

“ THE KINGDOM ”

AND

“ THE CHURCH ”

OR

The Seven Parables of Matthew xiii.

BY

E. W. BULLINGER, D.D.

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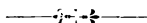
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“THE KINGDOM” AND “THE CHURCH”:

OR

THE SEVEN PARABLES OF MATTHEW XIII.

A GREAT principle was stated, and a solemn command was given, when the Lord Jesus said, “What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder” (Matt. xix. 6).

But the converse must be equally true, and we may assert as a like divine principle—*What God hath put asunder, let not man join together!*

It is scarcely too much to say that all the confusion that abounds in connection with God’s Word, and especially with prophetic truth, arises from the violation of one or other of these two foundation principles.

For example, God has drawn a line of separation between the “*priest*” of the Old Covenant and the “*presbyter*,” or elder, of the New; * between *Law* and *Grace*; between the *old nature* and the *new* in the believer; between the Christian’s *standing* and his *state*; between *professors* and *possessors*; between *salvation* and *rewards*; between the judgment of the *believer’s works* (2 Cor. v. 9, 10; 1 Cor. iii. 10–15), of the *living nations* (Matt. xxv. 31–46; 2 Tim. iv. 1), and of the *raised dead*† (Rev. xx.); between the “*first*” resurrection and the “*second*” (Rev. xx. 4–6); † between Christ’s coming “*forth*” and coming “*unto*,” as forming two distinct stages both of His first and of His second advents ‡ (Micah v. 2; Zech. ix. 9); between “the Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God” (1 Cor. x. 32); and between “*the Kingdom*” and “*the Church*.”

All these are emphatically “put asunder” and for ever separated by the Spirit of God. How then can they be “joined together,” as they are by the majority of Bible readers,

* Yet these are confounded by Rome in her French Romish Version, in which these two different words are translated by the one French word, “*prêtre*.”

† See *Ten Sermons on the Second Advent*, by the same author.

‡ See *Things to Come*, by the same author.

without causing the greatest possible confusion, and bringing in dangerous and mischievous errors?

God's Word is presented to us under various aspects and titles, each of which has its own corresponding relation to us, and sets before us some peculiar duty with regard to it.

It is called the "ENGRAFTED WORD" (James i. 21). As such we are to *receive* it "with meekness." "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."

It is called the "FAITHFUL WORD" (Titus i. 9). As such we are to *hold it fast*. "Holding fast the faithful word."

It is called the "WORD OF LIFE" (Phil. ii. 16). As such we are to *hold it forth*. "Holding forth the word of life."

But it is called also the "WORD OF TRUTH" (2 Tim. ii. 15). As such we are to *rightly divide it*. "Rightly dividing the word of truth," just because it is truth. If it be not rightly divided we have error instead of truth.

Now this is the duty which we have to perform with regard to these two—"the Kingdom," and "the Church." Nowhere are they said to be the same; nowhere are the terms used synonymously: God has separated them. It is a pure assumption on the part of man (not to say disobedience to God's plain command), which has made him join them together, and has thus led to so much error, and to so many mistakes.

Let us first define our terms. "The Kingdom" is none other than that which forms the great subject of Old Testament promise and prophecy. The Kingdom which was offered and presented to Israel by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels is the same Kingdom which we see set up with divine judgments and power in the prophecies and visions of the Apocalypse.

What is a "kingdom"? It is a people and country *ruled over by a King*. Brazil was recently a kingdom; now it is a republic. France was a kingdom; but now it is a republic. What is it that has made the difference? In each case the country is the same; the people are the same; the hills and valleys and rivers and cities are the same. There is only one change, only one thing that creates all the difference—*There is no King*. So that a kingdom necessarily implies the presence of a reigning king.

Then let us ask, What is "the Church"? Few words are used in a greater variety of meanings. It is used of a particular Church, *e.g.*, Rome, Antioch, England, &c.; it is used of a "congregation of faithful men"; it is used of a building; it is used as the opposite of Nonconformity; it is used of the

whole body of professing Christians; it is used (wrongly) of the ministry. But the sense in which we use it now is "the Church of God," *i.e.*, as consisting of those who have been born again by the Holy Spirit and made by Him new creations in Christ Jesus; who belong to God; whom the Father gave to the Son (John xvii.), and whom the Son came to save, and did save with an everlasting salvation; who have eternal life, and shall therefore never perish; who have been built into one Building, and incorporated into one Body by one Spirit. Not any Church of man, or the Church of any country, but "the Church of God."

Now, our point is that these two, the Kingdom and the Church, as thus defined, have been "put asunder" by God; are thus totally and altogether distinct. They ought therefore never to be joined together, and can never be identified without serious loss of sense and truth.

