

The Wheat & The Tares

Matthew 13:24-43

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The Consummation

Jesus' disciples had a thoroughly "Jewish" perspective on the coming of Messiah's Kingdom. They had been taught, (from such passages as Psalm 37, Isaiah 40, 62, 65, 66; Daniel 2, 7; Joel 3; & Zechariah 14), that the creation would be restored to its pristine condition when the Messiah comes to establish His Kingdom on earth. The restoration of the creation was their hope. Their belief that they had "found the Messiah"¹ drove their anticipation. They did not understand the concept of two comings of the Messiah. They were oblivious to the fact that He first had to suffer. They had no idea there was to be a period of time in which the "Gospel of the Kingdom" must be preached to all nations prior to His coming in power and glory. ²

Jesus first began to reveal the details of His second coming through parables. By far the most important such parable is the "Wheat and Tares." This parable sheds considerable light on the nature of the Kingdom of God and when the righteous will be received into the presence of Christ the King. It is therefore a fitting place to begin our study.

Before we begin, we need to dispense with a common misconception. Many Christians suppose that the term "Kingdom of Heaven" found in Matthew's Gospel refers to heaven itself, to a kingdom that exists within the sphere of heaven. That concept would be foreign to the Jewish mind, because all of the prophets had predicted that the coming Kingdom would be here on earth.³ The term "Kingdom of Heaven" was used by Matthew exclusively, the parallel accounts in the other Gospels all having "Kingdom of God." The terms are therefore synonymous. The Kingdom is "of heaven" in the sense that it comes from heaven, and its authority is derived from heaven. Both terms probably originated from Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Dan 2:43-44

*44 And in the days of these kings **the God of heaven will set up a kingdom** which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.*

This Kingdom is really "the Kingdom of the God of Heaven." It is easy to see how it could be abbreviated as both "the Kingdom of Heaven" and "the Kingdom of

God." That "the Kingdom of the God of heaven" will rule the earth is made clear in various other passages in Daniel.

Dan 7:13-14, 27

13 I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.

14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. ...

*27 Then the kingdom and dominion, **and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.** His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.'*

Notice in the highlighted portion above that "the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven" will be inherited by the saints. "Kingdoms" is plural. Essentially, the saints will rule the earth with the Messiah. This is "the Kingdom of Heaven" for which the Jews eagerly waited. With that background, let's turn our attention to Jesus' parable.

Matt 13:24-30, 36-43

*24 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: **"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field;***

25 but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.

26 But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.

27 So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'

28 He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?'

29 But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."'" ...

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field."

37 He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.

38 *The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one.*

39 *The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels.*

40 *Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age.*

41 *The Son of Man will send out His angels, and **they will gather out of His kingdom** all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness,*

42 *and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

43 *Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun **in the kingdom** of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

First, let's notice that the "Kingdom of Heaven" is introduced by "planting" wheat. We learn from verse 37, that Jesus is the "sower." He was at that time beginning to "sow" the seed, preaching "the Gospel of the Kingdom."⁴ The disciples themselves would take up this task when Jesus went back to the Father.⁵ And this "sowing" of the seed would continue until the "end of the age."⁶

Satan sowed "tares" among the wheat. These "tares" were wicked persons who perverted the truth of the Gospel. An example would be the Gnostics that invaded the churches in the late first century, of which Paul warned the Ephesian elders.⁷ Jesus also warned about many "false prophets" who would appear to be true "wheat," but would be refused entrance in His coming Kingdom.

Matt 7:21-23

21 *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*

22 *Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'*

23 *And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'*

These pseudo-Christians are the "tares" in Jesus' parable. While they use the name of Jesus or the title of the Messiah, they are really the Devil's apostles, "sons of the Wicked One" (v. 38).

When the angels noticed the tares growing alongside the wheat, they asked the Master whether they should remove them for the sake of the wheat. Yet, the reply was to let them alone until the time of the harvest.

Next we see that “at the end of this age” the harvest will arrive. The angels are the agents of the harvest (both of the true followers of Christ and the wicked imposters).

Notice that the Lord commands the angels to first gather and bind the tares into bundles so they could later be burned. They are not, however, destroyed at this time. They are merely “bound,” and their fate is sealed. We see this “gathering” of the wicked imposters just before the Lord returns in both Testaments.⁸

As soon as the tares are separated and bundled for burning, the wheat are gathered by the angels into the barn. It is significant that the angels gather the wheat. We will see this again in the Olivet Discourse, as Jesus sends forth His angels to gather together His elect “immediately after the tribulation.”⁹

It is important to note that the wicked are being removed from “the Kingdom.” That is, the Kingdom does exist now in this age. It exists among all those who profess Jesus as their Lord and King. But, the Kingdom will continue after the harvest, with the genuine followers of Jesus Christ. The imposters will all be removed.

This is the extent of Jesus' interpretation of His parable. However, we need to keep some things in mind as we proceed.

- The tares are limited to those who are false followers of the Messiah, and not all who may be unsaved.
- The “binding” of the tares takes place before the true followers of Jesus are harvested. (This “binding” may in fact be the purpose for the mark of the Beast, which condemns to the furnace of fire all who take it).¹⁰
- The harvest of the righteous takes place at the “end of this age.”

Notes:

1. John 1:41

2. Matt. 24:14

3. Acts 3:20-22 “and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times **of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.**”

4. Matt. 4:23, 9:35

5. Matt. 24:14

6. Matt. 28:18-20

7. Acts 20:29.

8. cf. Joel 3:1-2, 9-17, Zech. 14:2, Rev. 16:13-16.

9. Matt. 24:29-31

10. cf. Matt. 13:40-42 & Rev. 14:9-11