, and to hear what you are hearing, and they do not hear.”

(Matthew 13:16-17 FT)

Jesus then tells His disciples that, on the contrary, they were truly happy or blessed because they had been given the spiritual perception to see and hear the truth of God being uttered from Jesus’ lips. (They may have been slow in their understanding of these things at times, but nevertheless, they had been given enlightenment and were among those chosen to learn directly from the Messiah Himself). He then tells them that many prophets and righteous men, past, present and future, yearn to see and hear the words of the Master as the disciples did, but they are not given that privilege in the same way as they were.

But later, after His resurrection, Jesus also said to ‘doubting’ Thomas, one of the Twelve,

“You have believed because you have seen Me. Happy are those who are not seeing and believe.”

(John 20:29)

So it is also a great blessing for those of us who have not literally seen Christ as yet to believe the testimony about Him as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and to receive illumination by the Holy Spirit of God and to partake of the Spirit of Christ – even though we have never seen His face or heard His words as the disciples did. But, one day we will!

Then Jesus says to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?” (Mark 4:13).

He is saying here that this parable of the Sower is a very basic parable that the disciples should’ve understood. If they could understand this one then they should be able to understand the others that He was to share with them. So He gently has to give them a helping hand to understand it. Yet even this was all set up by God, so that Jesus would have to explain it for the benefit of all who would read it.

## The Hard Heart

He then gives them the meaning of the parable. So let’s break it down and take a look at the four environments where the seed is sown and their meaning:

“When anyone hears **the word of the kingdom** and is not understanding it, the wicked one comes and snatches what was sown in his heart. This is the seed being sown on the road.

(Matthew 13:19 FT)

The spiritual Word of God (as it states in Luke's account), also referred to here as the Word of the Kingdom, is the Seed that is being sown into people's hearts, particularly as applied to Israel, who were the original saints and sons of the kingdom. So the seed represents the gospel or evangel of the kingdom first proclaimed through Christ and then by His disciples; and the four places where the seed is sown represents the four kinds of responses to the message. The number 4 represents that which is universal, or the whole world, so it applies to all people throughout this age.

The seed that is being sown on the unploughed dirt road or pathway represents those who hear the message of the Messiah and His kingdom but they don't understand it because their hearts are hard and unbroken. Consequently, Satan, the wicked one, like the birds of the air, comes and snatches the word from their heart so that they cannot believe.

This is a reminder of the words of the prophet Jeremiah that were spoken to Judah and Jerusalem,

“Break up your unploughed ground and do not sow among thorns.  
Circumcise yourselves to Yahweh, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem...”

(Jeremiah 4:3-4 NIV)

God's people are commanded to stop hardening their hearts in unbelief, in the hypocrisy of their religious fervour, but to bring forth the fruits of repentance that prepares a heart for the words of God. Only then can they be saved from sin and condemnation, and receive the promised kingdom. But Jesus reveals here that many will not believe in the days ahead during the proclamation of the Gospel.

## The Temporary One

The seed being sown on the rocky places is the man who hears the word and receives it immediately with joy, **yet because he has no root within, it is temporary**. When affliction or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he is snared.

(Matthew 13:20-21 FT)

The seed that is sown on the rocky, stony soil represents those who hear the message and receive it straight away with much joy because it sounds good and is full of blessing. But just as the seed cannot take root in such soil even though it may have shown signs of life initially, likewise the faith of such a one is very temporary because they have no root. Like the sun that rises and scorches the seed, when a time of testing comes in relation to the kingdom, bringing affliction or persecution, they fall away and are trapped, killing the life that was there. For true believers, the sun is usually a figure for the blessings of the Son of God, but for the rest, the sun becomes a fire in a parched land that resembles a curse rather than a blessing.

Jesus reveals that, as a result of His ministry and those of the disciples, some will accept the message with gladness to begin with, but they will eventually fall away because they do not have true faith to endure the necessary trials that often comes with living a life of faith.

## The Stifled One

What was sown among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worry of this age and the seduction of riches are **stifling the word**, and it becomes **unfruitful**.

(Matthew 13:22 FT)

The seed that is sown among thorns represents the one who hears the message and receives it, but in the same way as the thorns grow up and choke the growing grain, so this one's faith is hindered by the worry that comes with this present wicked age of man's rule, and the seduction of riches and material gain, and the gratifications of life. This results in them becoming unfruitful, or put another way, they do not become mature or perfect. As we shall see, according to the rest of Jesus' teaching, if they do not bear fruit, they are cast into the fire of judgment – in other words, they will not get into the kingdom at His return.

Jesus is revealing here that there will be those who will have a form of belief as a consequence of receiving the message, but they will not grow spiritually and bear real fruit from the heart due to the pressure of the world and the weaknesses of their own flesh. Paul reveals that in these last days there will be many who, as religious leaders, will be ever learning yet they will not be able to come into a realisation of the truth. They will have a form of godliness yet will deny the true power of God, especially His power to save and reconcile all creation (2 Timothy 3:1-9, 13).

The story of the rich young ruler will serve as an appropriate example of Christ's meaning here, which can be found in Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27 and Luke 18:18-27.

## The Rich Young Ruler

This young rich guy, who was probably the ruler of a synagogue, came up to Jesus making a bit of a show in front of the people. He calls Jesus 'Good Rabbi,' but Jesus saw through his pretence and unbelief, and questions his use of the word 'good,' saying that God alone is Good. Then the rich ruler asks Jesus how he can be assured of entering the kingdom to receive eonian (or age-abiding) life. Jesus intentionally points him to the Ten Commandments of the Law, knowing full well how he would reply. The ruler then boasts that he has kept the commandments since he was a boy. He was boasting in his law-righteousness, especially as he was a greatly respected citizen amongst the people.

Jesus' reply to him is very illuminating. In Mark's account it reads,

**'Now Jesus, looking at him, loves him**, and said to him, "Still one thing you are wanting. Go. Whatever you have, sell, and be giving to the poor, and you will be having treasure in heaven. And hither! Follow Me, **picking up the cross.**"

(Mark 10:21 CV)

Jesus knew that this guy was lost and full of sorrow, boasting in his own righteousness, yet as He looks at him, He loves him. This is the heart of God right here, revealed in and through His

Son. His heart goes out to those lost in sin. Then Jesus tells him that he still lacks one thing if he wishes to become perfect and enter the kingdom. He needs to sell all he has, give the money to the poor, and then actually follow Jesus in the way of humility and suffering, picking up his own cross. At hearing this though, the ruler turns away sombrely, full of unhappiness because of his great wealth.

Jesus went on to say that those who are wealthy and who put their trust in money would find it extremely difficult to enter the kingdom of God. In fact, the Greek word that is used in all of the accounts should be translated 'squeamish.' That is, the process of entering into the kingdom for a wealthy person is one that will make them distressingly sick! Now as most of the religious Jews were rich, and they thought that this was a sign of God's blessing upon them (prosperity teachers, take heed), you can understand the shocked reaction of the disciples when Jesus spoke these words – They said, "Who then can be saved?" Humanly speaking, it is impossible for a rich person to enter the kingdom, **but with God, all things are possible!**

This wealthy young ruler had failed the test of Christ. He had to choose between serving God or his Money but he chose his money and his possessions and his own law-righteousness, *yet this never brought him happiness*. In this state he cannot, and will not, receive entrance into the coming kingdom. This test revealed his heart of unbelief, a life that was unfruitful; a life that was not perfected or mature so as to be called a true son of God. The seed was being stifled. (I'd like to think, though, that at some later time, he repented, sold everything and followed Jesus. Whether he did or not, we are not told).

He had chosen to save his own soul but would inevitably lose it, while if he had made the decision to follow Jesus by taking up his cross and dying to his self, living a life of true love and humility and sacrifice, trusting in his Master for his daily provision, he would have been among those who lost their souls (their earthly comforts) for the sake of Christ, only to find them again in the kingdom; he would've been listed among those who were fit for service, who put their hand to the plough and did not look back; he would've been a wise man building his tower on a solid foundation or the king who asks for peace from the opposing stronger King by giving up everything he has (Matthew 16:24-27; Luke 9:59-62; 12:32-34; 14:25-33).

Now this doesn't mean that every disciple of Jesus has to sell everything and have no earthly possessions, but the willingness to do so, if necessary, needs to be there, and the principle of total abandonment to God has to be accepted. Anything less is not true discipleship. Ultimately, we don't own anything - it's all His!

He who is greatest in the kingdom of the heavens and who will be given real authority and great wealth, is the one who truly serves God by loving and serving others in a true child-like spirit of humility and meekness – in the footsteps of the Lord and Master Whom they follow; the King Who washes His servants feet (Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:35; 10:42-45; John 13:1-17).

Notice here that the main 'thorns' mentioned above are worry and seduction, especially **seduction of riches**. There is certainly a message here for the Church today. Worry is a form of unbelief because it is a result of not trusting God. This path will inevitably cause us to be unfruitful, as worry and unbelief are chokers of faith and peace. But if we want to become fruitful followers of God then we need to learn to believe God's Word and talk to Him in prayer, leaving all things, including the worry, with the One Who truly is the Almighty Creator and Father of us all. As Paul said to the Philippians,

‘Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, that is superior to every frame of mind, shall be garrisoning your hearts and your apprehensions in Christ Jesus.’

(Philippians 4:6-7 CV)

And as Peter also said,

‘Be humbled, then, under the mighty hand of God, that He should be exalting you in season, tossing your entire worry on Him, for He is caring concerning you.’

(1 Peter 5:6-7 CV)

## Which Master: God or Money?

The seductions of the flesh and the world are numerous, but the seduction of riches and greed is one of the big ones. Most people today are living for these things – and even the Church has a new ‘prosperity gospel’ that encourages Christians to seek material gain by ‘sowing your seed-faith’ of money to reap greater money and riches! But is this teaching really new? Apparently not, for Paul spoke the following to Timothy concerning those who thought that devoutness or godliness (that is, to be devoted to God) was a means to financial gain, which many should take heed to in these extremely seductive days,

‘Now devoutness with **contentment** is great gain; for we carry nothing into the world, and it is evident that neither can we carry anything out. Now, having sustenance and shelter, with these we shall be sufficed. Now those intending to be rich are falling into trial and a trap and the many foolish and harmful desires which are swamping men in complete ruin and destruction.

**For a root of all of the evils is the fondness for money**, which some, craving money, were led astray from the faith and they place themselves in trials on all sides with much pain.

**Now you, O man of God, flee from these things:** yet pursue righteousness, devoutness, faith, love, with endurance, suffering, and meekness.’

(1 Timothy 6:6-11 FT)

What Paul is basically saying here is “Don’t get too fond of money and don’t aim at getting rich. If you do, you’ll surround yourself with painful trials that will destroy you and lead you away from the truth. Run away from these things as a true follower of God. Be content with the basic things of life that you need to survive, and chase after true righteousness and godliness and faith and love, at the same time being willing to endure and suffer in a spirit of gentle submission.”

Now this is radically different from the message of the world today, and sadly, from what many in the Church are preaching and teaching as well! This is not to say that money or

material things are wrong in themselves. If we are blessed with such things, as most of us are today, especially in the West, then we thank God for such comforts. But the bottom line is this: we cannot serve two masters; it is either God or money (Matthew 6:24). It's a matter of Heart-Priority.

There is nothing wrong with seeking to walk in health and blessing. After all, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and should be cared for as such, and the Spirit of God and of Christ within us should have an effect on our mortal bodies as we walk in the Spirit. **Nevertheless, the focus of our prosperity should be on truth and love.** This is the real prospering of the soul.

‘Beloved, concerning all I am wishing that you be prospering and sound, according as your soul is prospering...I am having no greater joy than this, that I am hearing of my children walking in the truth.’

(3 John: 2-4 CV)

## Sowing and Reaping

There is one passage of Scripture in the New Testament that talks about sowing and reaping in the context of money and that is 2 Corinthians 9:5-15. But the focus of this passage is not on the money or financial gain. Paul was talking to the Corinthians about the monetary gift that they promised to contribute on behalf of the fellow saints back in Judea and Jerusalem. The believing Jews there were in great need due to a famine in that area. So Paul was collecting a gift from the ecclesias of the nations where he was ministering to take back to the needy in Judea. Paul saw this giving as an important part of the gospel message and he mentions it in a number of his letters.

In verses 6-7, he lays down the principle that ‘he who sows (or gives) sparingly, shall also be reaping sparingly, and he who sows bountifully, shall also be reaping bountifully.’ As Jesus taught, it is more blessed to give than to receive, so the more one gives, whether it be money or something else, especially to those in need, then the more they will be blessed in return. But this blessing or reaping is primarily spiritual, although God may choose to bless that person with material things as well. Then the more we are blessed with, the more we can give, and so on.

Yet Paul goes on to say that God loves a cheerful giver, one who gives because they really want to. But he does not say that we *have to* give or that we *have to* tithe when we are unhappily forced to do so. We should give because we know that this is the way of love, and we should give what we have decided to give, and not what someone says we should give – and that includes ‘forced’ tithing!

Tithing is not something that should be forced on the Body of Christ as though we are still under Law. Many Pastors and leaders today misuse scriptures on tithing to rob the people so as to feed their own desires and plans, and to keep their ministries going. In God’s sight this is an abomination, where they are preaching law and not grace. Paul says that those who do not proclaim true grace in accordance with his message, and distort it instead, “Let him be anathema,” that is, treated as cursed (Galatians 1:6-9).

Yet in relation to giving, we should also be wise as to where we place our gifts, that is, we must be careful as to whom we are giving the gift, and the purpose of the gift.

For example, it is a common thing these days to come across many drug addicts that will often scrounge and use elaborate lies to get money, and giving it to them will only feed their habit. In my naïveté, I have succumbed to these kinds of tricks a number of times in the past - and some of them were very convincing! But it is better to offer them some food and drink or clothes rather than money if they are in genuine need – and then pray for their deliverance. Only those believers who are especially called to this kind of ministry are usually in a position to offer any further help and on-going support to the homeless and the addicts. Most of these needy ones need professional help and care.

There are also numerous charities and Christian organisations around today, but some of them can even be deceptive or unwise as to how they actually use their money. If each of us gave to every charity and good cause, we'd have to start a charity for ourselves! We need to learn how to be wise and good stewards of all that God has given us as we are led by His Spirit. And we must always remember: God is ultimately the Master Who owns everything anyway!

Paul continues,

‘Now God is able to lavish all grace on you, that, **having all contentment in everything always**, you may be superabounding in every good work...Now may He Who is supplying seed to the sower, and bread for food, be furnishing and multiplying your seed and be making the product of your righteousness grow, being enriched in everything, for all the generosity, which is producing through us thanksgiving to God...’

(2 Corinthians 9: 8-12 CV)

The sole purpose of God blessing us and multiplying our ‘seed’ is so that we may bless others with the blessings we have received. The growth and the enrichment based on our generosity (the sowing and the reaping) that Paul is referring to here is primarily spiritual, but it can also include material blessing as well – but not for getting rich so that we can have a comfortable, easy life, and become complacent and greedy. Yet the principle stands that whatever measure we use in giving to others, the same will be measured to us (Luke 6:38). But this isn't some kind of 'pyramid scheme' (though it is often presented as such), because the true principles of God are always the opposite of man's ways.

## Be Content

The key word in both passages above is **contentment**. Whatever our circumstances and position in life, we need to learn to be content. Paul learned to be content whether he was in need (and that included going hungry and suffering all sorts of trials) or whether he was super-abounding in all things and doing rather well. His strength came from the invigorating Spirit of Christ within him, and he was aware that God would take care of him and give him everything he needed, whatever he was called to do (Philippians 4:11-13,19). And Paul followed the greatest example of all – Jesus, Who said,

“Yet seek first the kingdom and its righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

(Matthew 6:33 CV)

In all of these examples of sowing and reaping, the most important thing is our spiritual walk with God. It is a spiritual principle that if we sow for our own flesh, from the flesh we shall reap dark and corrupt things that can only end in death; whereas if we sow for the Spirit, from the Spirit we shall reap good things that leads to real life that shall last for the eons or ages to come (that is, eonian or age-abiding life).

For this reason, believers shouldn't be despondent about doing good things for others, for in due season we shall be reaping the benefits and rewards *if we do not faint and give up*. Therefore, as we have occasion to do so, under the Lordship of Christ in obedience to the evangel, we should be working for the good of *all*, yet *especially* for our brothers and sisters in the faith (Galatians 6:7-10).

Paul also gives some good advice to Timothy concerning believers who are already materially rich.

‘Those who are rich in the current eon be charging not to be haughty, **nor yet to rely on the dubiousness of riches**, but on God, Who is tendering us all things richly for our enjoyment; to be doing good acts, **to be rich in ideal acts**, to be liberal contributors, treasuring up for themselves an ideal foundation for that which is impending, **that they may really get hold of life.**’

(1 Timothy 6:17-19 CV)

As most of us would be considered rich by first century standards, we should assume that Paul is addressing us, reminding us here that the reality of eonian life and the kingdom of God is spiritual, for it is not a matter of food and drink and material things, but righteousness and peace and joy in Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). The real treasure that gives us a sure foundation for the future kingdom that is coming is our righteous acts of faith, which is the *fruit* of the gracious work of God's Holy Spirit within us. This gives us a glimpse of what life really is - and shall be in the future age. And whatever we truly treasure, whether it be earthly or heavenly, that is where our hearts will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

## The Ideal Soil

Returning to the parable of the Sower, Jesus continued,

But that which was sown on the ideal soil is the man who hears the word and understands it, **who by all means is fruitful and produces a crop** – some a hundred, some sixty or some thirty times what was sown.”

(Matthew 13:23 FT)

The seed that was sown on the ideal soil represents the one who hears the word and understands it, and who perseveres to produce a crop. Jesus is revealing here that there will also be those amongst the people who possess a good and noble heart that will receive the truth of God and understand it, **and they will also endure to the end, producing fruit fit for the kingdom.** The individual harvest may vary amongst those who persevere in the truth, but they nevertheless will all multiply their seed.

These are the ones who become fruitful, who mature and become perfect. The harvest that they produce may be varied – either 30, 60 or 100 times what was sown – but nevertheless, they all bear fruit. As we shall see from the figures used in some of the other parables, these are equivalent to the good and faithful servants who serve wisely and double their talents or minas; and the wise virgins who are prepared to meet their Bridegroom; the little flock who hear their Shepherd's voice; the pruned, yet fruitful branches of the Vine; those who are accepted into the wedding feast, etc.

These are the true Israel of God, the believing remnant of the nation that will form the new nation of the kingdom, the Bride. And as Jesus began to reveal during His ministry, this spiritual Bride nation was also to include sheep from another flock, those from the nations, to form what Paul calls the Joint-Body of Christ (John 10:16; Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6-7).

Throughout Jesus' teaching, we see that things are very black and white, cut and dry, straight down the line. There's no sitting on the fence here. Depending on the context, a person was either fruitful or unfruitful; a good tree that produced good fruit or a bad tree that produced bad fruit; a lamb or a wolf; wheat or darnel; good fish or rotten fish; a wise servant or a foolish servant; a faithful steward or an unfaithful steward; for Jesus or against Him; gatherers of the fruit or scatterers; sheep of His flock or not sheep of His flock; chosen or not chosen.

We either belong to the Ecclesia of God or we belong to the world under the jurisdiction of Satan. Those who claim to belong to the Ecclesia of God will be tested to show their true allegiance to their King, for judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17).

## 2. The Wheat and the Darnel

In Matthew 13, we have 7 parables of the kingdom that Jesus taught on the same day. These parables were the first ‘secret’ ones that He revealed. It is very significant that Matthew lists these seven parables, which, taken together as a whole, reveal some of the basic truths of the secrets of the kingdom. As many are aware, the number seven, in Scriptural numerology, stands for spiritual completion or fullness. So, here in Matthew, we have a complete package in itself of the kingdom secrets revealed through these **seven** parables.

We have already considered the first one, The Sower, and now we are going to consider the second one, which is often called The Wheat and the Weeds (or Tares). These two parables lay the foundation for the others that follow, so, like the first, we shall be considering this second one in quite some detail. This parable is only recorded in Matthew’s account, in Matthew 13:24-30, with Jesus’ interpretation given in verses 36-43.

‘He then tells them another parable, saying, “The kingdom of the heavens is likened to a man sowing ideal seed in his own field. Yet while the men are sleeping, his enemy came and sowed darnel among the grain, and went away. Now when the wheat produced its fruit, the darnel also appeared. Now the servants of the householder came to him and said, ‘Lord, didn’t you sow ideal seed in your field? Then where did the darnel come from?’ He said to them, ‘A man, an enemy, did this.’

The servants said, ‘Do you want us to go and pull out the darnel?’ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘otherwise, as you are pulling up the darnel, you may also be uprooting the grain with it at the same time. **Let both grow up together until the harvest**, and in the season of the harvest I shall say to the reapers, **‘First reap the darnel and bind them into bundles to burn them, yet gather the grain into my barn.’**” ’

(Matthew 13:24-30 FT)

One of the keys to understanding the real meaning of this parable is the mention of *darnel*. Now most versions render the Greek word *zizanon* here as *weeds* or *tares*. The Keyword Concordance of the CV says that this Greek word, along with the Arabic word *zawan*, literally means *bearded-darnel*. Strong’s Concordance also confirms that *zizanon* means *darnel*. This is a poisonous kind of rye grass that looks just like wheat until the ear appears. This is the key to the parable – **darnel looks like wheat for a time until the harvest, when the fruit should appear in the ear. But only the wheat will produce fruit, as the darnel is a poisonous weed that is only fit for burning up.**

In fact, some botanists would say that this darnel is basically degenerated wheat, that is, wheat that doesn’t produce the grain. Darnel is widely known to have poisonous properties that are believed by some to be caused by a fungus. When ingested, darnel causes severe symptoms

similar to drunkenness. Darnel is seen as a farmer's enemy, along with thorns and thistles, as they can hinder the growth of the crop, and the crafty practice of deliberately sowing darnel seed in a wheat field has been known from ancient times. All of this is a figure of those who are false and in gross error. They appear as though they will bear fruit, but in reality, they only produce poison, a fungus, that which causes others to become drunk in sin and error, and they are only fit for the fiery judgment of God.

## The Keys

Now before we go any further with this, let us see how Jesus interpreted this parable to His disciples.

‘Then leaving the crowds, He entered into the house. His disciples come to Him, saying, “Explain to us **the parable of the darnel of the field.**” He answered them, saying, “He Who is sowing the ideal seed is the Son of Mankind. Now **the field is the world.** Now the ideal seed are **the sons of the kingdom.** Now **the darnel are the sons of the wicked one.** Now the enemy who sows them is the Adversary. **Now the harvest is the end of the age.** Now the reapers are messengers.

So even as the darnel is being reaped and burned in the fire, **thus shall it be at the end of the age.** The Son of Mankind shall be dispatching His messengers, and **they shall be pulling all the snares out of His kingdom and those doing lawlessness,** and they shall be throwing them into the furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous be shining like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”’

(Matthew 13:36-43 FT)

Now Jesus gives us a number of keys not only as to how to interpret this parable, but He also gives us clues as to how to interpret a number of other parables as well, as we shall see later. The first two kingdom parables, the parable of the Sower, and the Wheat and the Darnel, are the only ones where we are given a clear interpretation of each by Jesus Himself. Yet these spiritual words can help us understand the rest of the parables as well. So we must remember what we have learned from each parable and then apply it to others where appropriate.

Now the facts of this parable are pretty simple really – and notice that the disciples rightly called it ‘the darnel of the field.’ The focus is on the darnel. It reveals the following: During Christ's absence from this earth, while the kingdom of heaven is spiritual and invisible, He is sowing the ideal seed of the Word of truth into believer's hearts through the Holy Spirit. As we learned from the Sower parable, those who receive the Word and continue in the Faith, bearing fruit to God, these are the true sons of the kingdom who are producing fruit, that is, the wheat (literally the good grain, which could actually refer to barley or wheat).

## Separation of True and False

Yet at the same time, Satan the Adversary is also doing some sowing of his own. The darnel are those who are the sons of the wicked one, those who are lawless, those who lay traps or snares for others who are searching for truth. These are imposters, those who claim to belong to Christ, but by their fruits, they deny Him. They appear as wheat, that is, as genuine followers of Christ, but in reality, in their hearts, they do not know Him – they are darnel. But their end will be what their actions deserve. At the coming of Christ, all will be made manifest. There will be nothing hidden from the eyes of Him to Whom we must give an account. All will be revealed in the Day of the Lord.

Throughout the writings of the Apostles, there are warnings about those who are false, the darnel, and they were already rising up in the First Century – false apostles masquerading as ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Revelation 2:2); false prophets, particularly those performing false miracles (1 John 4:1; Matthew 24:24; Revelation 16:13-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:9); false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; 6:3-10); and false brethren, wolves in sheep's clothing (2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4-5; Acts 20:29-31; Matthew 7:15-23). This apostasy has only increased through the centuries, and the astounding thing today is that those who are going back to the original truth of the Scriptures are often viewed as the heretics, the false ones! Thankfully, the Lord will bring it all to light when He returns.

So this judgment of separation between the true and the false not only applies to individuals at the end of the age, but it also includes all false doctrine that has crept into the teachings and creeds of Christendom through the centuries (see also 1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Everything that is truly false, everything that is poisonous, everything that is not in accord with righteousness and truth, shall be exposed and done away with in fiery judgment, for everything is manifested by the Light.

## The Whole World

The effects of this are felt worldwide, as the field represents the whole world. Now notice here that the field belongs to Christ. We shall see from some of the other parables that Jesus gave His life for the sake of the whole world so that He could purchase the hidden treasure in the field – the true Church or Ecclesia of God. **Yet the truth of the matter is that He purchased the entire world!** The whole of humanity and the earth belongs to Him, for He has redeemed it. The whole world was originally His due to the rights of creation because He is its God and the Firstborn of all creation, yet He is also its Redeemer, having purchased it by His own blood, and through the resurrection, He is also Firstborn from among the dead.

So God has given us a double witness for Christ's Ownership of the world in that 1) He is the Creator of ALL (Colossians 1:15-20; John 1:1-3), and 2) He is the Redeemer of ALL (Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; Hebrews 9:12). So whether the Old Creation or the New, ALL belongs to Him, He is the Owner of ALL things.

So during this present administration of grace and the secrets of the kingdom, the enemy is trespassing in Christ's field! Eventually, Satan will receive his judgment from God for stealing that which belongs to Christ by making sure that all things are given back to the Owner by complete restitution, as God's Law demands (Leviticus 6:1-5), and he will also pay back

double by being sold into God's hands to then endure the Lake of Fire indefinitely until his sentence is complete (Exodus 22:3).

Anyhow, it is essential that these false believers, the darnel that looks like the wheat, are left to do their work until the end of the age, when Christ shall return. They are not to be pulled up beforehand as they serve a purpose in training the wheat to know good from evil. If the darnel is pulled up too soon, there's no telling who the wheat really is! So as time passes, as each generation passes by, God is allowing more time for the wheat and darnel to grow. Each individual believer has to continue to bear fruit throughout his or her life to confirm their calling and choice, while on the other hand, those that are false impostors shall reveal this through their lack of fruit and lack of endurance in the truth. Everything shall be laid bare when Christ returns, and that which is of God shall remain.

Yet every year that passes is evidence of God's mercy and patience in giving us all time to repent and bear fruit. Both must be allowed to grow.

“The Lord is not tardy as to the promise, as some are deeming tardiness, but is patient because of you, not intending any to perish, **but all to make room for repentance.**”

(2 Peter 3:9)

“Or are you despising the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, being ignorant that **the kindness of God is leading you to repentance?**”

(Romans 2:4)

“Wherefore, rather, brethren, **endeavour through ideal acts to confirm your calling and choice**; for, doing these things, you should under no circumstances be tripping at any time. For thus will be richly supplied to you the entrance into the eonian kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

(2 Peter 1:10-11)

“So that, be not judging anything **before the season**, till the Lord should be coming, **Who will also illuminate the hidden things of darkness and manifest the counsels of the hearts.**”

(1 Corinthians 4:5)

## The Harvest

At the end of the age, at the season of the harvest, He will send out His messengers (that is, His chosen angels or spirit beings) to gather the unrighteous darnel for judgment while harvesting the righteous wheat (Revelation 14:14-16). On that Day there will be a judgment of separation between the righteous believers and the unrighteous unbelievers (that is, the apostate pretenders). One shall be taken, while the other is left for judgment (Luke 17:26-37; Revelation 19:15, 21).

The parable of the Darnel, as well as the Net of Fish, are describing these judgments of separation, where the wicked are separated *first* to be thrown away, then the righteous are left to enter the kingdom. Yet take note that there are actually two Harvests at this time, a Good Harvest (i.e. the Good Grain) and a Bad Harvest (i.e. the Bad Darnel). Both are reaped or harvested at the same time. One is positive while the other is negative, depending on the viewpoint.

As we shall see later, the bad Harvest is often referred to as the Grape Harvest and the crushing of the grapes in the winepress of God's wrath. Yet the Great Harvest shall not occur until both are fully ripened at the end of this age. Then Christ will come to save His Body/Bride and to judge the rest through a judgment of separation. And His heavenly angels will play a large part in this process (cf. Revelation 14:14-20).

## Who's First – Wheat or Darnel?

Now some may wonder how the snatching away of the Body of Christ fits into this picture, as both Jesus and Paul clearly taught about this event. Well, the kingdom parables are not really concerned with the *detailed* chronology of the Day of the Lord. They are more concerned with teaching principles about righteousness and faith, and the basis of judgment to decide who are the true servants and who aren't. The details of the end of the age are very brief within the parables.

Yet later in His ministry, Jesus did say that His chosen ones (that is, His brethren, the Bride Ecclesia, His servants, those who are watching and waiting for His return) will be gathered together with the help of His messengers to assemble with Him in the air on the Day He returns (Matthew 24:30-31). This is one of the *first* things that will happen on that Day. This event is likened to Noah and his family entering the ark before the judgment of the Flood occurred, as well as Lot leaving Sodom before the heavenly fire fell.

Now Paul was given further information in regard to this event revealing that the trumpet call of God, the shout of command from Christ as the Chief Messenger, will raise the dead in Christ *first*, and then the living ones will be supernaturally changed and then snatched away, and both groups shall be gathered together in clouds to form the armies of Christ in the air with the messengers of God (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; Revelation 19:7-8, 14).

Now this doesn't contradict the details in the parable of the Darnel, although it may appear that way on the surface. The parable is focusing on the fact that the Darnel will be separated from the Grain, and the Darnel will receive the fire of God's judgment first, before the righteous will shine in the kingdom, when it is established in all its fullness and glory. That is to say, the judgment of the Day of the Lord, which will include the 'Great White Throne' Judgment, has to occur first to separate the good from the bad.

The sons of the kingdom will then enter the kingdom of their Father, to shine out as a source of blessing to the rest of creation, like the Sun itself. On the other hand, the sons of darkness will enter the Gehenna of fire where there will ultimately be weeping and gnashing of teeth due to the spiritual torment and frustration of those who will not be allowed into the kingdom for the ages to come. At the Second Coming of Christ, all those who do not belong to Him will perish in the fiery wrath of God, which will be the final great judgment upon this Old Creation, at which time the present heavens and earth shall pass away, and in its place, a New Creation shall arise.

Now the day of the Lord will be arriving as a thief, in which the heavens shall be passing by with a booming noise, yet the elements shall be dissolved by combustion, and the earth and the works in it shall be found. At these all, then, dissolving, to what manner of men must you belong in holy behavior and devoutness, hoping for and hurrying the presence of God's day, because of which the heavens, being on fire, will be dissolved, and the elements decompose by combustion! **Yet we, according to His promises, are hoping for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness is dwelling.**

(2 Peter 3:10-13 CV)

Then the resurrection of all mankind shall occur followed by the Great Judgment Day. Then a different *figurative* fire, the Lake of fire, shall be the age-abiding destiny of the Darnel and the Chaff in the age of the New Creation.

Then I saw **a great white throne** and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,** and there was no longer any sea.

(Revelation 20:11-21:1 NIV)

## John the Baptist

John the Baptist had said something to the religious leaders about this fiery judgment while he was baptising the people in the Jordan River, preparing the people for the coming of the King Messiah.

“Who warns you to be fleeing from the coming indignation? **Produce fruit worthy of repentance, then.** And don’t presume to be saying among yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as a father,’ for I am saying to you that God is able to raise children to Abraham out of these stones. Yet already the axe is lying at the root of the trees. **Every tree which is not producing ideal fruit is hewn down and thrown into the fire...**

...He (*Christ*) will be baptizing you in Holy Spirit **and fire**, Whose winnowing shovel is in His hand, and He will be scouring His threshing floor, and will be gathering His grain into His barn, **yet the chaff He will be burning up with unextinguished fire.”**

(Matthew 3:7-12 FT; also Luke 3:7-9, 16-17)

John was warning the religious leaders, and the people, of the coming Day of the Lord, the Day of Indignation or Wrath, in which Christ will judge Israel and the world with a baptism of fire that will destroy the wicked unbelievers and hypocrites. Only those who produce fruit will be saved for the kingdom, while all others will be thrown into the fire. Those of Israel are warned not to rely on their racial lineage, for the flesh will not save them, and God has the power to raise up children of Abraham to fulfill the promises from out of the inanimate creation, such as stones! So don’t rely on the flesh and religious rituals to save you!

John also likens Jesus to a farmer who uses a large winnowing shovel to separate the grains of wheat from the useless chaff at harvest time. This would take place on a threshing floor, a raised piece of ground made for this purpose, and the shovel would be used to throw the reaped grains into the air after they’d been threshed, after which, the heavy grains would fall back down, while the lighter elements of grass (and any missed darnel), the chaff, would blow away in the breeze. The chaff would then be gathered and burned, while the grain is stored in a barn.

Also, both John and Jesus taught that everyone is figured as a fruit tree that either produces good, ideal fruit, or bad, obnoxious fruit. Jesus taught the following when warning the people of false prophets who appeared like the real thing.

“**You shall be recognising them from their fruits.** They are not culling grapes from thorns, nor figs from star thistles. Thus every good tree is producing ideal fruit, yet the rotten tree is producing noxious fruit. A good tree cannot bear noxious fruit, neither is a rotten tree producing ideal fruit. **Every tree not producing ideal fruit is hewn down and thrown into the fire.** Consequently, from their fruits you shall surely be recognising them.”

(Matthew 7:16-20 FT)

Yet even now, disciples of Christ are being winnowed and threshed by the fire of God's Holy Spirit to prepare God's Sons for rulership.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every

branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

(John 15:1-2 NIV)

## The Good Fruit

All of this confirms John's words that the axe is already at the root of the trees, and those who do not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. But what is the ideal fruit of the good tree, the fruit of repentance? It is the fruit of the Spirit, particularly love, grace, peace and righteousness.