The Old Testament is occupied with "the Jew" and "the Gentile." The New Testament chiefly (though not exclusively) with "the Church of God." We read nothing of it in the Old Testament. It was hidden in the "unsearchable riches of Christ"; those riches and treasures which were untrackable even by the prophets, who tried in vain to understand the interval between "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." This was "the mystery" * specially revealed to the Apostle Paul, and by him to the Church. He was singled out and chosen to be the medium of this new revelation of what up to that moment had been "kept secret since the world began," "hid in God," "hid from ages and from generations," but was then "made manifest to His saints," *viz.*, that Jews and Gentiles, on being born of the Spirit, should cease to be Jews and Gentiles, as to their standing, their hopes, and their destinies, but should become members of "the Body of Christ," and form a new and hitherto unknown company, called "the Church of God," "the Body of Christ" (read Rom. xvi. 25, 26; Eph. iii. 2-11; and Col. i. 24-27).†

The Kingdom and the Church in the New Testament.

1. The Church is said to be "BUILT upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, † Jesus Christ Himself being the chief

* *i.e.*, Secret; secret purpose or counsel.

† See *The Mystery*; also "Papers on the Apocalypse," by the same author, and published in *Things to Come*, Jan. 1901.

‡ *i.e.*, the New Testament "prophets." See Eph. iv. 8, 11; iii. 5, &c.

corner-stone, in whom all the BUILDING, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy Temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are BUILDED together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." This word "build" is found twenty-four times in the New Testament, and is never used in connection with the Kingdom. On the other hand, the word used of the Kingdom, (*ἀνίστημι*) "set up," is never found in connection with the Church of God.

2. Men speak, and write, and pray about the "extension" of the Kingdom, and the "advancement" of the Kingdom, but such expressions are foreign to the Word of God. It knows nothing of them. Again—

3. Men stand in a totally different relation to them, *e.g.*, we read of "heirs of the Kingdom," but not of the Church; "children of the Kingdom," but not "children of the Church" (except in Romish books, and those who imitate Rome's language). We read of "receiving the Kingdom," but there is no sense in which we can receive the Church. We read of "entering," "seeing," and "inheriting" the Kingdom, but there is no sense in which we can inherit the Church.

On the other hand, we read of "the elders of the Church," but not of the Kingdom; "the servant," and "the messenger of the Churches," but never of the Kingdom.

4. No other word is translated Kingdom, except βασιλεία, and this word is never translated otherwise.

5. The Kingdom, once it is set up on the earth, will be an "everlasting Kingdom"; but the Church will be removed from the earth to heaven as soon as it is completed.

6. Again, this Kingdom is always used in the *singular number* (162 times). It is only when "the kingdoms of this world" are spoken of that it is in the plural. While the word ἐκκλησία is translated "church" 112 times,* and of these it is 79 times in the singular, but 36 times in the *plural*, the church being composed of an aggregate of assemblies or churches.

7. The Church of God is also peculiar in its characteristics. Its members are spoken of as "called" (1 Cor. i. 2); "faithful" (Eph. i. 1); "holy" (Col. iii. 12); "sons" (Gal. iv. 6), &c.

8. The metaphors used of the Church are never used of, and can have no reference to, the Kingdom, *e.g.*, "the house of God" (1 Tim. iii. 15); "the Temple of God" (1 Cor. iii. 16, 17); "the Body of Christ" (1 Cor. xii. 27, &c.); "the

* Out of 115; being three times rendered *assembly*.

flock of God" (Acts xx. 28). And those who compose the Church are "members" of this body, "sheep" of this flock, "living stones" of this Temple, "strangers and pilgrims"* in this world.

9. Again, the privilege of the Church will be to reign with Christ; but the subjects of the Kingdom will be reigned over and ruled by Christ and His Church.

10. The Church is an *election*, taken out of all nations while the Kingdom is in abeyance. But, according to Rev. xi. 15, the Kingdom (still future) will be *universal* when "the kingdoms of the world are become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." (R.V.)

11. The Church is now in the world, and looks and longs for the time when it shall be delivered out of it, and caught up to meet the Lord in the air, so to be "for ever with the Lord"; while the Kingdom is not yet in the world, but is prayed for in the words, "Thy Kingdom come," until the time comes for it to be set up.

In short, the Bible knows of only one Kingdom and one King. This is the great subject of the Bible, and, "rightly dividing the word of truth," we see it in the Old Testament prophesied and promised; in the Gospels we see it proclaimed and rejected; in the Apocalypse we see it set up and established with Almighty power and Divine glory; while in the Epistles we see a break in its continuity during this present interval or parenthesis (the Acts of the Apostles being transitional).

The prophets of old testified of "the sufferings of Christ;" and also of "the glory that should follow." But nothing was said as to any interval between them. Indeed, they were connected so closely together, sometimes the one passing on to the other in the next, or even in the same verse, that the prophets themselves, we are told, wondered as to "*what time or what manner of time* the spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow them" (1 Pet. i. 11). The fact as to there being any interval at all, or as to the duration of any such interval was kept secret. It was one of "the mysteries (or secrets) of the Kingdom" which the Lord referred to in Matt. xiii. 11, 35.

