

The House of Israel

As we begin a study of the kingdom parables, it is important that we understand what the kingdom of God is. It is also essential that we realize that we are presently living in the kingdom and that its benefits are not solely for the Millennium as some people believe. For example, as born-again believers we have the power to walk in health and prosperity now just as people in the Millennium will. Before we go over the individual parables, let's look at the events which led up to Jesus' use of parables to teach people.

The first record of Jesus teaching in parables is recorded in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew. This chapter happens to be the pivotal or dividing point of this book.

In chapters 1-12, we learn of the early life of Jesus, of His suffering in the wilderness where He was tempted by Satan, and of His first public ministry in the temple. Then Jesus began His teaching ministry as He taught the disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. After that, He began to teach in the various cities around Judea.

By the time we reach chapter 12, Jesus has taught in every major city in the area and has many people following Him. It is interesting to note that even though Jesus intended His message for the Jews, it is largely the Gentiles who received it. In fact, while many Jews did follow Jesus, as a whole, the Jewish nation under the influence of their religious leaders, rejected Him.

In one city after another the religious leaders tried to kill Him, but each time He escaped out of their midst. The Pharisees wanted to get rid of Jesus, but in chapter 12, we find them following Him. However, their motivation was that they wanted to find fault with Him so that they could say that He was breaking the Law. They then would be free to stone Him and be rid of Him forever.

They think they have this chance when they catch Jesus and His disciples picking corn on the Sabbath.

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. Matthew 12:1-2

Jesus was under the Jewish dispensation of the Law (which would not end until the Cross) and He would not violate His Father's Word by breaking the Law, nor would He allow His disciples to do so. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus had said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

The Pharisees' accusation is based on the premise that picking corn on the Sabbath was against the Law, but it is not! Rather, it was against the Pharisees' religious tradition which had become so entwined with the Law that they could not distinguish one from the other.

The question remains, why were the Pharisees following Jesus into a corn field to entrap Him? Remember, Jesus has been preaching in the major cities and even though many Jews rejected Him, there was still a good number who followed Him. This meant that those people were not following the Pharisees and this angered them. But, most of all, it hit them where it hurt most - in the pocketbook!

We know from Matthew 23, that Jesus castigated the Pharisees for milking money from the people (they were forced to tithe even their spices) and for misusing money in the name of religion. Now He was causing their income to drop by taking their people.

Can't you imagine that when Jesus and the disciples looked over their shoulders, they could see the Pharisees duck! Then these heads among the corn jumped up and shouted, "Aha! Caught you! Picking corn on the Sabbath day!"

To prove that He was not breaking the Law, Jesus reminds them of Jewish history in Matthew 12:3-4.

But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the

shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

He brings up one of their favorite ancestors, David, whom they revered and loved. He reminded them of the time David ate the showbread from the holy of holies and yet nothing was done to him.

In the next verse, Jesus also reminds them of how one of their own, a priest, can go blameless "Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?" (Matthew 12:5).

In other words, He is saying, "You look at David who broke the Law, and you won't say anything about him. You look at one of your own men who broke the Law, and you won't say anything about him, but you look at Me breaking your tradition and you're ready to jump all over Me."

Jesus goes on to say in verse 6, "But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple." Isn't the builder of the temple greater than the temple? Jesus is the author of the temple; He gave the dimensions of it. The one who talked to Moses personally, the one who spoke out of the burning bush and said, "I AM THAT I AM" is this same Jesus who later told the religious leaders, "Before Abraham was, I AM," Jesus is the one who built the temple and now He is saying, "I'm greater than the temple, and I'm here in our midst."

In Matthew 12:7, He tells them, "You men have missed the whole point. You strain over every little law and you're missing the most important thing in God's Word - His mercy,"

The same thing is true today, when mercy goes out the door, law takes over. When God's grace goes out the door, nit-picking takes over. But you see, when God comes in, He amplifies His mercy and grace.

