

“Prophecy in the Parables”

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INTRODUCTION

These notes are intended to supplement the classroom-type sessions conducted during the **2005 Arkansas Winter Family Retreat (AWFR)** – an event sponsored by the James A. Brettell Bible Ministries. The notes are not meant to be an “all-comprehensive” analysis of all of the parables of Jesus. The parables of Jesus (as is true of most all of Scripture) can be examined from multiple dimensions (e.g. theological, soteriological, dispensational, the spiritual life and principles related thereto, etc.); however, consistent with the theme of the **2005 AWFR**, I have been invited as a speaker to focus upon the prophetic and eschatological dimensions of the parables of Jesus. Accordingly, I have selected many of Jesus’ parables in these notes and the parables selected constitute more than a representative sample of Jesus’ teaching using the parable as a tool intended to communicate spiritual realities to God’s people – the Jews of the nation Israel with whom God entered into a covenant relationship.¹ Even though I present some positions at odds with Alva J. McClain, he makes a very salient observation regarding the parables of Jesus, especially in regard to the parables of Matthew 13 which these notes address.

In no area of the Word of God is there greater need for caution on the part of interpreters than in the parables, and especially in those concerned with the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” Even the most spiritual and well-taught among students of the Word may go astray here; and many an error has found its basis in some parabolic detail, e.g. the gradual and ultimate triumph of the Church in converting the world through the “leavening process” of the Gospel. It is never safe to use either a type or a parable to teach something not elsewhere taught directly and clearly in the Word of God.²

It is important for me to note that the emphasis upon dispensational distinctions embodied in these notes and in the classroom teaching is not intended to promote a self-righteousness borne of some feeling of interpretive superiority. I certainly acknowledge that there are similarities or continuities that exist between dispensations and some are highlighted in these notes. We must recognize that there should be a correct interpretation toward which all expositors and students of the Word strive. Once correct observations of the passage have been made and the correct interpretation is obtained, we are then positioned to extract the spiritual meaning and relevance to us in this unique age of the Body of Christ (or Church Age) in which we live. In many cases, the parables of Jesus have wonderful spiritual principles applicable to us today; however, those parables were directed at a specific audience and that audience was not us. Nevertheless, it is extremely profitable for us to understand the whole of Scripture for it is through that understanding of the whole that we gain insight, appreciation and a strengthened faith regarding our past, our present and our future as members of the greater community of faith throughout all of human history (2 Tim 3:16-17).

¹ The Scriptures contain references to **five** major covenants with Israel: **1) Abrahamic** – [Gen 12:1-3 (confirmed and enlarged in 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-14; 22: 15-18; 26:2-4; 28:13-14; 35:11-12)]; **2) Mosaic** – [Ex 19:5ff; Deut 28:1-68]; **3) Palestinian** – [Deut 30:1-10]; **4) Davidic** – [2 Sam 7:11-16; 1 Chron 17:10-15]; **5) New** – [Jer 31:31-34 (contains term “New Covenant”); Concept found in Isa 49:8; 54:10; 55:3; 59:21; 61:8-9; Jer 32:39-40; 50:5; Ezek 11:19; 16:60-63; 18:31; 34:25; 36:22-36; 37:26; Hos 2:18-20]. In reality, there is one covenant with Israel – the Abrahamic – which finds elaboration and amplification in each of the successive “covenants.” The “Mosaic Covenant” sets forth, among other things, the conditions for blessing. The “Palestinian Covenant” provides elaboration regarding the land portion of the Abrahamic Covenant. The “Davidic Covenant” provides clarification regarding the “seed” component of the Abrahamic covenant. The “New Covenant” provides additional detail regarding the “blessing” component of the Abrahamic Covenant.

² Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom – An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1959), 324. McClain died in 1968.

Not all of the material contained in these notes will be presented during the time period I have been allotted – three 45 minute sessions. However, it is my hope and prayerful desire that they will be of some value to the attendees who consider investing a bit of time apart from the conference in further consideration of this material.

THE MAJOR THEME OF PROPHECY: “THE SUFFERINGS OF THE CHRIST & THE GLORIES TO FOLLOW”

To begin reading the Bible by starting in the New Testament with the Gospels is like starting to read a novel in the middle of the book. As we read the Gospels, we see on occasion after occasion where it is recorded that Jesus did something or said something in order “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by” an Old Testament prophet (e.g. Matt 2:5-6, 17-18; 3:3; 4:14-16; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 26:31; 27:35). Jesus Himself said: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.” (Matt 5:17)

Peter presents the theme of and the key to interpreting the prophetic passages of Hebrew Scripture in 1 Peter 1:10-11. Note his statements.

Of this salvation [*“deliverance” in an eschatological sense based upon the context*] the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ Who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand **the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow**. (1 Peter 1:10-11)

The first component (“the sufferings of Christ”) is redemptive. The second component (“the glories that would follow”) is eschatological and dispensational. The “glories that would follow” refers to the Messianic, millennial kingdom – the kingdom that John the baptizer, Jesus and Jesus’ apostles announced as being “near at hand” (see Matt 10:1-26 esp. v. 7).

The theme of the Gospels as a whole is centered around the “King” and His “kingdom” and these two words appear approximately 178 times in the Gospels. The “kingdom” of the Gospels is not simply a reference to the spiritual condition of the hearts of believers nor is it simply a reference to the general sovereignty of God over the universe. Jesus taught His disciples to pray “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” This “Kingdom” is the spiritually regenerate nation of Israel from which the Messiah (Christ) will rule and reign over the earth for 1000 years after His 2nd Advent (Rev 20:1-7).

Before that Kingdom could be established, other important prophecy had to be fulfilled – the Messiah must first suffer and die in order to provide redemption for man (e.g. Gen 3:15 cf. Psalms 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:1-12). Jesus’ life and teaching (including the parables) must be interpreted in view of this thematic backdrop.

PROPHETIC PARABLES OF JESUS

The Greek word for “parable” means something placed beside something else. In the Gospels, Jesus used a truth or well-recognized principle from nature or the temporal realm to illustrate a spiritual reality. Jesus recognized the principle that some people choose to remain in darkness or a state of spiritual blindness, thus some people would not accept the spiritual realities that underlay His teaching.

At a certain point in Jesus’ public ministry it became obvious that some were not willing to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. If they did not accept this most basic fact based upon clearly presented evidence, they would certainly not accept the spiritual reality that was the subject of Jesus’ parables. The “**mysteries** of the Kingdom” is the spiritual insight into the interpretation of the then existing body of prophetic Hebrew Scripture – an insight that was missing in all the teaching provided by Israel’s leadership. This was the spiritual reality that the parables were designed to highlight. This is illustrated in the following passages.

And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” He answered and said to them, “**Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven**, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled which says: *‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’* But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” (Matt 13:10-17)

But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, “**To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God**, but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that *‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.’*” (Mark 4:10-12)

Then His disciples asked Him, saying “What does this parable mean?” And He said, “**To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God**, but to the rest it is given in parables, that *‘Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’*” (Luke 8:9-10)

It is important to observe and note the audience to whom Jesus’ teaching was directed. Jesus’ teaching was directed to Jews who were the children of promise and who constituted the nation of Israel. This is very clear in Jesus’ words – “**I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**” (Matt 15:24). This provides us with one of the most important hermeneutical principles that underlies any attempt to interpret the Gospels – especially those sections that record Jesus’ teaching.

While various spiritual applications may be drawn from the parables, it is most important to understand their primary interpretation. The parables deal with either

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the subjects of the Kingdom or with the chief Character of the Kingdom, who is depicted under such figures as Nobleman, King, Bridegroom, Builder, Master Judge, Sower, Husbandman, Shepherd, Physician, Creditor, Rock, Cornerstone. After we understand the primary meaning of the parables, we may make secondary applications to ourselves in this Church age, for the simple reason that there are certain moral and spiritual truths which are unchangeable and apply to mankind in every age.³ [Underline mine – added for emphasis]

PARABLES OF THE “MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM”

The “Kingdom” of which Christ spoke was (and is) the Messianic Kingdom (a.k.a. the Millennial Kingdom) – the Davidic Kingdom with its capital of Jerusalem. This “Kingdom” is not a reference to God’s general sovereignty over the universe. This “Kingdom” is not simply a purely spiritual kingdom consisting of believers of all ages.

The error of identifying the Kingdom with the Church, followed by the logical attempt of certain ecclesiastical organizations [i.e. Roman Catholicism] to exercise during the present age a regal authority which belongs to the true Church in a future Kingdom, has been the source of untold evil and disaster. Such authority and power could never be safely committed to sinful men, even though redeemed and members of the body of Christ. To this lamentable fact we have the clear witness of nineteen centuries of church history. The Church must be perfected in order to reign with Christ over the nations in the coming Kingdom (Rom. 8:17-23).⁴ [Bracketed words are my addition].