In Ps. xxii., for example, up to verse 21, we have the "sufferings of Christ;" and in verses 21-31 we have the prophecy

* Not "pilgrims and strangers," as so often misquoted. We cannot be pilgrims in the world until we have become strangers to it.

of the glory when it shall be said "the Kingdom is the Lord's: and He is the governor among the nations" (*v.* 28).

Again, in Isa. liii. 1-9 we have the "sufferings of Christ," while in the middle of verse 10 it is added that "He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. . . . Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death" (*vv.* 10-12).

Another example, showing how this parenthetical interval was kept secret, is given in Isa. ix. 6, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given . . . and the government shall be upon His shoulder," &c. Again another, in Luke i. 31, 32, "Thou shalt bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus. . . . He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David," &c. Again notice another, in Luke iv. 19, where, quoting Isa. lxi. 1, 2, the Lord reads as far as "the acceptable year of the Lord . . ."; then He closes the book and sits down, because He knew that at least 1870 years would elapse between that and the next sentence, "the day of vengeance of our God." So also in Zech. ix. 9. John tells us how Jesus came sitting upon an ass's colt, as it was written of Him; but he does not go on to tell of the long interval between those words and the prophet's next sentence: "And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim," &c. This is the parenthesis or break in the history of the Kingdom, while Israel is "Lo-ammi," "not My people," while Divine communication is suspended, and Divine intercourse is interrupted.

It is a remarkable fact that when this parenthesis was about to begin, God changed His covenant title of relationship. The Name "Jehovah" seems to be, like the Kingdom, in abeyance, for in the books of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, He is known as "THE GOD OF HEAVEN." In those books He is the God Who has removed to a distance, and Who acts from heaven. He is no longer the God who dwells in the midst of His people, acting no longer from between the Cherubim, but from Heaven, and as "the God of Heaven."

Have we not here the key to the phrase "the Kingdom of Heaven"? and does not this phrase present us with that aspect of the Kingdom during this same period, while God is "the God of Heaven"—the Kingdom in abeyance and in

mystery, or secret character? the Kingdom while the King has removed to a distance? the Kingdom of Heaven while the King is in heaven? This Kingdom was proclaimed by Christ and His forerunner as being "at hand"; but the King was rejected and crucified, and now, while the King is in heaven, the Kingdom is there with Him, just as it was said to be in or with, or rather "among you," when the King stood in their midst on earth (Luke xvii. 21, margin). Hence, now, God (to Israel) is "the God of Heaven," and the Kingdom is "the Kingdom of Heaven."*

This expression occurs thirty-two times in the Gospel of St. Matthew, and nowhere else. Matthew is "*the gospel of the Kingdom.*" In it God says to us, "Behold thy King" (Zech. ix. 9).† And so in this Gospel we have the life of our Lord in connection with the Kingdom, and everything is presented in relation to it.

In this gospel Christ makes known the hitherto unrevealed secrets concerning the Kingdom in

The Seven Parables of Matt. xiii.

This is clear from *vv.* 34 and 35, where we read, "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables . . . that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." In *v.* 11 the Lord adds, "It is given unto you to know the mysteries (or secrets) of the Kingdom of Heaven"; in other words, to you is unfolded the revelation of that which has heretofore been "kept secret."

When He says, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like," it is as though He said, "*The kingdom is to be in abeyance, here is a likeness of what will happen to it; here is another; here is another. I am speaking concerning the things connected with the kingdom which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.*"

* By the figure of Enallage (or Exchange) a noun in the gen. case pl., *οὐρανῶν* (*ouranōn*, of heaven), is used instead of the adjective *οὐράνιος* (*ouranios*), *heavenly*, thus emphasising the adjective. Had the ordinary adjective been used it would have meant "Heavenly KINGDOM"; but seeing the noun is used instead, the emphasis is "HEAVENLY Kingdom," showing us that this Kingdom is not yet established on the earth, and that when it is it will be *heavenly* in its source, its origin, its character, and its King.

† Just as in the Gospel of Mark, He says, "Behold my servant" (Isa. xlii. 1); in Luke, "Behold the Man" (Zech. vi. 12); and in John, "Behold thy God" (Isa. xl. 9).

These seven parables of the Kingdom must be interpreted by what is written in the "Law and the Prophets" according to the "Scriptures," quite apart from the subsequent revelation in the Epistles addressed to the Church.

At the close (*v.* 51), the Lord asks the disciples: "Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord." The Lord does not correct them, but goes on to speak of them as scribes "instructed unto (or, as to) the Kingdom of Heaven."

Now, how could they have thus "understood" if the common interpretation be correct, which refers all these parables to the Church? The Church of God (which is the subject of the present dispensation) had not then been revealed. This is expressly so stated in Eph. iii. 1-10; Col. i. 25, 26; Rom. xvi. 25, 26.

The subject of these parables is the *kingdom*; from its first proclamation by John the Baptist to its final consummation in Rev. xx., omitting all reference to the present dispensation (while the Kingdom is in abeyance), from the Destruction of Jerusalem to the Rapture of the Church.

In looking at Matt. xiii. we must first gather its scope from its structure,* which sets forth not merely the Parables as such, but the Lord's reasons for speaking them.