Jesus was speaking to these same religious leaders later in Matthew 23:24, and He said, "Ye blind guides, which strain at [out] a gnat and swallow a camel." He meant that the Law contained gnats (little things) and camels (big things). But what they did

was strain out the camels and put them off to one side, and let the people have just the gnats.

These religious leaders knew that the first five books of the Bible, were filled with the mercy and the grace of God. Yet, they disregarded them, so all that remained was the Law. Furthermore, they even omitted the camels or the weightier matters of the Law; that is of judgment, of righteousness, and of mercy. The camels are the mercy, the grace and the loving- kindness of God.

When Jesus said, in verse 7, ". . . I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless," He meant that He would have the camels and not the gnats. He gives them a camel in verse 8 when He says, "For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day."

In verse 9 we find Jesus leaving the corn field and going into the synagogue.

And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?" that they might accuse him. And he said unto them, "... What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?" Matthew 12:9-11

It is logical that they would be thinking, "Sure, we've had a sheep fall into a pit on the sabbath day. What are we going to do but pull it out?" Jesus' point is made in verse 12 and 13.

How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

Thank God Jesus wasn't moved by tradition! When religion said, "Don't do that," He went ahead and did it anyway, because He observed the grace and the mercy of God.

We learn from verse 14, that once again the Pharisees were plotting to destroy Jesus. Knowing this, Jesus left and the multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all (verse 15). The multitudes accepted Him. The religious leaders rejected Him.

This multitude that followed Him is mainly made up of gentiles. He did not go to them first, yet they responded to the gospel. The Jews, as a nation, are so bound up by their tradition and their religion that when Jesus, their very Messiah, comes along, they don't recognize Him. Even when He walks in with proofs of miracles, they will not accept Him. Jesus pointed this out in the 23rd chapter of Matthew. He said, "You garnish the tombs of the prophets, and you say to yourselves, 'If I had lived then, I wouldn't have killed them as our forefathers did.' But your forefathers didn't do anything compared to what you are going to do. You are going to fill the measure to the top and let it run over because you are going to kill the one of whom they prophesied."

Jesus then leaves the synagogue and goes into the streets. The multitudes follow Him, but so do the Pharisees. At this time, a demon-possessed man was brought to Him. "Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb . . ." (verse 22). This man (an unbeliever) is controlled in his spirit by a demon. (By the way, believers can be oppressed, tempted and harassed; but they cannot be possessed by demons.) This demon possession has resulted in two manifestations in the man's body. He cannot speak and he cannot see. In other words, nothing can come in and nothing can get out. This man is totally taken over by this demon. This didn't stop. Jesus, ". . ." and he healed him inasmuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw."

Verses 23 and 24, contrast the reaction of the people to the reaction of the Pharisees.

And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

When the masses refer to Jesus as the son of David, they are recognizing Him because son of David is a Messianic title. They were saying, "This is the promised one of

David who was supposed to come because the Old Testament told us that when He came, He would open the eyes of the blind and cause the deaf to hear and cause them to speak. He would preach the acceptable year of the Lord." They recognized Jesus for who He was; and as a mass, they received Him as their Savior.

But what happened? Religion rose up. Religion hates it when people accept Jesus. To belittle Jesus, the Pharisees claimed that He cast out demons by Satan. They wanted to make the people think that they had been duped.

However, according to Matthew 12:25, "And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. House means "an individual." The significance of this is made clear in verse 26, "And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, how shall then his kingdom stand?" In other words, He is saying, "If Satan is in Me and is casting out devils, then I am walking around as a divided kingdom."

Jesus goes on to say in verse 27, "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges." Even the Pharisees' sons were casting out devils, and we know they weren't believers. He said, "If you want an example of a kingdom divided against itself, look in your own ranks." He told them at one time, "You're of your father the devil." Now these people have the nerve to look at Jesus and say that He is in league with the devil.

Actually, Jesus was prophesying that this nation of Israel was demon-possessed. It was not being taken over by the devil. It was divided against itself, and the time of desolation was coming. The whole house of Israel was going to eventually topple, and the people would be dispersed around the world for the dispensation of the Church age.