To reiterate – the “mysteries of the Kingdom” to which Jesus referred is the spiritual insight into the interpretation of the then existing body of prophetic Hebrew Scripture – an insight that was missing in all of the teaching provided by Israel’s leadership. The word “mysteries” does not mean that a Jew of Jesus’ day did not have the same Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus had. It does not mean that God had withheld Truth from the Jews that would have allowed them to possess a correct prophetic outline of future events on the Jewish calendar. (They had such passages as Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:12; and Daniel 9:24-27). What they did not have was a correct interpretation of these passages and a correct understanding of the spiritual life required by God for a Jew to enter the Kingdom.

Without exception (based upon the Biblical record), every Jew believed that the Kingdom would accompany the Messiah’s coming in very short order (Luke 19:11). They reasoned – “If Jesus is truly the Messiah, then where is the Kingdom?” The answer to this question was truly a “mystery” to the Jew of Jesus’ day. Jesus’ parables were designed to unravel the web of false understanding surrounding His “sufferings and the glories to follow” that were the subject of much of Hebrew Scripture.

³ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels – A Different Approach* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1978), 111.

⁴ McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 329-330. I include this quote because it illustrates the ramifications of confusing Kingdom principles taught by Jesus in the parables with the Church of this age. However, the inclusion of this quote does not mean that I necessarily agree with McClain on all of his analysis that surrounds this excerpt.

It is important to keep in mind that Jesus was addressing the Jews. He did not come to directly address the Gentiles even though He knew that the Gentiles would be beneficiaries of the Truth and that they would participate in the Kingdom that was “at hand.” (Reference the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman recorded in Matthew 15:21-28). Hebrew Scripture is replete with the blessings that would accrue to the Gentiles by association with believing Israel. Therefore, in these parables, we see believer and unbeliever represented by “wheat” (“good seed”) and “tares” or “good” fish and “bad” fish. The “good” remain while the “bad” are thrown away into the fire.⁵

This understanding and distinction is vital to a proper interpretation of Jesus’ parables and teaching, especially on those occasions in the Gospels where we see an emphasis upon a demonstration of one’s faith through baptism or other works that evidence repentance. These actions (e.g. baptism or good deeds) on the part of the Jew of Jesus’ day were very important in that they provided testimony to other members of the Jewish community regarding whether one identified with Jesus as the Messiah and accepted His claims or not. When the focus of Jesus’ teaching is confused with the present age, then, among other things, the Pauline-centric grace gospel of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone is blurred. A saving faith that is equated with obedience (a.k.a. “Lordship Salvationists”) such as that promoted by John MacArthur and which is prominent with Reformed theology is one result of this confusion.⁶

There are many passages in Hebrew Scripture which refer to the re-gathering of Israel and the separation of the faithful from the rebellious (e.g. Isa 27:12-13 cf. Ezek 20:13-38 esp. v. 38). Why would the prophets prophesy concerning a future re-gathering and a separation of the faithful from the rebellious? Because they understood the principle and promise of God in Leviticus 26:14-39 – the five cycles of discipline. According to Matthew 24:31, God will use the angels to re-gather the elect of Israel from all the Gentile nations among which they are scattered. In the symbolism of Revelation, the sea represents peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages (Rev 17:15 cf. 13:1; Dan 7:2).

The “**mystery**” parables are located in Matthew 13:1-53; Mark 4:1-34 and Luke 8:4-18. Matthew records seven “mystery” parables while Mark and Luke record only the first one – the Sower. Mark then records the parable of the candle and the parable of the unconscious growth

⁵ This distinction is critical to the proper interpretation of these parables in particular. Jesus addressed these parables to the Jews to whom the kingdom was being presented as near. Some dispensational theologians, beginning most notably with C.I. Scofield (1843-1921), the author of the Scofield Reference Bible, interpreted the “mystery” parables to be directed to those who would live between this point in Jesus’ ministry until His 2nd Coming, thus encompassing a period that consisted of the Age of Israel prior to the Church Age, the Church Age (Body of Christ), and the Tribulation (the last seven years of the Age of Israel a.k.a. Daniel’s 70th Week). Consequently, this affected Scofield’s interpretation of the meaning of the “kingdom” which he equated to “Christendom” – that global group of people consisting of believers and unbelievers – rather than the nation of Israel with a specific emphasis upon that believing remnant who would live to possess and inherit the kingdom on earth. Scofield’s interpretation was influenced to some degree by the burden he carried by what he and others considered the professing church, i.e. those who claimed to be Christian on some basis or for some reason other than saving faith. The “wheat” and “tares” are interpreted as true believers and professing believers of the present age instead of Jewish believers and unbelievers of that portion of the Age of Israel leading up to the Messianic Kingdom’s establishment. This interpretive model was adopted by other dispensationalists that followed Scofield. See Arno C. Gaebelein, *History of the Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Our Hope Publications, 1943), 41, 59.

⁶ See Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings – A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man* (Hayesville, North Carolina: Schoettle Publishing Company, 1992), 8, 274, 281.

before he presents another mystery parable – the Mustard Seed. Luke mentions the Mustard Seed and the Leaven in a different context (13:18-21).

The first two parables (the “Parable of the Sower” and the “Parable of the Wheat and Tares”) contain quite a bit of detail. The remaining “mystery” parables should be interpreted in harmony with the first two parables. The lesson of the first two parables is that there will be a period of preaching of the Kingdom during which good and evil will grow up together. The preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom occurs during the Tribulation (a.k.a. Daniel’s Seventieth Week). The dual presence of believers and unbelievers in Israel will be rectified at the 2nd Advent of Jesus. The wicked are punished and the righteous are ushered into the new age of the Millennial Messianic Kingdom.

The Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:3-9, 18-23; Mk 4:1-20; Lk 8:4-15)

This parable is not necessarily prophetic on the surface; however, it does teach a spiritual principle that is associated with the preaching of the gospel – in context, the gospel of the kingdom. The gospel of the kingdom was preached during Jesus’ day and it will be preached during the future Tribulation period. It is this fact that adds a prophetic or eschatological aspect to this parable.⁷

As previously mentioned, there are spiritual principles that transcend dispensational setting and this parable illustrates one such spiritual principle. The parable is more about production in the life of a Jew than it is about salvation. The following points highlight the interpretation of the parable:

- ✓ The “sower” is Jesus.
- ✓ The “seed” is the gospel of the kingdom
- ✓ The “ground” upon which the seed fell represents four different kinds of hearers.
 - The “wayside” hearer is the one who heard the Kingdom message, but did not understand or accept it (Matt 13:19).
 - The “stoney place” hearer is the one who heard the Kingdom message, immediately received it, but because of his lack of spiritual depth, he wilts under adversity and persecution (Matt 13:20-21)
 - The seed which fell among thorns and was choked out represent those hearers who accepted the Kingdom message, but who allowed the cares of the world to keep them from being spiritually productive (Matt 13:22).

⁷ While Pentecost’s interpretation of each of the symbols used in the parable agree point-by-point with the interpretation presented in these notes, it is interesting that he ascribes the parable to the “present age.” He states that “we learn that in the present age there will be a sowing of the Word of God by our Lord ... and by those whom He calls ‘the sons of the kingdom.’” See J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus – Lessons in Life from the Master Teacher* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1982), 47-48. By doing this, Pentecost has opened the door to an interpretive precedent whereby the distinctions necessary for a proper understanding of passages are blurred. We might as well present our tithes at the Temple while we offer a burnt offering if we really live in the same “age” as did Jesus’ hearers. This is a common understanding that is reflected in the writing and teaching of many well-known dispensationalists. Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., “Matthew” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 49 makes the following comment that reflects a widely-held understanding. “The ‘secrets’ of the kingdom now reveal that an entire Age would intervene between Israel’s rejection of the King and her later acceptance of Him.” Thus, what we understand as the Church Age and the Tribulation are consolidated into one “mystery Age” dispensation. See also Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, 45. Alva J. McClain, who was previously cited, continues this precedent and uses the term “*interregnum*” to describe the “mystery age.” See McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 325-331.

- Finally, the “good ground” represent those who accept the Kingdom message, who have spiritual depth and who bear varying degrees of spiritual fruit (Matt 13:23).
- ✓ In regard to the salvation of each of these groups of Jews, it is clear that the first group represents unsaved Jews and the last group are saved Jews; however, the second and third group are open to interpretation – especially when it comes to the Jews of Jesus’ day.⁸
- ✓ **The point of the parable** – the preaching of the Kingdom Gospel will not result in the conversion of the entire nation of Israel. Only some will accept the Kingdom message and become spiritually productive.
- ✓ **Important** – While this parable has secondary application to the preaching of the Gospel in the Church Age, we must be careful to not confuse personal salvation with spiritual production. Saved people have been caused to doubt their salvation by a faulty application of this parable to our day.

The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43)

This is a parable of two sowers. One man sowed good seed in his field and his enemy sowed tares in the same field while the man slept. Again, we are fortunate that Jesus explains this parable for us in verses 36-43. First, let us make some observations about this parable.