The structure is as follows:—

(*Repeated alternation.*)

A¹ | 1-9. One Parable (the Sower).

B¹ | 10-23. Reasons: and Interpretation of the Sower.

A² | 24-33. First Group of Three Parables (the Tares, Mustard-seed, and Leaven).

B² | 34-43. Reasons: and Interpretation of the Tares.

A³ | 44-50. Second Group of Three Parables (the Treasure, Pearls, and the Net).

B³ | 51, 52. Reasons: and Explanation.

The whole section is thus divided up into three pairs, in which the Parables alternate with Reasons. The Parables themselves are seven; the number of spiritual perfection.

The Parable of the Sower, or the Sowing, stands out separately from all the others to mark its distinct nature and

* For the description of what is meant by "structure," see the Introduction to *A Key to the Psalms*; also *Figures of Speech*, pp. 363-379, by the same author and publisher.

character. It is further separated from them by the words "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (v. 9). This utterance always calls attention to a change in the dispensations.

The other six Parables are divided into two groups of three Parables each, and separated (as in v. 9) by the same Divine formula in verse 43: "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

Those in the *first group* are linked together by each commencing with the word "another" (vv. 24, 31, 33): and the *three* in the *second group* by commencing with the word "again" (vv. 44, 45, 47).*

The *first three* are spoken to the multitude (v. 34). The *second three* to the disciples (v. 36).

The *first three* were spoken "by the sea side" (v. 1). The *second three* in "the house" (v. 36).

The *first three* are all from the *vegetable* kingdom. The *second three* from the other kingdoms.

Hence the *first group* gives us, as might be expected, the *outward* aspect of the kingdom. The *second group* the *inward* aspect. The *first group* gives the *worldly* aspect, as in the dream to Nebuchadnezzar. The *second group* gives the *moral* aspect, as in the vision to Daniel.

Now, as the perfection of the setting shows the preciousness of the jewel, so the perfection of the structure of these parables shows us the importance of the truth which they reveal.

All the seven parables must be *interpreted* of the Kingdom. The period covered by them runs from the first proclamation of the Kingdom by John the Baptist until the formal withdrawal by God in the Acts of the Apostles. After which there is a break while it is in abeyance and the Church is being taken out. Then (after the Church shall have been caught up, according to the special revelation in 1 Thess. iv. 14-16) these parables take up the Kingdom again until it is finally established according to the counsels of God.

If we thus rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Tim. ii. 15) according to the dispensations to which it refers, we shall keep the Church quite distinct from the Kingdom; we shall distinguish between the present dispensation of grace and the future

* Just as the former five commandments are linked together by the words "THE LORD THY GOD," occurring in each; and the latter five by each commencing with the same letter \aleph (*Vav*) in the Hebrew (by the same word "THOU" in the English).

dispensation of judgment, and separate the present dispensation of the Spirit from the coming dispensation of Christ's Personal Revelation.*

The First Parable.

I. The parable of THE SOWER. This clearly represents the *proclamation of the Kingdom*. The emphasis is not so much on the sower as on the sowing, the seed, and the soil. The seed is declared to be "the Word of the Kingdom" (v. 19). The Lord does not say who the sower is. It is left indefinite, for it includes all who sowed "the Word of the Kingdom:"—(1) John the Baptist; (2) the Son of Man; (3) Peter; (4) Paul. These called Israel to repentance: for national repentance is the alone condition for securing national blessing and entrance on the promised Kingdom.

The four kinds of soil clearly illustrate these four ministries, and the results of the seed sown in each correspond with the results of those four ministries respectively.

Let us look most carefully at these four ministries as embodying the proclamation of "the Word of the Kingdom."

(1.) JOHN THE BAPTIST preached that the Kingdom was at hand; that One was coming to purge His floor, to gather the wheat and to burn up the chaff, and to bless men after executing judgment. Those who received John's testimony were baptized, "confessing their sins," and thus evidenced that *repentance* which is the one condition of national blessing. They then waited for the Coming One who could forgive sins, preserve them through the judgment, and bless them on the earth, afterward, in the Kingdom, when it should be set up.

(2.) THE SON OF MAN bore similar testimony. The object of His mission on earth was not to "found a Church" as Rome and tradition teach; though the *result* of it was. We are distinctly told "that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the Truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. xv. 8). Peter was also the apostle of the "circumcision" (Gal. ii. 8, 9). Christ declares that He was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. xv. 24). His testimony, therefore, was taken

* This *interpretation* does not, of course, do away with any *application* which we may make to-day, as to any testimony or ministry of the Word of God, and the manner of its reception by those who hear it. All this is perfectly legitimate, but it must be kept subservient to and independent of the *interpretation* which is governed by the dispensational character of the subject of Christ's teaching.

up with the Kingdom, which was the subject of "the promises made unto the fathers" in the Old Testament. He proclaimed the Kingdom as near; He Himself, the King, being in their midst (Matt. iv. 17, Luke xvii. 21, marg.). He called on the people to repent, as John had done; this being the one indispensable condition connected with the setting up of the Kingdom. His testimony was rejected, and Matt. i.-xii. records the steps of that rejection, culminating in that of the rulers (xii. 14) and His own family (xii. 46-50). Compare Mark iii. 21, which makes the object of His family quite clear. It was "to lay hold of Him; for they said, He is beside Himself."