"Now **the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control..."

(Galatians 5:22-23)

"...(for **the fruit of the light** is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)..."

(Ephesians 5:9)

"He who **is loving his brother** is remaining in **the light**, and there is **no snare** in him."

(1 John 1:10)

"...the **peaceable fruit of righteousness**..."

(Hebrews 12:11)

"...filled with **the fruit of righteousness** that is through Jesus Christ..."

(Philippians 1:11)

"Now the wisdom from above is first, indeed, pure, thereupon peaceable, lenient, compliant, **bulging with mercy and good fruits**, indiscriminating, unfeigned. Now **the fruit of righteousness** is being sown in peace for those making peace."

(James 3:17-18)

Those who truly follow God and His Son will ultimately remain in these things and will continue to produce this kind of fruit in some measure or another – whether a 30, 60 or 100 fold harvest. All those who do not produce this fruit of the Spirit, no matter what they may lay claim to in the flesh, will ultimately be cut down and thrown into the age-enduring fire of judgment.

## The Bad Fruit

The rotten fruit is the fruit of the flesh, which leads to death.

“For even as you present your members as slaves to **Uncleanness** and to **Lawlessness** for lawlessness...For when you were slaves of **Sin**...What **fruit**, then, had you, then? – of which you are now ashamed, for, indeed, the consummation of those things is **death**.”

(Romans 6:19-21)

“Now **the works of the flesh** are apparent, which are adultery, prostitution, uncleanness, wantonness, idolatry, enchantment, enmities, strife, jealousies, furies, factions, dissensions, sects, envies, murders, drunkennesses, revelries, and the like of these, which, I am predicting to you, according as I predicted also, **that those committing such things shall not be enjoying the allotment of the kingdom of God**.”

(Galatians 5:19-21)

The judgment of fire mentioned above has a special application to those lawless ones who will be living at the end of the age, when Christ returns with His holy messengers in flaming fire. All those who have died in previous generations will not experience this aspect of the Day of the Lord, yet we are also told that 'every eye will see Him,' and this is because all mankind shall be raised to receive their sentence at the Great White Throne Judgment.

“...the unveiling of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful messengers, **in flaming fire, dealing out vengeance** to those who are not acquainted with God and those who are not obeying the evangel of our Lord Jesus Christ – who shall incur the justice of **eonian extermination** from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His strength...”

(2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.

(Revelation 1:7 NIV)

“**Every plant which is not planted by My heavenly Father shall be uprooted**...Woe to the world because of snares! For it is a necessity for snares to be coming. Moreover, woe to that man through whom the snare is coming! Now, if your hand or your foot is snaring you, strike it off and cast it from you. Is it ideal for you to be entering into life maimed or lame, or, having two hands

or two feet, **to be cast into the eonian fire?...to be cast into the Gehenna of fire?**”

(Matthew 15:13; 18:7-9)

These are solemn words! Jesus is saying *metaphorically* here that if there is a weakness of the flesh that causes you to be bearing obnoxious fruit, or put another way, that which is becoming a snare or trap for others, leading you or others into sin and wickedness, you should cut it off! It is better to go without certain things in this life and then enter the life of the kingdom, rather than to try and hold on to the things of the flesh, and then be severely judged at the return of Christ and be thrown into the eonian fire of extermination, the fire of Gehenna!

He who tries to save his own soul will lose it, but he who loses his soul (gives up fleshly indulgence and the self-life) in this life for the sake of righteousness and truth will ultimately save it and will enjoy the life of the kingdom. Even if we were to briefly gain the whole world through sin in this life, it is nothing compared to losing or forfeiting our souls in the kingdom.

But what is this fire? Is it the traditional Hell? Let's take a look at this important, yet grossly misunderstood, subject.

## Gehenna, the Rubbish Dump

Firstly, it needs to be said that 'hell' is not a scriptural word. This may come as a surprise to many, but it's true and anyone can check this out for themselves. As well as being used for *hades* (literally the unseen or imperceptible), hell has also been used for two other Greek words - *Gehenna* and *Tartarus*. The most used of these two words is Gehenna.

When people say that Jesus was the one who spoke the most about hell, He was in fact referring to Gehenna. This word stems from the Hebrew meaning 'ravine of Hinnom.' The valley of Hinnom was on the south-western side of Jerusalem, and it had been used as a place of child sacrifice in ancient Israel, where they sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire to the idol Moloch. This was an abomination to God. And the 'hell-fire doctrine' is also an abomination to God, portraying Him as a barbaric idol of the nations who will burn His creatures in eternal fire! Nothing could be further from the truth!

Anyhow, later, Gehenna became the city's incinerator for dead carcasses of criminals and other garbage, which was continuously kept burning, and the parts which were not burning were consumed by maggots (worms). It also became known as Topheth meaning abomination. (See also 2 Kings 23:10; Isaiah 30:33 and Jeremiah 19). This became the meaning and purpose of the Hinnom Valley or Gehenna – **an unclean rubbish dump**.

Even under the Law, which had very severe penalties for those who transgressed God's commands, burning in fire was not one of the penalties. There were instances where those who had been stoned to death for certain sins, primarily sexual sins, were to have their bodies burned or cremated instead of a decent burial, as a sign of shame and contempt (Leviticus 20 14; 21:9), but this was not being burned alive in fire. In fact, God reveals how much He detests this practice of being burned alive when He showed His contempt for the rituals of the Ammonites, whereby they would sacrifice their sons and daughters in the fire to their idol

Moloch (also known as Molech or Milcom). He specifically commanded that the Israelites must not do the same thing (Leviticus 18:21, 24-28; 20:1-5; Jeremiah 32:35; 1 Kings 11:5, 33).

## The Fire of God

Yet even the instances where God destroyed people with spiritual fire, such as Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, this fire was not natural fire that burns up the flesh. These guys still had their priestly tunics on them when their bodies were taken away for burial (Leviticus 10:2-5). God is a consuming fire, and His supernatural, spiritual fire can destroy without touching the physical flesh at all, though, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, it can also destroy like natural fire, leaving things smoking like a furnace (Genesis 19:24-28).

Yet it is interesting to note from this account in Genesis, that Lot's wife, who hesitated and took time to look back at Sodom while they were escaping, after they were specifically told not to hang about (i.e. she wanted to go back), was not burned up by the fire that fell from above, but instead, she became a pillar of salt! What actually happened chemically, we don't know, but somehow after her sudden death, her body immediately changed into some kind of salt, which may have had something to do with the sulphur. This linking of fire, sulphur and salt is very significant, as we shall see.

Moses also saw this same fire of God burning in a desert bush, yet the bush did not burn up (Exodus 3:2-3). Natural fire needs certain physical elements, which it will then consume so that it can keep burning, but spiritual fire is altogether different. It is the supernatural fire of God that can give life or destroy it – without having to literally burn anything.

Going back to our subject, here is what Jesus had to say about Gehenna.

"It is ideal for you to be entering into the kingdom of God one-eyed, rather than, having two eyes, to be cast into the Gehenna of fire, where their worm is not deceasing and the fire is not going out. **For everyone will be salted with fire**, and every sacrifice will be salted with salt...Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another."

In Mark 9:42-49, quoted above, Jesus is using the symbol of Gehenna to describe the coming judgment of the powerful Day of the Lord's indignation, when He will be unveiled from heaven in flaming fire, dealing out vengeance on the wicked (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). This accords with the prophecy in Isaiah 66:22-24.

"...all mankind will come and bow down before Me," says Yahweh. "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against Me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

(NIV)

"Wheresoever the corpse shall be, there will the vultures be gathered."

(Matthew 24:28; also Revelation 19:17-21)

In light of the New Testament, these prophecies, especially the Isaiah text, are to be understood figuratively or spiritually when applied to the judgment in the age to come.

## The Fire of the Law

So on the one level, the Gehenna of fire was a **natural fire**, an incinerator, indicative of shame and contempt. In most of the instances where the word Gehenna is used in the New Testament, it is describing the judgment of the Day of the Lord. But on another level, it is describing the **figurative fire** of God's Law working out its righteousness and justice. Jesus said that *everyone* shall be salted with fire. This is the fire of the Divine Law destroying sin. The fire may be figurative, but it is very real. It is a spiritual fire, on the highest level, because the law itself is spiritual (Romans 7:14).

"Is not My word like fire," declares Yahweh, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

(Jeremiah 23:29 NIV)

"For He will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap."

(Malachi 3:2 NIV)

"...and His eyes as a flame of fire"

(Revelation 1:15)

Now if anyone is building on this foundation gold and silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw, **each one's work will become apparent**, for the Day will make it evident, for **it is being revealed by fire. And the fire, it will be testing each one's work - what kind it is.**

(1 Corinthians 3:12-13)

...being sorrowed by various **trials**, that **the testing of your faith**, much more precious than gold which is perishing, yet, **being tested by fire**, may be found for applause and glory and honour at the unveiling of Jesus Christ...

(1 Peter 1:7)

These few scriptures will suffice to show that the ultimate fire of God is His righteous Law. Not only will everyone be salted with fire, but Jesus also said that every sacrifice will be salted with salt. Now we all know that common salt is a preservative and an antiseptic, and it is also a seasoning for food. In the Law of Moses, every grain offering, also termed a sacrifice, had to be seasoned with salt (Leviticus 2:13). The salt represents the goodness of God's Law and character. Jesus said that His followers are to be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). We are to

be living sacrifices, burnt offerings with a pleasing aroma, salted with the salt of goodness, grace and peace, consumed by the righteous fire of God's Spirit.

“...present your bodies a sacrifice, living, holy, well pleasing to God, your logical divine service...”

(Romans 12:1-2; also Ephesians 5:2 and Philippians 4:18)

“...offer up spiritual sacrifices, most acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

(1 Peter 2:5)

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt...”

(Colossians 4:6 NIV)

"Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another."

(Mark 9:50)

But before we can truly have salt in ourselves, we need to be salted with the fire of God's Truth. The disciples received this baptism of fire at Pentecost at the coming of the Holy Spirit. The presence of God as a consuming fire was represented in the flames of fire that rested upon each of them (Acts 2:1-4). The giving of the Law at Sinai was begun in the Hebrew month of Sivan, when God appeared to Israel on the mountain as a fire and spoke to them, instilling them with fear at the sight and sound of His Glory (Exodus 19:1-2, 16-19; 20:18-20). Yet at Pentecost, in the month of Sivan of 33 AD, this same fire of God came to dwell within the disciples of Jesus who were gathered at the temple courts, the house of God, waiting for the power from on high (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4).

This pentecostal fire, though, as opposed to the fire of Sinai, was in accord with the New Covenant that brings life, and not in accord with the Old Covenant that brings death. The pouring out of the spiritual blessings of this New Covenant was due to the recent Sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, Who fulfilled all the old types and shadows of the Old Covenant rituals.

## Eternal Punishment or Eonian Chastening?

Now over time, through a distortion of the truth foisted upon the people by the powers of Christendom, and aided by faulty translations of the Bible, Gehenna and its 'eternal' fire became synonymous with the 'eternal hell of the Lake of Fire' mentioned in the book of Revelation (Revelation 20:10, 13-15). In Revelation it states that all the wicked and unbelieving are cast into this Fire after the Great White Throne Judgment of ALL humanity. They are not found written in the Book of Life and so therefore they will not be given age-abiding life in the kingdom of God.

Jesus is ultimately describing this judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, which we shall consider in more detail later in the book. His brethren, the Bride/Body of Christ, are already with Him. This is because they have already experienced the

special First Resurrection and Transformation at the return of Christ, as we learn from Revelation 20 and other prophecies. Then all the nations are gathered before Him for judgment.

They are judged in accordance with their acts as to whether they have shown acts of loving kindness to His brethren or not. Those who have shown basic love and kindness to the servants of God are called the righteous sheep, and they are accepted into the kingdom and given eonian life. The rest are the unrighteous goats, and they are cursed and thrown into the eonian Lake of Fire, which was originally prepared for the Adversary and his messengers.

“Go from Me, you cursed, into the eonian fire...”

(Matthew 25:41)

“And these shall be coming away into eonian chastening...”

(25:46)

Now the majority of Bibles read ‘everlasting fire’ and ‘eternal punishment’ in the above verses of Matthew 25. But the Greek word *aeonian* (transliterated into English as *eonian*) does not mean unending, and the phrase ‘*eons (ages) of the eons (ages)*’ used in relation to the Lake of Fire in Revelation does not mean ‘*forever and ever*.’ For the correct translation of the words usually rendered *eternal* and *forever and ever* see The Concordant Version.

Also, the Greek word *kolasis* in verse 46 is describing *chastening* or *discipline*, not necessarily punishment. Chastening carries the thought of correction for the benefit of the one undergoing it. Punishment has more to do with the satisfaction of fulfilling the penal code.

So already we can see that these unrighteous ones are to receive *chastening* in a *spiritual fire* that was originally prepared for Satan, a spiritual being. It is described as *eonian* because this fire belongs to the eons (or ages) of time, beyond the horizon of time as we now know it. It is age-abiding, not eternal, so therefore **it will end. God's justice has a time limit.** This Lake of Fire is the ultimate Gehenna of Fire.

“the Lord...is keeping **the unjust for chastening in the day of judging**...”

(2 Peter 2:9)

This fire of chastening shall also apply to Satan and his messengers, for whom it was originally prepared.

“For if God spares not **sinning messengers**, but thrusting them into the gloomy caverns of **Tartarus**, gives them up **to be kept for chastening judging**...”

(2 Peter 2:4)

This text gives us the other Greek word usually mistranslated as hell - *Tartarus*. There are two other passages in the New Testament that seem to be related to this one (1 Peter 3:18-20 and

Jude 6). In putting these scriptures together, we are told about a group of stubborn spirits or sinning messengers who are bound in a place called Tartarus because of their involvement in the early downfall of humanity, in the era before the Flood, but we are not told exactly what they did. It was to these spirits in jail that Christ went sometime after His resurrection to proclaim to them His victory and exaltation, mentioned in 1 Peter 3:19-20.

Jude 6 is the most revealing though:

'Besides, messengers who keep not **their own sovereignty**, but leave **their own habitation**, He has kept in **imperceptible bonds under gloom for the judging of the great day.**'

So from these scriptures we can see that some of these stubborn spirits abandoned their God-given position of sovereignty and their God-given home in the celestials, and sinned during the era before the Flood. This of course is an abomination to God, so they are confined with invisible chains in the gloomy caverns or jail of Tartarus until the day of their chastening judgment. Then they too will enter the eonian fire. But why is it called the Lake of Fire in the book of Revelation?

## The Lake of Fire

The vision of Revelation is full of spiritual signs and symbols that are deeply rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially as it relates to the Temple services. Outside the Temple of Solomon was the brazen **Sea**. This was a huge bowl of water for the priests to wash themselves for their ceremonial **cleansing** (1 Kings 7:23-26; 2 Chronicles 4:6). Now in the New Testament we read about the Sea of Galilee, which is really a Lake. It is describing a huge expanse of water. So we can already see that the **Lake** of Fire is related to the brazen **Sea** as a means of **cleansing** or **purification**. Now let us look at the fire element.

We've already established earlier that the fire of God is His Law, His justice, His righteousness. The Greek word for fire is *pur* from which we get such words as purify and purge. Natural fire has this effect on materials that can stand the test of fire, such as gold and silver. These metals can be **purified by fire** to get rid of all the dross, the unwanted, impure alloys. So we have two witnesses, from nature and Scripture, to show us that **fire cleanses and purifies**, and so does water. In the **Lake of Fire** we have the picture of both of these – fire and water - in a powerful, figurative image as a double witness.

In relation to this, the Lake of Fire is also described as 'the Lake of Fire burning with **sulphur** (or brimstone)' (Revelation 14:10; 19:20). Interestingly enough, the ancient Greeks used sulphur in the rituals of the gods as a symbol of divine cleansing. The Greek word used here for sulphur is *theion* which is the same word translated 'divine,' which comes from the Greek root word used for God or Deity. So even in the sulphur we have the picture of **divine cleansing**. Even within the ancient beliefs of the idolatrous nations there was the awareness that fire is a purifier.

But sadly, like the 'hell-fire doctrine,' they interpreted this truth in a fleshly, carnal manner, believing that literal, natural fire cleanses humans – hence they would sacrifice humans in fire to appease the gods! And tragically, the powers of Christendom also went on to imitate this horrific belief by burning people at the stake. Their reasoning must have been 'God's going to do this forever, so we might as well begin it now, and cleanse the heretics!'

In Daniel 7:9-10 we have another vision that is describing the final judgment scene given in Revelation. Here in Daniel the throne of God is described very graphically as a **throne of fire** with a **River of Fire** flowing out from before God. This is another figure for the Lake of Fire. **It is describing the purifying, chastening judgments of God's Law during the final age. But this is not torture in a literal fire and it will not be unending. It will last until the consummation of the ages is complete, when death will be abolished and ALL will be saved, vivified and reconciled to God** (1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Colossians 1:20).

In God's sight, the *legal transaction* for this glorious ultimate occurred in 33 AD when Christ became the ultimate once for all Sacrifice for ALL sin during His First Advent and mission. The price for Adam's initial sin, which then brought death and all other sin to the whole race, has been fully paid for. **The mission has been accomplished, finished, paid in full** (John 19:30; Colossians 2:14-15). Christ has purchased the whole field of the world and redeemed mankind, so that *all* belongs to Him, even those held in Death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). In this light, even now **the ends of the ages, the conclusion and consummation of the ages, has already arrived** (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 9:26; 1 Corinthians 15:24).

## The Second Death

But you may be asking, "The Lake of Fire is called the Second Death in Revelation 20:14, and death is a sleep."

"And death and the unseen (*hades*) were cast into the lake of fire.  
**This is the second death - the lake of fire."**

So what does this mean? Well, bear in mind that the First Death, along with Hades, is metaphorically thrown into this fire as well. All of mankind are experiencing the First Death right now, which was passed on to us through Adam (Romans 5:12). But Jesus has paid the full price for Adam's sin so that one day, ALL MANKIND SHALL BE MADE ALIVE (1 Corinthians 15:22). Christ is the Saviour of ALL mankind and He will eventually save ALL mankind, but there is a process in which this shall occur.

Yet even now, in a figurative sense, all who do not know Christ are dead in their sins. Paul reveals throughout his letters that sin and death are interconnected, that our present bodies of flesh and blood are mortal, that is, they are dying. Only those in Christ are given life by the Spirit of God. Everyone on this earth is born into slavery, slaving for the masters of Sin and Death, which in turn is under the jurisdiction of the spiritual adversary, Satan. Only believers in Christ are redeemed from this slavery to Sin and Death, and rescued from the jurisdiction of Satan, by becoming slaves of God through Christ instead.

Yet throughout Romans chapters 7 and 8, Paul talks of a death that we all experience while we are still alive! This is not a contradiction. He is telling us that our mortal flesh has a law at work within its members that causes sin and death to operate in us. This is the flesh that we have to put to death or crucify daily if we are to grow into Sons of God, that is, spiritually mature men and women of God. The Old Humanity breeds Death, and the New Humanity breeds Life.

So the Second Death is related to the First Death but they are not exactly the same. The First Death will no longer exist because it is thrown into the Lake of Fire, which *is* the Second Death, but all those who are not in Christ at that time (that is, those who are not written in the

Scroll of Life) shall be raised and judged as **the dead**. They will not be granted immortality or age-abiding life at that time, so they will not be enjoying an allotment in the Kingdom of God. In relation to the true immortal Life of the New Humanity, they are figuratively dead!

**The Second Death, the Lake of Fire, is describing the chastening judging of God for those who will have to serve their sentence in that final age in mortal bodies, being in the presence of God on the New Earth but not in the Kingdom itself, which is the New Jerusalem, the dwelling place of the Temple of God, the Bride/Body of Christ, the Church (Ecclesia) of God, who shall be ruling the earth as kings and priests after the order of Melchisedek. But unlike in this Old Creation, there will be no more doom or destruction, or the actual death state itself.**

These things are being described symbolically in Revelation 21-22. These symbols are not essentially describing a physical locality (as is often taught) but they are describing a condition or state of being. The New Jerusalem is not so much a place but a state of being - that is, immortality; the kingdom of God. In the same way, the Lake of Fire is not so much a particular location but a state of being - that is, the Second Death; the judgment of God in continued mortality.

Even now, God dwells within a portion of sinful mankind by His Holy Spirit and He is conciliated to the whole of humanity in this Administration of Grace. All of this is possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit was given on the Day of Pentecost 33 AD, and the two loaves of bread made with yeast (or leaven) that were used on that day as a wave offering of the Firstfruits of the wheat harvest are a symbol of the true Christian Church, the Joint Body (Bread) of Christ, made up of leavened (sinful) Jews and Gentiles in whom God dwells by His Spirit (Leviticus 23:15-21; 1 Corinthians 5:8; 10:17).

In the final Age of the New Creation, the Holy of the Holies, the Age of the Ages, God shall dwell with ALL humanity, and grace and righteousness shall reign in life through the Man, Christ Jesus, and His Wife, the celestial Israel of God. The New Creation will bring Life to ALL, as the Old Creation brought Death to ALL. **Now this is Good News!**

## Justice will be Done

Yet the majority of humanity will be outside the kingdom of God, as the peoples and nations on the New Earth, along with the Adversary and his messengers, for whom the eonian fire was initially prepared for (Matthew 25:41). All of these will be experiencing the Lake of Fire, which is the Second Death, the Gehenna of fire, where they shall be salted with the fire of God (Mark 9:47-49; Revelation 21:8; 22:15).

This is the best way, *metaphorically speaking*, to describe the chastening judging of unbelievers in that final age of consummation (Matthew 25:46; Daniel 12:2). There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in this place of outer darkness, for the people shall be face to face with themselves before God in flesh and blood bodies, having to undergo the justice of God because they refused to be forgiven by the blood of the Lamb. They will pay back all they owe for they were unmerciful and unforgiving, and the measure they used shall be measured to them, and as they judged so will they be condemned, and by their words they will be convicted (Matthew 8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 25:30; 18:21-35; 12:36-37; 7:1-2).

They shall receive graded chastening after being judged in accordance with their acts in this life, in accordance with the Divine Law of God manifested at the universal court of the Great White Throne, which shall bring affliction and torment to their souls as they undergo the fiery justice of God until they also learn obedience to the King (Matthew 11:22, 24; 18:34-35; Romans 2:9). Christ and His saints, the kings of the earth, shall reign over them till all His enemies are under His authority, bringing healing to those who are injured by the Second Death (Revelation 2:26-28; 3:21; 22:2-5).

This whole process of the Consummation, that of bringing life to all, shall be complete at the very end of the ages, when the last enemy, Death, shall be completely abolished; when ALL those who have been experiencing the Second Death will have been given immortality also, and they shall be reconciled to God as Father, so that God may be ALL in ALL (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Colossians 1:19-20). ALL creation shall bow before, and acclaim, Jesus Christ as Lord of all, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11; Revelation 5:13). Then Christ shall hand over the perfected kingdom to His Father.

## The Stubborn Ones

Both Jesus, and Paul especially, make it clear that the unbelieving, unrighteous sons of stubbornness shall not enjoy the allotment of the kingdom. Instead, they shall experience the divine justice and indignation of God for eonian chastening in outer darkness.

**"...God, Who will be paying each one in accord with his acts:...yet to those of faction, and stubborn, indeed, as to the truth, yet persuaded to injustice, indignation and fury, affliction and distress, on every human soul which is effecting evil..."**

(Romans 2:8-9)

"...yet he who is stubborn as to the Son shall not be seeing life, but the indignation of God shall be remaining on him."

(John 3:36)

"And these shall be coming away into eonian chastening, yet the just into eonian life."

(Matthew 25:46)

"...And, being indignant, his lord gives him up to the tormentors (*jailers*) till he may pay all he is owing him. Thus shall My heavenly Father also be doing to you, if each one should not be pardoning his brother, from your hearts."

(Matthew 18:34-35)

"I am saying to you, 'I don't know you or where you come from! Withdraw from me, all workers of injustice!' **There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you are seeing**

**Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out."**

(Luke 13:27-28)

"And you, being dead to your offences and sins, in which once you walked, in accord with the eon of this world, in accord with the chief of the jurisdiction of the air (or atmosphere), the spirit now operating in the sons of stubbornness..."

(Ephesians 2:1-2)

"For this you perceive, knowing that no paramour (or male prostitute) at all or unclean or greedy person, who is an idolater, **has any enjoyment of the allotment in the kingdom of Christ and of God**. Let no one be seducing you with empty words, **for because of these things the indignation of God is coming on the sons of stubbornness**. Do not, then, become joint partakers with them, for you were once darkness, yet now you are light in the Lord."

(Ephesians 5:5-8)

"Deaden, then, your members that are on the earth: prostitution (*or unlawful sexual acts*), uncleanness, passion, evil desire and greed, which is idolatry, **because of which the indignation of God is coming on the sons of stubbornness** - among whom you also once walked, when you lived in these things."

(Colossians 3:5-7)

**"Or are you not aware that the unjust shall not be enjoying the allotment of God's kingdom? Be not deceived. Neither paramours (male prostitutes), nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor catamites (homosexual paedophiles), nor sodomites (practicing homosexuals), nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards; no revilers (those who angrily wound with words or slander), no extortioners (swindlers) shall be enjoying the allotment of God's kingdom. And some of you were these, but you are bathed off, but you are hallowed, but you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."**

(1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

Now take special notice of this last text. You can't get much clearer than this! Yet tragically, not only is the world full of such things, the whole of Christendom has been, and continues to be, riddled with these things, particularly adulterers and homosexuals, the greedy, thieves and extortioners, including those who are raping the people of God with forced tithing and 'seed-faith gifts.' On the whole, this new Christianity has become a huge money-making machine

serving man and money rather than God. People of God, as well as everyone else, be warned, from the words of the King Himself!

"To him who is thirsting I shall be giving of the spring of the water of life gratuitously. He who is conquering shall be enjoying this allotment, and I shall be a God to him and he shall be a son to Me. **Yet the timid (or cowardly), and unbelievers, and the abominable, and murderers, and paramours, and enchanters, and idolaters, and all the false (hypocrites) - their part is in the lake burning with fire and sulphur, which is the second death**...Outside (of the New Jerusalem, the kingdom of God) are curs, and enchanters, and paramours, and murderers, and idolaters, and everyone fabricating and fondling falsehood (liars and hypocrites)."

(Revelation 21:6-8; 22:15)

## The Sons of the Kingdom

This should instill the fear of God into us all – and the fear of God is something that is severely lacking in the world, and especially within the Church. Arrogance, immaturity, irreverence, religious entertainment passing as the supernatural power of God, lies, deceit, trickery, swindling, the flaunting of the gifts of the Spirit like some kind of stage act, seeking the blessings of God with monetary gifts, etc, etc! The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33), because while we are in these bodies of sinful flesh, we need the fear of God, which comes from knowing His awesome power and holiness, to keep us from sinning.

This was one of the reasons why God manifested His power to Israel and gave them the judgments of the Law (Exodus 20:20; Deuteronomy 6:13). Nevertheless, this positive, healthy, reverential fear should in turn lead to spiritual maturity, and then the knowledge of the love of God as our Father will cast out all fear of judging and condemnation as we manifest the character of God as His sons (1 John 4:17-18).

The original plan of God in relation to the nation of Israel was for them to be a holy nation, a special people, a kingdom of priests - and that plan is still yet to be fulfilled (Exodus 19:3-6). We now know from the New Testament that this special kingdom of royal priests goes beyond the faithful remnant of Israel itself, known as the Circumcision, the original Bride of Yahweh. It now includes *all* believers in Christ Jesus out of *all* nations, known as the Uncircumcision, the Complement of the nations (or fullness of the Gentiles), who together with the remnant from Israel form the Bride/Body of Christ, the Wife of the Lamb, the Ecclesia (or Church) of God. This Celestial Israel, the New Jerusalem, is the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of royal priests, who will rule the earth and the heavens and all nations in the future ages.

These are the Wheat, the sons of the kingdom, the ones who bear fruit to God. These are the Overcomers, the sons of God who will be manifested to the world at Christ's return.

I have taken the time to go into these things in quite some detail at this point so as to lay the groundwork for the rest of the parables. When it comes to explaining the rest of them in the following pages, the content will be somewhat briefer for the foundation has now been laid.

### 3. The Mustard Seed

“The kingdom of the heavens is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of the garden plants, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch (*or roost*) in its branches.”

(Matthew 13:31-32 NIV; also Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19)

In this next parable, Jesus continues to describe what the kingdom of the heavens is like, in accordance with how it will manifest in the earth during the period of His absence through to His Return. In this instance, He simply likens the kingdom of God to a mustard seed and plant.

The mustard was a very common garden plant in the East. Its seed was known to be very minute, the smallest of all the cultivated garden seeds, yet after planting, it would grow quite tall to become the largest of all the garden plants. It would actually resemble a tree with large branches that were big enough for birds to come and nest among the boughs.

The main thought behind the meaning to this parable is the relative *size* of the seed and what *size* the plant becomes through the natural growth process. Jesus is saying that the birth of the spiritual kingdom of God would begin very small but it will eventually grow to become something very large. This will occur by the power of God’s Spirit, and not by the power of man.

The small company of disciples, made up of common men and women from the tiny nation of Israel, was the mustard seed, and through the power of the Holy Spirit the kingdom has continued to grow since the Day of Pentecost in 33 AD till the present time, having gone out to all nations around the world. It even grew into the visible kingdom of Christendom that did, in fact, rule the world as a lamb-like Beast for over a thousand years, and even now it still seeks to take over the earth for Christ.

#### A Kingdom Tree

In Daniel 4, we have the account of King Nebuchadnezzar’s conversion to the One True God, which began with a prophetic dream of a tree. He saw a huge glorious fruit tree in the middle of the land of Babylon, which fed the people, and provided shade for the beasts of the field and branches for birds of the air – in fact; it provided food for all creatures (Daniel 4:10-12). Subsequently, we are told that the tree was to be destroyed. Daniel then reveals to the king that **the tree represents the king of Babylon himself, and his whole kingdom**, which would eventually fall like a tree to reveal the true power and sovereignty of God in order to humble the king (verses 20-27).

Ezekiel also had a similar word for Pharaoh of Egypt. In Ezekiel 31, as a warning to Egypt, the prophet describes the ancient Empire of Assyria as being a cedar of Lebanon in its time, which had been pulled down due to its arrogance and wickedness. The same would happen to

the Egyptian Empire. So here we have further evidence to show us that *these trees represented kings and their kingdoms*. Ezekiel 31:6 says,

“All the birds of the air nested in its boughs, all the beasts of the field gave birth under its branches; all the great nations lived in its shade.”

So it is evident that Jesus was alluding to these scriptures in the Mustard Seed parable, where the kingdom of God is likened to a tree that provides a nesting place for the birds of the air. This is not indicating that the kingdom is to be a political kingdom in this present age, only that it provides spiritual sustenance and it blesses those who live in its shade and dwell among its branches. As we have already seen earlier, fruit trees are also symbols of men, whether they produce good fruit or bad fruit. Yet, of course, the time will arrive when the Kingdom of God will be fully manifested at Christ's return as a governing kingdom. The Tree of Life, representing Christ and His kingdom, will then give fruit and shade to all peoples of the earth.

## Faith

Jesus also uses the mustard seed as an example of faith and its growth (Matthew 17:20-21; Luke 17:5-6). In both these instances, Jesus was telling His disciples that even if their faith was as small as a mustard seed, the power and ability within the seed would grow, and then they would realise that under God's direction, as deputies of Christ, they can do the impossible, such as moving a mountain or a mulberry tree without touching them, in the same way as Christ rules the created order by the power and will of the Father.

In Scripture, mountains are also symbolising kingdoms and empires, so to move mountains and trees essentially means the moving of kingdoms and nations by the power of Christ's kingdom. This is what true Christianity has done since its humble beginnings. Yet this power will ultimately be realised in the resurrection when the Body of Christ ecclesia shall be operating fully in the power of God and with the authority of Christ. The apostles began to do this in the first century AD as a foretaste, and the sons of God have continued to do such things in the power of the Spirit.

Yet many today believe that the Church should be ruling as an Empire with this kind of power and miracles even now, but the truth is this – now is not the appointed time! Israel had the opportunity to enter the Promised Land quite quickly after leaving Sinai, but due to their unbelief, they missed out and instead had to turn back to wander in the desert. Yet shortly after this, they decided to go up and conquer the land by themselves anyhow, contrary to what God had told them (Numbers 14:39-45). Moses specifically warned them that God would not be with them if they foolishly went to battle, yet they still did so – and they got a real beating for it, as they had been warned!

**The issue here has to do with the will and timing of God**, as it's all about *obedience*. Like ancient Israel, the Church is seeking to enter the Promised Land ahead of time, and even the modern nation of Israel is literally seeking to do the same by violent force, but the simple fact is this: there will be no lasting visible, political kingdom of God on this earth until the appointed time comes when the King Himself will fully manifest His rule. In the meantime, it is a spiritual, invisible kingdom, a secret kingdom, known only to those who belong to it. The fifth kingdom of stone that becomes a mountain will crush all other kingdoms first when the rightful Ruler of all mankind returns in power and glory, as it states in Daniel (Daniel 2:34-35,

44-45). **Any attempt to set up a world-wide political, religious kingdom before then will ultimately fail!**

So contrary to what many teach today, it doesn't matter *how much* faith you have, as though it were physically measured out to you or something, it is the *quality* of the faith that counts, that is, whether we are truly believing God from the heart in obedience to His word. Jesus may have rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith a few times ("O ye of little faith"), which appears as though He was saying that the amount of faith does count after all, but this was an expression to highlight the fact that real faith in God was virtually non-existent among the disciples to begin with, for they often used their carnal, fleshly way of thinking instead. And to think that Jesus deliberately chose such an immature bunch! That gives hope to us all! Oh, the wisdom and grace of God!

True faith in God will grow, just as the anointing of the Spirit grows, until it can do the impossible in accordance with the power and will of God. It is a process that requires training, but for maturity to occur there has to be a death to the fleshly and worldly viewpoint of the carnal mind, along with a willing heart of obedience in the spirit of a servant. Jesus said that,

“...unless an ear of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds...Whoever serves Me must follow Me.”