- ✓ The “man who sowed good seed” - Jesus (v. 24 cf. v. 37)
- ✓ The “field” is the world (v. 38)
- ✓ The “good seeds” are the sons of the kingdom, i.e. the Age of Israel believers who will inherit the kingdom and enter into it (v. 38)
- ✓ The “tares” are the children of Satan (v. 38)
- ✓ The “enemy” who sowed the “tares” is Satan (v. 39)
- ✓ The “harvest” is the 2nd Advent at the end of the Age of Israel (v. 39)
- ✓ The “reapers” are the angels who come with Christ at His Second Advent (v. 39)

Note that the “tares” are gathered by the reapers (i.e. the angels) at the end of the age. Only the “good seeds” remain. In the parable, the “tares” are cast into the fire (v. 40). This event seems to coincide with the “end of the age” in the parable narrative. However, the parable compresses the “end of the age” and the casting into the fire events together. The casting of the tares into the fire is the ultimate outcome and doesn’t actually occur until a date future to (i.e. after) the “end of the age” and the “harvest” (see Rev 20:11-15).

At the 2nd Advent of Christ, the righteous will remain on the earth to inherit the Messianic Kingdom. Unbelievers (i.e. the “tares”) who have lived alongside and in the midst of believers within Israel will be taken away. (This is true of Jew and Gentile; however, the focus of Jesus’ ministry is the Jew). As a point of distinction, the Rapture of the Church Age Body of Christ will take believers away and leave unbelievers behind – just the opposite of the events described in this parable (see 1 Thess 4:15-17).

⁸ Even though he may introduce a certain degree of confusion into his analysis by using the term “Christian,” Dillow nevertheless makes some very good points in his analysis of this passage. He states – “There is not a word about heaven and hell in the parable. There is much about fruit bearing (Lk. 8:8) and progression to maturity (Lk. 8:14). The most plausible interpretation of the phrase is simply to fall away from that progression which leads to maturity, to fruit bearing, and become a dead and carnal Christian. Adherents of perseverance [Reformed theology] may not like such an interpretation, but it is hardly fair to bring their theological exegesis to play and introduce notions of heaven and hell to which the parable never alludes.” Dillow, *The Reign*, 399.

The only thing in this parable which is similar to God's present spiritual program is the fact that both good and evil exist together in the world. Everything else in the parable is a contrast when compared to the truths that are applicable to the Church Age Body of Christ.⁹

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt 13:31, 32; Mk 4:30, 32; Lk 13:18-19)

The parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the leaven (13:33) are parallel parables and teach a parallel truth. The parable of the mustard seed likens the kingdom of heaven (the Messianic kingdom on earth) to a grain of mustard seed. This parable has four elements:

- ✓ A grain of mustard seed
- ✓ A sower
- ✓ Birds
- ✓ Abnormal growth of the mustard seed into a tree

This parable, like the parable of the wheat and the tares is should be interpreted in the context of the last days of the Age of Israel known as the Tribulation. During that period of human history, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached again in anticipation of the 2nd Advent of Christ and the Messianic, Millennial kingdom on earth (Matt 24:14). This understanding requires the following interpretation:

- ✓ Grain of mustard seed = the gospel of the kingdom
- ✓ Sower = Jesus Christ (same as the parable of the wheat and the tares)
- ✓ Birds = does not represent evil as in the parable of the sower or soils. In the Hebrew Scriptures, a tree large enough to support nesting birds was considered prosperous and healthy (see Ps 104:12; Ezek 17:23; 31:6; Dan 4:12, 21).¹⁰
- ✓ Abnormal growth of the mustard seed into a tree = the gospel of the kingdom which is once again preached (sowed) during the Tribulation grows into a great tree (the Millennial kingdom) at His 2nd Advent.

The point of the parable – even though the Messianic, Millennial Kingdom has insignificant beginnings in the small seed of the Gospel of the Kingdom, it grows to great proportions (i.e. the rapid

⁹ In his interpretation of this parable, Pentecost aligns very well with the analysis in these notes. However, he continues to attribute the meaning to the “present age” which he defines as the period between the rejection of Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 12) and His 2nd Advent. See Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, 51 cf. 42-45. The “mysteries” of the kingdom of heaven that are the subject of the parables in Matthew 13 are then made applicable to this “present age” – a period spanning from the last year of Jesus’ ministry until His 2nd Advent. See also McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, 325 for a similar interpretation where the “period of sowing and growth...must be the present age.”

¹⁰ This interpretation of the birds is consistent with the context – a parable about the positive and extraordinary growth of the kingdom. Some have tried to indicate that this parable and the parable of the leaven teach something negative or undesirable – the growth of the presence of evil in the present Age. No doubt, this is a result of a confusing and erroneous definition of the period to which the parables of the “mysteries of the kingdom” apply – an understanding as previously noted that includes the present Church Age. See John A. Martin, “Luke” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, Edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 241.

expansion of the Kingdom after the events of the Tribulation and 2nd Advent of Jesus). It will provide blessing to all of those who come into it.¹¹

The Parable of the Leaven (Matt 13:33-35; Lk 13:20, 21)

The principle of leaven is that a little leaven has an effect upon the whole of the dough with which it interacts. The context of the passage determines whether leaven should represent evil or whether it should represent something positive. When leaven or yeast is kneaded into dough, it causes the dough to expand. Here the kingdom of heaven (the “Messianic Kingdom” or “Millennium”) is seen to grow based upon the internal dynamic of the Holy Spirit verses being powered by outward armies or organizations. The kingdom was presented to be near without any display of pomp or extravaganza.

The point of the parable – The kingdom grows disproportionately in relation to its insignificant beginnings. The dough [not mentioned] is Israel, whereas the yeast or leaven is the gospel of the kingdom. This is a parallel truth to the parable of the mustard seed.

Point of comparison – The parable of the mustard seed addresses the extent of the kingdom’s growth whereas this parable (the parable of the leaven) concerns the source or impetus for its growth. All kingdoms of the world have grown by military might. Once established, the Messianic Kingdom will grow through an internal dynamic (the Holy Spirit) much like dough which has had yeast added to it.

Point of contrast – Leaven is used to represent evil in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Galatians 5:9 as well as many Old Testament passages such as Exodus 12:15 and Leviticus 2:11. However, this is not always the case, e.g. Leviticus 7:13 (leavened bread is specified as a part of the peace offering) and 23:15-18 (the loaves of bread used during the Feast of Weeks were to be made with leaven and were considered firstfruits to the Lord).

Some dispensationalists have tried to interpret the leaven of Matthew 13:33 to represent evil. Most of those who do so interpret the leaven as representing the professing (but not believing) Church that grows throughout the Church Age which is a part of the Interregnum period.¹² This understanding is derived from their understanding of the phrase, the “mysteries of the kingdom” (13:11) whereby the term “mystery” in the Gospels is equated to Paul’s use of the same term in his epistles.

Other dispensationalists have interpreted the leaven to represent religious (unbelieving) Judaism during the Age of Israel (pre-Pentecost and Tribulation). However, this too is an interpretation that sees leaven as only representing evil. These alternative interpretations by various dispensationalists overlook the fact that the leaven represents a principle related to a growth dynamic

¹¹ Again, Pentecost’s interpretation is very helpful until the last paragraph of explanation. He equates the kingdom with the present age and he equates the expansion of the kingdom with the growth of the Church. See Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, 53.

¹² Barbieri, “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 51 makes the same observation.

and not evil in context. The spiritual quality [good or evil] of the growth must be evaluated based upon the context. The Jews did not consider leaven to always be evil, otherwise they would never have used it. Instead, it was forbidden on certain occasions, e.g. the feast of unleavened bread. The context of this parable is Jesus' clarification of the nature of the kingdom of heaven (the Millennial/Messianic reign on earth) through parables. Again, the kingdom produces ultimate consequences out of all proportion to its insignificant beginnings. The dough [not mentioned] is Israel, whereas the yeast or leaven is the gospel of the kingdom.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matt 13:44)

This parable and the next parable (the Pearl of Great Price) are paired in order to make the same general point, but have significant individual emphasis. The purpose of the parable of the hidden treasure is to illustrate the value of the kingdom. The following points interpret this parable:

- ✓ Israel is the hidden treasure (among the nations of the world). See Exodus 19:5; Psalm 135:4
- ✓ The field is the people or nations of the world (among whom true Israel was dispersed).
- ✓ Jesus is the man making the purchase.
- ✓ The Cross was where Jesus sold all that He had (1st – He gave up His presence in heaven and 2nd His earthly, physical life)
- ✓ Jesus paid the price for the entire field (a.k.a. unlimited atonement – 1 Jn 2:2) in order to obtain the treasure (Israel).
- ✓ Jesus recognized Israel as something of value

The fulfillment of this parable will occur when the believers of the Tribulation (last seven years of the Age of Israel) will enter the kingdom because they accept God's redemptive provision through Christ's death on the Cross as the Messiah.