Then, it is, as consequent upon this rejection, that He reveals certain things hitherto kept secret concerning the Kingdom; and makes known its mysteries (xiii. 11, 35).

But further testimony was to be given after the crucifixion of the King, and

(3.) PETER presents the same ultimate result in his testimony at Pentecost, in Acts ii. and especially iii. 18-21 (R.V.): "The things which God foreshewed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, He thus fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began."

Here we have the same call to repentance and the promise of the "restoration" of the Kingdom, the time of which they had enquired about in Acts i. 6. Here was the answer to that question of the disciples. Peter was commissioned to proclaim that blessing on the earth, extending to all flesh, under the reign of the Lord Jesus as the Seed of David. But there was this difference—the repentant believers now received forgiveness of sins and were baptized in confession of Jesus as the Christ (*i.e.* the Messiah), the Lord of all.

The eunuch was baptized by Philip as confessing the Lord Jesus to be the One of whom the Prophet Isaiah had spoken.

Cornelius and his household were baptized as having received the same gift as they. "Who could forbid" his formal association with the saved of Israel?

The last recorded case of baptism (Acts xix.) carries us back to the first; the beginning and the end are brought

together. Paul uses it, as it were, as the complement of John's baptism. The disciples of John were *re-baptized* at Ephesus in confession of Jesus as the One who had come, and of whom John had spoken. Baptism is thus shown to stand in connection with the preaching of the Kingdom of God.

(4.) PAUL'S testimony concerning the Kingdom is in strict harmony with all this. He was himself baptized as a Jew, confessing Jesus as the Christ, analogous to one cleansed under the law, "washing away his sins" (Acts xxii. 6).

All the cases of baptism under Paul's preaching occur after he had become associated with the Twelve at Jerusalem, as stated in Gal. ii., and after he had become "as a Jew unto the Jews," as shown by his circumcising Timothy (Acts xvi. 3); and are all in connection with his preaching the Kingdom of God, as stated by himself in Acts xx. 25.

So long as the "Gospel of the Kingdom" was the subject of testimony, ordinances and signs accompanied it; but God had otherwise determined concerning those who were to be united to Christ as risen from the dead, and who were to be in heavenly association with Him.

The earthly and the heavenly are never mingled in Scripture. The public preaching of the Kingdom ends with Acts xix. 20. Not until after this (Acts xx. 28) are believers spoken of as "the Church of God:" nor is "the blood of Jesus" mentioned as purchasing that Church.

The parable of the Great Supper in Luke xiv. takes up the last two ministries of Peter and Paul. The *first* servant is that of Peter in his use of "the Keys of the Kingdom." It was "supper-time": "all things were now ready" (Acts ii.-vii.). The call to "come" was given "to them that had been invited" * before. They were specially the rulers of the people (see Acts iii. 17; iv. 1-8; v. 17, 18, 21-28, 34-41; vi. 12; vii. 1). The *anger* in Luke xiv. 21 refers to that opposition as well as to the rejection, as manifested in the death of Stephen.

The *second* servant was Peter's second ministry in opening the Kingdom to the Gentiles as he had to the Jews (Acts viii.-xii.)

The *third* servant was Paul's ministry in the synagogues; no longer confined to those who had been "bidden," as with the first servant; or to the "city" as with the second servant; but to "the highways and hedges" of the world, thus fulfilling the solemn words—"for none of those men who have been bidden* shall taste of my supper" (Luke xiv. 24).

* κεκλημένοις (*keklēmenois*).

Thus in the Dinner of Matt. xxii. and the Great Supper of Luke xiv. we have the filling out of the ministries of the Sower. As we have already said, we have in the parable of the Sower, or rather of THE SOWING (Matt. xiii.), four separate successive ministries indicated: (1) John; (2) Christ; (3) Peter; (4) Paul.

IN THE MARRIAGE DINNER (Matt. xxii.) we have *three* ministries: (1) the Apostles (Matt. x.); (2) Peter (Acts ii.-vii.); and (3) the Ministry at the end of the age (Matt. x. 16-23; xxiv. 14; xxviii. 19, 20).

IN THE GREAT SUPPER (Luke xiv.) we have three other ministries: (1) Peter (Acts ii.-vii.); (2) Peter, "that servant" (Acts viii.-xii.); and (3) Paul (Acts xiii. to end).

The ministries of the three parables may be thus exhibited:

THE SOWER. Matt. xiii.	THE DINNER. Matt. xxii.	THE SUPPER. Luke xiv.
1.—John (Matt. iii.)	1.—The Apostles (Matt. x.)	{ 1.—Peter (Acts ii.-vii.) 2.—Peter (Acts viii.-xii.) 3.—Paul (Acts xiii.-xxviii.)
2.—Christ (Matt. iv. 17.)	2.—Peter (Acts ii.-xii.)	
3.—Peter (Acts ii.-xii.)		
4.—Paul (Acts xiii.-xxviii.)	3.—The ministry at the end of the age (Matt. xxiv. 14, etc.)	