(John 12:24-26 NIV)

The wonder of creation is that of multiplication. Numerous plants produce numerous further seeds, which in turn produce more and more seeds! Yet the single seed has to die in the earth first before it can grow and bear fruit to generate further seeds. This is pure genius, and although we take it for granted, it is like magic. The true servant of Christ also has to learn to die to the flesh, for only then can we grow and bear fruit to God, and then sow further seed. This is the path of faith-obedience that leads to spiritual maturity. This is the kingdom of God.

Believers in Christ have all been given a measure of faith. With some it may appear that they have greater faith in the sense that some are more mature than others, some are more gifted than others, and some find it easier to believe than others (Romans 12:3), but we all have a measure of faith.

But we must also remember that, as Paul says, we are just the channels that God uses to sow His seed and to water it, as His fellow workers, **but it is God alone that makes it grow!**

“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

(1 Corinthians 3:6-7 NIV)

It isn't us or the actual faith that gets things done, it is God's power alone that does the work. Modern preachers so often focus on the faith itself or the works of faith as though it was some kind of magic force that can be manipulated by us. This is in fact Witchcraft! It is God's power that does anything worthwhile, and His power alone – and we cannot manipulate it. It is true that unbelief may hinder the power of God from working effectively at times within

individuals, as Jesus encountered a number of times (Mark 6:4-6; 9:23-24; Matthew 13:58), because even if God were to do a miracle, unbelief doesn't care and doesn't acknowledge the source of it. It is stubborn and ignorant. Nevertheless, the unbelief is not stronger than God!

If God so wishes He could knock someone down and blind them, and change their heart, as He did with Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul, but usually where there is unbelief God will not move much at all. The unbelief (or the faith for that matter) itself has no power of its own, for God can blow it away by giving faith instead, for faith is the gift of God! God is the Power and the Source, faith is the channel or gateway, but it contains no inherent power of its own. We must keep things in perspective in these deceitful days. You can hinder the flow of the wind entering your house by keeping the door closed, but a stronger wind will blow your door down anyhow!

So as a summary: Christ has already taken the tiny Mustard Seed of God and planted it in His field, that is, the world (which began in a garden, the land of Israel) – and it has been growing by the power of God for nearly two thousand years, bringing shade and nourishment to many. The Day is very near when the fullness of the kingdom will shine forth like the sun, and the great Kingdom Tree shall fill the earth, bringing blessing to all. This is the Tree of Life that bears 12 crops of fruit a year and its leaves will bring healing to the nations on the New Earth (Revelation 22:1-3).

## 4. The Leaven

“He told them another parable, saying, “The kingdom of the heavens is like leaven which a woman, after getting it, hides in three seahs of meal, till the whole dough was leavened.””

(Matthew 13:33 FT; also Luke 13:20-21)

Jesus now continues to focus on the more negative aspect of the secrets of the kingdom, which He began to introduce in the parable of the Wheat and the Darnel – that is, the increase of wickedness and error throughout this present age, that is, apostasy.

Leaven or yeast is a kind of fungus that is used for the process of fermentation in baking bread and cakes, as well as in brewing wine and beer. During the fermentation process in baking bread, the yeast breaks down the carbohydrates giving off small bubbles of carbon dioxide gas. This permeates the mixture causing the dough to ‘rise’ by becoming light and porous. In fact, the Greek word for leaven is *zume*, which literally means *ferment*.

Throughout Scripture, leaven is used as a symbol of wickedness, corruption and error. In Exodus 12, we have the first account of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was connected to the Passover.

“For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day until the seventh must be cut off from Israel.”

(Exodus 12:15 NIV; also 18-20)

This feast introduced the principle to Israel that yeast was symbolically a bad thing, even though the initial reason as to why leaven was not used during Passover was because the Israelites had to leave Egypt quickly, so they didn’t have time to add leaven to their bread. Nevertheless, in the Law, yeast was not generally allowed in any of the offerings made to Yahweh for the reason given above – it symbolises corruption (Exodus 23:18). But there was one major exception to this rule of unleavened sacrifices – the two loaves of bread offered as firstfruits at Pentecost (Leviticus 23:17-20).

These were to be *leavened* loaves because they symbolised the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which was a firstfruits of the Spirit poured out on humans who are still in bodies of sinful flesh. The Ecclesia of God is made up of Jews and Gentiles who have received the firstfruits of the Spirit in sinful flesh (represented in the two loaves of bread made with yeast). This truth is also symbolised in the Fellowship or Peace Offering, which included leavened cakes of bread as part of the sacrifice (Leviticus 7:11-14).

The firstfruit loaves offered at Pentecost represents the collective Ecclesia as a whole, and the cakes offered as Peace offerings represent the individual believer before God. In Christ,

leavened humans are made clean by the word of truth, that is, we become unleavened, nevertheless, we still have a body that belongs to the Old Creation, cursed by sin and death, until we receive our spiritual body at Christ's return, and then our deliverance will be complete.

Paul is alluding to the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the clear symbolism of yeast in the following texts.

“...Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast, then, **that you may be a fresh batch without yeast – as you really are.** For Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for our sakes so that we may be keeping the Festival, not with old yeast, the yeast of evil and wickedness, but **with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**”

(1 Corinthians 5:6-8 FT)

“A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.”

(Galatians 5:9 NIV)

As far as the contexts of these words are concerned, in the first instance, he is rebuking the Corinthian church for their indifference to some immorality and sins of the flesh being tolerated amongst them. And in the second text, he is reminding the Galatians that false teaching and error, particularly that which opposes the gospel of grace and exalts religious rituals instead, is a seductive and corrupting influence, and it spreads.

## Hypocrisy and False Teaching

Jesus Himself confirms these two aspects of the symbolism of yeast, that of personal sin and doctrinal error, in the following texts. Both are a corrupting influence.

“ “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, **which is hypocrisy**...Be careful... Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod...Be careful...Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees”...Then they understood that He was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against **the teaching** of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

(Luke 12:1; Mark 8:15; Matthew 16:6, 11-12 NIV)

It is clear from these three passages that the yeast of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and that of King Herod, was

a) *hypocrisy* (that is, pretending to be something you're not, or saying one thing and doing another, both are false), whether religious or political hypocrisy; and

b) *false teaching* or doctrine.

The rabbinical sect of the Pharisees, which Paul belonged to at one time, were considered more ‘fundamental’ and ‘orthodox’ than the priestly sect of the Sadducees, yet Jesus told His disciples to be on guard against *both* these sects and their respective teaching, because, not only did they contain error due to the traditions and teachings of men, but they were largely composed of hypocritical liars who did not know God in their hearts, in spirit. They would rather cling to their traditions rather than seek out and believe the truth of God. Believers on the other hand are to be like unleavened bread, full of **sincerity, truth, goodness, righteousness** and **love**, those who worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.

## The Woman and the Yeast

So in this parable of The Leaven, we have the following picture. A woman gets some yeast and mixes it into three measures of meal until the whole batch of dough is leavened. Now notice from the original quote that we started with, that the original Greek says that the woman *hides* the yeast in the dough. This should’ve been an unleavened batch, but the woman secretly introduces yeast into the dough! Even this intimates that *seduction* is involved.

Now this leavening process will eventually cause carbon dioxide gas to form in the dough, which will distend or ‘puff up’ the dough and make it light and porous. This is what sin does! It releases poison that corrupts, which fills us with pride and all manner of sin and wickedness – but it is all light and fluffy and full of holes, with no real substance. Jesus is saying here that this hypocrisy, and false teaching, and evil, and wickedness, and corruption, and lawlessness, will be subtly and seductively introduced into the Church and it will eventually permeate the whole lot as the age progresses!

It is worth noting here, that even in relation to the physical body, yeast and fungal overgrowth is often the root cause of many illnesses and various symptoms of disease. The yeast, *Candida Albicans*, is the most common, which causes Candidiasis and all manner of distressing and debilitating symptoms. This doesn't mean that all yeast is bad for our health, because, to the contrary, many good bacteria thrive in fermented foods, but in general, yeast and fungi need to be kept in check. It's all about positive or negative; perfect or imperfect; good or bad.

Anyhow, you could be thinking, 'Is there any significance as to why it says ‘*three* seahs or measures of meal?’ I firmly believe it is referring to the **three divisions of humanity**. Firstly, the whole of mankind is divided into three major portions, that of **Shem, Ham and Japheth**. The table of nations in Genesis 10 gives us the original tribes and peoples that descended from Noah's three sons, from which all of mankind subsequently descended.

These three divisions are also represented in the book of Acts, whereby the gospel went out to all nations, namely, the Jews and Samaritans (Shem), the Ethiopian Eunuch (Ham), and the Roman Centurion, Cornelius (Japheth). Paul also refers to another three-fold division that encompasses all mankind – the **Jew**, the **Greek** (or Gentile), and the **Ecclesia** (or Church) of God (1 Corinthians 10:32). It could also be referring to Body, Soul and Spirit.

So it appears evident that Jesus was saying that the whole of Christendom and the world, throughout all nations, shall be tainted with this ‘yeast’ in this age of the kingdom of the heavens. And it would also make sense that ‘the woman’ who introduces the yeast into the dough is representing Secret Babylon, the Prostitute (Revelation 17-18).

## 5. The Hidden Treasure

And

## The Precious Pearl

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

(Matthew 13:44-46 NIV)

Both of these parables are declaring certain aspects of the same truth, hence they need to be considered together. Jesus is the man who finds the treasure hidden in a field, and He is also the merchant looking for fine pearls. In both instances the man purchases the precious things he has found through personal sacrifice by selling everything he has – and He does this with great joy! The basic truth revealed here is very simple really, but there is a little more that can be gleaned from it. These principles of love and sacrifice in accordance with God's righteousness are at the heart of the kingdom of God. So not only do these things apply to the Master, Jesus, but they also apply to His brothers, His followers, the sons of God.

Firstly, let us consider the treasure. This particular treasure is already hidden in a field. In the Greek, it actually reads ‘*the* field’ rather than ‘a field.’ Now at the time when Jesus was telling these parables to His disciples, He had left the crowd and gone inside the house where He was staying. He had just revealed to them the meaning of the parable of the Wheat and the Darnel. As we have learned earlier from this parable, the field represents the whole world.

Exodus 19:5-6 shows us clearly that the nation of Israel is God's treasure in the world.

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, **then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession**. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**.” (NIV)

This text indicates that the ultimate purpose of God, which began through Israel, is to form an Ecclesia or more literally ‘a called out group’ commonly called the Church, who will be a kingdom of royal priests ruling the earth and the heavens as the sons of God. Israel according to the flesh could only temporarily fulfil this purpose in the past, but it will be ultimately fulfilled through the Body and Bride of Christ, which is composed not only of a remnant of Israel, but a large remnant out of the nations as well, who are the complement or fullness of

Israel (Romans 11; Ephesians 2:11-22). **This Ecclesia of God is the Treasure and the precious Pearl, the heavenly Israel of God.**

## Israel and the Nations – a Joint-Body

The nation of Israel, who were originally given the promises and the covenants of God, were scattered throughout the world, with the vast majority of them hidden in the field. Then Jesus came as the Messiah of Israel and the world, firstly, to seek and to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Yet those of Israel who followed the true Shepherd of the sheep were again hidden in the field of the world, while a new secret administration of grace was introduced, during which time the secrets of the kingdom are being unfolded, and the Gospel has been proclaimed to all nations.

In the meanwhile, Jesus gave His own soul as the ultimate Sacrifice and Ransom, selling all He had, to purchase the Treasure, the apple of His eye, the sheep of His pasture. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross. Yet in doing so, He not only purchased the treasure, He bought the whole field! The whole world - in fact, the whole of creation - now legally belongs to Christ Jesus. He holds the title deed to this earth, as well as the heavens.

This truth about the Ecclesia of God is what the Apostle Peter was referring to in 1 Peter 2:9-10.

“Yet you are a chosen race, a “royal priesthood,” a “holy nation,” a procured people...who once were “not a people” yet now are the people of God.” (CV)

Nevertheless, this little flock and ecclesia of Israel is not enough. There are others from amongst the nations, those of another sheep pen, who are joining the remnant of Israel to become one flock under the One Shepherd, Who gives His soul for the sake of the sheep (John 10:14-16). This flock of faithful followers will become the Firstfruits of a new humanity offered to God. They will become the Wife of the Lamb, the heavenly Israel, ruling from the New Jerusalem as the Body of Christ – a kingdom of royal priests ruling the heavens and the earth. This is what Paul is ultimately revealing in Ephesians 2.

"Wherefore, remember that once you, the nations in flesh - who are termed "Uncircumcision" by those termed "Circumcision," in flesh, made by hands - that you were, in that era, apart from Christ, **being alienated from the citizenship of Israel**, and the **guests of the promise covenants**, having no expectation, and without God in the world. Yet now, in Christ Jesus, you, who once are far off, are become near by the blood of Christ. For He is our Peace, **Who makes both one**, and razes the central wall of the barrier (the enmity in His flesh), nullifying the law of precepts in decrees, **that He should be creating the two, in Himself, into one new humanity, making peace**; and should be reconciling both in one body to God through the cross, killing the enmity in it. And, coming, He brings the evangel of peace to you, those afar, and peace to those near, for through Him we both have had the access, in one Spirit, to the Father.

**Consequently, then, no longer are you guests and sojourners, but are fellow-citizens of the saints and belong to God's family**, being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the capstone of the corner being Christ Jesus Himself, in Whom the entire building, being connected together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord: in Whom you, also, are being built together for God's dwelling place, in spirit."

(Ephesians 2:11-22 CV)

So what about the precious pearl? A pearl is a very precious gem that is formed in an oyster shell, which comes from the sea. Throughout Scripture, the nations and peoples of the earth are often symbolised as the sea (Isaiah 57:20; Revelation 17:15). So Jesus, the Merchant, finds one pearl of great value and sells everything to purchase it. This 'very precious pearl' (CV) represents the remnant of the nations who belong to the Body of Christ. Yet the Treasure *and* the precious Pearl *together* represent the whole Bride and Body of Christ as the kingdom of royal priests, composed of Jew and Gentile, Circumcision and Uncircumcision, as clearly revealed in the above text. Therefore we find that the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem are twelve *pearls*, symbolising the governmental authority and mediatorial or priestly position of the sons of God (Revelation 21:21).

## The Kinsman-Redeemer

In the book of Ruth we have the tender account of the role of a special kinsman redeemer named Boaz, who, because of his love for Ruth, a woman of the nations, yet daughter-in-law of his poor relative, Naomi, sets out to redeem her. He was a man of renown and Ruth worked among the servant girls who collected the wheat and barley from his field. In accordance with the Law, and yet using much tact and wisdom, Boaz redeems Naomi's property, which included Ruth as well, and Ruth became his wife.

This is a wonderful allegory of Jesus redeeming His bride. Christ is the Kinsman-Redeemer. Not only did He become a Man so as to redeem man from his poor, helpless state, but He was also born an Israelite of the tribe of Judah, descended from David, to rescue Israel from their poor, helpless state of condemnation under the Old Covenant. (Interestingly enough, Boaz and Ruth were His ancestors according to the flesh, as Ruth was the great-grandmother of David). The law of the kinsman-redeemer can be found in Leviticus 25.

**This means that Christ has the legal right as a Kinsman-Redeemer to redeem not only Israel, but also the whole of mankind.** Yet His heart is set on a Bride, a precious treasure and pearl, chosen from among those who serve in His field. Yet the legal basis for this is the fact that Jesus is the rightful Heir to the throne of David, and all of the covenants and promises given to Israel are to be fulfilled in Him – the only One Who can establish the New Covenant due to His own blood having paid the Ransom price.

Nevertheless, we mustn't forget that Christ has purchased **the whole world**, and He is the Kinsman-Redeemer **of all humanity**. He truly is the Saviour and Redeemer of all mankind. The law of the kinsman-redeemer in Leviticus 25 is intimately tied up with the law of sabbatical years and the year of Jubilee. These laws reveal the divine principle that no one is to be rejected forever. Even those who have become poor and do not have the means to be redeemed are to be set free in the year of Jubilee. In all of these things, Israel (and the Church)

is representing all of humanity as Firstfruits. They are a circle within a larger circle, and God deals with them as an example to the rest of mankind – as Firstfruits and Firstborn sons.

The year of Jubilee was to occur every forty-ninth/fiftieth year and this would be the year for cancelling all debts and restoring everyone to their original inheritance. The Sabbatical years, which occurred every seventh year, were also to be years of cancelling debts, but this was to apply only to fellow Israelites (Deuteronomy 15), whereas the Jubilee included foreigners as well. Both the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee were to be years of rest dedicated to Yahweh.

These are types of a special redemption during the ages (sabbatical years) and a greater, fuller redemption and restoration of all at the end of the ages (the Great Jubilee). The first includes a heavenly Israel, the Ecclesia of God, and the latter includes all the rest of mankind. As far as God's time clock is concerned, the first coming of Christ was to occur within a special period known as the Seventy Sevens or Weeks, which was revealed to the prophet Daniel. (For further study of this subject, see the section [The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed](#)). This period of seventy sabbatical years (70 x 7) equals 490 years. This symbolises the fullness of the Jubilee (49 x 10). At the conclusion of this period, Jesus had established the kingdom of God and secured the Ransom for the New Covenant. This in turn has become the basis for the ultimate Redemption and Restoration of all creation.

At His first coming, Christ purchased the whole world by paying the correspondent Ransom for humanity, and in turn, secured His hidden treasure and His precious pearl, so that He legally owns the whole lot! At His return He will fully secure His right to the whole earth and He will fully take possession of His special treasure and pearl via the First Resurrection. This will be the first of 'the Sabbath years for cancelling debts,' metaphorically speaking. Another release will occur again at the Second Resurrection at the Great White Throne. Finally, at the consummation of the ages (during the ages of the ages), the Great Jubilee will arrive, in which all of humanity will be released from the Second Death. (God willing, I shall be considering these types in greater detail in my book *The Hidden Prophecies of the Seven Feasts*).

## 6. The Net of Fish

“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

(Matthew 13:47-50 NIV)

This parable is very similar to the earlier one of the Wheat and the Darnel, so I will not be repeating much here. I would advise the reader to refer back to the Wheat and the Darnel. Nevertheless, there are a few subtle differences between these two parables, though the Wheat and the Darnel gives much more detail than this one does. Why, then, you may be asking, are there two parables basically declaring the same truth? Because when God has something extremely important to say, He reveals it at least twice in two different ways to highlight different aspects of the same truth, and to show that it has been established by God and it will come to pass. This can be seen in the instance of Joseph’s two dreams and Pharaoh’s two dreams (Genesis 37:5-11; 41:1-7).

“The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.”

(Genesis 41:32 NIV)

This also occurred with the prophet Daniel, whereby king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a Large Statue, which Daniel interpreted, then Daniel had a vision of Four Beasts, and he also had another dream that filled in further details of the previous dreams and visions, that of a Ram and a Goat (Daniel chapters 2, 7 & 8). All of these visions, particularly the first two, are revealing the same basic truths. This follows the divine principle that every matter is to be established out of the mouth of two or three witnesses (Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1).

So here we have another parable that reveals and confirms the truth that was revealed in the parable of the Wheat and the Darnel. This time we are given the picture of a large ‘dragnet’ (CV) that hauls in a large amount of all kinds (or species) of fish. Then there is a process of separating the good fish from the bad (or rotten) fish; the good fish being placed in baskets while the bad are then thrown away. Of course, a number of Jesus’ disciples would’ve been very familiar with these things, seeing as they were fishermen.

Then Jesus simply says that this is what shall occur at the end of the age. When He returns in the Day of the Lord, He will send out His messengers or angels to separate the righteous from the wicked, and the wicked will be thrown into the Gehenna of fire for age-abiding chastening,

where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, while the righteous will inherit the kingdom.

The Wheat and the Darnel describes this process or judgment of separation in a little more detail. That parable is focusing on the Ecclesia of God, the Church or Christendom, which is composed of the true children of God (the Wheat) and wicked impostors (the Darnel). The Net of Fish, on the other hand, is focusing on the whole of mankind, all peoples and nations, the many 'species of fish,' who will also be judged at that time. In both cases, the unrighteous, wicked ones, who have not truly called upon the Name of the Lord, shall be temporarily destroyed, following which; they shall suffer the chastening of God in the Lake of Fire, which is the Second Death.

Jesus refers to this judgment of separation at His return in the following texts.

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man...they knew nothing about what would happen **until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.** Two men will be in the field; **one will be taken and the other left.** Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; **one will be taken and the other left.**”

(Matthew 24:37-41 NIV)

“ “It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, **fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed...** I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; **one will be taken and the other left.** Two women will be grinding corn together; **one will be taken and the other left.**” “Where, Lord?” they asked. He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.” ”

(Luke 17:28-30, 34-37 NIV)

In the context of the above texts, Jesus was warning His disciples about the Day of His return. He makes it abundantly clear that it will be just like the judgments that took place at the time of Noah and of Lot. Only true believers in Christ, who obey His word, will be saved from this judgment of wrath, while the rest will be destroyed in the judgment, leaving their dead bodies for the birds of prey. Jesus made this clear when the disciples asked Him, “Where, Lord, where will they be taken?” and He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.”

As unpleasant as this may sound, Jesus was confirming the many prophecies of the Old Testament that the Day of Yahweh will involve numerous people being temporarily destroyed in judgment before the kingdom is fully manifested in the New Creation. It had to be done in the past, and it will need to be done again in the near future. The earth will need to be cleansed from the arrogance, wickedness and lawlessness of man. Here is one example:

“See, the LORD is coming with fire...he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD.”

(Isaiah 66:15-16 NIV)

The Apostle Paul also confirms this.

“...the unveiling of the Lord Jesus from heaven with His powerful messengers, **in flaming fire, dealing out vengeance** to those who are not acquainted with God and those who are not obeying the evangel of our Lord Jesus Christ – who shall incur the justice of **eonian extermination** from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of His strength...”

(2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

Here is something to consider in light of the above: If even believers can be taken out in judgment, such as the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11; also cf. 1 Corinthians 11:29-32); and Peter states that judgment begins from the house of God, that is, His people, so if it begins with us, what will become of those who are stubborn as to the gospel; then, as Peter also says, if the righteous are hardly being saved, what about the rest who are irreverent sinners (1 Peter 4:17-18)? Many Christians today are trying to avoid these plain facts concerning the coming judgment of Christ, and instead, they are re-interpreting them to mean something else altogether different. I believe this is dangerous ground and it is a form of unbelief. On the contrary, there is coming a day, and now is, when the same message of the kingdom that Christ and the apostles heralded will also be proclaimed as a testimony to all nations (Matthew 24:14) – “Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is near!”

We shall be considering this subject a little more in some of the other parables. (For further study of prophecy and the Day of the Lord, see [The Day of the Lord](#) and the section [The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed](#)). So in light of this we need to be watching in expectation, producing fruit worthy of repentance, and praying always, so that we may be able to escape the wrath of God and stand before the Son of Man as true sons of God (Luke 21:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

In closing this parable, let us return to the subject of the fish in the sea. The prophet Ezekiel saw a preview of the blessings of the New Covenant Gospel in the vision of the Temple. In Ezekiel 47:1-12, we have the vision of the River of Life winding its way down the Mountain of the Lord, having its source in the Temple at the summit. The River flows down the Jordan Valley and into the Dead Sea. It then causes the Dead Sea to become fresh, so that it becomes full of living creatures and many species of fish. There is also the mention of fishermen, and the spreading of nets, as well as fruit trees for food, with their leaves for healing. So essentially we have the River of Life, the Fruit of the Spirit and the Tree of Life, and the Mountain (or Kingdom) of God.

Now if you've been carefully paying attention so far in this book, or if you are familiar with the teaching of the New Testament, you will notice that Jesus spoke of these things in His parables and teaching, and so did the apostles in their writings. These details in Ezekiel are also very similar to that which is recorded in Revelation 22:1-2. These things are symbols and spiritual pictures of the blessings of the Gospel of the kingdom in Christ Jesus.

The River is the Holy Spirit of God, which brings Life to the Dead. The fish are the peoples of the earth. The fishermen are Christ's 'fishers of men,' His gospel messengers, who are catching the Elect Remnant of God in their nets, etc, etc.

In relation to this, John 21:1-14 gives us the account of the miraculous catch of fish that occurred after Jesus' resurrection. There is great significance in the fact that it gives the exact number of fish that were in the net once they arrived at the shore - 153. This represents the full number of the chosen ones of God, who have believed the Gospel heralded by the Apostles, the fishers of men (there were 7 disciples present at this time, which speaks of Apostolic Spiritual Fullness). It is very interesting to note, that the Gematria (where the letters are also numbers) for the Hebrew for 'sons of God' is **153!**

For further study of this, I would recommend the classic book *Number in Scripture* by E. W. Bullinger.

Oh, the wonder of the Word and Works of God! I pray that you, the reader, may be dragged into Christ's Net as a good fish!

## 7. The Grain Seed

He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain (*literally ‘fruit’*)—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

(Mark 4:26-29 NIV)

The meaning of this parable is intimately linked to a number of the previous parables, particularly [The Sower](#) and [The Mustard Seed](#). Jesus is focusing on the miracle of nature whereby a seed of grain, whether wheat or barley, once sown in the soil, begins to sprout and grow of its own accord and power. It is the Spirit of God that gives everything life, including that which grows in the earth. Man only has to sow the seed in the right soil and then wait for the seed to germinate.

Even the task of watering it is primarily left to God in sending rain upon the earth. Water itself is the source of all life because, without it, we would all die. All of these things of nature are God-given and we should learn to be thankful to Him for providing us with such blessings, while not taking it all for granted.

In the past, God often used drought as a sign of His judgment upon Israel and the other nations revealing that He is the only One who provides us with everything we need, not only for our survival, but for our enjoyment (1 Timothy 6:17). According to Zechariah 14:16-19, God still uses this judgment of ‘no rainfall’ as a means of chastening against those nations who do not go up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This may have had a more literal fulfillment in the past concerning ancient Israel, but under the New Covenant, its meaning becomes more spiritual.

Allegorically speaking, this prophecy is teaching us that those who do *not* grow into spiritual maturity and reap a good harvest of fruit to God (fulfilling the feast of Tabernacles in the *New Heavenly Jerusalem*, as those who worship in spirit and truth) will be disciplined with a lack of spiritual refreshment and anointing (the rainfall). It also symbolises the future judgment of the Second Death, where the spiritual drought will be due to the ‘unquenchable fire’ of God, for those who are experiencing it. (For further study of the Judgment associated with the Second Death, see [The First and Second Resurrections and the Judgment Day](#)).

Scripture and nature teaches us that there are three stages of physical and spiritual growth as follows:

1. Infancy
2. Adolescence
3. Adulthood

## The Secrets of the Parables

These are represented by the following Biblical figures, which Jesus Himself also experienced:

1. Circumcision (Milk)
2. Bar Mitzvah (Solid Food)
3. Sonship (or placing of a son, also known as Adoption, which usually occurred when the child/man was 30 years of age)

These are also represented by the following phrases, particularly in John's first letter:

1. Little Children (Immaturity)
2. Young Men (Growing Maturity)
3. Fathers (Full and Greater Maturity)

The three main Feasts of the Lord also represent this three-fold progression:

1. Passover (Justified - Spirit)
2. Pentecost (Sanctified – Soul)
3. Tabernacles (Glorified – Body)

There are a number of other three-fold examples that could be given, but these will suffice. God willing, these subjects will be considered in more detail in the book *The Hidden Prophecies of the Seven Feasts*.

These three stages of spiritual growth are also being figured in the above parable of the Grain Seed, namely, the stalk, the head and then the full kernel in the head. There isn't any way that we can escape this divine order or try and take a short cut. It has to occur first in the soulish, physical realm, and then in the spiritual realm. We must all travel the same path from Passover to Tabernacles; from immaturity to full maturity; from the soulish to the spiritual; from the old humanity to the new humanity. This has to occur on a personal level and on a corporate level, in the individual temple, as well as the corporate temple.

Yet Jesus is also saying that the spiritual kingdom of God in this present age will continue to grow and bear fruit of its own accord **for it does not depend on man for its growth and power**. God will accomplish His purpose in the earth through His Ecclesia until the time of the harvest at Christ's return, when the sons of God shall be unveiled, and the Bride will have made herself ready for the Wedding Feast. Then He will gather the wheat into His barn (Revelation 14:14-16; Matthew 3:12).

## 8. The Fig Tree

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ “ ‘Sir,’ (*Lord*) the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’ ”

(Luke 13:6-9 NIV)

Jesus told this parable towards the end of His three and a half year ministry, just before He began making His final journey to Jerusalem to present Himself to the people there on the 10<sup>th</sup> Nisan 33 AD, when He rode into the city on a donkey and it’s colt. This parable of the Fig Tree is the first of 3 significant lessons relating to the fig tree, and it lays the foundation for what follows a few days later while Jesus was teaching in Jerusalem.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the nation of Israel is often represented as a Fig Tree, an Olive Tree or a Vine. (The vineyard itself also represents the land of Israel, particularly Jerusalem. We shall be considering the vineyard in more detail in the next parable, The Vineyard Farmers, but in the meantime we shall be focusing on the Fig Tree. We have considered the Olive Tree in other articles on the website.

These three fruit trees represent Israel’s original intended role of being God’s anointed Prophet (Fig Tree), speaking out God’s words to the world and bearing good fruit; His Kingdom (Vineyard) in which the judgments of God would be manifested to the world; and His Priest (Olive Tree), mediating between God and mankind, and bringing spiritual illumination. The ultimate fulfilment of these fruit trees is in Jesus Himself, Who, as the Messiah, the Anointed One, is the perfect Prophet, Chief Priest and King.

### The Fig Tree

In the above parable, the owner of the vineyard is God the Father, and the vineyardist or gardener is Jesus, the Son. Through Christ, God had been visiting His vineyard, Jerusalem, for 3 years to look for fruit on His fig tree, Israel – but He did not find any. This had particular relevance to the religious leaders of the Jews who represented the people before God. Due to its lack of fruit over a three-year period, judgment is pronounced upon the nation to cut it down.

Yet the gardener, Christ, intercedes for the nation to allow them one more year to bear fruit. During that time, He will dig the soil and put manure on it, that is, seek to bring the nation to repentance in order for them to bring forth good fruit. But if they still do not bear good fruit after that time, then the tree is to be cut down. This 'extra year' was an example of God's mercy and grace as manifested in, and through, Christ.

Sadly, as we know from Scripture, during that fourth year the Jews crucified their Messiah, and shortly after they rejected His servants as well, eventually putting Stephen to death. So judgment came upon the Jews and Jerusalem, cutting down the fruitless fig tree, although it didn't actually occur until almost 40 years later in 70-73 AD due to an era of grace. Nevertheless, the fig tree was cursed - the judgment was pronounced - and it withered away.

## A New Fruit Tree

There is also an allusion here to the Law of Planting New Fruit Trees in Leviticus 19:23-25.

“When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree, regard its fruit as forbidden (*Heb. Uncircumcised*). For three years you are to consider it forbidden (*Heb. Uncircumcised*); it must not be eaten. **In the fourth year all its fruit will be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD.** But in the fifth year you may eat its fruit. In this way your harvest will be increased. I am the LORD your God.” (NIV)

When planting a new fruit tree, the Israelites were not allowed to eat the fruit of it for three years. It was to be treated as though it was uncircumcised and unclean, and therefore, they were forbidden to eat it. In the fourth year, they were still not allowed to eat it, but the whole crop of that year had to be offered as firstfruits to Yahweh via the priests at the Tabernacle or Temple. Only the priests could partake of this firstfruit praise offering. Then in the fifth year, the Israelites could enjoy the fruit. If they obeyed this law then they would be blessed with an ever-increasing harvest of fruit.

When Jesus came to minister to the lost sheep of the house of Israel in the land, He was planting a new fruit tree – the Tree of Life, the New Covenant. The people could not fully enter into this covenant and eat its fruit for three years while they remained uncircumcised in their hearts. Yet this tree was gradually bearing fruit in a little flock, the Ecclesia of God. But it wasn't until the fourth year that the firstfruits were offered to God at the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost while the small group of believers were in the temple courts.

The Body/Bride of Christ, the true Church of God, the Royal Priesthood, are the firstfruits being offered as a praise offering. Since that time, in the great Fifth Year, the era of Grace, the fruit of the New Covenant Tree of Life has been blessing Jews and Gentiles alike, and this shall continue until the time of the Great Harvest.

## Good and Bad Figs

Over 500 years earlier, the prophet Jeremiah had warned the people of Judah and Jerusalem that God would judge their wickedness and fruitlessness.

“I will take away their harvest, declares the LORD. There will be no grapes on the vine. **There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither.** What I have given them will be taken from them.”

(Jeremiah 8:13 NIV)

During the time of the Babylonian Exile, when the judgments had already begun, Jeremiah was given a vision of two baskets of figs being offered to God in front of the temple in Jerusalem. One basket had very good figs, the kind that ripen early, while the other was full of bad figs that couldn't be eaten. He was told that the good figs represented the people who had obeyed God in submitting to the yoke of Babylon, knowing that this was God's chastening upon the people; while the bad figs represented those who were in rebellion against God, seeking to fight their divine chastening every way they could. God told Jeremiah that the good figs would be accepted, while the bad figs would be destroyed (Jeremiah 24).

Jesus' words echoed the words of Jeremiah concerning the good figs and the bad figs. The good figs represented those Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, while the bad figs represented the rest of the nation who rejected Him and His prophetic words. The latter would remain under a curse, while the former would be blessed as God's true people.

## The Cursed Fig Tree

During the final couple of days of Jesus' ministry, just before His death at Passover in the spring of 33 AD, a very significant event occurred, which was also a continuation of the parable of the Fig Tree.

“Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. **Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves.** Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.”

(Matthew 21:18-20 NIV)

“The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it... In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! **The fig tree you cursed has withered!**”

(Mark 11:12-14, 20-21 NIV)

This special fig tree was situated somewhere on the Mount of Olives near Bethany, outside Jerusalem. This whole episode was a parable in action. Jesus came to look for fruit on this fig tree because He was hungry. The purpose of the tree was to produce fruit to eat, and the Creator of all needed some breakfast from it – yet He found nothing. If this had been a good fruit-bearing fig tree, then there would've been some early ripe figs or at the least, some late figs left over from the previous year for Jesus to eat, even though it was not the general season for harvesting figs.

Nevertheless, there should also have been plenty of green unripe figs, as these bud before the leaves come out in early spring, and this tree had leaves. So this tree had the appearance of

being alive and fruitful, yet it had no fruit at all, but only leaves. So it was cursed, and its leaves withered immediately. The spirit of life within it was cut off due to the power of Christ's words. The following day, Peter drew attention to it again, seeing that the whole tree had now withered from the roots.