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matt 13:45, 46)

This parable is paired with the parable of the hidden treasure to emphasize the same point, i.e. that the Messianic kingdom is of extreme value to our Lord – so much so that He is said to sell all that He has in this parable also. This is yet another reference to our Lord's death on the Cross in which He (the merchant) gave His life (sold all that He had) and purchased the pearl of great price (believers who enter the Messianic Kingdom). See Revelation 7:4-8; 12:17 cf. Romans 9:27; 11:5 and the many references to the remnant in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Micah).

Note: the point is not that Jesus didn't pay the price for other believers of other ages. The focus of Jesus' preaching at this point in His ministry is upon the gospel of the kingdom.

Some interpreters claim that the pearl represents the Church as distinct from Israel. However, the Church Age Body of Christ was a mystery that was only made known through the Apostle Paul.¹³

¹³ While Pentecost's analysis of the Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price is helpful (see Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, 56-57), I believe he misses the mark in his interpretation when he combines the two into one and interprets the "treasure" to mean the believing remnant of Israel and the "pearl" to mean the Gentiles who would share in the kingdom. He seems

The Parable of the Dragnet (Matt 13:47-50)

This parable is a parallel to the parable of the wheat and the tares. However, the parable of the wheat and the tares focuses upon the coexistence of believing and unbelieving Jews during the Tribulation. The parable of the dragnet focuses upon the situation that will exist when the judgment associated with the 2nd Advent occurs. An interpretation of the symbolism of this parable follows:

- ✓ The dragnet cast into the sea represents judgment associated with the 2nd Advent of Christ
- ✓ The some of every kind represents believing and unbelieving Jews and Gentiles
- ✓ The good gathered into vessels represents Tribulation believers who enter the Millennial, Messianic reign of Christ.
- ✓ The bad thrown away represents unbelievers who are cast into hell to await the Great White Throne Judgment at the Lake of Fire at the end of the Millennium (Rev 20:11-15).
- ✓ Angels attend Christ at His 2nd Advent to assist Him in executing judgment (Matt 25:31)
- ✓ The end of the age (v. 49) is the end of the Age of Israel (i.e. the end of the Tribulation or Daniel's seventieth week)
- ✓ Things new and old (v. 52) refers to truth concerning the kingdom in the "Old" Hebrew Scriptures which was given fresh insight by Jesus in these parables. The "kingdom" was an important motif in the Hebrew Scriptures; however, Jesus shed new light on spiritual aspects of the kingdom that had been missed by the Jewish teachers and leaders (except for the prophets of course).

OTHER PROPHETIC PARABLES

Parables on Readiness for the Coming of the Son of Man (Lk 12:35-48; Matt 24:42-51)

There are really three parables in this section.¹⁴ The first – the Parable of the Faithful Servants – (Lk 12:35-38) is based upon a bridegroom returning from his wedding and finding his servants waiting for him. The second – the Parable of the Thief – (Lk 12:39-40 cf. Matt 24:42-44) deals with the unexpected visit of the thief who breaks into the house. The third – the Parable of the Watchful Owner and the Wise Steward – (Lk 12:42-48 cf. Matt 24:45-51) contrasts the faithful and wise steward with the unfaithful and unwise steward.

- ✓ The first two parables illustrate the importance of constancy of faith in the life of the believer who is anticipating the Kingdom's advent (the "servant" in the parable).

to be trying to force the two parables to be an allusion to the Church Age Body and even references Ephesians 2:14-18 teaches that in the Church Age Body, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Obviously, the interpretive paradigm first established by Scofield (see earlier footnotes) was influential. Pentecost is not alone in this regard. Barbieri, "Matthew" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, 51-52 makes an excellent analysis of the Parable of the Hidden Treasure; however, in his analysis of the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, he too associates the Pearl with the Church Age Body. John Walvoord, a slightly older contemporary of Pentecost, follows the same interpretive path as he is cited by Barbieri in his interpretation of the Parable of the Pearl.

¹⁴ We find parallels in portions of this section in Luke to Matthew 24:42-51 (cf. Lk 12:42-48).

- Constancy of faith to the Jew of Jesus' day meant to live as if entrance into the kingdom was "near at hand."
 - Being blessed equated to entrance into the Messianic kingdom.
- ✓ In the first parable (v. 35-38), the girded waist and the burning lamps are illustrations of readiness.
 - Girding the waist involved pulling up the hem of the robe so that one could run.
 - A lamp was used at night.
 - The point of the first parable (and the second) is to stress watchfulness and preparedness in regard to the Messiah's return.
- ✓ In the second parable (v. 39-40; cf. Matt 24:42-44), Jesus adds emphasis.
 - Jesus' point in this parable is to emphasize the necessity for the servants (believers anticipating the kingdom's advent and representatives of the master of the house) to be on guard
- ✓ The third parable (v. 42-48 cf. Matt 24:45-51) involves a wise and unwise steward.
 - The former is constantly prepared for his master's return; whereas the latter expects and acts as if the return will be delayed.
 - The point of the third parable is to stress the need for faithfulness on the part of those who witness the signs of the Kingdom.
 - In Luke's account, this parable ends with a statement of principle upon which judgment of the Jewish unbeliever will be based – there will be greater punishment for those who know God's will but did not prepare themselves to do it and there will be lesser punishment for those who do not know God's will.
 - This is consistent with the statements we find about the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20:11-15 whereby unbelievers are judged according to their deeds written in "the books" and those whose names are not found written in "the Book of Life" are cast into the Lake of fire.
 - In Matthew's account, this parable ends more simply with unbelievers ("hypocrites") weeping and gnashing their teeth (v. 51)¹⁵

¹⁵ Dillow in *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 350-353 equates those who weep and gnash their teeth at the judgment associated with the 2nd Advent with the "Christian" who grieves over a wasted life. Dillow claims that these carnal Christians will be excluded from the joy of the banquet and experience profound remorse or regret in the kingdom even though he notes that there will be no remorse in heaven. He states that "those Christians who fail to persevere to the end, who are carnal experience three negatives at the future judgment: (1) a stinging rebuke (Mt. 24:45-51); (2) exclusion from the wedding banquet (Mt. 22:1-14; Mt. 25:1-13); and (3) millennial disinheritance (Mt. 25:14-30)." This type of interpretation by a dispensationalist in the noble attempt to defend the eternal security of the believer actually does harm to the cause in my opinion. Why? Because he has translated principles directed towards Jews of the *elect nation* Israel (that consists of believers and unbelievers until the 2nd Advent) to the Church Age Body (that consists of only believers). This creates confusion between: 1) the demonstration of faith in Jesus (through deeds and actions) that was sought as an indication that the nation had repented and was ready to receive the Kingdom and 2) the grace gospel of faith alone in Christ alone for salvation. Unfortunately, Dillow has perpetuated a hermeneutical precedent that is common to many dispensational interpreters of the Gospels.

It is important to keep in mind the fact that Jesus is speaking to the *elect nation* of Israel – not the corporate Church Age Body of Christ. The *elect nation* of Israel contained both believers and unbelievers – particularly at the point in time of Jesus’ address to His disciples in our passage. The spiritual Body of Christ contains only believers chosen (elected) “in Him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4 cf. 1 Pe 2:9-10).¹⁶ We should not misconstrue Jesus’ teaching to the *elect nation* of Israel that consisted of both believers and unbelievers to also be directed to the *elect Church Age Body of Christ* that consists of only believers. Otherwise, we risk confusing the means of salvation. Consider the following excellent analysis of this passage.

There is always the danger when speaking of judgments and rewards to apply these things to the salvation of the soul. It will help to remember that no one, in any dispensation, receives salvation as a reward for his works or faithfulness. The unsaved who are finally cast into the lake of fire are judged and punished according to their works, and therefore there will be degrees of punishment. [See *Revelation 20:11-15*]. The saved will also be judged, but not for the penalty of their sin which has been forgiven, but for their service for Christ. [See *1 Corinthians 3:11-15* cf. *Romans 14:10*; *2 Corinthians 5:9-10*]. This will result in reward or loss of reward. Believers in this present dispensation also are instructed to wait for the coming of the Lord (1 Cor. 1:7; Tit. 2:13), but this coming is not to earth to judge the world and to set up His Kingdom, but His coming in the air to catch up the Church in resurrection and glorification.¹⁷ [Inserts in brackets are comments I added for additional information and clarification]

The Parable of the Postponed Kingdom a.k.a. The Parable of the Minas (Lk 19:11-28; Matt 25:14-30)

Luke and Matthew’s accounts are virtually identical with some minor changes in the analogy (e.g. “talents” in Matthew vs. “minas” in Luke). The interpretation is the same for both accounts. For these notes, I’ll use Luke’s account.