From the comparison, in this table, of Peter's ministry, it will be seen how "the cares of this world" in Matt. xiii. 12 and Mark iv. 19 correspond with the "farm" and the "merchandise" of Matt. xxii. 5; and also with the "ground," the "oxen," and the "wife" of Luke xiv. 18-20.

Thus it is evident that Peter's ministry is indicated by the *third* company in the parable of the Sower; by the *second* in the parable of the Dinner; and by the *first and second* in the parable of the Supper.

With this clue, the other parts of each parable become easy of interpretation.

We are precluded from taking the first ministry of the Dinner and Supper as being that of John the Baptist, for it was John who did the bidding; and the first ministries after that were to those who had been *already bidden* (Matt. xxii. 3; Luke xiv. 17. John's and Christ's prior bidding is referred to in verse 16).

The First Group of Three Parables.

II. The parable of the TARES commences with this proclamation of the Kingdom by the King and His servants, and, after noting the *sowing* of the Tares, passes over this present interval while the Kingdom is in abeyance, and takes up the *Harvest* at the end of the age.

The gap or parenthesis begins towards the close of the Acts, and is marked internally by the solemn and formal repetition of Isaiah vi. in Acts xxviii. 25-28.

The preaching of the Kingdom ceases there, and "the Salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles." The end of the Kingdom was marked externally by the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of Israel.

The gap ends with the taking up of the Church, according to 1 Thess. iv. 16; and these parables take up the Kingdom again at that point and continue their revelation of "the secrets of the Kingdom" from that point. Not at once does the Lord set up His Kingdom. When the Church is removed the corruption will go on apace. The Tares will grow and abound. We know from 2 Thess. ii., the prophecies of Daniel, and Matt. xxiv., &c., that after the translation of the Church, which is the Body of Christ, Israel will again be the subject of the visible action of God; and that then "shall this gospel of the Kingdom be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations" (Matt. xxiv. 14). We know also that when the Jews are in their land and the Temple rebuilt "the man of Sin will be there revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the Temple of God, showing himself that he is God." Then will go forth Jews, believers in the Lord Jesus as the Messiah, proclaiming Him unto all nations as having received "all power in heaven and on earth," and as about to take to Him His great power and reign. They will baptize those who receive their testimony, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

If we consider the circumstances of that period, the appropriateness of the message and of the baptism becomes at once

apparent. The question before the world will be, Whom do you acknowledge as God? The man sitting in the Temple of God, working miracles by Satanic power? or the Man that was crucified and slain? Those who heed this testimony of the disciples thus preaching "the gospel of the Kingdom," will be baptized in confession of the Divine Trinity, in the Triune God, in opposition to the Infernal Trinity, the Anti-god (Satan), the Anti-christ (the Beast), and the Anti-spirit (the False Prophet).

Baptism in that day will have the same character as at the time of its first proclamation. It will connect believing Gentiles with the believing Remnant, and associate them with blessing on the earth, in the Kingdom, either by preservation alive through the Tribulation and the judgment; or by being raised up again, if slain, to inherit the Kingdom, and sit on their promised thrones, as written in Rev. xx. 4.

The Kingdom follows this testimony, being introduced by the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ (Rev. xix), taking vengeance on His enemies; the man of sin being consumed by the spirit of His mouth, and destroyed by the brightness of His appearing.

The commission of Matt. xxviii. 19, 20 having been given by the Lord for "the end of the age," accounts for the fact that it *was never acted upon by the Apostles*. There is no record of their ever having attempted it. Indeed, they baptized only "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts ii. 38), "in the name of the Lord" (Acts viii. 16; x. 48), and "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xix. 5). This was not in unfaithfulness, but because they knew their Lord's mind, and understood His words and His commission as referring to "the end of the age" (Matt. xxviii. 20). Through not "rightly dividing the Word of Truth," Christians have misunderstood the terms of that commission as supplying their own "marching orders" for this present dispensation.

In this we see the meaning of the Lord's words in Matt. xi. 12, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." It was even so. The enemy came, and the kingdom suffered violence—and when this present period of its abeyance is ended, it will suffer still greater violence—for the Devil, the Beast, and the False Prophet will take it by force and usurp it until the time comes for the saints to possess it (Dan. vii. 22). The end of this parable looks forward to the harvest time, the end of the age, when the Lord will act in judgment. The sequel to the

Gospel by Matthew is judgment at the end of the age (ch. xxii. 11-14; xxviii. 18-20).

III. The **MUSTARD TREE** tells us how, *externally*, the Kingdom will grow and "become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (Rev. xviii. 2). In the parable of the Sower "the fowls of the air" are explained by the Lord as denoting "the wicked one" (Matt. xiii. 19), "the devil" (Luke viii. 12), "Satan" (Mark iv. 15). And there is no intimation that we are to take them in any other sense in this parable.