Now contrary to how it may appear, Jesus did not curse the fig tree because He was annoyed that He couldn't have some breakfast! There was a very good reason as to why the Father told Him to do this – the fig tree is Israel. On the outside, the nation looked alive, serving God at the temple with religious fervour – yet spiritually, they were fruitless. They relied on their own ability and man-made traditions, covering their nakedness with the fig leaves of fleshly works, recalling the desperate act of the first human pair to cover the shame of their transgression (Genesis 3:7).

At best, the religious leaders were a basket of bad figs. In view of the events that were about to transpire at Passover 33 AD, and throughout the following year, Jesus prophetically pronounced the curse upon Jerusalem and the people of Israel. As a result of this, the fig tree withered and died. This is the inevitable final end of all flesh and its works – withered, dead fig leaves! The meaning of this parable can also be applied to Christendom, as the Church is now God's fig tree, but she has become Secret Babylon, and is therefore also cursed.

Jesus went on to use this miraculous sign as a means of teaching the disciples about faith and God's power, but the meaning of this sign is found in the parable of the Fig Tree. It was during these few days that Jesus also taught the parable of the Vineyard Farmers, which we shall consider later, and He also completed the third instalment of the parable of the fig tree.

It needs to be emphasised here that Jesus *did not* say, as some translations have it, that the fig tree was never ever to bear fruit again forever. What He actually said, as recorded in the original Greek, was “May you no longer bear fruit (or may no one eat fruit from you again) **for the age.**” He was referring to this present age of indefinite duration, during which time the nation of Israel will not bear spiritual fruit fit to eat.

## The Fig Tree Will Live Again

Now let us consider the final installment of the parable of the fig tree.

**“Now learn this lesson (or parable) from the fig tree:** As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”

(Matthew 24:32-34 NIV)

Jesus went on to tell His disciples that the parable of the fig tree doesn't end with the curse – the Fig Tree, the nation of Israel, will burst into life again towards the end of the age, not only physically, but spiritually as well. (Luke 21:29 adds “... the fig tree and all the trees” indicating that all nations will be showing signs of life). In the same way as a fig tree begins to bloom and sprout early fruit and leaves in the spring, heralding the approaching of summer, when the figs will be ripe for harvesting, so the nation of Israel will burst into life again on the world stage as all the things that are prophesied will come to pass, particularly with the focus

on Jerusalem. This is the sign that the kingdom of God is near, right at the door, because summer is coming and the fig tree will be restored and will bear fruit! Praise God!

But what did Jesus mean when He said, “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened?”

## This Generation

There are a number of various interpretations of what Jesus was saying here, but I believe that there are two ways we can interpret this - and both are correct. Many times throughout His ministry to Israel, Jesus spoke about “*this wicked and adulteress generation,*” which generally referred to those who were alive at that time. A generation was usually understood to be 40 years, due to the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness for ancient Israel, until that 'Exodus' generation had died.

A good portion of the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 (also Mark 13 and Luke 21) is describing the then future events of the first century concerning the judgment of Jerusalem and the temple, and the 'days of vengeance' upon the Jewish people. Jesus said all of this to answer the disciples' question about the temple's destruction, which included the signs that would occur, which would indicate that it was about to happen. But they had also assumed that this would coincide with Christ's return at the end of the age, so they'd also asked Jesus about his Coming or Presence (which only Matthew recorded). So Jesus proceeds to answer all their questions by prophesying these events.

The first interpretation of 'this generation' would be that this refers to the generation of Jews living at that time in the first century, from 30-70 AD, who would experience all these things coming upon Judah and Jerusalem via the Jewish/ Roman war of that period. These things are covered in more detail in the section [The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed](#).

But in some passages, the context clearly demands that “*this generation*” is referring to **the whole wicked generation of unbelieving Israel, beginning many centuries before Christ and continuing right through to the end of the age** (Matthew 12:39-45). Here is one such example, which is appropriate to the cursing of the fig tree.

“...so that **on you** should be coming all the just blood shed on the earth, from the blood of just Abel until the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, **whom you murder** between the temple and the altar. Verily, I am saying to you: **All these things will be arriving on this generation**... Jerusalem!... Lo! **your house is left to you desolate**. For I am saying to you: You may by no means be perceiving Me henceforth, **till you should be saying**, ‘Blessed is He Who is coming in the name of the Lord!’”

(Matthew 23:35-39 CV)

In the above passage quoted from Matthew, Jesus prophesies that the judgment would come ‘**on you,**’ that is, on those who would be alive during the period from 33-70 AD, the time when the judgments actually took place. And He also said that *they* had murdered the priest and prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah - even though he had lived and died many centuries before

them! These people were not hundreds of years old, yet they *were* connected to ‘this generation’ or race of Israel that Jesus was speaking about!

**So the phrase ‘*this generation*’ can, and does, have a wider application, depending on the context.** This is often overlooked by many Bible teachers who then limit this phrase to either the past or the future, but the truth is, it can apply to the past, present *and* future.

Jeremiah had prophesied that the descendents of Israel would continue as a nation until the end of this age, until the physical laws of this old creation would pass away.

This is what the LORD says,  
he who appoints the sun  
to shine by day,  
who decrees the moon and stars  
to shine by night,  
who stirs up the sea  
so that its waves roar—  
the LORD Almighty is his name:

"Only if these decrees vanish from my sight,"  
declares the LORD,  
"will the descendants of Israel ever cease  
to be a nation before me."

(Jeremiah 31:35-36 NIV; see also Jeremiah 33:19-26)

And God also made it clear that they would always be a spiritual remnant of Israel, for He would not completely reject all of the descendents of Israel because of their sins.

This is what the LORD says:  
"Only if the heavens above can be measured  
and the foundations of the earth below be searched out  
will I reject all the descendants of Israel  
because of all they have done,"  
declares the LORD.

(Jeremiah 31:37 NIV)

So whichever way one looks at these prophecies, they are definitely declaring that a spiritual Israel will continue until Christ's return and the establishing of the New Creation. But for this to occur, there also needs to be a physical nation of Israel after the flesh, out of which comes the spiritual remnant. And that's exactly how it is to this day.

Therefore, in the context of Matthew 24:34 quoted earlier, ‘*this generation*’ can also be referring to the **final generation of unbelieving Israel** who will see **all these things** unfold (that is, the various signs and events of Christ's Return), and they will not completely pass by until **all these things have occurred - which includes the visible return of Christ Himself!** Only then will the wicked generation ‘pass by’ and be no more, having no place in the New Jerusalem. The bad figs will be (temporarily) destroyed.

Jesus is also confirming that no matter what the Jewish people have to endure throughout this present age due to the curse, even being crushed in the winepress of His wrath, a remnant will ultimately be restored as a fruitful Fig Tree and a fruitful Vine, grafted back into their own Olive Tree, brought back from the dead, to serve their God in righteousness and holiness, welcoming their true Messiah in the Name of the Lord. Then the Tree of Life (Christ and His Body) will be planted on this earth, bearing its 12 crops of fruit each month for the people of the earth to feed on, and the leaves of the Tree will be for the healing of the nations, including Israel according to the flesh (Revelation 2:7; 22:2; Ezekiel 47:12). This is ultimate Restoration and Reconciliation.

[As a note of interest, it is my belief that the original Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the centre of the Garden of Eden was a fig tree. This is clearly implied in Genesis 3:7 where we are told that Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to make coverings for themselves immediately after they had both eaten from this tree. A thoughtful study of figs and fig trees throughout Scripture will show this to be so.

It is also my belief that the original Tree of Life was an almond tree, or at least, it is represented in Scripture by an almond tree. The key examples are: the budding of Aaron's staff overnight, which became an almond branch producing almonds (Numbers 17); and the exterior appearance of the seven-branched golden candlestick (Menorah) resembled an almond tree (Exodus 25:31-40; 37:17-22). Both of these are types and symbols of the Messiah Himself.

Be that as it may, in the vision of Revelation, the Tree of Life is described as being on both sides of the river and bearing twelve crops of fruit, one for each month (Revelation 22:2). Whether this is indicating that the crops are the same 'fruit-kind' or different 'fruit-kinds' is unclear, nevertheless, the tree is literally called the 'wood' or 'log of life' implying that this 'tree' was once dead, but now it is living! This, of course, symbolises Christ Jesus Himself. And to eat from this Tree is to have age-abiding Life in the Kingdom of God].

## 9. The Vineyard Farmers

“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.

Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end (*Evil men! Evilly will he be destroying them - CV*),” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone (*head of the corner - CV*); the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?

“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people (*Gr. ethnos - ‘nation’ CV*) who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed (*Gr. ‘scattered like chaff’*).” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them.

(Matthew 21:33-45 NIV; also Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19)

### The Vineyard is The Kingdom

Jesus spoke this parable during His last four days in Jerusalem, just before His death at Passover of 33 A.D, while He was teaching in the temple courts. The Landowner is God and the Vineyard represents His kingdom inheritance. In the Old Testament, the nation and land of Israel represented God’s kingdom, especially as it was embodied in His capital city of Jerusalem, the place of His Name, represented in the Temple. The prophet Isaiah spoke of this quite clearly.

“I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. **He dug it up and cleared it**

**of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah,** judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?

Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.

**The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.**”

(Isaiah 5:1-7 NIV)

Isaiah gives us a clear description of Jerusalem as the centre of God’s Vineyard, referring to a wall, a watchtower and a winepress. Jesus uses these same words in the parable. These terms are used a number of times throughout the prophets in relation to Jerusalem and Israel. The winepress is particularly used in relation to the judgment of Jerusalem and the people of God, as well as the coming judgment on all nations (Joel 3:12-14; Isaiah 63:2-6; Revelation 14:18-20; 19:15).

The people of God were supposed to bring forth the fruit of the vineyard – grapes, but instead of bearing good fruit, the fruit of righteousness, they bore bad fruit, the rotten fruit of wickedness. This had now come to a head in Jesus’ time, as the people of Israel were about to reject the Messiah Himself, the Son of the Landowner.

“I had planted you like a **choice vine** of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?”  
(Jeremiah 2:21 NIV)

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Let them glean the remnant of Israel as thoroughly as a vine; pass your hand over the branches again, like one gathering grapes.” ”

(Jeremiah 6:9 NIV)

## God’s Judgment on Jerusalem

God is the Owner of His land and His people, as well as being the Owner of the whole world. For almost 1000 years before Jesus arrived, God had been sending His servants, the prophets, to His vineyard tenant farmers to collect His fruit, particularly as the era of harvest time was approaching. (Take note here that the era of the First Coming of Christ was viewed as a time of Harvest, yet there is a greater Harvest still to come at the end of this age in relation to Christ's Second Coming. These things are discussed in the subsequent parables).

The leaders of Israel, however, who represented the tenant farmers, proceeded to persecute these servants by beating them, killing them and stoning them. Then more servants were sent out, but this time the leaders of Judah beat them, killed them and stoned them. Last of all, God was now sending His Son to them to claim His rightful inheritance. Was Jesus respected and accepted by the tenants? NO! Instead, they saw Him as a threat to their positions of religious and political power, **for they knew Him to be the Heir to the kingdom inheritance**. Notice that the Pharisees and the chief priests knew something of the meaning of Jesus' parables, *for they knew it was about them* (Matthew 21:45). Therefore, they plotted to kill Him, eventually throwing Him out of the vineyard (Jerusalem) and murdering Him (on the Mount of Olives, near the place of the Sacrifice of the Red Heifer).

At this point in the parable, Jesus asked the crowd "When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" He may have been speaking rhetorically, yet some of them replied, "Evil men! Evilly will he be destroying them, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." Little did they know that out of their own mouths they were pronouncing God's judgment on the city of Jerusalem, which was eventually fulfilled in 70 A.D. Jesus then reminded them of the messianic prophecy in Psalm 118 concerning the Stone that the builders rejected. The people, via their leaders, represented as the builders of the kingdom, were about to reject the Chief Cornerstone of the building of God! Yet even their rejection of the Living Stone fulfilled the purpose of God to make Him Head of the corner – and it is marvellous in our eyes!

For those who fall on this Stone, they will be broken before Him as His humble followers; yet to those on whom it falls, they will be crushed in judgment, scattered like chaff in the wind.

## God's New Temple

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit of God is now continuing to build His kingdom inheritance with living stones – the Ecclesia of God, the Body/Bride of Christ, composed of Jew and Gentile.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and **members of God's household, built on the foundation** of the apostles and prophets, **with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone**. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him **you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit**.

(Ephesians 2:19-22 NIV)

As you come to him, **the living Stone**—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—**you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood**, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the

capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey (*are stubborn to*) the message—which is also what they were destined (*appointed*) for.

(1 Peter 2:4-8 NIV)

## The New Nation

Even though the nation of Israel was promised the rights to the original kingdom inheritance of God, as they were the vineyard, yet due to their rejection of Jesus as Messiah and Lord, the vineyard of Jerusalem was to be judged and destroyed. As a result of this, the vineyard (the kingdom) would be given to a nation (or people) who will produce the fruit at harvest time. This nation is the heavenly Israel, the overcomers, the Ecclesia of God who belong to the New Jerusalem. These are the royal priests who will rule the world with Christ in a Melchizedek priesthood, and they will inherit the kingdom promises (that is, age-abiding life), as sons of Abraham and sons of God.

But you are a chosen people, **a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God**, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

(1 Peter 2:9-10 NIV)

“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, **I will give authority over the nations**— ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’— just as I have received authority from my Father.”

(Revelation 2:26-27 NIV)

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—**heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ**, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

(Romans 8:17 NIV)

If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the law was given to the people), why was there still need for another priest to come—one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law...For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal (eonian) inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

(Hebrews 7:11-12; 9:15 NIV)

## The Secrets of the Parables

Even though many of the true Ecclesia of God have died in faith, not as yet having received the promised inheritance (because they are not consciously in heaven, but are in the sleep of death awaiting the resurrection), some having died before Christ came and others having died since then, nevertheless, the era is very near when the last living stone will complete the temple of God, and Christ shall then return to fill His Temple with glory and power as we receive the kingdom inheritance together – as the Vineyard of the Lord Almighty. This is the true Sabbath-rest of God that still remains (Hebrews 4:8-11).

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. **God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.**

(Hebrews 11:39-40 NIV)

## 10. The Wedding Feast and The Great Feast

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet (wedding festivities – CV) for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

For many are invited (*called* – CV), but few are chosen.”

(Matthew 22:1-14 NIV)

This parable of the Wedding Feast (or Banquet) is closely linked to the parable of the Great Feast (or Banquet or Dinner) in Luke 14, which is why we shall consider both of these together. The main theme in the Wedding Feast is, of course, wedding festivities. As we shall see shortly, the Great Feast doesn’t mention anything about a wedding, but the emphasis of both parables is the same – that of the celebratory feast that is the Kingdom of God.

Throughout the Old Testament, God’s people, Israel, are figured as a bride and wife of God, and God eventually had to divorce Israel because she was unfaithful to His covenant. (For further study see *The Faithful Love of the Husband of Israel*). There is also the underlying idea that the coming manifestation of the kingdom of God will be like a wedding for the Messiah and His people, but this theme is not developed much in the OT, it is only there through

various inferences and typology. In the New Testament, though, the wedding theme is clearly revealed.

## First Century Jewish Weddings

Before we consider this parable in detail, we need some background information on Jewish weddings at the time of Christ. There were **three main stages** to getting married in the ancient Near East. We shall see that Jesus used all three stages to illustrate spiritual truth about Himself and His Body/Bride and the kingdom of the heavens.

- 1) **The Arrangement.** Firstly, while the couple were still usually quite young, the parents, especially the father, would arrange the marriage and sometimes they would be assisted by a 'matchmaker.' When they had settled the matter, the groom's family would pay a dowry or bride-price to the bride's family as a kind of security for the bride – a purchase price to seal the deal, if you will.
- 2) **The Betrothal or Engagement.** Then came the official betrothal ceremony. This was usually held at the bride's parent's house in the company of family and friends. The couple would exchange vows (and sometimes rings) and the groom would usually give his bride some gifts. This betrothal was legally binding and it could only be annulled through divorce or death (cp. Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38; 2:4-5 concerning Joseph and Mary). During the following year or two, the groom would begin to prepare a place for himself and his bride by usually building an extension onto his father's house.
- 3) **The Wedding Festivities.** The final stage was the actual wedding festivities, which, for a virgin marrying for the first time (as opposed to a widow remarrying), would last seven days (cp. Genesis 29:26-28 concerning Leah's bridal week). At the appointed time, the bridegroom would make his way to the bride's house with his friends. This would usually occur at night to give the element of surprise, but the bride didn't know exactly when her bridegroom would arrive. So she had to be prepared, ready and waiting for him, attended by her bridesmaids, who were usually young maidens or virgins, holding burning torches or lamps so that they could receive and welcome the bridegroom when he arrived.

The bridegroom would then take his bride, accompanied by all the friends and attendants, to either his father's house or a large hall nearby. Then the weeklong festivities would begin. It would be during this week, in their private chamber at night, that the bride and groom would physically consummate their marriage. Then the bride/wife would remove her veil to reveal her face to everyone.

Now for those who are familiar with the teaching of the New Testament, particularly that of Jesus and Paul, you will recognise many amazing and beautiful parallels emerging in the above three stages in relation to what is contained in the NT concerning our relationship to Christ. Here are some of those parallels.

Firstly, our heavenly Father has chosen His Son's Bride well in advance and He has paid the bride-price through His own Sacrifice to purchase His precious Pearl, and He has given His

Bride (the Body of Christ Ecclesia) a heavenly deposit (the Holy Spirit) as security (Ephesians 1:3-14; Matthew 13:45).

Secondly, through His First Coming (to His bride's home) and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, the Son (Jesus Christ) has been officially betrothed to His Virgin Bride and He has showered her with gifts (gifts and blessings of the Spirit) (Ephesians 4:7-8; 2 Corinthians 11:2-3).

Thirdly, He will return at the appointed time to claim His Bride, and she must be ready and waiting, for she doesn't know exactly when He will arrive. Then the Wedding Festivities will begin and the Bride will be in intimate union with her Bridegroom for the whole figurative week of the coming kingdom (the number seven symbolises spiritual completion or fulfillment). It is also at this time that she will be unveiled to the guests (the peoples of the world) as the Wife of the Lamb (which Paul calls '**the unveiling of the sons of God**' - Romans 8:19).

Nevertheless, without trying to confuse the matter, it can also be said that this spiritual intimacy between Christ and His bride is already a fact, in spirit, even now, as we are already His spiritual body/bride, who is at one with her husband. Yet the ultimate manifestation, though, is still in the future.

After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church (*ecclesia* – CV)— **for we are members of his body**. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery (literally *secret* - CV)—**but I am talking about Christ and the church**.

(Ephesians 5:29-32 NIV)

In the meantime, the Bridegroom (Christ) is preparing and building a place for His Bride, which is an extension of His Father's house (God's House, the true Temple of God with many rooms or abodes).

“In my Father's house are many rooms (or *abodes*); if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

(John 14:2-3 NIV)

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. **And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit**.

(Ephesians 2:21-22 NIV)

Many other details that could be mentioned are portrayed in some of the other parables that we shall be considering in the next few chapters.

Also, the events in Genesis Chapter 24, where Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac, are a beautiful picture or allegory of God choosing a wife for His Son. Much could be said about this, nevertheless, we need to get back to our parable.

Well, now that we have this background information, let us consider this parable of the Wedding Feast.

## The Wedding Feast is the Kingdom

God, the Father, is the King who is preparing wedding festivities for His Son, Jesus. The people of Israel were the original guests who were invited to the Wedding Feast, that is, the kingdom of God. During, and after, the First Coming of Christ, God sent out His servants, His prophets and apostles, to summon those of Israel who had been invited to come to the Feast, for everything was now ready. But on the whole, the majority did not want to come to the Feast when it was time. They all made various excuses and refused to go. Some of them even persecuted God's servants and killed them. This enraged God, so in His righteous indignation, He sent His army to destroy those murderers and to burn down their city.

This is a veiled prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the War of 66-70 AD – and yet notice that the Romans are viewed as being God's army to bring judgment on the Jewish people for their sins. Later, Jesus made it very clear that this judgment would befall the Jews because of their murders – particularly that of murdering the Son of God, which filled up the measure of the sins of their fathers. This was to bring wrath, distress and days of vengeance upon the people for an indefinite period of time, beginning with Jerusalem's burning by the Romans, and leading to the ultimate Day of the Lord – in fulfilment of all that has been written.

The historical details passed down to us from the Jewish historian, Josephus, in his book *The Jewish War*, shows us the awful state of the Jewish nation at that time and how they brought this destruction upon themselves through their great wickedness and violence. This same warning applies to the Jewish nation today, also, for the prophetic pattern or cycle has not yet reached its complete fulfilment in the Day of the Lord. Let us here these solemn words of Jesus.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. **Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!**

You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell (*Gehenna*)? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. **And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth**, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the

temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. **Look, your house is left to you desolate.** For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

(Matthew 23:29-39 NIV)

“But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them... **When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near.** Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment (*days of vengeance* – CV) in fulfilment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! **There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations.** Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles (*nations*) until the times of the Gentiles (*nations*) are fulfilled.

(Luke 21:12-24 NIV)

## Wedding Clothes

So due to the fact that Israel rejected their special invitation to enter the kingdom of God, for they did not deserve to come, the King then sent His servants, the apostles and prophets, to invite anyone, anywhere to the Feast, whether good or wicked. They did so and the wedding was filled with guests.

This was ultimately fulfilled in the ministry of the Apostles, especially the apostle Paul, as he was uniquely chosen to be the apostle to the nations. Through his ministry, many ‘good and wicked’ people from all nations believed, repented and became followers of Christ and, therefore, were invited to the Wedding Feast of the Kingdom. This invitation is still going out to all the nations of the world and many are being called to accept it. Therefore, the Wedding Hall is not quite filled with all the guests – yet!

But the parable doesn’t end here. Jesus goes on to say that when the King comes to see the guests, He finds a man there without any wedding clothes! When asked how he got in without wedding clothes, the man says nothing. The King then orders that this intruder be tied up and thrown outside into the darkness.

The last words of Jesus concerning this parable in verses 13-14 appear to be added after, and therefore, they probably don't belong to the actual parable narrative itself. That is, they are not the words of the King in the parable, but Jesus' additional words of teaching in relation to the parable. The CV brings this out. It reads,

“...outer darkness.’ There shall be lamentation and gnashing of teeth. For many are the called, yet few are the chosen.”

Nevertheless, the truth remains the same either way. This guest is thrown out of the Wedding party! Now in First Century Palestine, invited guests were often given white wedding clothes (linen garments), particularly by the wealthy, as they arrived for the wedding festivities. So anyone not wearing these garments would stand out from the rest. In the parable, the man was actually an intruder who had gatecrashed the party, so he hadn't been given his white linen wedding garment. This is why the King had him bound and thrown out into the darkness of the night.

Now a search through the Bible will reveal some interesting details about white linen garments. Firstly, it brings to mind the linen tunics that the Levitical priests had to wear when they were ministering at the Tabernacle or Temple (Exodus 28:39-41). The blood spattered garments, as a result of the animal sacrifices, were a constant reminder of the people's sins and God's provision for forgiveness. Yet God promised that their garments would become white as snow, symbolising the eradication of sin.

“Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD.  
“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;  
though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”

(Isaiah 1:18 NIV also Psalm 51:7)

The pure whiteness of these garments symbolises the absolute righteousness and purity of God, as well as the Glory of God. Christ Himself, as the One Who reflects the Glory of God, can shine as white as snow (Revelation 1:14; Matthew 17:2).

Yet the NT teaches that the chosen followers of Christ are a royal priesthood and we are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, **and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father**—to him be glory and power for ever and ever (*for the ages of the ages*)! Amen.

(Revelation 1:5b-6 NIV)

But you are a chosen people, **a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

(1 Peter 2:9 NIV)

Yet now, apart from law, a righteousness of God is manifest (being attested by the law and the prophets), **yet a righteousness of God through Jesus Christ's faith, for all, and on all who are believing**, for there is no distinction, for all sinned and are wanting of the glory of God.

(Romans 3:21-23 CV)

God made him who had no sin to be sin (or *sin offering*) for us, **so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

(2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV)

Then in Revelation 19:7-9 we are told the following in relation to the Return of Christ,

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! **For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.**” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Then the angel said to me, “Write: **‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’**” “ And he added, “These are the true words of God.” (NIV)

Take note of the following in relation to the full manifestation of the Kingdom of God at Christ's Return:

1. The **Wedding of the Lamb** has come
2. **His Bride** has made herself ready
3. **Fine linen**, bright and clean, is given to **the Bride**
4. Happy are those who are invited to the **Wedding Feast**

This confirms that the Kingdom of the Heavens *is* the Wedding Feast, particularly in its full manifestation at Christ's Return (that is, in the Day of the Lord). His Bride and Wife are His called, chosen and faithful followers, who are termed Overcomers and the Sons of God, who are prepared for His Return through their faithful and righteous acts.

And the fine white linen that is given to the Bride is said to be **‘the righteous acts of the saints.’** Not only have we been given the righteousness of God in Christ, we also have to *walk* in the righteous acts of Christ. Only then can we confirm that we are among the called and chosen ones of God; the Overcomers; the Bride and Wife of the Lamb – and, in the words of the parable, those who are clothed with the wedding garments.

For those who try to get in to the Kingdom (or be saved) without wedding clothes (that is, *not* clothed with the righteousness of God in Christ) will not succeed. Instead they will be thrown out into spiritual darkness, where there will be weeping and bitter gnashing of teeth. (For further information on these things, see the earlier parable of *The Wheat and the Darnel*). We must bear in mind that ‘Many are called (or invited) to share in the Kingdom blessings, but

only the few are chosen.’ These chosen ones are guaranteed salvation, for they belong to the Body/Bride of Christ. (For further details, see the earlier parable of *The Sower*).

It goes without saying that these chosen ones are also those who have been invited to the Feast, and they have accepted the invitation of the blessing of salvation. These are the ‘invited ones’ of Revelation 19:9 who are blessed because they have been graciously invited to share in the Happy Day of the Kingdom of God – the Great Wedding Feast of the Son. This is confirmed in the following parable.

## The Great Feast

Here is the parable of The Great Feast, which teaches us the same basic truths as the Wedding Feast.

When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’ “ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’ ”

(Luke 14:15-24 NIV)

In this instance, the Feast has nothing to do with a wedding, nevertheless, the overall meaning is the same. It is self-evident that there are many parallels in these two parables. Basically, they are both declaring the same truth, with slightly different emphases, but essentially they are the same.

Take note that in both of these parables, those of Israel were the original guests who had previously received the special invitation to come to the feast. Yet when the time came for the feast to begin (which is the era of the Messiah) these guests, who had previously accepted the invitation, now refused to come, making lots of excuses instead. They had become so pre-occupied with worldly things, including their religious duties, that they were not interested in

coming to the feast. So, they lost out on their special invitation and they could not attend the feast at all. Instead, numerous others were invited at the last minute and they all came to the feast, and these included the 'sinners' and the so-called 'dregs of society.'

These things were clearly played out in the events of the 1st century, as recorded in the NT. Yet it also applies right now to the Christian Church. Like Israel of old, those who claim to believe in Christ Jesus are the outward people of God, as those who have received the special invitation of the Gospel - but only the true Chosen Ones will ultimately come to the feast, while all the religious ones and the hypocrites, will ultimately be shut out, due to their unfaithfulness and disloyalty and excuses. In the meantime, there is a great ingathering of 'unworthy sinners' and 'dregs of society' who are filling the hall in preparation for the Great Feast.

It is worth bringing up an interesting point here. Some teach that the wedding guests in the first parable cannot be the believers of the Body of Christ because (so it is reasoned), they are not viewed as the bride herself, but only as the guests. The same is often said of the parable of The Ten Virgins, which we shall look at next. Some say that the virgins must represent a different group for they are not viewed as the bride!

It is true that in Revelation 19:7-9, quoted earlier, the guests *appear* to be distinct from the Bride, yet, it is evident from this parable that both the bride *and* the guests are representing, in figure, the chosen ones of God. The main emphasis in these parables is the invitation and its acceptance.

The chosen Body/Bride of Christ are symbolised as Guests of a Feast (whether a wedding feast or a normal feast, as in the second parable above). This special Ecclesia of the Sons of God are also figured elsewhere as Wise Virgins; Wise Servants; Sheep of the Good Shepherd; Wheat; Good Fruit; Sons of God, etc, etc. The symbolism varies depending on the context of the particular parable, nevertheless, they all refer to the same group. I've touched on some of these things already in this book.

In the same way, John the Baptist is not only the friend of the Bridegroom (Christ) in his special role of being the forerunner and messenger of the Messiah; he also belongs to the Bride because he is a true son of Abraham who belongs to the New Jerusalem – and this heavenly Jerusalem is said to be THE BRIDE AND WIFE OF THE LAMB (Revelation 21:9-14). This is confirmed in Hebrews 12:22-24.

But you have come **to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem**, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, **to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven**. You have come to God, the judge of all men, **to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.  
(NIV)

The Church (or Ecclesia) of the Firstborn is the Body/Bride of Christ; headed up by the Chief Priest and Mediator, Jesus Himself; which also includes the spirits of the righteous ones who died prior to the coming of Christ. All these will be resurrected and transformed into the New Humanity in Christ as dwellers and inheritors of the New Jerusalem.

Anyhow, before we get sidetracked too much, let's return to the subject of the Great Feast. As we have seen, this Great Feast represents the Kingdom of God manifested in all its glory. Jesus had already referred to this Feast a number of times previously. For example,

“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.

(Luke 13:28-29 NIV)

This is a condensed version of the above parables. The saints of the past are represented in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets, while the rest of the Ecclesia are represented as those who come from east, west, north and south (all nations); and the kingdom of God itself is equated with the Great Feast.

Now I am sure that actual food and drink will play its part in this glorious celebration, as even Jesus ate and drank after His resurrection (Luke 24:36-42; John 21:1-15); and He also said to His disciples on that fateful night of His betrayal and trial that He will again drink the fruit of the vine and eat the Passover when it finds complete fulfillment in the kingdom (Luke 22:15-18). He also promised the twelve apostles,

“And **I confer on you a kingdom**, just as my Father conferred one on me, **so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**”

(Luke 22:29-30 NIV)

These things have an earthly and a heavenly application, for the Kingdom of the Heavens must always manifest itself in this earth realm of creation - whether the Old Creation or the New, for the earth is the place where God has purposed to place mankind. Nevertheless, ultimately, Paul tells us the simple truth that surpasses all material things,

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but **of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit...**

(Romans 14:17 NIV)

## The Feast of Tabernacles

Before we finish this particular study, let us consider something else that relates to our present subject – namely, the Feasts of Yahweh. There were seven Feasts or Festivals that God originally gave to Israel through Moses. These Feasts were observed over a seven-month period, from spring through to autumn, and they were intimately tied in to the agricultural year. Three of these Feasts (namely, **Passover**, **Pentecost** and **Tabernacles**) were considered the major feasts, and every male Israelite had to attend these three feasts every year at the Tabernacle/Temple (see Leviticus 23:4-44; Exodus 23:14-17; Deuteronomy 16:1-17).

Yet these seven Feasts are a type or figure or allegory of the Plan of God concerning His Messiah. I hope to cover this topic in detail in a future book entitled *The Hidden Prophecies of the Seven Feasts*, but for now, though, here's just a brief overview.

Leviticus 23 supplies us with the details of the seven Feasts, (also supplemented by Exodus 23 and Deuteronomy 16).

“ These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: The LORD’s **Passover** begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the LORD’s **Feast of Unleavened Bread** begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast...

The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath...

“ ‘From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering (i.e. **Firstfruits**), count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD (i.e. **Pentecost**). From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD...

The LORD said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts (i.e. **Trumpets**). Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the LORD by fire...’

The LORD said to Moses, “The tenth day of this seventh month is the **Day of Atonement**. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the LORD by fire...

The LORD said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD’s **Feast of Tabernacles begins**, and it lasts for seven days...

“ ‘So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of rest. On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days.”

(Leviticus 23:4-6, 9-11, 15-17, 23-25, 26-27, 33-34, 39-40 NIV)

Beginning in the spring, **Passover** came first on the 14<sup>th</sup> Nisan, followed by **Unleavened Bread** on the 15<sup>th</sup>, which lasted for seven days. During this week, on the day after the Sabbath,

the Feast of Weeks began with **Firstfruits**, which then ended seven weeks later, on the day after the Sabbath, the fiftieth day, the Day of **Pentecost**. Firstfruits celebrated the firstfruits of the barley harvest, and Pentecost celebrated the firstfruits of the wheat harvest.

After this, there followed a period of about four months covering the summer. Then in the seventh month of Tishrei, the final three feasts were observed. **Trumpets** on the 1<sup>st</sup> (a special New Moon Festival ushering in the 7<sup>th</sup> month); **Day of Atonement** on the 10<sup>th</sup>; and **Tabernacles** on the 15<sup>th</sup>.

The Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering was considered the greatest Feast at the end of the sacred year, and it lasted for seven days, with a special eighth day to close the Feast. It was the final great Harvest, particularly of the olives and the grapes.

These seven original Feasts of Yahweh are prophetic of the Messiah and His work during this age and the one to come. They can be understood on a number of different levels of truth, but the following reveals their foundational meaning. The number **seven** figures prominently in the details of the Feasts, because **seven** symbolises spiritual completion or fulfillment. With God, ALL things are brought to a complete and satisfactory consummation within His great Plan and Purpose.

**Passover** portrays the Messiah's Ransom Sacrifice as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. This was fulfilled on 14<sup>th</sup> Nisan 33 A.D. when Jesus was crucified. He died about mid-afternoon as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the Temple.

**Unleavened Bread** symbolises the sin-removing, sanctifying work of Messiah Jesus, which was fulfilled during Passover week of 33 A.D (which also included the fulfilment of the details within the Seventieth Week of Daniel's prophecy).

**Firstfruits** symbolises the Resurrection of Christ from the dead as the Firstfruit of a New Humanity – an Immortal, Incorruptible New Creation. This was fulfilled on Nisan 16<sup>th</sup> 33 A.D. when God raised Jesus from the dead. This took place on the day after the Sabbath, the first day of the week (Sunday). This was also known as the eighth day. The number eight symbolises New Beginnings or New Creation.

**Pentecost** symbolises the next firstfruits of the New Humanity who are, at this stage, still in sinful, mortal bodies, though they have been given a down-payment as a guarantee – the promised Holy Spirit. This was fulfilled at Pentecost 33 A.D. at the coming of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Christ while they were in the Temple Courts. Like the feast of Firstfruits before it, Pentecost also occurred on the eighth day, the day after the weekly Sabbath.