Matthew 12:28-29, goes on to say,

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

What Jesus was saying to them is, "How could I even walk into your midst and do the works I'm doing unless I had bound the strong man over your house first? That proves that I'm the One who has the authority over Satan. I walked right into your midst and I've been able to spoil his goals. I was able to open this man's eyes. I was able to heal that withered hand. I have been able to do these miracles and all these people have believed on Me because I walked right into the devil's house one day, and I bound him so that I could spoil his house. But, you men don't even recognize it."

In verse 34, Jesus is still speaking to the Pharisees, "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?" Jesus was pointing out that the demon-possessed man was a type of Israel itself, being bound by the devil, spiritually blind and not able to speak a word. The nation of Israel was blind to the glorious gospel. Furthermore, since they were corrupt on the inside, all they could produce to come out of their mouths was corruption.

In verse 43, He tells the religious leaders what has happened to the demon-possessed man, "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none." The demon has been cast out of him and is now going into dry places. But, when the demon cannot find rest, it desires to return to its house. Remember, a house symbolizes an individual.

Jesus goes on to say in verse 45, "Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation." Jesus is comparing the house that the demon finds empty, swept, and garnished to that generation of Jewish religious leaders.

Before we continue, let me point out that this verse also applies to individuals, believers as well as unbelievers. When a sinner is demon-possessed, and somebody casts the devil out of that man, if that man doesn't become born again and receive Jesus as

his Saviour, that demon can come back and possess the man seven times worse. Likewise, when a believer is tempted by the devil and harassed by demons, and those demons are cast off him, if that believer doesn't get into the Word of God, the demons can come back and oppress him seven times worse.

Therefore, those demons should find the house so full of the Word of God they can't get in the window or even can't get a toe in the door!

Now let's look at Matthew 13. The first verse tells us, "The same day went Jesus out of the house. . ." (Matthew 13:1a). This "house" refers to the house of Israel. He was fed up with that nation. They rejected Him, so He walked out of the house and said, "I warned you of the result of this - the nation of Israel will be seven times worse than before."

It is interesting to note that when Jesus left the "house," He went, "O . . . and sat by the sea side" (Matthew 13:1 b). The Sea is a type of all humanity. In fact, the Book of Revelation compares all the nations of the world to the sea. So, Jesus turned from one nation, Israel, to another, the Gentiles. However it is only after His own received Him not that He turned to the Gentiles.

It is at this point that Jesus begins teaching parables that tell about the coming kingdom, the glory of the kingdom, and how it's going to grow and flourish.

I believe that the parables are progressive. That is, as a whole and individually, they show that until the time of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ we are not going to get weaker and weaker, but are going to become stronger and stronger. I believe that we are living in the hundred-fold generation which is seeing the Church build up to greater power than ever before.

Thus the two-fold theme of Matthew 13 is the increase of the Church and the decline of the Jews. However, this chapter also brings out that there is going to be a time when the Jews will again be lifted up.

As we have mentioned, this is the first time Jesus ever taught in parables. by switching to parables, He's now making it more difficult for those who rejected Him to

receive. At the same time, He's making it easy for those who really desire to receive to understand. The parables bring out such things as, the power of God and how God preserves the believer.

Let's take a look at what "parable" means, The word "parable" is actually a transliteration from the Greek, We had no English word for such a story, so the Greek word "parabole" was carried over into our language and became "parable,"

Parabole is a compound word, "Para" means "beside," "Bole" means, "to throw or to cast.' The word actually means, "to throw down beside," Thus, in order to explain a spiritual truth to the people, Jesus would "throw down beside" it a story that they could understand, So, a parable is a simple story cast down beside a teaching to help you understand the teaching.

Jesus' parables came from the teachings of the day, so, in order to better understand them, we will be going over some of those customs. Although customs have changed, the teaching never changes. The truth then still applies to us today because the Word of God lives and abides forever.

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