The present dispensation is leaped over: for the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of Israel is the dividing line at one end, and the taking up of the Church is the dividing line at the other end. The present dispensation is not reckoned while the Kingdom is in abeyance. When the Church of God shall have been removed, then the mustard tree will have "grown" (v. 32), and the Kingdom will again suffer violence. The unclean spirit will return to the place from whence he came out, and with him other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there (Matt. xii. 43-45). These foul birds shall then come "and lodge in the branches" of this mustard-tree phase of the kingdom. The last state shall be "worse than the first. EVEN SO SHALL IT BE ALSO UNTO THIS WICKED GENERATION."

IV. The parable of **THE LEAVEN** shows how corruption *within* will keep pace with corruption without.*

The parable teaches the gradually increasing corruption of the Kingdom consequent upon its rejection by the rulers of the people. The leaven was *hidden*. It began its work then, but "the whole" will not be leavened until we see the Kingdom under the rule of the Beast.

This concludes the four parables which deal with the outward aspect of the Kingdom, and brings us back to the second part of the parable of the Tares, *viz.* the harvest, which is, as the Lord explains, at "*the end of the age*," when He Himself, "the Son of Man," will divide between the Wheat and the Tares; will judge all those who while professing to call Him Lord are really "the children of the Wicked One."

* Leaven is a microscopic vegetable ferment, which grows so wonderfully that it permeates the whole mass into which it is put, and nothing will stop its growth except *fire*! So with this leaven of corruption: it will go on growing and increasing, and nothing but the fire and heat of God's coming judgment will arrest its progress and destroy it.

And observe that when that time comes, at the end of the age, the *tares* are *first* gathered out. This is because it has to do with the outward aspect of the Kingdom as man sees it. This has nothing to do with the Body of Christ—the mystery, or secret, which was only afterward revealed. The gathering together “first the tares” refers, as the Lord Himself clearly explains, to *the cleansing of the world*, as part of the events which shall commence His millennial reign. “The Son of Man” (not “the Head of, the Body,” or “the Lord Himself”) shall send forth His angels (see ch. xxiv. 31), and *gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend* (xiii. 41). He does not say that He will gather them out of His *Church*, but “out of His Kingdom.” “His Kingdom,” as we have proved, is not “His Church.”

Now we come to the division between the first *four* parables and the last *three*. This division is marked by the emphatic words of v. 36, “Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went INTO THE HOUSE; and his disciples came unto Him.” Compare this with v. 1, “The same day* went Jesus OUT OF THE HOUSE, and sat by the sea-side.” Surely we have here a distinct and emphatic intimation that we are passing from what is *exoteric*, or outward, to that which is *esoteric*, or inward. The *four* parables give us the outward events, or marks, which will be seen by all; while the *three* present us with revealed truth and teaching which will be seen and understood only by “disciples.”

The Second Group of Three Parables.

As to arrangement: The first two are linked together by both being taken from the *mineral* kingdom, the third to the *animal* kingdom. The first two, we believe, relate to the *duration* of the age; the last relates to the *end* of the age.

The *First*, “THE TREASURE,” reveals God’s purposes as to Israel *as a nation*; the *Second*, “THE PEARL,” teaches the truth concerning the *Remnant*. This Remnant is spoken of all through the prophecies, as well as in the New Testament.

* The same day that had witnessed His rejection, not only by “His Own people” (John i. 11), but by His Own house, xii. 46–50. If we compare this with Mark iii. 21, 31, it is clear that His mother and His brethren “went out to lay hold on him: for they said he is beside himself”! This completed His rejection; and “the same day” He goes out and teaches by these parables what events will follow His rejection and fill up the time while He is gone into the far country.

See Is. i. 9; vii. 3; x. 21; xi. 11, 16. Ezek. vi. 8; xi. 13, xiv. 22. Joel ii. 32. Mic. ii. 12. Rom. ix. 27; xi. 5. These will be the overcomers in the great tribulation, brought through it and out of it (Rev. vii., xiv., xv.); while the *Third*, "THE DRAG-NET," relates, universally, to "the end of the age," as to *the world at large*.

V. THE TREASURE.—It is reasonable to assume that when more than one parable is given, the purpose is to give either distinct subjects, or different aspects of the same subject,* and not substantially the same in all. Is it not so with these two parables of the "Treasure" and the "Pearl?" Israel as a nation is emphatically God's "peculiar treasure," "The Lord hath chosen . . . Israel for His peculiar treasure" † (Ps. cxxxv. 4). The passages given in the note show that Israel is God's reserved treasure. See also Deut. iv. 20, 37; viii. 8; ix. 5; xxxii. 9. But now, until the hour arrives for Israel to be the glory of God to the ends of the earth, this treasure is

"*Hid.*" (1) "Hid under moral defilement (Isa. i.). (2) "Hid" under judgment, deprived of liberty, trodden down of the Gentiles; a degenerate vine, torn by the wild boar of the wood (Ps. lxxx.; Micah iii. 4, 5). (3) "Hid" in God's purpose. Known to God in all their sorrows through every age of such hiding. Hence the security of the promises. See Isa. xliiii. 1-7. Hid till the Body of Christ shall be complete (Rom. xi.).