The four summer months symbolise the universal Era of Grace, which is nearing its end, in which the last days are being extended.

**Trumpets** and **Atonement** will have their complete fulfillment during the events of the Day of the Lord, that is, the Return of Christ.

**Tabernacles** symbolises the coming of the Kingdom of God in all its fullness.

Now the OT clearly uses the final great Harvest Feast of Tabernacles as the symbol for the coming Kingdom of God. This is especially evident in the dedication of the Temple under

Solomon found in 1 Kings 8; and in the special celebration at Jerusalem during the return from the Babylonian Exile under Ezra and Nehemiah, found in Nehemiah 8.

All the men of Israel came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Ethanim (i.e. Tishrei), the seventh month... So Solomon observed the festival at that time, and all Israel with him—a vast assembly, people from Lebo Hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. They celebrated it before the LORD our God for seven days and seven days more, fourteen days in all. On the following day he sent the people away. They blessed the king and then went home, joyful and glad in heart for all the good things the LORD had done for his servant David and his people Israel.

(1 Kings 8:2, 65-66 NIV)

The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. **From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.** Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

(Nehemiah 8:17-18 NIV)

To those with spiritual eyes, it is clear that Tabernacles = The Feast = The Kingdom. The celebration of this Feast was *greater* at the time of Ezra than at the time of Solomon, and in fact, it had not been celebrated that way since the time of Joshua. This hints at the fact that, at the time the kingdom is established in glory at Christ's Return, the exiled remnant of the Israel of God will be delivered and they will celebrate the Feast in the kingdom under their Messiah - Jesus or Yehoshua or Joshua (these are variations of the same Hebrew name meaning 'Yahweh is Saviour').

Nevertheless, Solomon's kingdom is a type of Christ's Kingdom, and Solomon celebrated this feast for 2 x 7 days, which speaks of the greater glory of the fullness of Christ's Kingdom as a double portion of the blessings of the Firstborn.

## The Harvests

Now it is extremely interesting to note that these seven Feasts are intimately tied in with the three major harvest periods. Passover/Unleavened Bread/Firstfruits occurred at the beginning of the **Barley harvest**; Pentecost occurred at the beginning of the **Wheat harvest**; and Tabernacles occurred at the time of the **Grape harvest** in particular, though it was also the final Great Harvest of all the crops at the end of the year.

In view of this, some of Jesus' teaching is extremely fascinating concerning what He says about the various harvests, particularly that of the great Harvest being the end of the age. We touched on this a little earlier in the Parable of *the Wheat and the Darnel*.

“The field is the world... The harvest is the end of the age...”

(Matthew 13:38 & 39 NIV)

Also, take note of the following words of Jesus.

“Are you not saying that, ‘Still four months is it, and the harvest is coming?’ Lo! I am saying to you, Lift up your eyes and gaze on the countryside, for they are white for harvest already. And he who is reaping is getting wages and is gathering fruit for life eonian, that both the sower and the reaper likewise may be rejoicing. For in this case is the saying true, that ‘One is the sower and another is the reaper.’ I commission you to reap that for which you have not toiled. Others have toiled, and you have entered into their toil.”

(John 4:35-38 CV)

Then he said to his disciples, “**The harvest is plentiful** but the workers are few. Ask **the Lord of the harvest**, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

(Matthew 9:37-38 NIV)

Jesus was saying something very significant here in relation to the symbolic meaning of the Feasts. When you follow the chronology of the early chapters of John’s account, the events of John Chapter 4 would’ve occurred a few weeks after the first Passover/Unleavened Bread of Jesus’ ministry. This would’ve been around the month of May, during which time the barley was still being harvested, and the wheat was nearing its time of harvest, which began after the firstfruit offering at Pentecost. This meant that there were yet four months until the great harvest time of Tabernacles in September/October time.

What Jesus was saying here is that the apostles and early disciples were not to primarily focus on the coming kingdom of God at the end of the age (Tabernacles), for they had a job to do *now* as reapers of a present harvest (Firstfruits/Pentecost). Jesus had prophesied earlier, in Matthew 9 quoted above, that the harvest is plentiful in His grain field, which is the field of the world, but more reapers or harvesters were needed to reap the crop.

The spreading of the Gospel of God’s Son needs chosen believers to sow the seed, and to reap the harvest, in the field of the world. In the process, these servants of Christ will be getting wages and gathering fruit for age-abiding life in the kingdom of God. So, Jesus is saying that there are a number of harvests, but there is still the great Harvest of Tabernacles still to come. This is made evident in the vision of Revelation, which is ultimately a vision of the Day of the Lord - both present and future.

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one “like a son of man” with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has

come, **for the harvest of the earth is ripe** (*dried* – CV).” So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

(Revelation 14:14-16 NIV)

This is symbolically describing the great Harvest of believers at the end of the age in relation to the Feast of Tabernacles, in which the chosen ones will inherit the kingdom of God at Christ’s Return. Take note that this is describing a **grain harvest** of the earth or world (that is, God’s field) for the harvest is literally *dried*. Then what follows in verses 17-20 is the graphic, yet figurative, depiction of the wrath of God being poured out upon the earth, where the stubborn unbelievers of the world are being viewed as red grapes being trampled and crushed in a winepress – and Christ is the One who treads this winepress (Revelation 19:15). This also has a relation to the feast of Tabernacles and the great Harvest. Scripture even speaks of sin and wickedness becoming ripe for judgment.

“Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, **for the harvest is ripe**. Come, **trample the grapes, for the winepress is full** and the vats overflow— **so great is their wickedness!**” Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

(Joel 3:12-14 NIV)

Hence, Revelation 14:18 says that these “grapes are dead ripe!” Not only is there going to be a Harvest of Righteousness and Glory for the Overcomers, but there is also going to be a Harvest of Judgment and Condemnation for the Sons of Stubbornness. Yet both will occur at the same time, in the Age of Tabernacles, the time of the Great Harvest. Anyhow, there is so much more that could be said, but this will suffice for now.

We must remember that there is a harvest occurring right now, which the Body of Christ is involved in, yet we are also awaiting the era of the Great Wedding Feast, the era of the Great Harvest and the wonderful Feast of Tabernacles – the glory and power of the coming Kingdom of God. It is not too far away...so don’t give up the Faith. Walk the path of Righteousness and Truth in the Grace of God.....and be prepared.

## 11. The Wise and Foolish Virgins

“**At that time** the kingdom of heaven will be like **ten virgins** who took their lamps and went out to meet **the bridegroom**. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. **The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.**

At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. **The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet.** And the door was shut. Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’

Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

(Matthew 25:1-13 NIV)

Firstly, the thing we must take note of is that this parable is given in the context of Christ’s Return, also known as the Day of the Lord. It belongs to the clear prophetic details of Christ’s ‘Olivet Discourse’ in Matthew 24. So Jesus is saying that ‘At that time’ or ‘then,’ as the end of the age draws near, the kingdom of the heavens (that is, the Church) will be like Ten Virgins.

Secondly, we dealt with the subject of the Wedding Feast in quite some detail in the last chapter, so to avoid unnecessary repetition, I would suggest that the reader should refer to that chapter for further details on Jewish weddings in the time of Christ. This will shed further light on our present parable.

So in the above parable we have the following picture. Ten virgins or young maidens, who are bridesmaids, are awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. Due to the fact that they are not aware of when he will arrive to take his bride to the wedding festivities, they need to have oil lamps or torches with them so that they can guide the way of the wedding procession at night upon his arrival. Five of them were foolish and didn’t come prepared with extra oil, while the other five were wise and carried extra oil with them. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, so as they waited, the day wore on, eventually becoming evening and nighttime - and they all fell asleep.

Yet, in the middle of the night, the cry from the watchmen, leading the bridegroom’s procession, rang out, announcing the bridegroom’s arrival - at last. The ten virgins wake up and quickly trim their lamps, ready to receive the bridegroom, but the five foolish ones were

running out of oil; hence their lamps were going out. So they begged the others to share what oil they had, but, wisely, they had to refuse, otherwise none of them would be ready to receive the bridegroom on behalf of the bride, because all their lamps would be going out, ruining everything!

Yet while the five foolish virgins went off to buy more oil, the bridegroom arrives and the complete procession moves on to the place where the wedding festivities are about to be held. Meanwhile, the five foolish virgins return and they try to get in to the feast, but the bridegroom rejects them for their failure to serve and honour him and his bride.

## The Virgins Are Leaders

The simple message that Jesus gives here is ‘Be prepared and watch for My Return.’ He indicated many times in His ministry that the Church, during the era of His Return, would be characterised by deception and complacency, summed up in the words “Watch, for you do not know the day or the hour, and the Son of Man will come at a time when you do NOT expect Him.” Interesting, yet sober, words from the Master. Yet there is a little more being revealed in this parable.

Evidently, Jesus is the Bridegroom, who is a long time in coming, and the wedding festivities are the manifestation of the Kingdom at His Return. Yet notice that the bride herself is not mentioned at all. She is only there in the background, so to speak, and she is not the main focus. The primary focus of this particular parable is the Bridegroom and the ten Virgins. So who are the ten Virgins?

Well, the job of the virgins or bridesmaids was to be servants and guides for the bride and bridegroom. In the same way as John the Baptist was the Friend or Best Man (special Prophet) of the Bridegroom (Christ), yet he still belonged to the Ecclesia of God (the Bride) (John 3:27-30), so the Virgins represent the leaders (i.e. apostles, prophets, shepherd/teachers, evangelists) of the Church, though they still belong to the Ecclesia or Bride (cf. Ephesians 4:11-13).

Paul spoke the following words to the Ecclesia at Corinth, which by extension applies to all believers.

For I betroth you to one Man, to present **a chaste virgin** to Christ.

(2 Corinthians 11:2 CV)

Although Paul is primarily referring to believers in Christ as being, collectively, a betrothed bride, nevertheless he mentions the fact that we are to be spiritual chaste virgins. That is to say, we are to remain loyal to Christ by walking in righteousness and holiness and truth, in obedience to His commands, avoiding all forms of idolatry, which is viewed in Scripture as spiritual adultery and prostitution. So the ten Virgins are clearly representing the Ecclesia in some way or another.

Also, the number Ten seems to symbolise God’s Perfected Order in the world. God is perfecting His order of the kingdom of the heavens in this world through His Ecclesia. Yet five of them are wise (five being the number symbolising Grace), and the other half are foolish. The real issue is that the wise ones are prepared with extra olive oil for their lamps, because their

focus is on serving the Bride and Bridegroom, while the others are totally unprepared, revealing their lack of loyalty to the bride and groom.

## Olive Oil

It is a common, well known fact that in ancient times, olive oil was used for anointing those in special office, such as prophets, priests and kings, and it was also commonly used in lamps, in particular, the seven-branched Lampstand in the Tabernacle/Temple. Olive oil is a clear symbol of the Holy Spirit of God, which brings illumination (light) and power (heat), as well as authority (being anointed).

“Command the Israelites to bring you **clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning**. In the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain that is in front of the Testimony, Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning before the LORD from evening till morning. This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for the generations to come.

(Exodus 27:20-21 NIV)

“...and a hin of **olive oil**. Make these into a **sacred anointing oil**, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil.”

(Exodus 30:24-25 NIV)

The Menorah (the seven-branched lampstand) represents Christ Jesus as the ultimate Anointed One of God (Messiah) who is the Light of the whole world. Yet the spiritual Body of Christ, as temples of God (individually and corporately) are also Menorahs, lights of the world (Revelation 1:20; Matthew 5:14-16).

## Loyal Servants

In light of this (excuse the pun), the following words of Jesus fit well into our present subject.

“Be dressed **ready for service and keep your lamps burning**, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. **It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes**. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. **It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night**. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. **You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.**”

(Luke 12:35-40 NIV)

Here we have a similar picture and message. The followers of Christ are like servants who need to be diligent, loyal servants of their Master as they wait for Him to return, keeping their lamps burning, even if He returns late into the night, during the second or third watches. When He knocks on the door, they'll be ready for Him. These are good, wise servants. Then in response to their loyalty and faithfulness, the Master Himself will dress Himself to serve them as they recline at the Feast in the Kingdom of God. What a beautiful picture of love and fellowship – and awesome humility from our beloved Lord. This IS age-abiding life – knowing Him!

Yet even now He is knocking on the door, that we may open it for Him and begin to have fellowship with Him in His Kingdom, and to those faithful ones who overcome and serve Him faithfully to the end, He will give the throne-rights to co-rule with Him in His Kingdom. An awesome promise!

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, **I will come in and eat with him, and he with me**. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

(Revelation 3:20-22 NIV)

This also reminds me of one of my favourite passages of Scripture – John 21:1-25. John tells us of the time Jesus appeared to seven of the disciples after His resurrection (John included), while they were fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Early in the morning, while they were still in the boat trying to catch some fish, after fishing all through the night, Jesus appeared to them on the shore. After causing them to haul in a miraculous catch of fish, Jesus cooked them breakfast over a coal fire on the beach (the staple food of fish and bread), which, I may add, was already cooking by the time they got to the shore with the miraculous catch of fish. They then ate together on the beach by the Lake, talking and having fellowship with their resurrected, immortal Master.

During this time, Peter was fully restored to fellowship (after the shame of his triple denial) through Jesus asking him three times, “Do you love Me?” and then commissioning him to be a shepherd of His sheep (of added interest, Jesus used the two Greek words for *love* in this conversation – ‘agapao’ for unconditional love, and ‘phileo’ for brotherly love or affection). This is such a wonderful picture of pure love and friendship that goes beyond a Master/slave relationship. To me, this is what it’s all about – communing with (or knowing) the Father and His Son, and the rest of His family. This is what Moses was doing when he was up on the Mountain of Sinai for 40 days and nights – hanging out with God and His Son!

Here are some more precious words that Jesus originally spoke to the Twelve.

“**You are my friends if you do what I command**. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. **Instead, I have called you friends**, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that

will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”

(John 15:14-17 NIV)

These words contain the key to true discipleship. Those who are growing into the sons of God (the chaste virgins; the wise, obedient servants) are no longer called servants, but friends of Jesus, the Prince – ultimately, His brothers. This, in turn, leads to true power and authority before the throne of the Majesty in Heaven. No servant is greater than his Master, but it is enough that we become like our Master, so we must learn to walk as Jesus did.

This whole episode of Jesus and the seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee is also a type or figure of the end of this age. The Seven disciples represent the Ecclesia, particularly the chosen leaders, who will be working through the night or darkness of this world appearing to catch nothing, but at dawn Jesus will appear and a great harvest of fish (i.e. men, fishers of men) will be saved for the kingdom. Then Jesus and the Seven will co-rule over the rest in the kingdom in love and fellowship (breakfast on the beach).

## Burning Lamps

Anyhow, getting back to our parable, the Virgins are leaders of the people of God (the Bride) who are also servants of the Bridegroom. (This is a similar metaphor as to believers being the sheep of God’s flock, yet there are those who are called to be shepherds of the sheep – yet the shepherds still belong to the flock!) In relation to this, the ecclesias in Revelation chapters 1 to 3 are symbolised as 7 seven-branched candlesticks or lampstands, which not only represents individual believers, or ecclesias (groups of believers), but they represent various characteristics of the whole of Christendom or the Church from the First Century to the end of the age. Jesus’ words in the letter to the ecclesia at Ephesus are very sobering.

“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. **If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”**

(Revelation 2:4-5 NIV)

So, not only are believers in Christ supposed to be burning lamps, shining out God’s righteousness, truth and love, but we are to be loyal servants of God, some of whom become chief servants (or virgins with lamps), serving the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The wise ones are those who remain loyal to the end, being prepared by studying the Word of God, remaining in Christ, and walking by the Spirit. This is how we watch – and endure – and have plenty of oil while the Bridegroom tarries.

Yet notice how ALL of the virgins fell asleep! This appears to be indicating that at the end of the age, when the kingdom is drawing near again, THE MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD WILL BE LULLED TO SLEEP DUE TO THE LENGTHY ABSENCE OF CHRIST. No wonder, then, that Jesus and the Apostles have given many warnings about this age, and the apostasy and deception that will grow as this age progresses. No wonder the NT is full of words of encouragement that urge believers to watch, be prepared, endure to the end, remain in

the teaching of Christ, run the race, keep focused on your faith, etc, etc. There is an inevitable danger of falling asleep due to the spirit of the times!

Remember how Peter, James and John fell asleep in the garden of Gethsemane while Jesus was praying, even though He had warned them about what was coming (Matthew 26:36-46). “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak,” Jesus told them. Nevertheless, their weak flesh got the better of them and they slept at a time when they should’ve been watching and praying with their Master. The result was that they were unprepared for what happened that night – Peter attacked the servant of the chief priest with a sword, and all the disciples deserted Jesus and ran away due to fear of what was happening. Peter then went on to deny Jesus three times due to his fear and weakness of the flesh, exactly as Jesus had told him beforehand that it would happen, warning him that Satan was going to sift him (Luke 22:31-34, 54-62). Even though all this occurred before the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, nevertheless, the lesson to be learned remains the same.

## The Time is at Hand

I strongly believe that we are already approaching this era of the end of the age when all the virgins will temporarily fall asleep. If you are a disciple of Christ (as most reading this probably are), and especially if you are called to be a chief servant or virgin in the Ecclesia of God, then you will either be a wise one or a foolish one. If you’re taking the time to read this, then you’re probably a wise one, as you’re seeking truth. I pray that you may be amongst the wise ones who are patiently waiting and enduring, watching for the Master’s Return, being faithful to His commands, no matter what others may say or do – and relying totally on His Grace and Mercy to deliver us all.

The time is near when the prophecies of the Day of the Lord and the coming manifestation of the kingdom shall be fulfilled. This is a time for spiritual fasting for we are entering the deep watches of the night, when, for a time, the Shadow of darkness will grow for a while – but the great Wedding Feast is nearly upon us. Rejoice and be glad for the Bridegroom is coming to expel the darkness – and Watch!

Here are some closing words of Scripture in relation to this. For those who have ears to hear, let them hear!

Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?” Jesus answered, “How can **the guests of the bridegroom** mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.”

(Matthew 9:14-15 NIV)

“Yet should not God by all means be doing the avenging of His chosen ones, who are imploring Him day and night? And He is patient with them. I am saying to you that He will be doing the avenging of them swiftly. **Moreover, consequently, at the coming of the Son of Mankind, will He be finding the faith on the earth?**”

(Luke 18:7-8 CV)

**The Spirit and the bride** say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.”

(Revelation 22:17 NIV)

## 12. The Wise and Foolish Servants

“It's like a man going away: He leaves his house **and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task**, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. **If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.** What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

(Mark 13:34-37 NIV)

Peter asked, “Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?”

The Lord answered, “**Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time?** It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, **he will put him in charge of all his possessions.**”

But suppose the servant says to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time in coming,’ and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces (*as in lashes from a whip*) and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

“That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows (*lashes - CV*). But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows (*lashes - CV*). From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”

(Luke 12:41-48 NIV; also Matthew 24:45-51)

This parable of The Wise and Foolish Servants could also be called The Wise or Foolish Manager. It is intimately linked to the previous parable of The Wise and Foolish Virgins, and it therefore carries a similar message.

This parable is recorded in the context of Christ's return at the end of the age, but of course, it applies to every Christian in every generation - not just the generation that will witness His return. Jesus says clearly that the message of watching for His return and being prepared for it is not just for those who are put in charge of His people, but it is for everyone! Yet there is also a strong and sobering word for those who are leaders in the Church of God, those who are spiritual elders and overseers, the shepherds of the Flock of God.

Luke gives us this parable in greater detail than Matthew or Mark, but when we put all of these accounts together we get the complete picture. Jesus is the wealthy Nobleman, the Master or Lord Who is going away (and the parable later implies that His absence will be for a long time) and He is leaving His household (the people of God) in the hands of His various servants who have been given various tasks. Yet even among the servants there is a structure of authority.

This is not indicating that Jesus was wealthy in any worldly sense, for there are many texts in the NT that reveal that Jesus was born into a poor family, along with the fact that He became a travelling Jewish Rabbi, and these rabbis relied heavily upon the generosity of their disciples to help with their daily provisions. Of course, Jesus' true wealth is primarily spiritual and heavenly, and it is these things that are the true riches, which He will share with His brothers, the many sons of God. Yet ultimately, even the whole world, the whole universe, belongs to Christ as the true King of all kings - and one day soon, Christ and His Bride will fully inherit it all!

## The Wise Servants

The manager (or administrator) represents the Apostles and Prophets who were given the highest authority over the others as Deputised Overseers, and their authority is contained in the writings of the New Testament. The other servants are those who are called to be Evangelists, and Shepherd/Teachers - those who are to feed the sheep of God as servant/shepherds.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. **And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers**, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

(1 Corinthians 12:27-28 NIV)

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

(Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV)

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: **Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers**—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

(1 Peter 5:1-4 NIV)

...God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

(1 Timothy 3:15 NIV)

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

(Ephesians 2:19-20 NIV)

Those who are faithful and wise are the ones who continue to serve God and His Son, being led by His Spirit, working out their faith with fear and trembling, enduring till the end (either the end of their life or the end of the age, whichever comes first), doing the job that they were called to do by faithfully feeding the other servants in the household so that they get their daily rations at the appointed times. These are the ones who will be ready to face Christ if He should return suddenly, and to stand before Him with all glory and honour, without any shame. These are the Overcomers, the true sons of the Father. The Day of the Lord will not surprise them like a thief in the night!

The result of all of this at the Judgment will be that these faithful servants will inherit full sonship as the Sons of God, and they will enter into their inheritance of ALL THINGS that belong to Christ. This will begin immediately after the Judgment, in the establishing of a New Creation, the commencement of the Restoration of all things. They will then rule the nations as royal priests with Christ Himself! They will inherit age-abiding Life - that is, the state of immortality and incorruption, which is the Kingdom of God!

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. **The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed**. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from

its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

(Romans 8:17-21 NIV)

**To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—**

'He will rule them with an iron scepter;  
he will dash them to pieces like pottery'— just as I have received authority from my Father...

**To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.**

(Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21 NIV)

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we died with him,

we will also live with him;

if we endure,

we will also reign with him.

If we disown him,

he will also disown us;

if we are faithless,

he will remain faithful,

for he cannot disown himself.

(2 Timothy 2:10-13 NIV)

## The Foolish Servants

But the servant who is foolish and unfaithful will eventually fall asleep in spiritual apostasy and darkness, sliding into worldliness and lusts of the flesh. He will begin to think that the Master is not coming back for a long time yet, and so he begins to mistreat and abuse those under his authority, while getting drunk and disorderly on the doctrines and rules of men. He becomes a lawless rebel, a worthless servant who is not doing his job as he should. He walks in blatant disobedience to the will of His Master, though some are ignorant of this fact.

But the time will come when the Day of Judgment will arrive suddenly, His Master will return home, during one of the watches of the night, and the foolish servant will be taken unawares, completely oblivious of the Day or Hour of his Master's arrival. In fact, Jesus said that the foolish servant will not be aware of that Day or Hour, and he will not be expecting it either - and it will take him totally by surprise!

The outcome is one of severe judgment and chastening for the unfaithful servant. In the Law of Moses, one of the punishments for breaking certain laws was to get a lashing with a whip. Yet notice that the flogging was limited to 40 lashes (40 being the number of trial and probation), which emphasises the point that over-punishment is just as unjust as no punishment at all! To make sure they didn't violate this command through miscounting, the Jews made this the '40 lashes minus 1,' which Paul received 5 times for preaching Jesus as the Messiah! (2 Corinthians 11:24).

When men have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. If the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make him lie down and have him flogged in his presence with the number of lashes his crime deserves, **but he must not give him more than forty lashes**. If he is flogged more than that, your brother will be degraded in your eyes.

(Deuteronomy 25:1-3 NIV)

Jesus is using this as a figure for the chastening of the Second Death in the age to come, when each will be judged in accordance with their acts. The one who claims to be a servant of God and of Christ, but is disobedient and unfaithful, will be judged and chastened, and among these, those who have received greater light and knowledge will be chastened (or 'lashed') more severely than others with less knowledge and understanding.

For he who has been entrusted with much, then much more will be asked of him. He who has will be given an abundance, but he who does not have, even what he has will be taken away, and he will be lashed with either many blows or fewer blows, depending upon his knowledge or his ignorance of the will of the Master. Nevertheless, the punishment will end eventually, so that they are saved, yet as through fire, for the lashes cannot exceed their divine limit.

This is also confirmed by James, who says that those who are teachers of the Scriptures will be held more accountable than others and will receive greater judgment.

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

(James 3:1 NIV)

Also, here's a strong word from the Master for all those who are leaders in the Church of God. God hates the self-righteous actions of religious hypocrites.

While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a

show make lengthy prayers. **Such men will be punished most severely.**"

(Luke 20:45-47 NIV)

## A Utensil for Honour

All of this is indicating that many Jews and Christians who claim to know God or Christ will, in fact, have to endure the Second Death, the Gehenna of Fire, receiving the chastening of God until they are set free. They will not have a place in the First Resurrection. This accords with the rest of Jesus' teaching that the subjects of the kingdom who are hypocritical liars shall be thrown out into outer darkness and death.

Jesus has already paid the price for our sins and transgressions, which is why He was lashed and beaten most severely, not by a normal whip of cords, which would've been bad enough, but with the dreaded Roman flagellum which ripped the flesh like a knife. I believe also, in accordance with the Divine Law, that Jesus was stoned while He was on the cross, which caused even further lacerations to His whole body - so much so that His face was marred beyond that of any man! It is truly by His wounds that we are healed.

Therefore, for those who reject His Word, and the glorious Gospel of God's Son, there is nothing left but for the Living Stone to crush them as they receive due punishment for their words and actions on the Day He is revealed. The Gospel does not do away with God's Holiness and Justice - yet Grace will triumph in the end!

So, for those of us who are servants of the Living God and of Christ Jesus, let us endeavor to become wise and faithful servants, those who run the race to the end to gain the Prize. May we become utensils of gold and silver (spiritually mature sons), rather than those of wood and clay (immature fleshly children), precious utensils that can be used by the Master for noble purposes in His great household.

Now in a great house there are not only **gold and silver utensils**, but **wooden and earthenware** also, and some indeed **for honor**, yet some **for dishonor**. If, then, anyone should ever be purging himself from these, **he will be a utensil for honor**, hallowed (*holy*), and useful to the Owner, **made ready for every good act**.

(2 Timothy 2:20-21 CV)

## Become Watchful

In Mark's account of this parable, Jesus refers to the doorkeeper of the house being watchful. In ancient times particularly, a wealthy household would have many servants, and one or two of those servants would be given the job of Doorkeeper or Gatekeeper. Their main task was to keep watch at the main entrance to the house, usually in the courtyard, to greet visitors, messengers and merchants, as well as being a guard to ward off any intruder or enemy. They were like the Watchmen who stood guard at the gates of a city, but on a smaller scale. They had to be vigilant and sober, keeping themselves awake, even through the night shift.

## The Secrets of the Parables

Jesus uses this figure of a watchmen or doorkeeper staying awake to teach His servants to stay awake spiritually, to be vigilant and sober, watching for His return in expectation, being careful about the way we live, being aware that we shall all have to give an account to the Master when He returns, and then we shall be given our wages accordingly - or possibly forfeit the reward altogether! These words of warning are not to be taken lightly!

Consequently, then, we may not be drowsing, even as the rest, **but we may be watching and be sober**. For those who are drowsing are drowsing at night, and those who are drunk are drunk at night. Yet we, being of the day, may be sober, putting on the cuirass (*breastplate*) of faith and love, and the helmet, the expectation of salvation, for God did not appoint us to indignation, but to the procuring of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...

(1 Thessalonians 5:6-9 CV)

"Wake up! (*Become watchful - CV*) Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up (*if you should not be watching - CV*), I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you."

(Revelation 3:2-3 NIV)

Therefore, may we become watchful, being prepared, for the Day is very near. Don't let Him find you sleeping! Let us always pray for one another.

Watch! Stand firm in the faith! Be manly! Be staunch! Let all your actions occur in love!

(1 Corinthians 16:13-14 CV)

(For further study of Christ's Return, see [The Day of the Lord, the Return of the King](#)).

## 13. The Talents and The Minas

"Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave **five talents of money**, to another **two talents**, and to another **one talent**, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money (Gk. *silver*).

**"After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.** The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money (Gk. *silver*) on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

" 'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. **For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.** And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

(Matthew 25:14-30 NIV)

The two parables of the Talents and the Minas carry a similar message, though they are two distinct parables that were spoken at different times. Essentially, they are two versions of the same truth. In fact, Jesus would've repeated most of His teachings and parables numerous times throughout His ministry, but we can only accept what has been specifically recorded in the Gospel accounts under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And the instances that have been recorded have been written in accordance with the wisdom and counsel of God, for good reason.

The Parable of the Talents (quoted from Matthew above) was spoken to the disciples during Christ's Olivet Discourse, only days before He was going to die. It was given in the context of Christ's Return at the end of this age, following on from the parable of the Ten Virgins.

The Parable of the Minas (which can be found in Luke 19:11-27) was spoken about a week earlier while Jesus was in the region of Jericho, during His time at Zacchaeus' house (Luke 19:1-10). It's interesting that this parable was given on the occasion when a chief tax collector, a business man, one who was viewed as a traitor to the Jews because he was working for Rome, showed the fruits of repentance, in accordance with the Divine Law, by giving his money to the poor and paying restitution to those whom he had cheated. Jesus described Zacchaeus as a true son of Abraham due to his active faith, one who was receiving salvation that day.

The reason Jesus spoke the parable of the Minas at that time was *'because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.'* The fact of the matter was that the Kingdom of God was not going to appear immediately in the way that the Jews thought it would. It had already arrived, and was already in their midst! The spiritual Kingdom of God and of Christ Jesus was set up in the 1st century AD, during the era of Jesus' ministry, and it continues to the present day. But it did not arrive in the physical way that the Jewish people were looking for - that is, as a military worldly kingdom that would crush the Romans!

Jesus, as the true King, the Man of noble birth, was going to travel to a distant country (heaven) to receive His kingship (at the right hand of God) and then He would return at a later time (the Second Advent) to settle accounts with His servants (at the coming Judgment). In the meantime, His servants (the apostles and prophets and disciples of Christ) are entrusted with His money and possessions to 'trade and do business' as faithful workers to their Master.

The Parable of the Talents teaches the same basic theme, but the emphasis is more on the rich Master going on a long journey, while His servants are entrusted with His money and possessions, to watch over His estate and business in His stead, while He is gone.

The emphasis of both parables, though, is that of Christ, the Master/Prince, going away for a long time, while He entrusts His servants with His estate, and to watch over His 'business' affairs. Eventually, He will return to settle accounts with them all and to see what they've done with what He gave them. The faithful ones will be greatly rewarded with positions of authority and great blessing, while the unfaithful ones will be rejected, and they will not have any share in His inheritance. Instead they will be 'cast outside, in the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' This is describing, somewhat metaphorically, the judgment and chastening of the Second Death, described in Revelation.

Take note also that there is only one Judgment Day for all concerned. The religious hypocrites and false brethren (the wicked, unfaithful servants) are judged at the same time as the faithful ones. The New Testament makes it clear that this will occur on the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Second Advent, when all mankind will be judged at 'the Great White Throne,' the 'Bema Seat' of Christ.

"The master of that servant (the unfaithful servant) will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces (as in the lashes of a whip) and assign him a place with the unbelievers."

(Luke 12:46 NIV)

Let us now take a closer look at these parables, highlighting the main points of both. Let us consider the Talents first.

## The Master and His Servants

Jesus is, of course, the Master/Householder of the parable Who was about to be going away for a long time. So already there is a hint that Christ will be absent for a long time, but for how long we are not told. Before He left, via His ascension to the heavens after His death and resurrection, He entrusted His property (i.e. the things that belong to the spiritual kingdom of God) to His servants, the apostles, prophets and disciples of the early church - and by extension, to the whole Church of God, particularly those who are called to be teachers, pastors and evangelists.

In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel were considered to be God's servants (Leviticus 25:42) and Yahweh was their Master and Redeemer. In the New Testament, there are numerous references that reveal that all followers of Christ Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, are bond-servants (literally slaves) of God and of Christ, and Jesus is the Lord or Master Who has redeemed us from the harsh enslavement of sin with the price of His own blood. Therefore, we are not our own, for we were bought at a price - and a high price at that - the Ransom price of Christ's precious blood, and we are now servants of God and of Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 1 Peter 1:18-19).

Now servants are workers, they work for their master. So Christ has given every one of His servants a job to do within His spiritual kingdom. This is symbolised as talents of silver. This money was given to His servants so that they could oversee His business affairs (most likely the business of Olive Oil or Grapes). Both a talent and a mina were various weights used for gold and silver coinage. In both parables, in the Greek, the money is referred to as silver, which is symbolic of redemption and salvation.

Gold is symbolic of that which is divinely pure and kingly, for there isn't any metal greater than gold. Silver is next, which has to do with redemption. Jesus was betrayed for 30 pieces of silver to obtain our redemption. Then there is copper or bronze, which symbolises God's judgment upon sin. These things can be seen more readily in the layout of the Tabernacle and the metals used for its construction and its furniture (see Exodus 25-30).

In the Talents, the money is distributed according to the servants' ability, therefore they don't all receive the same amount, and they are not all expected to produce the same amount. This highlights the different gifts and callings of God, for not everyone is given the same gift or gifts. We are all called to various positions and circumstances in life, but whatever we do, we should do it as serving our Master, in faithful obedience, as the Spirit gives us strength and ability.

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

(1 Corinthians 12:4-6 NIV)

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:

"When he ascended on high,  
he led captives in his train  
and gave gifts to men."

... It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **to prepare God's people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

(Ephesians 4:7-13 NIV)

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

... Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, **serving the Lord.**

(Romans 12:6-8, 11 NIV)

In the Talents, one servant is given 5 talents of silver, one 2, and the other 1. This equals 8 talents of silver in total, which symbolises the gifts of the New Creation in Christ (the number 8 symbolising new beginnings, new creation and resurrection). The first two servants put their share of the Master's money to work and they doubled what they were given, while the other does nothing with his share and consequently hides it by burying it in the ground.

This act reveals the attitude of the unfaithful servant towards his Master. He cares nothing about his Master's affairs, and is therefore unfaithful and lazy. His wickedness is later revealed through the excuses he gives to the Master, which are full of lies, slander and hypocrisy.

The faithful servants have worked hard in service to their Master by doubling their original amount of silver, and this in turn has caused the Master's business (i.e. His kingdom) to grow. Just like in the parable of the Sower, the good, faithful servants of God will multiply their seed/crop 30, 60 or 100 times over.