Jesus is near Jerusalem in Luke’s narrative at this point. The disciples evidently believed that Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem would signal or inaugurate the kingdom (v. 11). After all, John the Baptist had preached that the kingdom of heaven was near (Matt 3:2) and Jesus had preached the same message (e.g. Matt 4:17). Jesus’ teaching of the parable of the minas is designed to dispel this erroneous notion held by His disciples and others perhaps (e.g. verse 37). The phrase “do business till I come” (v. 13) shows that Jesus’ return would not be immediate. In addition, the return would not be until “a certain nobleman” (i.e. Jesus, the Messiah/King) went away into a far country (i.e. heaven) to receive a kingdom (v. 12). The kingdom would not be received until after a delay for a period (i.e. the period between His death, resurrection & ascension and His 2nd Advent).¹⁸

¹⁶ See William W. Klein, *The New Chosen People – A Corporate View of Election* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1990), 21, 257-263.

¹⁷ Baker, *Understanding the Gospels*, 176.

¹⁸ The delay is equated to the Interregnum period by some dispensational theologians as we have seen in these notes thus far. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings*, 426, 564-565, 588-589 equates the Kingdom-centric principles of this passage to the differing degrees of reward that the believer of the Church Age Body will receive in the Kingdom. While we know that we will rule and reign with Christ during the Messianic Kingdom period on earth and while it is possible that there will

This parable may have had a connection to an actual historical event. Archelaus, the son of Herod, went from Jericho, the town in which Jesus is currently located, to Rome to obtain the right to rule over Palestine. Archelaus was granted his kingdom by the Roman emperor Augustus. The palace of Archelaus was in the neighborhood of Jericho.¹⁹ The connection to Jesus' parable is that like Archelaus, the nobleman did not remain in the far away place, but he returned to rule.

The kingdom that Jesus receives is the Messianic/Millennial kingdom. The Father grants Him the kingdom; therefore, we see many references to the kingdom as the kingdom of the Father and the kingdom of the Son (Dan 2:44; 6:26; 7:14; cf. Matt 6:10, 13; 13:43; 16:28; 26:29; Lk 1:33; Acts 1:3; 1 Co 15:24; Eph 5:5). Jesus ministered with the anticipation that the kingdom would be established in accordance with prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e. the Old Testament – 2 Sam 7:16; 1 Chron 17:14; 2 Chron 7:18) once He had fulfilled prophecies related to His death (e.g. Psa 22; Isa 52:13-53:12).²⁰ Therefore, in our passage, the period of time in which the “nobleman” (i.e. Jesus) would have been away in a far country would have corresponded to Daniel's 70th Week (i.e. the seven year Tribulation – Dan 9:24-27).²¹

The principle that Jesus taught in verses 15-27 relates to reward in His Messianic kingdom. Reward in the kingdom will be related to service in one's life. This principle is true of any believer who inherits the kingdom regardless of dispensation (Ex 19:6; Matt 5:3-12 cf. 1 Co 3:11-15; 2 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 2:11-13). Nevertheless, bad hermeneutical precedent is established whenever such a passage as Luke 19:15-27 is interpreted as if Jesus was prophesying the Church Age in a veiled manner just because there are spiritual principles that are common to both the dispensation of the Age of Israel and the Church Age.

The “mina” was equivalent to about four month's wages. By analogy, the mina represents the spiritual heritage and responsibility (cf. Rom 9:3-5; 11:11-36) of the Jew within the last days of the Age of Israel (i.e. Daniel's 70th Week or the Tribulation).

In verse 20, we see a servant who did nothing with the mina that he had been given. One can almost picture the Jew during the Tribulation period, who under the pressure of deprivation, suffering and even death at the hand of the anti-Semitic forces of the Anti-Christ, does not execute his responsibility as a Jew to believe the gospel of the kingdom (Matt 24:14) and claim the privileges associated with that kingdom as his own as prophesied in Scripture. He is an unbeliever.

be a correlation between our faithful service and the responsibilities we are given in the Kingdom, we cannot find basis for that thought in this passage. It relates to the Jew – not the Christian believer.

¹⁹ J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1946), 473 quoted in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 367.

²⁰ It is my opinion (as well as others) that Jesus did not anticipate the Church Age as a unique dispensation in any of His teaching. We have studied this issue in depth in our Matthew series and used such passages as Acts 1:3-8; 2:17-21 and 3:19 among others to support that position. Therefore, I will not elaborate or present that material again here.

²¹ Of course, we now know that the Church Age was intercalated into the timeline of human history due to Israel's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah after His death (e.g. Acts 3:19 cf. Acts 13:46). However, this historical fact was not anticipated by Jesus.

This is evident in his lack of understanding of the Messiah as manifest by His statement in verse 21 that “I feared you because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.” The implication is clearly that the servant did not really expect the king to come back. He was not concerned about the king’s return so he did not bother with the king’s business. He belonged with the group of unbelievers who did not want the king to reign over them (v. 27).

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers a.k.a. The Parable of the Vineyard (Matt 21:33-46; Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19)

Obviously, Jesus was speaking of the nation of Israel that had been carefully prepared by God to be His fruitful vineyard (Isa 5:1-7). The care of the vine had been delegated to the nation’s religious leaders. However, they failed to acknowledge the Master’s (the Heavenly Father’s) authority over them and treated His messengers and prophets badly. They would ultimately even kill His Son, Jesus outside Jerusalem (outside the vineyard).

In verse 43, Jesus makes a prediction that the kingdom of God would be given to a “nation” (ἐθνος) nation or people) which would bear the fruits of it [the kingdom]. Many have interpreted this to be a prophecy of the Church which would consist of Jew and Gentile since the Church is on some occasions referred to as a nation (Rom 10:19; 1 Pe 2:9-10).²² However, I do not believe that Jesus was necessarily predicting the Church here. The Kingdom will one day belong to Israel (Rom. 11:15, 25) and the Church Age Body is not now inheriting the Kingdom.

In this parable, Jesus is referring to that future group of Jews who will in fact believe in Him. Jesus was using the term “nation” in the same sense as the term “generation” in Matthew 23:36. Because of their rejection, that generation of Israel would never be able to experience the kingdom. However, a future generation will respond to Him in faith (Ro 11:26-27) and experience the spiritual and physical blessings of kingdom.

The Parable of the Marriage Feast (Matt 22:1-14 cf. Lk 14:15-24)

Summary of the meaning of this parable: This parable (as most of Jesus’ parables) is designed to illustrate or teach a point of truth regarding the Messianic kingdom (i.e. the “kingdom of heaven” or the “kingdom of God”). The point is simply that those who had rejected the invitation to enter the Messianic kingdom through the message of the gospel of the kingdom would be destroyed by the armies that attend Christ’s Second Advent, e.g. Matt 24:29-31; 25:31. Also, after the Second Advent and as the Messianic kingdom is being established, the invitation to participate is extended to Gentiles (i.e. those “in the highways” – v. 9) as well as Israel. Any unbelievers (the man without the wedding garment) will be destroyed and ultimately cast into the Lake of Fire at the Last Judgment.

Further points of analysis in support of this interpretation: There are other interpretations of this parable that have been made by dispensationalists and others which attempt to connect this passage with: 1) a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; and/or 2) to interpret the casting “into outer darkness” to refer to the fate of Christians of the Church Age who were unfaithful during their lives on earth. However, I find those interpretations unacceptable.

²² Both Barbieri, “Matthew” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 70 and Pentecost, *The Parables of Jesus*, 133 refer to this tendency among some interpreters.

The destruction of Jerusalem did occur in A.D. 70 and represented the 5th Cycle of discipline (Le 26:14-33) toward Israel for failure to repent in anticipation of the Kingdom. However, to interpret the destruction in this passage to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 would require that the wedding feast (i.e. the establishment of the Messianic kingdom) follow that event. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was in no way related to the establishment of the Millennial kingdom and did not accomplish the purging of unbelievers from the kingdom as is taught in this parable (verses 11-13) and as will occur during the establishment of the Messianic kingdom.

The phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is never used in reference to the Church Age believer. It is a phrase descriptive of the Jewish (and Gentile) unbeliever during the period of time that the gospel of the kingdom (i.e. “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”) was preached during Jesus’ public ministry and will again be preached during the Tribulation (Matt 24:14). Unbelievers of all dispensations will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the Messianic Millennial Kingdom in what is known as the Second Resurrection (Rev 20:11-15) and be cast into the Lake of Fire after having been judged “according to their works” (Rev 20:13) which are not sufficient to save.