The Son of Man it was who found this Treasure, and "for the joy that was set before Him" (Heb. xii. 2), He left His glory (Phil. ii. 7, 8) and paid down the price for this field (the world) in which this Treasure is hid.

There is a sense in which the world, the forfeited inheritance, has been bought, and for the sake of His people Israel. The purchase money has been paid, ‡ and presently He will issue

* Just as we have *four* offerings, giving us four aspects of Christ's death; and *four* Gospels, giving us four aspects of Christ's life. No *one* offering or *one* Gospel could have done this.

† סְגֻלָּה (s'gullah) occurs only in Exod. xix. 5; Deut. vii. 6; xiv. 2; xxvi. 18; Ps. cxxxv. 4; Mal iii. 17, where it is used of Israel; and in 1 Chron. xxix. 3; Eccles. ii. 8, where it is used of peculiar or personal property. It specially denotes a *reserve*; what one keeps for oneself as the choicest. Probably the Latin *sigillo*, to seal up, is from this Hebrew word.

‡ The word here is ἀγοράζω, to buy; not λυτρόω, to redeem, or to purchase by ransom, as used of God's people.

the judgment-summons, put in execution, and with the Apocalyptic judgments eject the usurper.

VI. The PEARL represents the elect Remnant of Israel, as distinct from the Nation as a whole. The Pearl includes all the saved beyond the Church of God:—The Old Testament Saints; the “partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. iii. 1; vi. 1; xi. 9-16); all the overcomers in the Apocalypse; the one hundred and forty-four thousand; the “great multitude of” Rev. vii.; the companies seen in Rev. xii., xiv., xv., and xx. All these were bought by the great “Merchantman,” and all blessed with royal blessings have part in the everlasting kingdom and the holy city (Rev. xxi. 9-21).

VII. THE NET.—Here we get the end as to the inner truth of the *three* parables concerning the Kingdom, just as in the Tares we got the end as to the outward truth of the *four*, concerning the same. Hence it is that while in the former, the Tares (the wicked) are gathered first out of the Kingdom; here, the “good” are gathered first out of the Net. Thus the difference of the order in the two cases is not something for us to explain. It explains to us that in the parable of the Tares and the Wheat, the *Tares* are first gathered out at the advent of Christ with His Church (which will then have been already gathered to Himself, according to 1 Thess. iv. 15-17 and v. 1-4), as described in Rev. xix. 19-21. There we see the Tares gathered out and burned; the Beast and the false prophet being “cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone; and the remnant were slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of His mouth, and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.” Then shall the children of the kingdom shine forth in the glory as described in Rev. xx. 4.

In the parable of the Drag Net the “good” are first gathered. This judgment takes place subsequently to that of the Tares. The Tares are judged at the advent of Christ in glory, and are of *one kind*; while the net gathers “of every kind.” The Tares do not occupy all the field; but the Net is “full.” Those who deal with the Net “sat down.” The process is not summary as with the Tares. The Tares are simply gathered and burned: the contents of the Net are dealt with deliberately. This judgment may commence with Matt. xxv. 31-46 (subsequent to Rev. xix.), for it does not begin until “the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His

glory." This judgment may go on during the Millennium; for, according to Ps. ci. 8 (R.V.), it is written:

"Morning by morning will I destroy all the wicked of the land;
To cut off all the workers of iniquity from the city of the Lord."

It may even include the final judgment of Rev. xx. 11-15.

The judgment of the NET is thus *final*.

The judgment of the Tares is not: for in Rev. xiv. 14-16, we have a preliminary vision of the "Harvest," which afterwards actually takes place in chap. xix. 19-21. This is the "harvest" of Matt. xiii. 30, 39-42. It is a summary judicial act.

But in the judgment of the NET we have that which is universal. The net is drawn to the shore and the deliberate process of separation commences. We see its *beginning*, immediately before the Millennium (Matt. xxv. 31-46; Joel ii. 1, 2, &c.); its continuance during the Millennium (Ps. ci. 8); and its consummation in Rev. xx. 11-15.

To understand these seven parables concerning "the secrets of the Kingdom" we must not introduce the thought of the Church, or even of Christendom. They are quite distinct, and have their place only during the present interval while the Kingdom is in abeyance. They bring the history of the Kingdom down to the destruction of Jerusalem, and do not take it up again until after the Church of God has been removed. There is no transmutation of the Kingdom into the Church; and no transfer of the Kingdom over to corrupt Christianity.

The Church of God is to be distinguished from the Jew and the Gentile; from the Kingdom and from the world. The Scriptures concerning each are to be rightly divided (2 Tim. ii. 15). So only shall we learn to distinguish things that differ, and thus show ourselves as to God—approved; and as to men—workmen that need not be ashamed.

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