But how is this done in a practical sense? By following the commands of Christ and to be led by the Spirit of God, in grace, by faith, seeking to be faithful in all things. Only in this way can we bear the good fruit of the kingdom of God, and shine the light of Christ's character into a dark world. The issue is not 'how many souls we've saved' for only God can save anyone. The real question is, 'Have we been obedient to our Master, seeking the true will of the Father, progressively bearing the fruit (character) of our Lord?'

Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

(Matthew 7:17-23 NIV)

I always find these words of Jesus quite shocking really, for He says that MANY Christians who call Him 'Lord' and have used (or abused) the gifts of the Spirit, shall not receive the kingdom inheritance due to their lawlessness and wickedness of bearing the wrong fruit! No wonder Paul encouraged believers to 'work out your salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12-13). There is much teaching in the NT that talks about obedience and faithfulness.

Only those who listen to the Master's words and put them into practice (which includes acts of repentance where there has been failure and sin) will survive the storms of judgment.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams

rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

(Matthew 7:24-27 NIV)

"If anyone should be serving Me, let him be following Me, and where I am, there My servant also shall be."

(John 12:26 CV)

God does not show favouritism or partiality, so if we're blatantly going against His Word, He will deal with it sooner or later. We cannot bury our talent of silver in the ground and think that our Master will not notice. Ultimately, the Day of Judgment will bring it to light, and we will all be rewarded accordingly, when we shall either be repaid with wages in accordance with our acts (or works of service) - or otherwise we shall forfeit it all in the flames of God's judgment.

## The Rewards or Wages

After a long time, the Master of the parable returned and settled accounts with His servants. To those who had doubled His silver through their faithful works of service, He said, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

This is talking of Christ's return in the Day of the Lord, and the subsequent Judgment that will follow. As already mentioned, take note that all the servants in these parables are judged at the same time, whether they are faithful or unfaithful. That is, ALL Christians, including those who are not the true overcomers of the Sons of God, will be judged before Christ's throne, along with ALL the rest of humanity. This is the event that Revelation describes as The Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

At this time, each of us will be repaid accordingly, being given wages (or not, as the case may be) in accord with our acts and works of service.

"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted (*justified CV*), and by your words you will be condemned (*convicted CV*)."

(Matthew 12:36-37 NIV)

"For all of us shall be presented at the dais (*or Judgment Seat: Bema*) of God, for it is written: I am living, the Lord is saying, for to Me shall bow every knee, and every tongue shall be acclaiming God! Consequently, then, each of us shall be giving account concerning himself to God."

(Romans 14:10-12 CV)

"For all of us must be manifested in front of the Dais (or judgment seat; Bema) of Christ, that each should be requited (or repaid) for that which he puts into practice through the body, whether good or bad."

(2 Corinthians 5:10 CV)

"...For the Lord Christ are you slaving. For he who is injuring shall be requited (or repaid) for that which he injures, and there is no partiality."

(Colossians 3:25 CV)

"Yet each will be getting his own wages according to his own toil...Now if anyone is building on this foundation (Jesus Christ) gold and silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw, **each one's work will become apparent**, for the Day will make it evident, for **it is being revealed by fire**. And the fire, it will be testing each one's work - what kind it is. If anyone's work will be remaining which he builds on it (*Christ the Foundation*), he will get wages. If anyone's work shall be burned up, he will forfeit it, yet he shall be saved, yet thus, as through fire."

(1 Corinthians 3:8, 12-15 CV)

"Lo! I am coming swiftly, and My wage is with Me, to pay each one as his work is."

(Revelation 22:12 CV)

Jesus often taught the principle that he who is faithful in little will be faithful with much, and He always encourages us to be faithful even in the little, seemingly unimportant, things, having integrity of heart in all things and at all times - for God always sees us, whether anyone else does or not. Let us take the following words of Jesus with all seriousness.

**"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.** So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?

"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, **but God knows your hearts.** What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight.

(Luke 16:10-15 NIV)

It's all about having the right focus in life, and having the right spiritual priorities, for there is nothing wrong with money and possessions in and of themselves, but if these things become our main focus, then the light of our eyes becomes bad, filling us with spiritual darkness. Like Paul, we must learn the secret of being content in all circumstances.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

(Matthew 6:19-23 NIV)

I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. **I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.** I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

(Philippians 4:11-13 NIV)

## Co-Reigning with Christ

The parable of the Talents indicates that the rewards or wages for the servants will involve reigning over others as a part of sharing in the blessings of Christ's inheritance ('I will put you in charge of many things'). And the words of Jesus in Luke 16, quoted above, also indicates that the true sons of God will be given true riches in the age to come - and this will involve co-reigning with Christ as princes of the universe! The meek will truly inherit the earth, as well as immortality and incorruption! This all belongs to the promise of Age-abiding Life (i.e. Eternal or Eonian Life).

In the parable of the Minas, this is made even clearer, where it mentions cities. This promise of reigning with Christ on a New Earth, when the Kingdom of God, and the Sons of the Kingdom, will be fully manifested to all mankind, is mentioned throughout the New Testament. Here are some examples.

"Or are you not aware that the saints shall judge the world?...Are you not aware that **we shall be judging messengers, not to mention life's affairs?**"

(1 Corinthians 6:2-3 CV)

For if, by the offence of the one, death reigns through the one, much rather, **those obtaining the superabundance of grace and the gratuity of righteousness shall be reigning in life through the One, Jesus Christ**...even as Sin reigns in death, thus Grace also should be reigning through righteousness, for eonian life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord."

(Romans 5:17, 21 CV)

"And to the one who is conquering and keeping My acts until the consummation, to him will I be giving authority over the nations; and he shall be shepherding them with an iron club, as vessels of pottery are being crushed, as I also have obtained from My Father...The one who is conquering, to him will I be granting **to be seated with Me on My throne** as I, also, conquer, and **am seated with My Father on His throne**."

(Revelation 2:26-28; 3:21 CV)

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—**heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory**.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

(Romans 8:17-21 NIV)

(For further study of these things, see [The Promise and Christ's Inheritance](#)). Let us now consider the parable of the Minas, which confirms much of the above.

## The Minas

While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. He said: "**A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return.** So he called **ten** of his servants and gave them **ten minas**. **'Put this money to work,'** he said, **'until I come back.'**

"But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'

**'He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money (Gk. *silver*), in order to find out what they had gained with it.'**

"The first one came and said, 'Sir, **your mina has earned ten more.**'

" **'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'**

"The second came and said, 'Sir, **your mina has earned five more.**'

"His master answered, **'You take charge of five cities.'**

"Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.'

"His master replied, **'I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant!** You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? Why then didn't you put my money (Gk. *silver*) on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

"Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his mina away from him and give it to the one who has ten minas.'

" 'Sir,' they said, 'he already has ten!'

"He replied, **I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.** But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me."

(Luke 19:11-27 NIV)

Jesus is the Prince, the Nobleman, who went to the distant country of heaven to be proclaimed King. The leaders of Israel (the original subjects of the kingdom) objected to Him being made king, and they sent a delegation after Him by persecuting and murdering His apostles and servants. He nevertheless was made Lord and Messiah, and one day He will return to settle accounts with His servants whom He left in charge of His estate on earth (the spiritual kingdom of God, the Christian Church).

The difference in this parable is that there were 10 servants who were given 1 silver mina each. This is emphasising the fullness of God's order and plan in this present age through His people (as number Ten speaks of the perfection and completion of Divine order in the earth), and through the fact that every servant is given the same amount. This speaks of the gracious gift of salvation and blessing that all followers of Christ can share in. But it is what we do with this gracious gift of life that will count in the end.

The other big difference in this parable is the rewards of the faithful servants. We are only told about the judgment of three of the ten servants, but they are a representative portion of the whole group, to show us the principle of how ALL will be judged at Christ's Return. The first one, who had multiplied his mina by ten, was given 10 cities to rule over, in accordance with his acts. The second, who had multiplied his mina by five, was given 5 cities to rule over, in accordance with his acts.

This is indicating that the sons of God, who are Overcomers, will be ruling over rebuilt cities on a new earth, as representatives of the kingdom of God and His Son, a government of a whole new order, ruled by Christ Himself. This is also implying that the chastening judgment of the Second Death, the ultimate Gehenna of Fire, the place of outer darkness where the unfaithful servants and all others will be cast; that these are all metaphors for the punishment that will be given to each, in accordance with their acts, on the new earth!

Yet only the regenerated sons of God will be experiencing the blessing of age-abiding (eternal) life, the inheritance of an immortal, incorruptible spiritual body - let alone everything else that comes from being a son of the living God through Christ Jesus and the glory that goes along with that position!

(For further study of these things, see [The First and Second Resurrections and the Judgment Day](#)).

## The Unfaithful Servant

Let us wrap this up on a more sober note of why the third and final servant was rejected. The parable of the Minas spells this out a little more clearly than the Talents.

In both parables, the unfaithful servant uses the same excuse, and the result is the same. He is called a lazy, wicked servant, one who, in the final analysis, is worthless or useless to the Master. As a consequence of his sin, he is thrown outside into the darkness, no longer being able to lay claim to being a servant of his Master. He does not inherit the kingdom of the Master/King. Even the silver (salvation and spiritual gifts) that was originally given to him is taken away from him, and instead is given to the one who has the most. For the faithful servants who have true riches will be given more, and will have an abundance. Whereas the unfaithful servant will be stripped of what he was originally graciously given.

1. He was lazy and worthless because he cared nothing for his master. He didn't do anything truly worthwhile with his portion of silver, but he just went and hid it away. He didn't work to increase his master's money, like the others, and do as he was told, and he was therefore careless and lazy and disobedient.

2. He was wicked because he made up lies and slander about his Master, and in a cowardly manner, used this as an excuse for his own failure. He made out that his Master was extremely harsh, as well as being a thieving extortionist - reaping where he had not sown, and taking out what he had not put in himself! So he made out that he was afraid of his Master and decided to just keep his money safe instead, rather than risk making a mistake! This turned out to be his final mistake (or sin).

The Master judged the unfaithful servant by his own words, saying that if he had believed that his Master was so severe, then why didn't he at least put the money on deposit in the bank so that it would earn interest - that is, he could earn some money by interest without having to do a thing, which was the very thing that he was accusing his master of doing (taking out where he had not put in)!

(By the way, in the Law of Moses, usury or charging interest amongst brother Israelites was not viewed too favourably at all, in fact, it was forbidden. There are those who use this parable to endorse usury, but that is not the point of it at all. The Master (Jesus) was judging the servant by his own wicked words.)

It is this very principle that Jesus will use at the Judgment. For those Christians who have misused or neglected their place in the spiritual kingdom of God, there will be fiery judgment and punishment and great loss - the same fate as all unbelievers. Jesus often spoke of this future punishment by using the language of the Law in a figurative manner, particularly in reference to the whipping or flogging of Deuteronomy 25:1-3. And in the same way as the Old Covenant flogging was limited to no more than 40 lashes, so also the 'lashing' of the Lake of Fire, the Gehenna of Fire, the Second Death (popularly called 'Hell') will be limited, and will be administered 'in accordance with their acts.'

"The master of that servant (the unfaithful servant) will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces (as in the lashes of a whip) and assign him a place with the unbelievers."

"That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows (lashes). But the one who does

not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with **few blows (*lashes*)**. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."

(Luke 12:46-48 NIV)

While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, "Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. **Such men will be punished most severely** (*lit. ...getting more excessive judgment*)."

(Luke 20:45-47 NIV)

The parable of the Minas concludes with the following sober words of Jesus, the Nobleman turned King.

"But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me."

These words have to be understood in the light of Israel's rejection of their Messiah, and the consequences for all their murderous acts of rebellion against Yahweh their God. All of this was in accordance with the terms of the Old Covenant (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). Here is the fearful pronouncement of judgment from the lips of Jesus.

"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell (*Gehenna*)? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. **Look, your house is left to you desolate.**"

(Matthew 23:33-38 NIV)

For further clarification of these things, see also *The Parable of The Vineyard Farmers* in this book (also known as the Parable of the Tenants).

These words of Christ in the parable were sadly fulfilled in the Jewish War of 66-70 AD, when the vengeance of God came upon the rebellious Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem. The rightful King dealt severely with His rebellious subjects as He took His 'rod of iron' and smashed them to pieces like pottery. His forgiveness and mercy had already been offered to them all, but, as a nation, they had rejected their King and His messengers, so inevitably, Divine justice and vengeance had to take its course for all the wickedness and murder they had done in the Name of God.

These words could also have a secondary application to the Day of the Lord Jesus, the Day of His Return in power and glory - and great fiery wrath! For that Day is likened to Noah's Flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The great Judgment Day is coming, so may those who call themselves 'servants of the King' make themselves ready for His Return, working wholeheartedly for their Master. Then when that Day arrives, we shall hear the comforting words 'Well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share in My inheritance.'

## 14. The Sheep and The Goats

(Including The Rich Man and Lazarus)

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats follows on nicely from our last parable of the Talents. It has to do with the same theme of the Judgment Day associated with Christ's Return. This parable is only recorded in Matthew's account, and it was part of Jesus' Olivet Discourse. Let us begin to consider this parable a few verses at a time.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates **the sheep** from **the goats**. He will put **the sheep** on his right and **the goats** on his left."

(Matthew 25:31-33 NIV)

Jesus begins by placing the events of this parable in the era of His Return, when He comes in power and glory, with the holy angels. He is talking about the ultimate Judgment Day when He is seated on His throne of heavenly glory and majesty, the era of His full Revelation, when the kingdom of God will be manifested in all its fullness in a New Creation - and all will be judged in accordance with their acts.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done."

(Matthew 16:27 NIV)

This is evidently the same event described in Revelation 20 as the Great White Throne Judgment.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books... If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

(Revelation 20:11-12,15 NIV)

## The Shepherd and His Sheep

In the parable, the process, and basis, of the Judgment is pictured as a shepherd separating the sheep from the goats. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were called the sheep of His pasture, while the leaders were referred to as shepherds (e.g. Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11). The good shepherds were true servants of God who walked in righteousness and truth, teaching the people to obey the commandments. The false, wicked shepherds were those who did the opposite, leading the people astray from God's ways and His word, abusing and deceiving the flock of God.

Jesus then went on to ultimately apply this figure of a shepherd and his sheep to Himself and His people, His little flock, the Ecclesia or Church of God. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd, who now has a new flock of sheep in His sheep pen, composed of both Jews and Gentiles (John 10). Under the Old Covenant, the 'pasture' was the land of Israel, and the 'sheep pen' was the religion of Judaism. Under the New Covenant, the pasture is the spiritual kingdom of God, and the sheep pen is Biblical Christianity or the Ecclesia of God.

There is only one flock and One Shepherd - which is Jesus Christ and His Ecclesia or Church - with under-shepherds acting as overseers. The word pastor essentially means a shepherd (from the Greek word *poimen*), and it is intimately linked to the office of a teacher (see Ephesians 4:11). A true Pastor/Shepherd will feed, guide and care for the flock of God under His care, as a servant and a teacher.

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."

(Luke 12:32 NIV)

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and **there shall be one flock and one shepherd.**"

(John 10:14-16 NIV)

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, **but being examples to the flock.** And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

(1 Peter 5:1-4 NIV)

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock."

(Acts 20:28-29 NIV)

Both sheep and goats, lambs and kids, were often sacrificed as a part of the Old Covenant system of worship, but the main difference between the two is that goats can often be much more aggressive and stubborn than sheep. This is probably one of the reasons why the righteous remnant of the people of God are viewed as sheep in this parable, while the rest are viewed as goats.

It is also interesting to note that, in the original Greek, these goats are referred to as **kids**, that is, young goats, in verses 32-33. The significance of this seems to be that the goats/kids have remained immature, whereas the lambs have grown into mature sheep. The NT often depicts the acts of the Old Humanity in Adam as immaturity, and the acts of the New Humanity in Christ as maturity or perfection (e.g. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4).

As we proceed through the parable, you will notice that there are opposing parallels between the Sheep and the Goats, and these distinctions tell us a lot about the destiny and character of each group. I will explain more about each one as we progress. The following table highlights these contrasts.

<b><u>The Goats</u></b>	<b><u>The Sheep</u></b>
On the Left	On the Right
Unrighteous Acts	Righteous Acts
Cursed	Blessed
<b>Destiny in the Coming Age</b>	
To Experience Eonian ('Eternal') Fire	To Inherit the Kingdom
Eonian ('Eternal') Chastening	Eonian ('Eternal') Life

So, returning to the scene of the parable, all the nations, all peoples, will be gathered before Christ, and there will be a judgment of separation. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, will separate the people one from another. One group is metaphorically described as the sheep, while the other group are called the goats. The sheep are placed to the right of the King, and the goats to the left.

Throughout Scripture, and in many cultures, both ancient and modern, the right side is viewed as being more favourable than the left (maybe because the majority of humans are right handed - as in 'the right hand of fellowship'). The reason could also be that when someone is facing north, then the East, the place of the sunrise, is on the right. Whatever its origins, the right side is symbolically viewed as being more favourable.

Jesus Himself is said to be seated at the right hand of God, meaning that He has the highest position of power and authority in the universe besides that of God Himself. He truly is God's right hand Man! Therefore, in the symbolism of the parable, the sheep are placed to the right, as they are the righteous sons of God, who will share in the reign of the King as firstborn sons.

## The Brethren of Christ

It is common today, especially among Dispensationalists, to apply this Judgment to Gentiles only, viewing 'the nations' in a fleshly sense, in contrast to the Jews. According to this view, this judgment will occur before the alleged coming Millennium - believed to be a literal 1000 year reign of Christ after His Return. This judgment of the nations is said to be based on how everyone has treated the Jews, for the Jews are the fleshly brethren of Christ. I also went along with this interpretation for many years - until I realised that there just isn't any basis for it in the NT.

We must remember that at the time when Jesus spoke these words, the disciples didn't understand that the rest of the nations were to become the centre of God's focus in the coming spiritual kingdom, and that the Apostles themselves would be proclaiming the Gospel to all nations. The people of God were no longer going to be primarily Jewish. So in one sense, Jesus is indicating here that all the nations will be involved in responding to the Gospel, and they will be judged on how they treated the disciples and servants of Christ - that is, His brothers or brethren.

Even during His ministry, Jesus began to indicate quite clearly that the place of the flesh, that is, earthly ties, were being superceded by spiritual ties.

While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

He replied to him, "Who is my mother, **and who are my brothers?**" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and **my brothers**. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is **my brother** and sister and **mother**."

(Matthew 12:46-50 NIV)

Some years later, the Apostle Paul revealed that even though Jesus came in the flesh as a Jew, and many knew Him as Jesus of Nazareth, nevertheless, NOW, these things of the flesh are to be placed in the background, having been superceded by the spiritual things of Christ as the Son of God. The New Humanity and the New Creation is now the focus.

So that we, from now on, are acquainted with no one according to flesh. Yet even if we have known Christ according to flesh, nevertheless now we know Him so no longer.

So that, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the primitive passed by. Lo! there has come new!

(2 Corinthians 5:16-17 CV)

And this applies to Christ's Flock, the spiritual 'called out company' of the Body of Christ. Therefore, it is clear that 'the brethren' in this parable are referring to the true disciples and servants of Christ, whether Jew or Gentile (although the original Apostles, and the majority of the early church, were Jewish).

That is, the true Israel of God is NOT based on fleshly ties of circumcision and uncircumcision, but it is essentially a *spiritual* nation composed of Jew and Gentile. Initially, the Jews were predominant as the people of God in the centuries leading up to, and including, the coming of Christ. Yet since that time, the Gentiles are now predominant in the spiritual Israel of God (which era Jesus referred to as 'the Times of the Nations,' and Paul described as 'the Fullness of the Gentiles').

It is also evident that in the final harvest of the end of this age, there will be (and already is) a large portion of Jews being gathered in again to the spiritual Israel of God, along with the Gentiles, for God has not forsaken His people Israel after the flesh. Therefore, when Christ returns to judge the earth, ALL ISRAEL (after the spirit) will be saved (see Romans 11).

## Acts of Righteousness

Let us continue with the metaphorical description of this Judgment.

"Then the King will say to those **on his right**, 'Come, you who are **blessed** by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then **the righteous** will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you **did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.**'

(Matthew 25:34-40 NIV)

Jesus addresses the judgment of the righteous first. The sheep on His right are called 'the righteous' or 'the just,' and they are said to be blessed (i.e. made happy) with the good things of the Kingdom of God. These are the sons of God, those blessed by the Father, those who will

receive the glorious inheritance of the kingdom in all its fullness, which was prepared for them since the beginning of time.

The Apostle Paul later confirmed these things in some detail to all those who are true followers of Jesus.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—...

...In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

(Ephesians 1:3-5, 11-14 NIV)

These blessed ones are called righteous because of their righteous acts of faith and love, which in the parable is so emphasised that the sheep are viewed as being ignorant of the fact that they have done any of these things to Jesus, not realising that when they showed loving actions to Christ's disciples, they were doing it to the King Himself. This reveals the truth that the true Church is the Body of Christ on the earth. Therefore, whatever is done to His Body is done to Him, for He is the Head. This is extremely important, because not only does it matter how we treat another human being, who is made in the image of God, it *especially* matters how we treat God's true children who are servants of Christ! Their identity is so wrapped up together, that to hurt one is to hurt the other, or to do good to one is to do good to the other, etc.

In ancient times, more so than today, a king would often send his servants as delegates or ambassadors to other kings to seek terms of peace to those in his kingdom. These servants were representatives of the king himself. Therefore if the servants were mistreated or ignored or even put to death, this was equal to an attack on the king himself. Jesus taught the same principle that His servants in His kingdom represent the King Himself.

The seeming ignorance of those in the parable to what they have done is probably not to be taken in a literal sense, of the sheep being oblivious of their actions - though it could be said that this kind of ignorance is more likely in the unrighteous goats. It is clearly there for emphasis to drive home the point that, as Jesus often taught, "he who accepts you accepts me,

and he who accepts me, accepts the One who sent me." There is a clear link and identity between the Father, and His Son, and His servants.

The list of righteous acts mentioned in the parable are basic acts of loving kindness, such as, feeding the hungry and quenching the thirsty; giving someone shelter and clothing, while showing hospitality; and visiting and caring for the sick and infirm, as well as helping those who are persecuted and unjustly mistreated in prison.

These kinds of acts are encouraged throughout scripture, especially in the New Testament teachings of Jesus and the Apostles. The great emphasis of Jesus' teaching is "Love one another. Love your enemies and do good to them. Love your fellow man as yourself." Yet righteous acts of love and kindness are also the underlying emphasis of the Law in the OT. Jesus even said that the teaching of the Law and the Prophets was summed up in the command to love God and one another.

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' **All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**"

(Matthew 22:36-40 NIV)

Paul also confirms this.

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse...

...Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:

**"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.**

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

(Romans 12:9-14, 17-21 NIV)

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. **Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

(Romans 13:8-10 NIV)

Paul also emphasised that not only should we seek to do good to everyone, but we should *especially* seek to do good to the family of faith, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. If not, we are in danger of great hypocrisy - and we shall have to give an account for all the things which we have done or said, whether good or bad, which has not been rectified by true repentance and faith.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature (*the flesh*), from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

(Galatians 6:7-10 NIV)

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

(2 Corinthians 5:10 NIV)

And it is the commandments of the Law, the Royal Law as taught by Jesus Himself, under the gracious terms of the New Covenant that He has established, that we are encouraged to follow. Even now, those who belong to the kingdom of the heavens (i.e. those who claim to be Christians) are judged as being great or small depending on how they truly teach and practice the commandments of their Master and King, Jesus the Messiah. The faithful one, the humble one, will be called great in the eyes of heaven, no matter what they may suffer for the Name.

"Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees

and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

(Matthew 5:19-20 NIV)

Yet not only are these righteous acts to be shown to all, to do good to all, even our enemies, nevertheless, in the parable the emphasis is on doing these things to 'the least of these brethren of mine.'

First and foremost, Jesus is talking about His servants, His brothers, those who are apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists, those whom He has called to represent Him to the world. This is particularly applicable to the 1st century apostles and disciples, who were taking the Gospel of the Kingdom to all nations for the first time. It was not to be confined to Israel alone.

Due to great hardship and persecution, His servants, even the least of them, would need food and drink, clothing and shelter, and care and support when they were sick or put in prison. Jesus said the following in relation to this.

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

(Matthew 10:40-42 NIV)

Ultimately, the description of the judgment and the blessing of the righteous sheep in this parable is a fulfillment of the Beatitudes in Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount.'

"Blessed are the poor in spirit (*Happy, in spirit, are the poor - CV*),

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for  
righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

**Blessed are the merciful,**  
**for they will be shown mercy.**

Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of  
righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Matthew 5:3-12 NIV)

May these words of the King encourage our hearts when we are downtrodden and barely surviving the onslaughts of the world, and may they spur us on to continue living for His kingdom, for the end result will not be in vain - though the wait seems endless. There is a Judgment Day coming, when we shall all give an account to God, and we shall all be repaid with the appropriate wages or rewards. So keep running the race of faith, and keep serving the King in faithfulness!

## The Unrighteous Goats

"Then he will say to those **on his left**, 'Depart from me, you who are **cursed**, into **the eternal fire** prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

"He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

"Then they will go away to **eternal punishment**, but the righteous to eternal life."

(Matthew 25:41-46 NIV)

In the remainder of the parable, we have the description of the acts of the unrighteous goats, and it is the complete opposite to the sheep. These are those who have lived in self-indulgence without showing any real love or kindness to the true servants and disciples of Christ. The damning verdict of the Judge/King is "whatever you did *not* do for one of the least of these, you did *not* do for me."

The focus is not so much on what they did, which could include all sorts of religious works and ritual, but what they didn't do in regard to caring for others, particularly their treatment of Christ's brothers, even the least of them.

Jesus' teaching was loaded with warnings and rebukes to the religious leaders of His day, who made so much of the wrong things in their lives, which they thought were good, such as self-righteous religious works and rituals of the Law (E.g. see Matthew 23). The truth was that they were completely empty of any true righteousness and justice, mercy and love - which was the real spirit behind the Divine Law. In practice, they placed their traditions and Rabbinic doctrines above the truth of the Scriptures.

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?"

He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

"These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.

They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are but rules taught by men."

**You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."**

"...Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

(Mark 7:5-8, 13 NIV)

One of the most piercing judgments of this kind that Jesus used in a parable was in the often misunderstood Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Let us take a brief look at this parable because it will lead us on to the subject of what the final destiny of the 'goats' is all about - the 'eternal punishment' of 'the eternal fire.' This is a subject that is so grossly misunderstood that all sorts of false teaching has arisen down the centuries centred around the doctrine of Eternal Torment in Hell - a real doctrine of the Dark Ages. So we shall need to consider this in some detail, beginning with this misunderstood, and often overlooked, parable.

## The Rich Man and Lazarus

Here it is quoted in full.

"There was **a rich man** who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid **a beggar named Lazarus**, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell (*Gr. hades*), where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

"He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

" 'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.'

"He said to him, '**If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.**' "

(Luke 16:19-31 NIV)

In this parable, Jesus actually used some of the terms and phrases that were commonly used by some of the Jewish Rabbis from their traditions (terms such as, Abraham's side or bosom; the angels carrying the dead; the figurative use of Hades and Paradise, with a great gulf between them; the dead talking to one another, etc). There are examples of this in the Talmud.

These things are not supposed to be taken literally, as some teach. Jesus was using a little irony, and using the Pharisees' own traditions to teach them something gravely important - the age-abiding destiny of the righteous and the unrighteous, the sheep and the goats, after the great Judgment Day.

The religious leaders are portrayed as the Rich Man, dressed in purple and fine linen, living in luxury and self indulgence. The poor and infirm amongst the people are represented by Lazarus, the beggar. The name Lazarus comes from the Hebrew *Elazar* which means God is my Helper. The religious leaders were corrupt and vain glorious, and they misused their wealth and position to exploit the poor and needy. Only God could help those who turned to Him, being faithful no matter what their circumstances.

The Rich Man never lifts a finger to help Lazarus, who is laid by his gate, covered in sores and longing for some food. Even the dogs lick his sores, which could've been a veiled reference to the fact that even 'Gentile dogs' had sympathy for Lazarus, and tried to help him, much in the same manner as the Good Samaritan cared for the wounded Jew, while the religious elite just walked on by, not wishing to become ceremonially unclean (see Luke 10:25-37).

Then Jesus speaks figuratively about the death of each, revealing that once they had died, their destiny in the age to come was sealed, for they were separated by a great chasm or gulf, and the rich man could not just hop over to the other side. They were both in Hades, the place of the unseen.

Lazarus was carried by angels and placed in heavenly Paradise with Abraham and the fathers of the Faith, being blessed with good things. This represents the inheritance of the kingdom of God, the blessing of 'eternal' life.

On the other hand, the Rich Man was in a place of Torment, experiencing the curse of a fiery punishment, made worse by the fact that he could see Lazarus and Abraham on the other side. This represents the ultimate Gehenna of Fire, the Lake of Fire, the age-abiding (or eonian) fire, the punishment and chastening of the Second Death.

The Rich Man longs to have his tongue cooled with water, which is symbolic of longing to receive the blessings of the Spirit of God to bring an end to the fiery chastening. Now that his eyes have been opened, though a little too late to avoid the inevitable judgment, he begs for Lazarus to go and tell his brothers about their coming judgment. Yet Abraham, the man of faith, who represents the believing remnant, advises them to listen to the voice of Moses and the Prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures. But the Rich Man reckons that this is not enough to convince them of the truth.

Abraham replies with the sobering words, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' Jesus was using this statement to reveal that that generation had a wicked, adulterous, unbelieving heart, whose leaders and people in general would not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, even after He rose from the dead. This also had further relevance to the raising of another Lazarus, who became the greatest sign to that generation, apart from the resurrection of Jesus Himself (see John 11).

So, to sum this parable up, the hypocritical Rich Man is judged by his actions, which revealed his lack of real faith in God's commands, and he receives punishment in a 'place of fiery torment.' On the other hand, Lazarus is also judged for his faithful actions and his humble circumstances (of which the former may have led to the latter), and he receives blessing along with Abraham in a 'place of Paradise' being associated with the angels of God.

At other times, Jesus used similar metaphors to this to describe the consequences of the coming judgment. Here is one such example.

"I am saying to you, 'I don't know you or where you come from! Withdraw from me, all workers of injustice! There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you are seeing Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the

prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out."

(Luke 13:27-28 CV)

These places of Torment and Paradise are not to be understood as actual, literal locations of heavenly bliss and fiery agony, but rather 'a state of being' in the age to come. The inheritance of the kingdom is actually IMMORTALITY and INCORRUPTION. This is described as age-abiding life, or the Life of the ages, commonly rendered 'eternal life.'

The opposite 'state of being' is that of continued MORTALITY in the Second Death, being judged and chastened by 'the fire' of God's Justice.

We covered something of these things earlier in this book, in the parable of the Wheat and the Darnel. To understand this subject correctly we need to realise that the Hebrew and Greek for 'everlasting, eternal, forever and ever, etc' essentially means INDEFINITE TIME, something that is obscure on the horizon of time. The Greek/English words *eon* and *eonian* do not literally mean 'never-ending' or eternity. These expressions are basically Latinised forms of the original Greek, which began to enter the translations of the Bible in the 4th century AD, particularly through Jerome's Latin Vulgate.

The other major point to remember is that we have to understand the original meaning of spiritual words and phrases within scripture, knowing how to apply the various figures of speech correctly. The 'Eternal Fire' of Matthew 25, and the Lake of Fire of Revelation, are not to be understood as literal places of fire. They are symbols for the fiery judgment of God, which will always be in line with the principles of His own Divine Law - which is truly righteous, holy and just.

Let us now return to our present parable of the Sheep and the Goats, and take a careful look at the destiny of each.

## Eternal Life versus Eternal Punishment

Let us be reminded of the main points in this parable, especially concerning the opposing destinies of these two groups.

<b><u>The Goats</u></b>	<b><u>The Sheep</u></b>
On the Left	On the Right
Unrighteous Acts	Righteous Acts
Cursed	Blessed
<b>Destiny in the Coming Age</b>	
To Experience Eonian ('Eternal') Fire	To Inherit the Kingdom
Eonian ('Eternal') Chastening	Eonian ('Eternal') Life

The parable closes with the following words.

"Then they will go away to **eternal punishment**, but the righteous to eternal life."

The Concordant Literal Version reads,

'And these shall be coming away into **chastening eonian**, yet the just into **life eonian**."

Young's Literal Version reads,

'And these shall go away to **punishment age-during**, but the righteous to **life age-during**.'

Concerning the 'punishment' of the unrighteous 'goats,' the Greek word *kolasis* is used in this text, which the CV has rendered *chastening*. The Greek word *timoria* is also used for *punishment*. These two words are only used a couple of times in the NT, and they clearly have to do with punishment of some kind. Here are the scripture references where these words for **chastening** and **punishment**, and those related to them, are used in the NT.

Kolazo - Acts 4:21; 2 Peter 2:4 & 9

Kolasis - Matthew 25:46; 1 John 4:18

Timoreo - Acts 22:5; 26:11

Timoria - Hebrews 10:29

There is a case for believing that *kolasis* essentially means chastening, which has a view to the ultimate correction of the individual, whereas *timoria* refers to punishment in the sense of satisfying the law. *Kolasis* is related to the Greek word *kolazo*, and this essentially means 'to prune, to cut back.' This is supposed to be the purpose behind someone being chastened or punished - to humble them and correct them, to 'prune' them.

Of course, both words and meanings could be used in relation to the Judgment, for not only will it involve chastening but it will also involve punishment in relation to the Divine Law. Each will be judged in accordance with their acts.

We can get some idea of what Jesus meant by this 'chastening judging' or 'punishment' in Luke 12:46-49, which we've considered earlier in this book.

"...the lord of that slave will be arriving on a day for which he is not hoping and at an hour which he does not know, and shall be cutting him asunder and shall be appointing his part with the unfaithful. Now that slave who knows the will of his lord and does not make ready, nor yet does aught with a view to his will, shall have many lashes. Now he who does not know, yet does what deserves blows, shall have few lashes. Now to everyone to whom

much was given, from him much will be sought, and to whom they committed much, more excessively will they be requesting of him. Fire came I to be casting on the earth, and what will I, if it were already kindled?"

(CV)

Jesus used very strong metaphors here. He was saying that when He comes to judge the world and His Church, He will be casting fire on the earth (that is, the fire of God's justice), and the unfaithful hypocrite will receive the same kind of judgment as the unsaved, unbelieving sinner. The chastening or punishment is likened to the lashes of a whip, whether few or many, depending on the 'crime,' that will cut them to pieces (which can also be translated as 'shall be cutting him off,' as in death).