The symbolism or analogy used by Jesus in this parable is presented in point-by-point manner in support of the previous paragraphs:

- The “king” (verse 2, 7, 11, & 13) represents God the Father.
- The “son” (verse 2) is Jesus Christ.
- The “marriage” (verse 2) is the uniting of all believers on earth under the rule of the Messiah. Believers of prior dispensations rule and reign with Christ during this period (Heb 12:22-24; Re 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6) and Israel has a very prominent position among the nations once again (e.g. Is 2:1-4; 11:11-16; 44:21-28 among many others).
- The “servants” (verse 3 & 4) are the prophets and Jesus’ disciples who proclaimed the Messiah’s arrival, but who were rejected by the religious people of Jesus’ day. (See also Matt 21:33ff).
- The “wedding” (verse 4) is the same as the “marriage supper of the Lamb” (Re 19:9) or the “wedding feast” that pictures the Messianic kingdom after the Second Advent of Christ.
- The “armies” are angels that will attend Christ’s Second Advent and defeat His foes (Matt 24:31; Re 19:14).
- The “murderers” (verse 7) are those unbelievers during the last seven years of the Age of Israel (Dan 9:24ff) known as the Tribulation who will persecute believers (even to the point of death for some – Re 20:4). **Note:** It is vitally important when interpreting this parable of Jesus to keep the dispensational perspective in mind that Jesus had and that should have been understood by believers within the last years of the pre-Trib portion of the Age of Israel, i.e. the years of Jesus’ public ministry on earth. The fact that not many, if any, Jewish believers understood the prophetic timeline with the clarity that Jesus did is not the issue. The issue is the perspective from which Jesus taught and ministered. That perspective was one which recognized the possibility that Israel might accept Jesus as the Messiah, suffer seven years of Tribulation after the Messiah’s death at the hands of the Romans, and those who endured until the end of the seven years would enter the “kingdom of heaven” on earth in the form of the Messianic reign at His Second Coming. There was no Church Age in view for the Church was a later intercalation into human history due to Israel’s failure to repent in anticipation of the kingdom being “near at hand.”
- The “wedding garment” is the righteousness of God possessed by every believer as a result of trusting in Christ as the Messiah (Age of Israel) or trusting in Christ’s death as the payment for sin (Age of the Church). Both are in reality the same message with just a different emphasis on Christ’s person and work.
- The man without the wedding garment is an unbeliever within the Age of Israel (specifically the Tribulation) who is discovered during that period between the Second Advent and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom of God on earth (Millennium). It is during this period that the Jewish believers are gathered to form a believing nation of Israel and Gentile

believers have the privilege of participating in the joys of the Messianic kingdom. **Note:** Not all of the events associated with the Second Advent and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom transpire in a split-second of time even though the Second Advent occurs in an instant of time. Over the course of several days to perhaps a month or so, the Second Advent will occur, the campaign of Armageddon will be concluded, and unbelievers (Jew and Gentile) will be culled out and destroyed while believing Israel is gathered. Believing Gentiles will have been identified and will be allowed to enter the Messianic kingdom. They will be invited to attend the “wedding feast”. There will be some overlap in chronological sequence between these events; therefore, it is indeed possible that an unbeliever could be identified during the period that the Messianic kingdom on earth is being established (i.e. the “wedding feast” is prepared) and cast out just prior to its inaugural event (i.e. the “wedding feast”).

- The “outer darkness” is the abode of all unbelievers awaiting the Great White Judgment Throne at the end of the Messianic kingdom and the conclusion of the Battle of Gog and Magog (Re 20:11-15).

As we have already seen, there are differences among dispensationalists in the interpretation of the prophetic aspects of the parables of Jesus. I have presented a representative sample of the views of various theologians in regards to this parable in a chart to follow. As I noted in the introduction to this series of notes, such analysis is not meant in any way to be critical of the motives or the spiritual lives of any of the men mentioned. Each of these men are admirable men who have only the purest of motives based upon my knowledge of them. Each has made a great contribution to many believer’s understanding of Scripture. However, as I’ve said before, when a person teaches 99 points that are correct, it doesn’t automatically mean that the 100th point will be correct. Evaluate each point on its own merits – not based upon the fact that other statements have been correct and supported.

Author/Reference	Synopsis of View	Points of Comparison/Contrast
<p>Jody Dillow – <i>The Reign of the Servant Kings</i>, 345-6, & 535.</p>	<p>Dillow connects the parable in this passage to Christians of the Church Age. The man without the wedding garment is the “Christian” who suffers loss of reward at the Bema Seat (2 Co 5:10; Ro 14:10-12) and the loss is defined to be rejection from the wedding banquet in the Messianic kingdom even though the unfaithful “Christian” is not completely excluded from the kingdom. On the same page, Dillow also makes the statement that “the invitation to attend is to be understood as an invitation to national Israel to accept Christ as Messiah.” The wedding garment is defined as righteous deeds of the saints (i.e. experiential righteousness) and Dillow uses Revelation 19:7-8 to support that view. In my opinion, in his admirable attempt to defend the doctrine of the eternal security of the believer, Dillow has not exegeted this passage, but he has eisegeted in order to defend this doctrine. The sad thing is that the doctrine of the eternal security of the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Believers of the Church Age will rule and reign with Christ during the Millennium. Dillow and I are consistent on that point. ➤ Dillow associates the loss of reward that the unfaithful Church Age believer suffers at the Bema Seat with the sorrow expressed through “weeping and gnashing” of teeth in this passage. He has been accused of advocating a type of Christian purgatory for unfaithful believers during the Millennial reign. ➤ Dillow views the wedding garment as experiential righteousness (righteous deeds) vs. the believer’s possession of the righteousness of God – a fact true of the Age of

	<p>believer is not even in question in this passage based upon the interpretation I have presented. Also, while it is true that Church Age believers who have been unfaithful during their time on earth will experience a loss of reward at the Bema Seat, the exact nature of that loss is not defined in Scripture.</p>	<p>Israel believer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dillow’s interpretation places the man without the wedding garment in the Kingdom. However, his interpretation doesn’t consider that the establishment of the Messianic kingdom is not instantaneous like the 2nd Advent. ➤ Dillow equates loss of reward for the Church Age believer with loss in the Messianic Kingdom. While I agree that there will be loss of reward for the unfaithful believer, Scripture doesn’t disclose the exact nature of that loss for the Church Age believer. A logical conclusion is less ruling and reigning authority in the kingdom; however, there is no Scripture to support that statement. ➤ Finally, nothing in the context of this passage requires an understanding of the Church for its interpretation.
<p>John Walvoord, <i>Prophecy Knowledge Handbook</i>, 362</p>	<p>Walvoord gives only very brief treatment to this passage. However, he does equate the man without the wedding garment to an unbeliever and states that “without salvation, it is impossible to go to heaven.”²³</p>	<p>My interpretation and Walvoord’s interpretation of this passage seem to be fairly consistent from what I can determine.</p>
<p>Dwight Pentecost, <i>Things to Come</i>, 227</p>	<p>Pentecost includes this passage (among others) in his discussion of the marriage or wedding supper. He defines the marriage supper as a “parabolic picture of the entire millennial age, to which Israel will be invited during the tribulation period, which invitation many will reject and so they will be cast out, and many will accept and they will be received in.” Because of the rejection of the invitation by</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The view that I have presented is fairly consistent with Pentecost’s interpretation. ➤ Pentecost doesn’t specifically address the man without the wedding garment nor does he address the phrase “weeping and gnashing” of teeth in the Matthew 22:1-

²³ John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1990), 362.

	Israel, many Gentiles are allowed entry into the Millennium. ²⁴	<p>14 passage in this book.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pentecost doesn't address the timing of the destruction of the city
Dwight Pentecost, <i>The Words and Works of Jesus Christ</i> , 386	Pentecost's interpretation is consistent in that he relates this parable to the Messianic kingdom being offered to Israel. He provides a little more information regarding the requirements necessary to enter the kingdom, i.e. a righteous life not just the righteousness associated with initial faith in Christ. ²⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pentecost interprets the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" to relate to eternal judgment. ➤ However, he interprets the wedding garments to be related to "a righteous character and holy life", i.e. experiential righteousness. ➤ He doesn't address the timing of the destruction of the city.
Barbieri, "Matthew" in <i>The Bible Knowledge Commentary</i> , 71.	The offer of the kingdom by Christ is in view. The wedding banquet portrays the Millennial Age.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is seen as related to the eternal judgment. ➤ The destruction of the city is seen as related to A.D. 70 ➤ The "wedding garment" is interpreted to be related to experiential righteousness not righteousness associated with belief.
<i>The Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor, 456-457	This commentary is written more from a covenant theological perspective; however the insight that it provides has proven valuable on occasion when properly sifted. ²⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The allusion to A.D. 70 in regard to the destruction of the city is rejected. ➤ The "kingdom of heaven" is seen as having already dawned in spiritual form which is consistent with the amillennial perspective. ➤ The commentary avoids a specific interpretation of the wedding garments.

²⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 227.

²⁵ Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 386.

²⁶ Frank E. Gaebelin, general editor, *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989-1998), electronic version.

The Parable of the Fig Tree (Matt 24:32-35; Mk 13:28-31; Lk 21:29-33)

This parable is set in the midst of several prophecies of Jesus that deal with the end of the Age of Israel (Matt 24:3-28) and the 2nd Advent (Matt 24:20-31). The Parable of the Fig Tree was presented by Jesus as a means to illustrate the significance of the signs in the prophecies and how His followers should respond when they see those signs.

The fig tree is not Israel in this passage. The fig tree is just an analogy for purposes of Jesus' lesson. When the fig tree begins to sprout leaves, then summer is soon to come. In the same way, when these prophecies (i.e. "these things" – v. 4-26) transpire, the disciples would have known that the Second Advent is at hand.

The phrase "this generation" has two acceptable explanations: 1) It can mean "race" as in the Jewish race; OR 2) it can mean the generation that sees these prophecies fulfilled.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-13)

In association with our Lord's return (24:30) and the regathering of the elect of Israel to the land (24:31), Jews will be judged (Matt 25:31ff). This judgment will also affect Gentiles; however, remember Matthew is writing to Jews primarily with an emphasis upon their relationship to Jesus as the Messiah. The Messianic (Millennial) kingdom will be inaugurated with only believers after the judgment associated with Jesus' 2nd Advent.

The parable of the ten virgins is based upon the marriage customs of our Lord's day. Prior to the wedding, an invitation would be sent to those who were invited to the wedding feast. During the Tribulation period (a.k.a. Daniel's 70th Week), the invitation to participate in the Messianic kingdom will be extended to Jews (and Gentiles) through the preaching of the *gospel of the kingdom*, i.e. that the kingdom of heaven is at hand (24:14 cf. 10:7). The kingdom of heaven is by analogy likened to a wedding feast (22:1-14). Therefore, the ten virgins are representative of Jews during the Tribulation who have heard the *gospel of the kingdom* and who have been invited to the wedding feast. Some prepared themselves to enter the kingdom and others did not. Their preparation (or lack thereof) is an outward representation of inward faith (or no faith) in the *gospel of the kingdom*. Like the faithful servant of Matthew 24:45, the wise virgins anticipated and prepared for the Messiah's Coming. Like the unfaithful servant of 24:48, the foolish virgins assumed things would continue as they always have and they did not prepare in faith.

In this parable of the ten virgins, Christ taught that during the period before His Second Coming, those believers who had faith in the gospel of the kingdom would manifest that faith through proper preparation for His arrival. They would **not** have an attitude similar to the "evil servant" of 24:48 who believed that Christ would not be coming for some time and live their lives based upon their own selfish interests (e.g. self-preservation and denial of the Messiah in the face of persecution). Christ's return at the Second Advent will terminate the opportunity for people to prepare themselves to enter the millennial kingdom, and only the prepared will be accepted.

Psalms 24 presents a picture of pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem for a festival. They are seen approaching the city with the hope that they might on that occasion meet Messiah and welcome Him to His kingdom. As they proceed, some ask, "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?" (Psa 24:3). Others provide the answer, "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false." (Psa 24:4). Thus only the pure in heart shall see God (Matthew 5:8).

EXAMPLES OF OTHER PARABLES THAT REQUIRE DISPENSATIONAL DISTINCTIONS FOR PROPER INTERPRETATION

The Parable of the Rich Fool (Lk 12:13-34; Matt 6:19-21, 25-34)

While this parable is rich with application to believers of all ages, it is important to recognize that Jesus spoke this parable to His disciples within the context of the Kingdom Gospel.²⁷ Nowhere in the Pauline corpus do we find any command to “sell what you have and give alms” (12:33). Paul never tells the members of the Body of Christ to sell all and give it away. He does instruct the believer though to work with his own hands so that he might supply not only his own needs but the needs of others (Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 4:11) and if any would not work neither should he eat (2 Thess 3:10). Furthermore, Paul does not instruct the rich to sell everything, but he does instruct them to be rich in good works (1 Tim 6:17, 18). Paul’s instructions on Christian giving are found especially in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 which he wrote in connection with the collection of money from the Gentiles to help the principally Jewish believers in Jerusalem. (Interestingly enough, it was the Jerusalem believers who had at one point sold their possessions for the common good, but they were now destitute and in need of contributions from the Gentiles (Rom 15:25-27).

Jesus taught the parable of the rich fool after having received a request from a bystander to make the bystander’s brother divide their inheritance so that the bystander might receive his fair share. On the surface this seems like a reasonable request for justice; however, Jesus was concerned with the more fundamental issue – covetousness. The energy man spends accumulating the things of this world has been compared to passengers on a sinking ship jockeying for the best deck chair. It is vanity. A man who is focused upon laying up treasures for himself is a pauper towards God. The majority of the book of Ecclesiastes is a commentary on this principle (e.g. Eccl 2:18, 19 cf. 5:10-17; 6:1, 2).

Political and economic dynamics will be completely different in the Messianic Kingdom when Jesus Christ is present to enforce justice. If Paul’s Church Age converts had given all that they had, they certainly would have had nothing left to give to the Jerusalem believers. The same is true of believers in the present day and age.

The Parable of the Unfruitful Fig Tree (Lk 13:6-9)

Israel is pictured with analogies to the Olive Tree, the Fig Tree and the Vine (see Rom 11:24-26; Isa 5:7; Jer 24:1-10). In this parable, the man who came to Israel (pictured as a fig tree) represents Christ who came to Israel looking for spiritual fruit and found none. (In Matthew 21:19, Jesus actually curses a fig tree and it withers away to illustrate judgment upon unbelieving Israel that was soon in coming should she not repent). As a matter of fact, the man in the parable tells the gardener that he had been looking for fruit for three years and found none. The three years probably corresponds to the period of Jesus’ public ministry to Israel even though Jesus’ public ministry may have not been exactly three years. The keeper of the vineyard interceded on behalf of the fig tree (Israel) and asked for additional time to cultivate and fertilize the tree. Israel was given a chance to repent as evidenced by Peter’s preaching that is recorded in Acts 3:17-21.

²⁷ As an aside, it is interesting to note the close association between the “kingdom” (v. 31, 32) and the “heavens” (v. 33) in Jesus’ parable. I believe that this reflects the fact that the temporal, earthly kingdom over which our resurrected Lord will rule includes a close interaction between resurrected believers of all dispensations and mankind who dwells on earth during the Millennium.

Two Parables in the House of a Chief Pharisee (Lk 14:1-24)

The second of these two parables is only mildly eschatological in nature and certainly there is great value in the cross-dispensational principles contained in them. I include this passage only because it serves as a very good example of the fact that we should maintain a balance in our interpretation of Scripture – a balance between recognizing the dispensational distinctions on the one hand and similarities of certain spiritual truths that transcend dispensations on the other.

On other occasions in the Gospels the Pharisees invited Jesus to their houses for a meal (cf. Lk 7:36), but their motives were anything but pure. They desired to trap Jesus and thereby find some basis for legitimizing their hatred of Him. In our passage, the Pharisees have invited Jesus to dine with them on the Sabbath. Throughout Jesus' public ministry, the Pharisees were constantly looking for Jesus to break the Sabbath because the penalty for doing so was stoning (Num 15:31-36). On this particular occasion, there happened to be a man present who was afflicted with dropsy – a condition of excess fluid in the tissues of the body. This man was probably invited to Jesus' house just to see what Jesus would do. Jesus recognized the setup and immediately asked them if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath (14:3). The Pharisees had learned not to answer Jesus' questions because every time they did they just got themselves in deeper trouble so they kept quiet. So Jesus healed the man and let him go (14:4). Jesus then asked them the same question in the form of a practical scenario. He took them from the world of the academic, theoretical and impractical to the real world where people had to live and make day-to-day decisions under the yoke of legalism. When faced with the dilemma of pulling their son or their ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath or leaving him there, would they ponder the intricacies of a legalistic code or would they quickly do the right thing (14:5-6)?

Jesus then tells the first of two parables – the parable of the overly ambitious guest. As the Pharisees had entered the house for a meal, Jesus observed them vie for the best seat next to the host. The parable is a simple lesson in courtesy and humility toward others as a demonstration of one's spiritual status. It was designed to get the Pharisees to think about the spiritual realities of the kingdom Gospel He and His disciples had been proclaiming. In God's economy (the future Kingdom), the one who exalts himself will be abased and the one who humbles himself will be exalted in due time (cf. 13:30). The Pharisees were of a mindset that assumed that they would occupy places of honor in the Kingdom and their actions at the dinner reflected it. However, the path to a place of honor in the Kingdom was and will be through humility of soul that is reflected in servant attitudes and actions. Jesus then turned to the host who was orchestrating this attempt at entrapment. Jesus told him that if he would invite the outcasts and lowly of circumstances – people who could never repay him for his generosity – he would thereby demonstrate his humility. His reward would come in the resurrection instead of this life (cf. Matt 6:1-7; James 1:26-27).

The second of the parables that Jesus told was prompted by the statement of one of the guests that those who eat bread in the kingdom of God would be among the blessed (14:15). We can almost picture the man looking around the table with a knowing glance that non-verbally acknowledged the thought that all of the Pharisees held in common – the assumption that they would have important positions in the kingdom because of the honor bestowed upon them in this life. The setting is perfect for Jesus' parable. Jesus was at a table to dine with Jewish Pharisees who all thought that they of all people would be among those seated at the table of fellowship in the Kingdom. As we have seen in other parables (e.g. Matt 22:1-14), a banquet feast was often used in Scripture as an analogy to fellowship among the redeemed in the Kingdom.