Jesus is alluding to Deuteronomy 25:1-3 concerning the '40 lashes' flogging, which became known as the 40 lashes minus 1, to make sure that the maximum 40 lashes were not increased by accident, due to a miscount. This only proves the point that this 'chastening' or 'punishment' has a purpose to it - it is justice. It is not some mindless torture or vicious punishment with no end in view. This also shows that this 'punishment' CANNOT LITERALLY BE ETERNAL - it has to end at some point, otherwise it is unjust, and it would conflict with God's own Law. Only after this chastening judging is complete will God save the rest of humanity, and reconcile them to Himself.

So returning to our text in Matthew 25, we are to understand that the unrighteous are to experience an indefinite period of chastening or punishment, which is also figuratively described as an 'age-abiding fire.' This is clearly a spiritual fire, for it was originally prepared for the Adversary and his messengers (i.e. the devil and his angels) - and they are spiritual beings. This is not natural, fleshly fire!

It is common to argue from this text, which was originally put forward by Augustine in the 4th century AD, that the **everlasting punishment** of the 'goats' has to be of the same duration as the **everlasting life** of the 'sheep' - with the emphasis being on the everlasting or eternal (Gr. Eonian). But I believe this view is incorrect, as logical as it may sound at first.

The 'everlasting' Life of the 'sheep' is not dependant on the word 'eonian,' which by itself is indicating an indefinite period of time in the age to come. The state of Life and Blessing of the believer is due to IMMORTALITY and INCORRUPTION - that is, DEATHLESSNESS! The emphasis should be laid on the 'life' and the 'chastening,' and not on the word 'eonian' or 'everlasting.'

These words are describing a state of being that will last for the age to come, but that doesn't mean that there isn't anything else beyond this distant horizon of Time. The 'chastening judging' will have to come to an end eventually, for not all will receive the same 'amount of lashes.' Nevertheless, the Life of the 'sheep' shall not end, because the Life is IMMORTALITY!

Let me give an illustration of what I mean here. Let us say that the two destinies of the Sheep and the Goats in the age to come, in a New Creation, are like two ships on the Sea of Time which are heading for the horizon. One is filled with Sheep, while the other is filled with

Goats. The Sheep are leading the way on a ship of blessing, while the Goats are on a slave ship under a curse. Eventually, both ships will reach the final destination beyond the Horizon of Time, and when this occurs the Sheep will be no less blessed than before, but the Goats will be transferred to another ship.....in fact, the Goats will become Sheep and will join with the other ship of blessing!

The Sheep are on an 'age-abiding' ship of blessing, while the Goats are on an 'age-abiding' ship of chastening. Both are on the Sea of Time for an indefinite period during the age to come (i.e. eonian; age-abiding; age-during; related to the ages), but they are on different ships (one of blessing and life; the other of chastening and death). When the goal on the Horizon has been reached, the Sheep will not change....but the Goats will. And it will be God's power and loving mercy, revealed in and through Christ and His people, that will accomplish this glorious end. We all need to see the bigger picture.

## The Lake of Fire is the Second Death

Now let us briefly turn to the book of Revelation, because the 'eternal (age-abiding) fire' of Matthew 25:41 is one and the same as the Lake of Fire in Revelation 20:11-15. We've looked at this topic previously in this book, so here I aim to focus on the nature of this 'Fire' which is called **the Second Death**, and to show how it relates to the 'eonian chastening' described above.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw **the dead, great and small, standing before the throne**, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is **the book of life**. **The dead** were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up **the dead** that were in it, **and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them**, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

(Revelation 20:11-15 NIV)

There are two major ways that this Second Death can be interpreted (with slight variations within both interpretations) - and that is, either literally or figuratively. Of course, there are other factors involved, such as how one interprets the words for 'eternal' and 'forever and ever,' etc (i.e. whether its duration is limited or not); and how one interprets the Lake of Fire (though, of course, to be consistent in your interpretation, if you accept that the Death is literal, then the fire should be literal, and if you believe that the Death is figurative, then the fire should be figurative as well - because the Lake of Fire is actually described as being the Second Death! So how you view one should be consistent with how you view the other.)

So here's my best attempt to briefly state the various viewpoints on this issue by putting them into two groups.

1. The first view is that it is a literal physical death, the death state, which is unconsciousness or oblivion or annihilation or continual sleep (though some view the death state as being alive in another spiritual sphere, which is a little confusing! We shall presume here that the Death state is, in fact, likened to sleep, hence the need for resurrection). Many who hold this view interpret the 'fire' as figurative, and the Death as literal (though there are some who view the fire as the literal agent to bring about the literal Death, which is, at least, consistent!)

Those who believe that 'eternal' and 'forever and ever' are literal conclude that this second Death will never end (i.e. a never-ending sleep of death or annihilation). The majority who believe in the 'Eternal Hell' doctrine view the 'fire' as somewhat literal, and the death as somewhat spiritual, which is very inconsistent and contradictory!

Those who believe in Universal Reconciliation, and who hold to this first view that the Second Death is literal, conclude that this Death will end, and that every one will be resurrected again to be saved at the end of the ages (though scripture doesn't clearly teach that there will be a third resurrection, as such - unless one views 'the consummation' of 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 as this final resurrection to Life. I would say, though, that this text is ultimately talking about Transformation to immortality, which can occur even in the living; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15:50-55. So it's not just about the bodily resurrection of the dead).

2. The second view is that it is a figurative death, that is, it is a metaphor for something deeper, which has similarities to the First Death (or the dying condition) in that it is the state of mortality. This view is generally accepted amongst some of those who believe in Universal Reconciliation/Salvation, and therefore they believe that this Death will eventually end (i.e. it is eonian or age-abiding, and not literally 'eternal.')

The fire is also viewed in a figurative, metaphorical sense, which is consistent with the Death being somewhat figurative.

[There are others, who believe in the Eternal Hell doctrine, who view this Death as being quite literally 'everlasting' but in their view, the fire is not literal, but figurative. Nevertheless, this 'Hell' is still viewed as a never-ending chastening or punishment, i.e. another version of Eternal Punishment or Everlasting Separation. At least this view aims to be more consistent in interpreting the 'fire' and the 'Death' as being more figurative than literal, but they incorrectly interpret 'eternal' and 'forever and ever' literally!]

Phew! I hope that's clear then! It just goes to show how difficult this subject is, and it is evident that there are a number of various viewpoints when it comes to understanding the destiny of the lost, i.e. the Goats.

It is my belief, held with strong conviction (which should already be clear by now), that the second interpretation is the correct one. The Fire and the Death are figurative, and it will one day end - with the Goats being saved and reconciled back to God through Christ.

This Second Death has to be figurative because you can't chastise people if they're literally dead and gone. There has to be a purpose in the verdict that will be passed at the Judgment, as well as a purpose in the sentence itself being carried out. This appears to be wise, common sense!

I once accepted the popular (some say traditional) belief of Eternal Hell many years ago, until I came to understand the truth of Universal Reconciliation, which also included a more accurate understanding of the words *eon* and *eonian*. I then accepted the belief that the Second Death was a literal death until the Consummation of the ages, partly due to the influence of the teachings of A. E. Knoch and the Concordant Publishing Concern. But even this interpretation was not satisfactory to me. I had questions about the whole issue of this 'chastening' and the purpose of the Judgment, and there were a number of texts that just didn't make sense to me if the Second Death was to be taken literally. There was also the question of who the saints were going to rule over and the purpose of their ministry?

This whole subject became much clearer to me when I eventually rejected the system of Dispensationalism, a fairly recent system of interpretation that chops up the Scriptures incorrectly and misuses prophecy to support Christian Zionism, with all sorts of strange and fanciful teachings about the end-times.

## The Dead Standing

Now take note of the fact that in the Revelation text quoted above, **the dead** are seen standing before the Throne to be judged. This is stated at least four times. Now if this is to be taken literally, then how can the literal dead be resurrected to stand before the throne of God to be judged.....if they're dead! This can only mean that these dead ones are unbelievers and religious hypocrites who have not received eonian Life, yet they are resurrected to be judged before Christ, and hence are seen standing before the throne.

That is to say, these 'goats' are viewed as being figuratively dead - the dead ones - who belong to the resurrection of judging and condemnation. Jesus made it clear that His true followers have already passed from the realm of Death to the realm of Life, hence they partake in the First Resurrection of Revelation 20. The rest, on the other hand, remain in Death, even while they are physically alive. The Death here is clearly mortality.

"And He gives Him authority to do judging, seeing that He is a son of mankind. Marvel not at this, for coming is the hour in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and those who do good shall go out into a resurrection of life, yet those who commit bad things, into a resurrection of judging."

(John 5:27-29 CV)

"Verily, verily, I am saying to you that he who is hearing My word and believing Him Who sends Me, has life eonian and is not coming into judging, but has proceeded out of death into life. Verily, verily, I am saying to you that coming is an hour, and now is, when the dead shall

be hearing the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall be living.

(John 5:24-25 CV)

Therefore, to be consistent in our interpretation of Revelation 20, the Second Death, which is said to be the destiny of the dead ones who are being judged, must also be figurative. There are many texts in the Gospels which indicate that those who will be in this place of 'fiery Death' will be experiencing 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' and they will be 'seeing Abraham and all the prophets in the kingdom of light,' while they themselves will be 'outside in the darkness.' (And think about this: If the fire were literal, then the darkness can't be literal, because fire gives light! Clearly both expressions are being used figuratively. Jesus was using spiritual metaphors, as He did in most of His teaching.)

We must also take note that 'death and hades,' that is, the First Death and all that relates to 'the unseen,' is metaphorically 'thrown into the Lake of Fire - which is the Second Death.' This occurs because all of the dead are raised to life to be judged, and therefore the First Death as we know it will no longer exist. It becomes consumed in the Lake of Fire and will be no more. Instead, the Second Death takes its place. Every aspect of sin and death, that is to say, the state of mortality, will be in 'a lake of fire' being judged for the age to come.

There are those who don't accept that Death can be figurative, and they believe that virtually every mention of death and destruction in the NT is referring quite literally to the death state (i.e. the physical death and destruction of the body, leading to soul sleep). I would certainly beg to differ on this. Here are a few texts that clearly reveal that death can certainly be figurative and have a deeper meaning, rather than just referring to physical death.

"We are aware that we have proceeded out of death into life, for we are loving our brethren. He who is not loving is remaining in death."

(1 John 3:14 CV)

John is saying here, in accordance with Jesus' own words, that only believers have come out of death into life - even now - and this is proven by the acts of love, whereas those who are not loving their fellow man are remaining in death, though they are yet still alive.

This state of sin and death within our mortal flesh is exactly what Paul is talking about throughout Romans chapters 6-8, showing that even believers still have to learn to continually die to the flesh for them to be truly living. The following verses will suffice to show this.

"The mind of the flesh is death...

...But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is life because of righteousness...

...For if you live according to the flesh, you will be dying. Yet if by the Spirit you are putting the practices of the body to death, you will be living."

(Romans 8:6, 10, 13 FT)

The truth of the matter is that the only way to true Life (that is, immortality) is through Death and Destruction, and the fires of God - either now or in the age to come.

"And he who is not taking his cross and following after Me is not worthy of Me. He who is finding His soul will be destroying it, and he who destroys his soul on My account will be finding it."

(Matthew 10:38-39 CV)

## The Chastening

I'm going to conclude by quoting a few interesting texts from the NT, which, at least to my mind anyhow, convinces me that the Judgment of the age to come is one of chastening or punishment for the 'goats' that will ultimately come to an end. This chastening judging will be in accord with God's righteous and just Law, whereby everyone will be judged in accordance with their acts. Only the true saints of God, the Overcomers of the Body of Christ, will be spared the Second Death and the divine sentence of God's wrath.

This is not to say that this 'fire' or 'Death' *itself* will save those going through this process of judgment, for only Christ Himself, and the results of His Sacrifice, and the power of God, can save anyone. Nevertheless, it is only through this 'fiery Death' that anyone can learn the ways of God's righteousness and justice, as well as His mercy and grace, and so be saved - for even believers have to undergo something of the fires of God in this life, as well as at the Judgment, when all will be laid bare before the all-consuming fiery eyes of God.

Be that as it may, the 'fire' of the Second Death will be very different, for it will include the wrath of God remaining upon the hypocritical, unfaithful, religious Christians who will fail to receive any wages, as well as upon all the unbelievers! It will probably take the form of a prolonged mortal life in servitude for their sins, reaping in their flesh the seeds of sin which they had sown. They will have forfeited eonian life and the salvation of their souls - and only the grace and mercy of God will set them free from their debt in the final Great Jubilee.

"Yet each will be getting his own wages according to his own toil...Now if anyone is building on this foundation (*Jesus Christ*) gold and silver, precious stones, wood, grass, straw, **each one's work will become apparent**, for the Day will make it evident, for **it is being revealed by fire**. And the fire, it will be testing each one's work - what kind it is. If anyone's work will be remaining which he builds on it (*Christ the Foundation*), he will get wages. If anyone's work shall be burned up, he will forfeit it, yet he shall be saved, **yet thus, as through fire**."

(1 Corinthians 3:8, 12-15 CV)

**"...God, Who will be paying each one in accord with his acts:...yet to those of faction, and stubborn, indeed, as to the truth, yet persuaded to injustice, indignation and fury, affliction and distress, on every human soul which is effecting evil..."**

(Romans 2:8-9 CV)

"...yet he who is stubborn as to the Son shall not be seeing life, but the indignation of God shall be remaining on him."

(John 3:36 CV)

"...the Lord...is keeping the unjust for chastening in the day of judging, yet specially those going after the flesh in defiling lust and despising lordship (*or authority*)...Now these, as irrational animals, born naturally for capture and corruption, blaspheming that in which they are ignorant in their corruption, also shall be corrupted, being requited (*or repaid*) with the wages of injustice."

(2 Peter 2:9, 12-13 CV)

I am convinced that there is every good reason to believe that these scriptures (and others like them) can only be satisfactorily fulfilled by viewing them as describing the judging process of the Lake of Fire, which is called the Second Death. This, to me, is the most satisfactory interpretation, and it aligns itself with the nature of God - that He is Just and Righteous, and will not therefore go against the righteous principles of His own Law and nature. Above all, He is Love.

The Good News is that Jesus Christ has conquered Sin and Death - period! He is the One who has full control of Death and Hades - and this will include the Second Death, the metaphorical Lake of Fire. The Righteousness and Justice, along with the Love and Mercy, of God will ultimately triumph over ALL His enemies - the last enemy being Death itself! The Kingdom of Light will ultimately consume the kingdom of Darkness until no one is left in it's deathly grasp, and Justice will be done in the process. This shall occur in the glorious Age to come, the age of a New Creation, when the Restoration of all things shall occur! Now that's something to shout 'Hallelujah' about!

For further information on these topics, see [The First and Second Resurrections and The Judgment Day](#) and [Is There Really a Hell?](#) Also [Will Death Last Forever?](#)

## 15. The Shepherd and His Sheep

We considered this subject briefly in the last parable of The Sheep and The Goats. In John chapter 10, we have the account of Jesus' allegory of the Good Shepherd and His Sheep. He spoke these words while He was teaching in the temple courts in Jerusalem during the autumn and winter months of 32 AD, during His final six months of ministry.

Like much of His teaching, it was aimed not only at those who were following Him as disciples, but it was also aimed as a rebuke to the religious leaders who were also listening to His teaching.

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were called the sheep of His pasture, while the leaders were referred to as shepherds (e.g. Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11). The good shepherds were true servants of God who walked in righteousness and truth, teaching the people to obey the commandments. The false, wicked shepherds were those who did the opposite, leading the people astray from God's ways and His word, abusing and deceiving the flock of God.

David was actually a shepherd boy before he became the king of Israel, and as a shepherd-king he was a type of the Messiah, the greater Son of David, Jesus Himself. The well known 23rd Psalm of David uses the imagery of a shepherd and his sheep, which David would've been very familiar with. He pictures Yahweh as his shepherd, and himself as a sheep from God's flock.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters..

(Psalm 23:1-2 NIV)

In fact, there are a number of Psalms which speak of God as the Shepherd and the people of Israel as the sheep of His pasture, the flock under His care (e.g. Psalm 95:7; 80:1; 100:3). In Psalm 119:176 the writer refers to himself as a lost sheep that has strayed from the ways of God (see also Isaiah 53:6). Jesus also was to echo the words of the prophets when He spoke about 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel' and that they were 'like sheep without a shepherd' (see Matthew 9:36; 10:6; 15:24; Luke 15:1-7).

This figure is later applied in quite some detail in the prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. God was rebuking the leaders of Israel and Judah for their wickedness and hypocrisy and disobedience, which had previously resulted in the Assyrian captivity of Israel, and it would also lead to the captivity of Judah in Babylon. Yet God promised that he would raise up a shepherd to care for them, and He would restore them to the land of Israel, which was described as the pasture land.

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?'

You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them...

...For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: **I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep.** I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice....

... **I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.** I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken...

... You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God, declares the Sovereign LORD.' "

(Ezekiel 34:1-6, 11-16, 23-24, 31 NIV)

(See also Jeremiah 23:1-6)

These things were fulfilled during the restoration from Babylon when Davidic leaders such as Zerubbabel and Nehemiah were the good shepherds of Israel, along with priests such as Joshua and Ezra, and prophets like Zechariah and Haggai. Yet these things were to have their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Himself as the King-Messiah of Israel and the world.

During the early period of the Restoration from Babylon, the prophet Zechariah prophesied about two shepherds. The good shepherd represented Christ, while the foolish shepherd represented either King Herod or the High Priest Caiaphas (see Zechariah 11:4-17). Again, we have the figure of a shepherd leader of Israel (whether good or bad) pasturing the flock of God. And it is also interesting to note that shepherds were viewed as having a lowly and humble station in life, so the good shepherd is to have a humble heart and spirit.

It is no coincidence that when the great Shepherd of Israel was born, the first among the people who were told about the birth via angelic visitation were shepherds out in the fields near Bethlehem. Even more significantly, these humble shepherds were probably among those who were pasturing the flocks that were especially bred to be used for the sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. These privileged shepherds were among the first to see the great Shepherd and Passover Lamb on the night of His humble birth (see Luke 2:8-20). And it was these shepherds who were also the first ones to evangelise the people of Bethlehem with the good news of Christ's birth. So even the events of Jesus' birth spoke of His coming role as the humble, yet mighty, Shepherd of Israel.

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

" 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.' "

(Matthew 2:3-6 NIV)

## The Sheep and The Sheep Pen

So with this in mind, let us now turn our attention to what Jesus taught in John 10.

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter **the sheep pen by the gate**, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is **the shepherd of his sheep**. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out."

(John 10:1-3 NIV)

Jesus begins by using the analogy of a sheep pen, where shepherds would keep their flocks temporarily under the guard of a watchman. Thieves and robbers would climb over the walls to steal the sheep, whereas the shepherds would enter the pen by the gate where the watchman was in charge as some kind of security guard. Only a legitimate shepherd would use the gate so he could rightly enter the pen to call and lead out his own flock.

Jesus was saying here that the sheep pen was the religion of Old Covenant Judaism, and the flocks of sheep represented the Jewish people. The shepherds were the true servants and prophets of God, while the thieves were the false prophets and messiahs who were not legitimately sent by God.

In particular, Jesus is the ultimate Prophet-King-Priest - the Messiah, the great Anointed One. So in a special sense, He alone has the right as the Good Shepherd to enter the pen through the gate of His Davidic ancestry, and the way was opened up for Him by the great prophet/watchman, John the Baptist.

"When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

(John 10:4-6 NIV)

The sheep will only follow their shepherd/owner by recognising his voice. They will not follow a false shepherd who has a stranger's voice, but instead the flock will run away from him.

Jesus is saying that those sheep who know Him as their Messiah/Shepherd will listen to His voice when He calls them out of the sheep pen of Old Covenant Judaism, and they will then begin to follow Him as disciples as He leads them into the spiritual kingdom of God. It is interesting to note that eastern shepherds would lead their flock to pasture, going ahead of them, rather than driving the flock from behind. In every way, Jesus has gone before us to lead us into the kingdom, the spiritual pasture land of God.

Now those listening to Him didn't understand what He was saying, so He began to elaborate a little.

Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; **I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**"

(John 10:7-10 NIV)

Instead of focusing on Himself as the Shepherd at this point, He continues by likening Himself to the Gate or Door! He is the only Way to the Father, the only Way to Life, the only Way into the Kingdom of Heaven. He is the Messiah - or put another way, the messianic Gate. All others are imposters and false messiahs, but the true sheep of God will only listen to the voice of His Son.

Jesus is the only Way into the pasture land of the kingdom, the only way to be saved from sin and death. Through Him, His sheep can find true freedom and salvation. They can come out of the Old Covenant system of the Law and into the New Covenant of Grace. The pasture represents the spiritual blessings and fruit of the Spirit that a believer can have access to. All those who are false are thieves who come to steal, kill and destroy, while the true Messiah or Christ came to give fullness of life, the life of the ages, to His flock. Only in Christ Jesus can we truly find peace, healing, life and spiritual blessing - both now and for the ages to come.

It is possible that Jesus may also have been alluding to the Sheep Gate, one of the northern gates into Jerusalem, by applying some spiritual significance to it, as it was one of the primary gates where the sheep and lambs were herded through for the temple sacrifices - which looked ahead to His own Sacrifice as the Passover Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. So here we have the Great Shepherd who would lay down His life as a sheep/lamb so that He could be the Gate into the Heavenly Jerusalem.

## The Good Shepherd versus the Hired Hand

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep."

(John 10:11-13 NIV)

Jesus refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd, in contrast to the many bad shepherds who were leading Israel at the time. He is a Shepherd-King who truly cares for His sheep, and He seeks only that which is beneficial to our ultimate well being. His love is so complete that He lays down His own life and soul for the sake of His sheep. Jesus' whole ministry was about love and sacrifice in obedience to His God and Father, culminating in the death of the cross.

In contrast to this is the hired hand, the religious leader who doesn't really care for the sheep, who is only there for money or selfish ambition. When the wolf comes, that is, the one with a wicked heart who wishes to deceive the people, who attacks the sheep to persecute or kill them, the hired hand cowardly abandons the flock, and leaves them open to harm, for he cares nothing for the sheep. He's only concerned for himself and saving his own skin or reputation. When the going really gets tough, he does a runner and deserts the sheep. This was a clear rebuke to many of the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

The Apostle Paul also used similar words when he had to warn the Ephesian elders that false brothers would seek to infiltrate the Church to cause division and sectarianism, and to raise themselves up as leaders with false ulterior motives.

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from

your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

(Acts 20:28-31 NIV)

The Apostle Peter gave us the true credentials for a spiritual leader of God's people, one who is a good shepherd like His Master, one who is not a hired hand, but a true pastor/shepherd who cares for the flock, who feeds them and guides them with real love and humility.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

(1 Peter 5:1-4 NIV)

Let us continue with the words of the Chief Shepherd as He begins to talk about His relationship to the sheep, as well as sheep from another sheep pen.

## Other Sheep From Another Fold

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. **I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.** The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

(John 10:14-18 NIV)

Jesus again emphasises the fact that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep, and that He knows every one of His sheep and they know Him also - in the same way as Jesus knows the Father and the Father knows Him. He is saying here that all true believers and followers of God know who Jesus really is, and this leads to a special spiritual relationship with Him. If we, as sheep, ever doubt His love and care for us because of the harshness of this world and the frailties of our flesh, may we be reminded of these words - that His love is so great that He laid down His life for us to bring us freedom and life.

God's love for His Son is paradoxically expressed in, and through, the loving obedience of His Son when He willingly laid down His life as the Passover Lamb. Take note that no one took Jesus' life from Him. Ultimately, it wasn't Pilate's decision or the Jewish leaders or Caiaphas or anyone else. It was all because it was God's will, and this authority to lay His life down - and to take it up again in resurrection - was given to Him by His Father, whom He willingly obeyed to the very end.

But Jesus also revealed here that He had other sheep who were in a different sheep pen - or possibly they were not in a pen at all, but they were just scattered around the field of the world, lost, without anyone to guide them or care for them. They too would hear His voice and follow Him, and there would be One Flock and One Shepherd. This is extremely important. To the Jewish disciples at that time, the thought that Gentiles would become one with them in the Messiah was hard to accept. Even Peter had to be persuaded by a spiritual vision before he realised this truth (cf. Acts 10). But this is what Jesus was talking about. The remainder of the New Testament writings reveal this to be so, especially the writings of Paul.

Jesus was revealing here that the Gentiles, believing sheep from other nations who belonged to another sheep pen (or just scattered and lost within pagan idolatrous religion), would also hear the call of the Shepherd-King, and there would eventually be One Flock and One Shepherd in the pasture land of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is fulfilled in Christ and His Ecclesia or Church, made up of Jew and Gentile. Therefore, these teachings of Christ about the sheep can now be applied to all those who follow Him (i.e. Christians). Besides this, many of the things that Jesus spoke to ancient Israel can also have relevance to the Christian Church in general - which also contains many false shepherds and hired hands like Israel of old!

The truth of Jew and Gentile coming together as One Flock in Christ is made abundantly clear in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

(Ephesians 2:11-13 NIV)

Yet in another sense, Jesus was also indicating that those lost 'sinners' of the diaspora of Israel who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire would also belong to the One Flock under the One Shepherd. This echoed the words of the prophets concerning Israel's ultimate re-gathering.

I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms...

...My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees.

(Ezekiel 37:22, 24 NIV)

"The days are coming," declares the LORD,  
"when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,  
a King who will reign wisely  
and do what is just and right in the land.

In his days Judah will be saved  
and Israel will live in safety.

This is the name by which he will be called:  
The LORD Our Righteousness.

(Jeremiah 23:5-6 NIV)

Even though these prophecies had been largely fulfilled in the centuries following the Babylonian restoration of all Israel, their ultimate fulfillment is in the Messiah and His kingdom. And it was exactly this fulfillment that Jesus was alluding to. The Jews knew what He was saying, and this caused widespread division amongst them!

At these words the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

(John 10:19-21 NIV)

## "My Sheep Listen To My Voice"

A few months later, during the Feast of Hanukkah (or Dedication), Jesus was again in the temple area in Jerusalem. The Jews were trying to get Him to say plainly whether He was the Messiah or not. And this led to some further teaching on the sheep.

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.** I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

(John 10:25-30 NIV)

Jesus makes it clear that those who listen to Him and believe Him and follow Him are His sheep. He knows them and they know Him. On the other hand, those that don't listen to Him or believe Him or follow Him are not His sheep. He blatantly said to the unbelieving Jews of His day that they did not believe in who He was because they weren't His sheep. Only the chosen ones of God are the true sheep, and these are termed Overcomers or Conquerors in Revelation chapters 2 & 3.

These are the sons of God who have been given eonian life. They shall not perish or be destroyed in the judgment of the age to come. They are no longer lost sheep, but they have been found and saved. No one can snatch these sheep out of Christ's hand, because God the Father, who is greater than all, has given these sheep to Christ, and therefore, they are also God's sheep as well. So no one can snatch them out of God's hand through persecution or death. These also will become shepherds of the kingdom, co-ruling with the Great Shepherd in the age to come.

It was during this discourse that Jesus dropped a bombshell by saying 'I and the Father are one.' His listeners knew full well that He was declaring to be the Son of God, the Messiah and Lord, the very one promised in the prophets. In a unique way, He was invoking the very authority of God as the sole King of Israel, raising Himself above all other authorities and making Himself equal to God. Of course, the Jews who weren't His sheep were enraged at what they thought was absolute blasphemy. And they even attempted to stone Him right then, but it was not His time, so He escaped their grasp.

Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"

"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."

...Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

(John 10:31-33, 39 NIV)

This is the great Touchstone of Truth that reveals who Jesus really is - He is the Messiah, the unique Son of God, the human Image of the Invisible God - and He lived up to His claim completely, fulfilling the words of the prophets concerning the Messiah. And many of the Jews of His day knew full well what He was declaring, but in their unbelief they rejected Him, though they didn't have any good solid reason to do so. This revealed the fact that they were not His sheep! And I ask you, the reader, this: Are you one of His sheep? If so, follow His voice.

In closing this chapter, let me finish with the words of the writer to the Hebrews.

Now may the God of peace, Who is leading up our Lord Jesus, **the great Shepherd of the sheep**, from among the dead by the blood of the eonian covenant, be adapting you to every good work to do His will, doing

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in us what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for the eons of the eons.  
Amen!

(Hebrews 13:20-21 CV)

May you listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and be led out of your sheep pen into His glorious pasture land.

## 16. The Vine And Its Branches

We shall now consider the final parable of this book, which is a fitting end to all that's gone before. Jesus spoke about the Grapevine and its branches during His last Passover meal with His disciples, on the night He was betrayed. It is recorded in John 15:1-17.

It was also during this 'Last Supper' that Jesus said that He wouldn't drink the fruit of the vine again until it found fulfillment in the kingdom of God, when He would drink it anew with His disciples (see Matthew 26:27-29; Mark 14:23-25; Luke 22:14-18). This red wine symbolised Christ's blood, the true blood of the New Covenant, as He became the great Passover Lamb Sacrifice. His death and resurrection fulfilled the spiritual and typological meaning of the Feast of Passover.

In this sense, it found fulfillment in the kingdom of God, and the spiritual kingdom of the heavens came at Pentecost that same year when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples. After His resurrection, the scriptures state that Jesus ate and drank with His disciples, so it is likely that He also drank the fruit of the vine anew with His disciples during this time, before He ascended. Nevertheless, there is a greater manifestation of the kingdom yet to come at Christ's return, when the wedding supper of the Lamb will take place in the glory of a New Creation. Then we shall all drink of the fruit of the vine in a cup of overflowing abundance.

There appears to be a double meaning here in relation to the fruit of the vine, for not only does the wine symbolise Christ's blood, but it can also represent the spiritual joy and blessings of the Kingdom of God, which, of course, is a consequence of Christ's blood sacrifice. Jesus' first miracle of changing pots of water into fine tasting wine at the wedding in Cana perfectly symbolises His glory and the blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven (see John 2:1-11). The water of the Spirit, which is refreshing in itself, especially when one is thirsty, is transformed into the sweet wine of the grape, which symbolises the joy and happiness of the wedding feast of the spiritual Kingdom of God. Jesus was referring to the same spiritual blessings of the New Covenant when He spoke of New Wine being poured into New Wineskins (Luke 5:37-39).

Anyhow, let us begin to consider the allegory of the Vine and its Branches.

### Israel Was The Vine

Firstly, we need to realise that this figure of Vines and Vineyards was not something new. There are many instances in the Old Testament where the nation of Israel was viewed as being the Vine planted in the Vineyard of the promised land, with Jerusalem itself as the centre of the Vineyard. Therefore the Vineyard ultimately represents the Kingdom of God, and the Vine represents the people of God who are to bear good fruit. (For further information on this, see *the Parable of the Vineyard Farmers* in this book).

Here are a few key examples.

You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
you drove out the nations and planted it.

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You cleared the ground for it,  
and it took root and filled the land.

The mountains were covered with its shade,  
the mighty cedars with its branches.

It sent out its boughs to the Sea,  
its shoots as far as the River.

Why have you broken down its walls  
so that all who pass by pick its grapes?

Boars from the forest ravage it  
and the creatures of the field feed on it.

Return to us, O God Almighty!  
Look down from heaven and see!  
Watch over this vine, the root your right hand has  
planted,  
the son (*or branch*) you have raised up for yourself.

**Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire;  
at your rebuke your people perish.**

Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,  
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

Then we will not turn away from you;  
revive us, and we will call on your name.

(Psalm 80:8-18 NIV)

This Psalm gives hints of the Messianic kingdom of the greater Son of David, the Branch, who would arise amongst the people of Israel. The Vine of Israel is seen as being initially blessed in the land of Canaan, within the boundaries originally promised to Abraham, yet they are ultimately judged by God for their sins, burned with fire and destroyed. The only hope is repentance and faith in the Messiah, the Son at the right hand of God.

The prophet Isaiah also spoke of these things, and the judgments of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, ultimately looking ahead to the era of the Messiah and the ultimate judgment upon Jerusalem by the Romans.

In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and  
glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and  
glory of the survivors in Israel...

...I will sing for the one I love  
a song about his vineyard:  
My loved one had a vineyard  
on a fertile hillside.

He dug it up and cleared it of stones  
and planted it with the choicest vines.  
He built a watchtower in it  
and cut out a winepress as well.  
**Then he looked for a crop of good grapes,  
but it yielded only bad fruit.**

"Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah,  
judge between me and my vineyard.

What more could have been done for my vineyard  
than I have done for it?  
**When I looked for good grapes,  
why did it yield only bad?**

Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my  
vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be  
destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be  
trampled.

I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated,  
and briars and thorns will grow there. I will command the  
clouds not to rain on it."

**The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of  
Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his  
delight.** And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed;  
for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

(Isaiah 4:2 & 5:1-7 NIV)

The sad indictment is that the vineyard of Israel produced only bad fruit, that of murder and all manner of unrighteousness. Therefore judgment was inevitable. Hosea also used this analogy.

**Israel was a spreading vine;  
he brought forth fruit for himself.**  
As his fruit increased,  
he built more altars;  
as his land prospered,  
he adorned his sacred stones.

Their heart is deceitful,  
and now they must bear their guilt.  
The LORD will demolish their altars  
and destroy their sacred stones...

... Sow for yourselves righteousness,  
reap the fruit of unfailing love,  
and break up your unplowed ground;

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for it is time to seek the LORD,  
until he comes  
and showers righteousness on you.

But you have planted wickedness,  
you have reaped evil,  
you have eaten the fruit of deception.  
Because you have depended on your own strength  
and on your many warriors,

the roar of battle will rise against your people,  
so that all your fortresses will be devastated—  
as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel on the day of  
battle,  
when mothers were dashed to the ground with their  
children.

(Hosea 10:1-2, 12-14 NIV)

Some time later, Jeremiah and Ezekiel echoed the same words.

I had planted you like a choice vine  
of sound and reliable stock.  
How then did you turn against me  
into a corrupt, wild vine?

(Jeremiah 2:21 NIV)

"Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: As I have given the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest as fuel for the fire, so will I treat the people living in Jerusalem. I will set my face against them. Although they have come out of the fire, the fire will yet consume them. And when I set my face against them, you will know that I am the LORD. I will make the land desolate because they have been unfaithful, declares the Sovereign LORD."

(Ezekiel 15:6-8 NIV)

Here we see the figure of the vine being burned in the fire of God's wrath and vengeance due to sin and disobedience. This figure of God's judgment upon Israel and Jerusalem is also symbolised as grapes being crushed in the winepress of His wrath. The following scriptures were prophesying these things concerning Jerusalem's judgment, as well as including the judgment that would fall upon the nations who attacked Jerusalem, promising protection for the believing remnant of Israel who remained faithful to Yahweh.

Concerning ancient Israel, these things have had their horrific fulfillment primarily in the wars of the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Romans, covering their history from the 8th century BC to 70 AD, when the Old Covenant was officially terminated.

"Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side.

Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. **Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!**"

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

(Joel 3:12-16 NIV)

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "**Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe.**" The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

(Revelation 14:17-20 NIV)

With this background information, let us now turn our attention to the parable in John 15.

## The True Vine

**"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener (or farmer).** He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes (*literally 'cleans'*) so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me."

(John 15:1-4 NIV)

Jesus is now the true Vine, the true Israel, if you will. That is to say, the only ones who belong to the spiritual people of the Israel of God are those who are followers and believers in

Jesus/Yeshua as the Messiah. Jesus is the true Vine and His followers are the branches in the Vineyard of the Kingdom of Heaven. God the Father is the Farmer or Gardener Who prunes and cultivates the branches so that they will bear more fruit.

All those who claim to be Jews or Christians, who claim to be in the Vine of the true Israel, but who bear no fruit, are cut off, that is, they are judged and condemned. Whereas those who do bear fruit are pruned, literally cleaned up, so that they will be even more fruitful. In the same way as dead branches are cut back to cause the tree to bear more fruit, so God prunes His people with discipline to get rid of the dead works of the flesh so that ultimately we will bear more spiritual fruit, the fruit of the Spirit.

Jesus stated that the true disciple is already clean because he has accepted the word of Christ, nevertheless, we are to remain in the Vine if we are to bear fruit to God. No one can bear fruit alone, of his own works, but we must remain in the source of all Life and fruitfulness, the Vine of Christ Jesus Himself.

Now you may be asking, 'What does all this mean in a practical sense?' Well, as we've already seen briefly from the OT, the fruit represents our deeds or works, and our character. The Good Fruit represents acts of obedience and faith and righteousness, whereas the Bad Fruit represents acts of disobedience and unrighteousness. These acts are expressed through our character and the way we live.

Jesus Himself is the ultimate example of One who bears Good Fruit, that is, One who obeys the commands and leading of the Father. In the same way, Jesus' followers, who are to remain in Him, that is, those true disciples who identify themselves with Christ's teaching and character, are to bear the same kind of fruit as sons of God. Bearing this kind of Good Fruit is what pleases God - but we have to remain in Christ and He in us. This is true discipleship and servant hood - but it's not religion or meaningless ritual! It's all a matter of Grace!

Let us take a look at some New Testament scriptures that tell us something about the fruit we're to bear.

## Bearing Fruit

But when he (*John the Baptist*) saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

(Matthew 3:7-10 NIV)

John the Baptist echoed the words of the earlier prophets by warning the religious leaders of Israel that the fiery wrath of God was soon to come upon Jerusalem and Palestine. He told them to produce the right fruit in keeping with repentance. He was telling them to not rely on

their religious roots of tradition, and flesh and blood ancestry, but to live out the righteous acts of repentance and faith toward God in obedience to the spirit of His Law. True faith will always produce righteous acts in accordance with God's commands, because the Law is holy, righteous and just, and it reflects something of the character of God. Those who love Him will obey Him - even through acts of repentance due to sin.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. **By their fruit you will recognize them.** Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**"

(Matthew 7:15-20 NIV)

Jesus warned the people of false prophets who would appear to be good, religious leaders, but inside, their heart motives and attitudes would be that of a wolf that attacks the sheep. So Jesus is talking about character here, and not necessarily doctrine. These false shepherds would really be thorns and thistles to the sheep, rather than being beneficial fruit for the people to feed from. They are likened to bad, rotten trees that can produce only bad, rotten fruit. As bad trees they are incapable of bearing good fruit!

So, Jesus says that we can tell a false prophet, or false shepherd/pastor, or false teacher, not so much by his doctrine, which may appear to be correct, but by his general character and spirit, and the way he lives his life. Does he live the life of His Master and Lord with the right heart attitude concerning righteousness, love and truth? This is described as the fruit one bears, and it is this fruit that reveals whether or not we're a bad tree or a good tree, that is, whether we're a true servant of God or not. A true son is one who bears the image and character of the Father.

This is not talking about sinlessness, for the child of God should always be growing, and we often make mistakes in our immaturity, sometimes without truly knowing it, but it does matter how we handle our mistakes. If we are truly seeking to walk in humble obedience to the Father, in love and truth, then we can rectify our mistakes through acts of repentance. The Spirit of Jesus cannot help but bear good fruit in our lives. Although it is the grace of God that saves us and sanctifies us through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, we are expected to walk worthily of our calling in obedience to the commands of Christ and of God. This is what it means to be a true Christian, a true follower of Jesus. Be that as it may, the false leaders cannot hide their true identity for their wolf-like character will reveal itself in their everyday lives.

At this time of writing, in recent months, there have been a number of well known evangelical Christian Bible teachers and pastors here in the UK who have been exposed as deceptive wolves and religious hypocrites (to my perception anyhow). Many have been influenced by them, which has led to great damage being done to many of God's people. One was very outspoken about upholding traditional family values and the Christian walk, and he was often very arrogant and angry in his preaching and teaching, making a big deal over

healings and miracles in his church - and yet it turned out that he was having an adulterous affair with a member of his church for many years! This guy is 'Bishop' Michael Reid.

Another guy, who's ministry I was greatly blessed by many years ago, a very intelligent, well-educated man, has become more and more arrogant and rude, resorting to slander, gossip and reviling of fellow believers, even against those who are clearly showing a more Christ-like spirit than he is, and this bad attitude and focus permeates his website. In fact, the only time I ever met him, when I greeted him with 'alright, then' and a smile, he just looked at me blankly and said nothing! That reaction had more of an impression on me than his subsequent teaching! But hey, peace and blessing to him, as he may have been having a bad day, like we all do sometime or another! Nevertheless, to me, this is where it matters - how we treat one another - even when we're feeling really ill or something. Without love and kindness, our faith and teaching can lose its meaning.

Yet sadly he just seems to be one of many these days who raise themselves up to 'defend the faith' with proverbial Tommy guns! He pretty much knocks down anyone who doesn't agree with him, and yet he is very popular among dispensational Christian Zionists. His name is Jacob Prasch of Moriel Ministries. His treatment of Rev. Steven Sizer is one such example.

Yet, in all honesty, I've known for a long time that things weren't right with these guys. I just knew it in my spirit, because they were not bearing the right fruit. It doesn't matter how intelligent or scholarly someone is, or how popular they are, but what matters most is the way they treat others, especially their own spiritual family!

Yet having said that, we must be careful that we don't judge anything before the appointed time, for some things remain somewhat hidden from view. And there can always be room for a change of heart and action. Grace is the key, for we all have a dark side! By God's grace, may the light of Christ shine out instead!

I'm not usually in the business of 'naming and shaming' but these guys have very public ministries, and they carry great influence. The things mentioned here are not just little mistakes committed in a quiet corner somewhere. For good reason, I am concerned for those who are greatly influenced by them. Hence, I have used them here as examples of obvious bad fruit, which has clearly tainted their ministries. Again, let us be reminded of Jesus' teaching on this.

"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. **But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.** For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

(Matthew 12:33-37 NIV)

Here is what the apostle Paul had to say on the subject of bearing fruit.

The acts of the sinful nature (*the flesh*) are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.** Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

(Galatians 5:19-26 NIV)

Here is a clear list of the acts of the flesh versus the fruit of the Spirit. The works of the flesh are just that - the works or actions of mortal flesh left to itself. This is the Old Man or Old Humanity. In this state, no one can please God or save themselves from sin and death. On the other hand, the character of the New Man or New Humanity is that which grows of the Spirit of God. This is totally a work of Grace.

Those who live in accordance with the acts of the Old Humanity in Adam will not inherit the kingdom of God - even if they claim to be Christians. Only those who are Overcomers in Christ, those who bear the spiritual fruit of the New Humanity, will inherit the kingdom of God in immortality and incorruption. And the principle fruit of the New Man is Love.

Here are some more scriptures that talk of the fruit of the Spirit.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

(Ephesians 5:8-9 NIV)

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

(Colossians 1:10 NIV)

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

(James 3:17-18 NIV)

In relation to the pruning or cleansing that the Father gives to His sons, so that we will bear more fruit, the fruit of righteousness and peace, the writer to the Hebrews had this to say.

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

(Hebrews 12:11 NIV)

We have a wall hanging in our living room that has a picture of a bunch of grapes on it, and it reads "Fruit is evidence of the Root" and below this it has the following quote from John 15 about the Vine and the Branches. This is always a good reminder to me of the true teaching of Jesus - we must bear the right fruit and live the life, but apart from Him we can do NOTHING that has any real lasting value toward God!

## "Apart From Me You Can Do Nothing"

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; **apart from me you can do nothing.** If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

(John 15:5-8 NIV)

What it means to remain or abide in Christ is to be a true follower or disciple of Jesus, seeking to hear the voice of the Spirit and to obey the commands of God and of Christ. This 'abiding' will then result in much spiritual fruit and fruitful prayer, for God hears the prayers of the righteous ones. This cannot be done in the strength of our own flesh, because the flesh can only produce bad fruit because its roots are rotten. So good deeds by themselves cannot save us from sin and death, and they cannot make us right with God. This can only occur through the gracious acts of the Spirit of God and of Christ manifesting love through us by faith. Jesus is the true Vine and the sons of God are the branches. That is, the Body of Christ Ecclesia or Church is the true heavenly Israel of God.

We must be transferred into the New Humanity in Christ, which is represented elsewhere as the ultimate Tree of Life. Christ is the ultimate Fruit Tree full of Life, and His people, the sons of God, are the branches and leaves. A greater manifestation of these things awaits us in the near future when Christ shall return to restore all things in a New Creation.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever....

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city."

(Revelation 22:1-5, 14 NIV)

It is the purpose of God that Christ's disciples bear much fruit for the Father's glory. This can only be done in and through Christ, for apart from Him we can do NOTHING that has any lasting value before God. All things of the flesh will be burnt up in the fires of God's righteous judgment in the age to come. That is, the dead withered branches that did not remain in the vine will be thrown into the fire of God's age abiding chastening. (These things have been considered in previous parables). Therefore, the grace of God is not a license for us to do what we want or to use our freedom to indulge in fleshly immoral acts. The Vine is NOT a rotten tree, but a sacred one, a Holy One. It's lifeblood is the very Kingdom of God.

## Love One Another

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.** Then the Father will give you

whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other."

(John 15:9-17 NIV)

Jesus went on to talk to His disciples about love - the love of the Father for His Son, the love of the Son for His Father, and the love of the Son for His friends. This love is expressed through obeying the commands of God and His Son. This is how we remain in Christ's love. This, in turn, should lead us to love one another in accordance with Christ's simple command. This is not a slushy, sentimental love (though there is a place for romantic love, of course, between a man and a woman), but this kind of love is the strongest thing that there is in the whole universe. It is the kind of sacrificial love that causes one to lay down his life for his friends. This same love causes one to even love their enemies. Jesus lived this love out to the utmost. He is our example, a true Leader.

This love brings the fullness of the joy of Christ into our hearts. As we grow in the love and grace and knowledge of God, we are then termed 'friends' of Christ rather than mere servants. As friends, we get to know the Father's business, as Jesus reveals more of Himself to us, and this in turn leads to much spiritual fruit bearing. This place of blessing and rest in the Father's hands is not automatically given to each believer. It has to come through experience and growth, leading to spiritual maturity. Only then will we live fruitful lives, spiritually speaking, as we obey the commands of Christ and remain in His love. Only then will we pray in accord with God's will, and He will give us whatever we ask for in His Name.

The Sons of God are not saved and sanctified because they choose to be of their own accord, but it is Christ who chose us in accord with God's will. We were chosen for a purpose - to become firstborn sons of the living God; shepherds who will care for the lost; royal priests who will rule and guide the sons of men in righteousness, love and truth, with the justice of God, tempered with mercy. This is confirmed by the Apostle Paul.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. **For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

(Ephesians 2:4-10 NIV)

We are to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, guiding us in all that we say and do, and we are to let the word of Christ dwell in our hearts richly through faith. Those who are the true sons of God will be led by the Spirit of God in accordance with the New Humanity in Christ Jesus. These words of Paul say it all. May we meditate on them often.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, **but Christ is all, and is in all.**

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

(Colossians 3:1-17 NIV)

Those who are the true chosen ones of God are not the Jewish people or the state of Israel, as many believe. Earthly Israel after the flesh are no longer the chosen people of God, apart from those who belong to the spiritual remnant of grace in Messiah Jesus. Yet this Israel of God also includes all true Gentile Christians as well.

"Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."

(Matthew 21:43 NIV)

The Old Covenant has passed away, and all the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are fulfilled in, and through, the New Covenant in Christ and His people, the true

Israel of God, the Vine and its branches. (This is dealt with a little more in the Appendix). Here are some scriptures that clearly confirm this truth.

By calling this covenant "new," **he has made the first one obsolete**; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear...

...For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant....

...But you have come **to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem**, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, **to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven**. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, **to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant**, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

(Hebrews 8:13; 9:15; 12:22-24 NIV)

It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel...

...But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ...

...So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, **but the elect did**. The others were hardened...

...I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. **And so all Israel will be saved...**

(Romans 9:6; 10:16-17; 11:5-7, 25-26 NIV)

In the days just before Christ returns, there will be a great ingathering of Jews into the kingdom of God, as well as Gentiles. We are now living in those days of the latter rains of the Spirit. The great Harvest of the end of the age is nearly upon us - so keep running the Race of Faith, and remain in the Vine - and you will receive the wreath of Life when He comes.

## Appendix:

### The Kingdom of Heaven and The 'Millennial' Reign

The system of Biblical interpretation known as Pre-Millennial Dispensationalism is very popular today, as well as its inevitable offspring of Christian Zionism. I was greatly influenced by this system for many years, largely due to the teachings of Hal Lindsey and others. In recent years, after researching the subject both biblically and historically, I have seen the errors of this system, and have therefore rejected it. Even Adolf Knoch and the Concordant Publishing Concern, from whom I've received much teaching over the years, and for whom I still have much respect, were, and are, very ultra-dispensational in their understanding of various subjects, particularly in regard to Biblical prophecy and the role of the apostle Paul.

In March 2003, I published a book entitled *Ancient Prophecies Unveiled: The Times of the Nations*, (which I'm still very proud of), but although it contains much truth, I have since had to alter some of my views on a number of important points, and because of this, and due to the 'pre-millennial dispensational' viewpoint that pervaded my book, I've since had to withdraw it from print. I really felt the need to do this for the sake of truth, because, as I've stated, in recent years I've become enlightened to the fact that this system of interpretation is incorrect.

You'd be forgiven for thinking that this pre-millennial dispensational viewpoint (which teaches that there will be a Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the church, a 7 or 3 1/2 year Tribulation leading to the final war of Armageddon, followed by the Return of Christ to set up a 1000 year reign centered in Jerusalem in Palestine, with a rebuilt temple, with the Jews being the central focus again, etc, etc) had been the overwhelming traditional orthodox interpretation of scripture from the early centuries of Christianity - but you'd be wrong. It may be popular today, but this modern Dispensationalism wasn't the prevailing viewpoint amongst the early church or the Greek Church Fathers.[\[1\]](#)

Even though I believe that the Kingdom of God will be manifested in fullness on the earth (on a new restored earth to be exact) when Christ returns, I do not believe that this will be the 'Millennial age' of Revelation 20. This is because 'Satan's Loosing' could not occur in the New Creation age with the people of God being attacked by the kingdom of darkness - again - as it states in Revelation 20! Yet if these things are applied symbolically to this present age, all makes sense.

All of this has a great bearing on the subject of this book, which has to do with the Secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven and Christ's reign. I felt the need to write this Appendix to clarify some important truths on what the NT teaches about God's chosen people, Christ's 'Millennial' Reign, and conditions at the end of this age. I hope that this somewhat brief appendix will help to bring some balance and clarity to the subject of Christ's Kingdom and End-Time Prophecy. For further study of these things, see the section [The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed](#).

### The Secrets of the Kingdom

The main theme of this book has been about the secrets of the kingdom that Jesus spoke about in various parables. We have seen that He revealed to His original apostles and disciples,

and through them to us, that the gospel of the kingdom would go out to the whole world, establishing God's kingdom on the earth through His 'Church.'

This would occur during the Times of the Nations, as opposed to the Times of the Hebrews, during which time Israel after the flesh, that is, the Jews, would be scattered throughout the nations, while Jerusalem would be trampled on by the nations until the end of this age, when the Times of the Nations will end or be fulfilled. These things were to fully take effect after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, when the Old Covenant era was officially closed (see Luke 21:20-24).

It must be understood that, in many of His parables, Jesus referred to 'the Kingdom of the Heavens' or 'the Kingdom of God' as existing in this present age, during His absence, while He is ruling from the spirit realm. In fulfillment of all prophecy, particularly the prophecies of Daniel, the New Testament declares that the Messianic Kingdom of the Heavens has now arrived and has already been established on earth, as well as in the heavens.

Jesus Christ is already ruling the nations with a 'rod of iron' from the throne room of heaven, having defeated Sin and Death, and the powers of Darkness, in His death and resurrection and ascension. He has fulfilled the prophecies of the greater son of David who would take the throne of Israel and the world. Christ is the One who has tied up the strong man (Satan) with the spiritual chains of the Kingdom of Heaven (cp. Revelation 20:1-3).

These few scriptures testify to the above.

"But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house."

(Matthew 12:28-29 NIV)

"I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

(Matthew 16:28 NIV)

It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

(1 Peter 3:21-22 NIV)

The Apostle Paul also revealed that the Body of Christ Ecclesia (or Church), the sons of God, may be on earth in the flesh, but we are also seated amongst the heavenly powers in Christ! Hence in fulfillment of Jesus' own words, the Twelve are already on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel in Christ's kingdom.

"And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

(Matthew 16:18-19 NIV)

"I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, **when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**

(Matthew 19:28 NIV)

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead **and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.** And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way...

...And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

(Ephesians 1:19-23; 2:6-7 NIV)

Now when we come to the vision of Revelation we should seek to understand it in the light of these clear scriptures and the main teaching of the NT. We should also take careful note of the fact that the book was addressed to those living at that time in the 1st century AD, when the things contained within it were to shortly be fulfilled (Revelation 1:1-3). We do not have to wait until the end of this age to see the vast majority of the vision of Revelation fulfilled, as many teach!

There is also compelling evidence, both internally and externally, that Revelation was written before 70 AD. This becomes the key to unlocking its initial interpretation - it was the ultimate apocalyptic vision prophesying the end of the Old Covenant system, and the judgment upon Israel and Jerusalem, followed by the victory of Jesus Christ and His people, the true Israel of God, in a New Creation.

Now if we approach the details in Revelation 20, which talks about the 1000 year 'Millennial' Reign and Satan's binding and loosing, etc, keeping all of the above in mind, we

can see that this is an allegorical story board for the present era of Christ's heavenly Reign. This doesn't rule out the fact that there is going to be a greater manifestation of these things yet to come on a New Earth after Christ returns, but He's already been ruling with His people for a symbolical period of 1000 years ( $10 \times 10 \times 10 =$  the perfection of divine order), during which time Christianity has triumphed over the Beast of the Roman Empire and continues to expand amidst great Apostasy! These are the very things that were prophesied in the teachings of Jesus and the writings of the Apostles.

So, simply stated, the present age of 'the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven' that Jesus so often spoke about is one and the same as the 'Millennial' Reign of Christ and the First Resurrection saints described in Revelation 20. This prophetic allegory also shows that, towards the end of this age, there will be a short period of 'Satan's loosing' before Christ returns in judgment with fire from heaven. This 'loosing' will cause a huge increase in the powers of the kingdom of darkness amongst the nations, whereby they will seek to surround God's people with lawless deception and the ancient mystery religions.

This will be a final assault upon the true Israel of God, the true Christians, understood as an allegorical fulfillment of the 'Gog and Magog' battle that was fulfilled in ancient Israel. This would indicate that Satan will seek to return the world to a pre-Christian pagan era, but the faithful remnant of God's people will overcome until the ultimate Day of the Lord arrives.

I now wish to briefly consider three main points below, all of which are intimately connected. They are:

- a) That Israel according to the flesh are no longer the chosen people of God
- b) To consider the clear prophetic indications of conditions at the end of this present age, which involves Satan's loosing; and
- c) To consider the length of the Times of the Nations

## A) The Israel of God

The original Abrahamic covenant was the basis for all the promises and covenants given to Israel, and this included the addition of the Mosaic covenant (that is, the Law of Moses, the Torah). That is to say, the Law incorporated the original promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob concerning the fleshly nation of Israel (the Seed; Abraham's descendants, the Circumcision), which included the promise of the Land of Canaan, and the promise that all mankind would be blessed through them. (See Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-16; Leviticus 26:40-46; Galatians 3:17-19).

The Promised Land and the Holy City of Jerusalem, the Temple and the Aaronic priesthood, the kingdom and kings of Israel and Judah, etc, were all an integral part of the Law Covenant 'package.' (See Deuteronomy 1:8; 7:6-11; 9:5-6; 12:1-7; 30:19-20).

These things were subsequently enlarged upon in the Davidic/Solomonic Covenant (see 2 Samuel 7). All these things were to lead to the coming of the Messiah, the greater Son of David.

The NT reveals clearly that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah (or Christ), the ultimate Anointed One, the ultimate Prophet, High Priest and King. He has established the New Covenant, promised through Jeremiah, and this covenant has superceded and replaced the Law covenant (because Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets), and the Law covenant is now termed the 'Old Covenant.' (See Hebrews 8-9).

The Abrahamic covenant, and all of the promises originally given through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, have been ultimately fulfilled in Christ - and by extension, to all those who belong to Him as the true Israel of God. (See Galatians 3:6-29; Romans 4:9-17; Matthew 5:17).

During His final week of ministry before His death, Jesus stated that the judgment upon Jerusalem and the Temple and the people of Judea (which occurred in 66-70 AD) would be **'the days of vengeance in fulfillment of ALL that has been written'** (i.e. that which was written in the Law and the Prophets). (See Luke 21:20-24; cf. Deuteronomy 28:45-68).

Jesus taught that the unbelieving Jews, as subjects of the kingdom and as the original tenants of the land of promise, would be cast out, and another nation would take their place in the kingdom of God who would bear the right fruit (Matthew 8:11-12; 21:43).

The inheritance of the earthly land of Israel has been replaced by a spiritual, heavenly land, an inheritance that has been enlarged to include the whole earth, even the universe! (Hebrews 2:5; 4:8-11; 11:39-40). [\[2\]](#)

The old Jerusalem has been replaced by the heavenly New Jerusalem, which ultimately represents the true Israel of God under the authority of the 12 tribes of Israel (OT) and the 12 Apostles of the Lamb (NT). Nowhere does it state in the NT that earthly Jerusalem will be restored to its ancient position as the holy city of God's people. In fact, Jesus prophesied the opposite, in that it would be trampled down by the nations throughout this present age.

The same goes for the Holy Temple that once stood in Jerusalem. It is not God's will that it should be rebuilt! The middle wall of partition, the fleshly barrier keeping Gentiles out, has been torn down in Christ! It is a reversing of God's purposes to try to erect the wall again! (Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20).

Every covenant and promise to Israel has been fulfilled in the history of Israel and Judah, and all are ultimately fulfilled in Christ Jesus and His people (1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Corinthians 1:18-20; Romans 15:4-9; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

God will never go backwards in His purposes, so all the 'fleshly, worldly' things of the Old Covenant, including that which belonged to the promises given to Abraham, such as circumcision and the land, have been fully superceded by the New Covenant in Christ. This doesn't mean that Israel as a nation, i.e. the Jews, are cast off completely. Like those of other nations, they can still be grafted back in again to the kingdom tree, even more so as the Olive Tree was originally their own! But this Olive and Vine is the kingdom of heaven represented in Messiah Jesus - He is the true Vine and Olive tree. There is no life or fruit outside of Christ (Romans 11).

God's choice (or election) and gifts and calling and promises, etc, originally given to the Hebrew patriarchs, have not been nullified or revoked, because they are irrevocable! They

have been fulfilled in Christ and the New Covenant, and the believing remnant of grace out of both Israel and the nations. This 'called out group' or Ecclesia is the Israel of God.

In Romans 9:6-7, Paul made a distinction between Israel according to the flesh (the Jews) and Israel according to the Spirit (the true spiritual nation). Therefore, the goal of Paul's discourse in Romans 11:26, that 'all Israel will be saved' at the return of Christ, is referring to the spiritual Israel of God in Christ Jesus - which includes Jew and Gentile alike. This Church is not a 'parenthesis' in God's plan, as some teach, which will then take a back seat to fleshly Israel again - it is the goal of it!

Christ is the end of the Law so that all who believe in Him can be made righteous - whether Jew or Gentile (Romans 10:4).

The NT writings, and early church history, leads me to conclude that virtually all the OT prophecies have been fulfilled in and through ancient Israel, leading right through to the time of Jesus and the apostles in the 1st century, and up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. The ultimate spiritual fulfillment of these things are found in Christ and His people.

Nowhere does the NT clearly state that fleshly Israel are still the chosen people of God who are still to be given the land, the city of Jerusalem and the temple in accordance with the Old Covenant promises. That is because all these things have already found fulfillment in the past history of Israel, and in the coming of Christ and the establishing of His kingdom.

The OT has to be understood and interpreted in the clear light of the NT, and not the other way around. If the NT is read with purely OT eyes, wrong conclusions and great error will inevitably result. The NT should not be understood as though God were going backwards into OT prophecy again. The NT is a forward progression, not backward.

As far as the events of the 1st century before 70 AD are concerned, it must be understood that the 'Acts period' was an era of transition from the Old to the New, as well as being a gracious era of probation for Israel, to give them time to repent, and for the gospel to go out to all the nations across the Roman Empire.

## B) The End of the Age and Satan's Loosing

Most Christians would be surprised to know that right now there aren't that many specific prophecies left to be fulfilled, and that the NT gives us only a few clues as to what the condition of the world and the Church will be like at the end of this age before the sudden return of Christ. These 'conditions' can be divided into three groups as follows.

- **The Harvest** - In accordance with the typology of the seven Feasts of the Lord given to Israel, Jesus, in His parables, spoke about the great Harvest being at the end of the age. His Return to fully manifest the kingdom at the end of this age is likened to the era of Tabernacles, the time of the ingathering for the great Harvest. This especially involved the harvesting of the grapes and olives.

This was also the general time of the latter rains which symbolises a time of spiritual refreshment. Peter spoke of this time of refreshing in Acts 3:19-21. Paul also hinted of a time when many Jews would be grafted back in again to the kingdom Olive tree just before Christ returns (Romans 11:12, 22-31). So this is a time of spiritual fruit bearing and harvest, a time of spiritual rain.

Yet in the parable of the Wheat and the Darnel, Jesus also indicated that 'the sons of the wicked one' within Christendom and the world would also grow to fruition to be judged at the time of the great Harvest. So this reveals that the Harvest involves good fruit and bad fruit growing to fruition at the same time.

- **Peace and Safety** - Both Jesus and Paul indicated that there will be an era of peace and safety just before Christ returns in the ultimate Day of the Lord. The world, and the Church in general, will be in a 'business as usual' frame of mind, not expecting the coming of the Lord, hence it will surprise them like a thief in the night (Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

Also, the letters to the seven Churches in Revelation 2-3 can be understood as symbolically portraying the entire 'Church era' of 'the Times of the Nations.' This is known as Historical Parallelism. Generally speaking, the eras can be broken down as follows:

The Ephesus Church (33 - 64 AD)

The Smyrna Church (64 - 313 AD)

The Pergamum Church (313 - 529 AD)

The Thyatira Church (529 - 1517 AD)

The Sardis Church (1517 - 1776 AD)

The Philadelphia Church (1776 - 1948\* AD)

The Laodicean Church (1948 - ? AD - the Coming of Christ)

Hence, the Laodicean Church is describing the 'end of the age' Church, which indicates that the Church (or Christendom) in general will be in a state of great prosperity and material riches, boasting in its health and wealth, and what it thinks is great spiritual insight! But in reality it is poor and blind and naked, and this 'comfortable position' will lead to a lukewarm, indifferent attitude (Revelation 3:17-18). Yet the discipline of God will shake it up before Christ returns to reward His people with true rulership in the age to come<sup>[3]</sup>

- **The Growth of the Kingdom of Darkness** - A number of passages in the NT speak of growing deception and apostasy within the Church during the last days (for example, 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; see also the parables of the Wheat and the Darnel, and the Leaven). This indicates that there will be a growth in the kingdom of darkness in relation to lawlessness and false religion, particularly that which infiltrates the Church. The symbolical story board of Revelation 20:7-10 (and

also 16:12-16) reveals that, as the end of the age draws near, after Christ has been ruling through His Church for a long period of time, there will be a marked return, in some measure, to a pre-Christian pagan era, which is referred to as 'Satan's loosing.'

This spiritual war of 'Armageddon' will manifest as an invasion of eastern religion with ancient idolatrous roots. The true people of God, as those who belong to the heavenly Jerusalem, will feel surrounded by the kingdom of darkness as the 'Gog and Magog' war clouds of all nations gather for a final onslaught against the Israel of God (Cf. Ezekiel 38-39).

Yet this spiritual attack will ultimately be thwarted by the fiery judgment of God from heaven - that is, the coming of Christ in flaming fire.

### C) The Times of the Nations

Thirdly, it can be shown that there are time patterns within Biblical history that can reveal the probable length of the present Church Era, also known as The Times of the Nations. Simply stated, there was the **Times of the Pre-Hebrew Nations** (or the Ancient Patriarchs); followed by the **Times of the Hebrews**; followed by the **Times of the Nations**.

The chronological data for these eras can be calculated with a high degree of accuracy by combining the biblical and historical information together.<sup>[4]</sup> It must be noted though that the early genealogies of humanity, from Adam to Abram, recorded in Genesis 5 & 11 (cf. 1 Chronicles 1 & Matthew 1), are not necessarily to be understood as complete. There are evidently some gaps in the genealogies. Nevertheless, the time spans that are recorded there have great spiritual and symbolical meaning, even though it is likely that they are not absolute and complete as far as the actual chronological history is concerned. (See [Biblical Genealogies](#) elsewhere on this website for further information).

The chronological eras can be shown thus.

#### **Times of the Pre-Hebrew Nations**

From Adam to the Abrahamic Covenant (in 1877 BC) = 2018 years

#### **Times of the Hebrews**

From the Abrahamic Covenant to the official end of the Old Covenant

That is, from the Covenant (in 1877 BC) till the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (in 70 AD) = 1948 years

(NB. Adding 1 year crossing from BC to AD)

**Times of the Nations (or Gentiles)**

Now if the length of the Times of the Nations is exactly the same as the length of the Times of the Hebrews then we come to the following conclusion:

From 70 AD + 1948 years = 2018 AD

Or put another way

The modern Israeli State was formed in 1948 AD + 70 years = 2018 AD

Now according to these calculations, from the 'birth' of the First Adam to the Abrahamic Covenant was 2018 years!

Now it is possible that from the birth of the Second Adam (Jesus, in 2 BC) to the full manifestation of the Kingdom promised in the covenants will be 2018 years - which would take us to 2017/2018 AD!

**I have to clearly emphasise here that in no way at all am I attempting to set dates for the Return of Christ.** I just wish to put forth my own observations in this regard for the reader to decide. There is no doubt at all that there are intriguing time patterns here which cannot be ignored, nevertheless, I would advise caution in taking this too literally. The earlier time span from Adam to Abraham is probably not to be taken as concrete history, *chronologically* speaking, that is. The same could be said of the present Times of the Nations. It may just be symbolic. And also, virtually every system of chronology has some 'holes' somewhere, I'm sure!

Be that as it may, taken as a whole with all of the other points above, I believe this gives further weight to the probability that we are very near the end of this age, when a far greater manifestation of the Kingdom of Heaven will arrive. Either way, there's a New Creation coming - and it's not too far away!

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[1] See the following web links:

[Chiliasm of the Early Church Fathers](#)

[Early History of Millennium Teaching](#)

[Why the Early Church Finally Rejected Premillennialism](#)

[2] There are those who emphasise the point that the Abrahamic promises were unconditional and were 'everlasting' in scope. This is used to support the belief that the Jews should still be given the land of Palestine/Israel because it's theirs 'forever.' The true meaning of the Hebrew words and phrases translated as 'everlasting' and 'eternal' and 'forever and ever' is not that of a literal absolute meaning of 'never-ending.' The Hebrew word *Olam* refers to indefinite time; that which is obscure on the horizon of time. Hence, depending on the context, 'everlasting' can mean someone's lifetime or many generations or thousands of years or time indefinite. It essentially has to do with the ages of time, which in Greek, is termed Aeonian. For further information, see [Examples of Olam \(Eon or Eonian\) Concerning Things That Are NOT Everlasting](#)

[3] I am largely indebted to Dr Stephen E. Jones for the layout of these epochs of Church history, as interpreted using the Historical Parallel method, which is taken from his book *The Seven Churches (revised edition 2004)*. I hasten to add, though, that I do not share his belief, stated in his book, that there is a Post-Church era after the Laodicean era. In my opinion, this goes beyond what is written - particularly as he claims that this era has already begun! The Laodicean era is clearly the seventh, and last, one before Christ returns. I would also differ slightly on the interpretation of some of the details of the Laodicean church letter in regard to its historical fulfillment, as well as the date of the end of the Philadelphia era and the beginning of the Laodicean era. (\*1948 is my own calculation which highlights the world-changing event of the founding of the modern State of Israel. This event followed the worldwide 'hour of trial' (Revelation 3:10) of the rise of Communism and Nazism, and the two World Wars).

Some would argue that these interpretations are very arbitrary, nevertheless, there is a general pattern within the details of these seven letters that does suggest that the main characteristics of Church history throughout this era are symbolically contained within these letters. Of course, it is only with a measure of hindsight that these things can be seen and understood from history. I would not say that these things are the primary interpretation of the seven letters, but it is a valid secondary interpretation that adds further light to God's Word. Ultimately, the true Church of God will triumph.

[4] My own chronology and calculations are largely based on the biblical/historical chronology of Dr Stephen E. Jones available in his book *Secrets of Time (revised edition)*.