In the second parable, the host had invited many guests; however, all of those invited began to provide excuses for not responding. The excuses appeared to be valid on the surface (14:18-20). The host became angry and invited the poor, lame, blind and maimed. Jesus was referring to the members of the Jewish society who were ceremonially unclean, yet who had responded to the Gospel message He and His disciples preached. Those from the “highways and hedges” who were invited to fill the remaining seats at the banquet most likely refers to the Gentiles who will participate in the Kingdom since there are a multitude of references in the Scriptures to the blessings that will come to the Gentile nations in the Messianic Kingdom by virtue of their association with Israel.

The Parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Lost Son (Matt 18:10-14; Lk 15)

These parables are fairly well-known and the spiritual value to people of our dispensation of the Church Age is rich. The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin emphasize the principle that God pursues the wayward sinner in grace. The parable of the lost or prodigal son emphasizes the principle that God receives the sinner in grace. Nevertheless, there is a dispensational and eschatological component to the proper interpretation of these parables that is often overlooked.

It is fairly obvious that these parables were directed at the religious leadership of Israel. They complained about the fact that Jesus spent time with known sinners – something a self-“righteous” Pharisee or religious leader would never do. In these parables, Jesus is describing God’s joy over a sinner who repents. The dispensational and eschatological components of these parables that are frequently overlooked involves a recognition of the greater context of the parable. The greater setting is Jesus’ presentation of the kingdom Gospel to Jews – God’s elect nation among whom there were believers and unbelievers.

Today, most expositors place these parables in a Church Age setting where they refer to the joy of the Father when an unbelieving “sinner” repents (changes his/her mind about Christ) and believes in Him for salvation. While this principle is true and that interpretation and application is certainly correct by analogy, the primary meaning of the parable is related to the fact that the Jewish people were in covenant relationship to God – even if they didn’t accept Jesus as their Messiah. The emphasis of John’s and Jesus’ preaching was repentance by the Jews from a rejection of Jesus as their Messiah and basis of covenant blessings.

Today, the covenant God made with the Jewish people is suspended. We do not have the possibility of entering the Messianic Kingdom in our mortal bodies in fulfillment of God’s covenant as did the Jewish believer of Jesus’ day. However, as believers of the Church Age, we do face the privilege of ruling and reigning with Him in that Kingdom in our resurrection bodies. Only truly saved people are the children of God today; whereas when the covenants were in effect, the nation of Israel was God’s people and that nation included both saved and unsaved Jews.

This fact is highlighted by the parable of the lost son. The older son represents the self-righteous Pharisees – children of the covenant, duty bound to stay, but unrepentant, unloving and unforgiving. The lost or prodigal son represents the Jew who repented and accepted the Father’s provision thereby being restored to a position of fellowship with the Father. Note once again the eschatological significance of the “feast.” When the younger son had repented, the father wanted to celebrate with a feast and put the best clothes and a robe on the son. Entrance into the Messianic Kingdom and fellowship with the Father there is often pictured by means of a banquet feast. The repentant younger son had only hoped to be brought back as a hired servant, but the father honored him greatly. The older son was angry and refused to take part in the festivities. The older son revealed a heart that was hardened and opposed to the love and grace shown by the father toward

this repentant son. The Pharisees and religious leaders in like manner were opposed to those who were repentant in Israel.

The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:14-31)

To understand this passage requires an understanding of Biblical teaching on the subject of the residence of the souls and spirits after death.²⁸ The beggar, Lazarus, went to a portion of hades known as Abraham's bosom or paradise. This was the abode of all OT saints (Age of Israel and prior) while they await their resurrection. The rich man went to torments which is the abode of all unbelievers while they await the Lake of Fire at the Second Resurrection. The point of the parable is that the "respectable" by the world's standards are not necessarily righteous. This point was directed toward the religious leaders who had a false sense of what constituted approval by God, i.e. material wealth and approval from man. On the other hand, those who didn't meet such standards such as the poor, maimed, lame, etc. would inherit wealth unimaginable in the afterlife because they had the right attitude toward the Messiah.

The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matt 20:1-16)

The chapter division between chapter 19 and 20 is unfortunate because chapter 20 is just a continuation of Jesus' teaching of His disciples in 19:28-30. In the last verses of chapter 19, Jesus has responded to the disciples question regarding their reward in the kingdom considering all that they have sacrificed to follow Christ. If it is impossible for the rich man to enter the kingdom on the basis of his merits (remember in Jesus' day, the prevalent thought was that material blessings

²⁸ The abode of the dead can be categorized as follows:

- ❖ *Gehenna* – this is the term that Jesus used to warn of the consequences of rejecting Him (Matt 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk 9:43, 45, 47, Lu 12:5). It is identical with the Lake of Fire in Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15). The 2nd Death and the Lake of Fire are identical in Revelation 20:14
- ❖ *Sheol* – this is synonymous with the grave – sometimes a general reference without an indication of righteous or wicked (Ge 37:35; 42:38; 1 Sa 2:6; 1 Ki 2:6; Job 14:3; 17:13, 16) – sometimes only of the wicked (Ps 9:17; Pro 23:14)
- ❖ *The "Abyss"* – This is also referred to as the "bottomless pit" and is the place where Satan is chained throughout the Millennium and prevented from having access to the earth. It is also the temporary abode of demons until they are cast into the Lake of Fire with Satan at the end of human history (Re 9:1-2; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3)
- ❖ *"Tartarus"* – This is the temporary prison of the angels that had sexual relations with women prior to the flood in Genesis 6 in violation of the rules of engagement in the Angelic Conflict (see 1 Pe 3:19-20; 2 Pe 2:4-5; Jude 6)
- ❖ *"Hades"* – This is synonymous with Sheol, but is seen in the NT as containing two compartments: torments and paradise
 - *"Torments"* (from Luke 16:23) – This is the abode of unbelievers prior to their sentencing to the Lake of Fire at the Second Resurrection (see Matt 11:23; 16:18; Lu 10:15; 16:19-31; Re 20:13-14; Re 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14)
 - *"Paradise"* (from Luke 16:22) – This is the abode of all Old Testament saints prior to their resurrection. Nothing is mentioned in the Bible regarding the resurrection of the Age of Gentile believers, however it is likely that they are housed in paradise (a.k.a. Abraham's bosom) with Age of Israel believers from the time of their death until their disembodied souls and spirits were transported with Christ to heaven (see Lu 16:19-31; 23:43; Ac 2:27, 31). They will receive their resurrection bodies at the Second Advent. After Christ's resurrection, paradise is seen as in heaven (2 Co 12:1-4; Eph 4:8-10)

implied God's favor), then the disciples wondered if they would have any reward at all considering all that they have sacrificed. Jesus answered their question in 19:28-30 and continues by reinforcing the answer with a parable in 20:1-16.

In this parable, Jesus reinforces the point that the notion that the rich, the powerful, the great, and the prominent will continue as such in the kingdom is contrary to God's grace. The parable begins with a typical scene and introduces atypical elements for shock effect upon the listeners. Jesus leads the hearers along in the flow of the parable to demonstrate that God's grace is completely removed from all principles of human merit found in a laissez faire economy. Those who approach God in childlike trust (verse 4 & 7 – "whatever is right") will be advanced beyond those who enjoy prominence now (19:23, 30) based upon the fact that God is omniscient and gracious. The point is not that all are equal before God and all kingdom work is equal. Nor is Jesus trying to teach free enterprise or establish principles for resolving management/employee disputes.

In verses 1-2, the owner of the vineyard agrees to pay the workers a denarius – the normal wage for a foot soldier or a day laborer. These workers would have started about 6 a.m. Note that the other four groups agreed to "whatever is right." The third hour would have been about 9 a.m. and the eleventh hour would have been about 5 p.m.

The principle in the world is that the worker who works the most (assuming the same job) receives the most pay. This is certainly just and the wise owner would not have many workers if he violated this principle. But in the kingdom, the principle of God's grace prevails. Some of these workers (Jews in context to whom the kingdom is being presented) protested (v. 12) and the owner (God) is said to respond with the question – "Is your eye evil because I am good." The evil eye is an idiom referring to jealousy (Deut 15:9; 1 Sam 18:9).

It is fairly easy to recognize the spiritual principles related to God's grace and sovereignty in this parable. However, the dispensational distinction that needs to be highlighted for a proper interpretation is that Jesus is addressing an audience that had the potential during their life-times to enter the Messianic Kingdom of God on earth. As noted, Jesus is not teaching believers of this present age (or any age) principles of employer/employee relations. Could a person of the 1st Century A.D. come to faith just prior to the Messianic Kingdom's establishment on earth and still be granted access? Yes – that is what this parable teaches. Are there indirect parallels related to the present age? Yes.

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