

Parallels between the Letters to the Seven Churches and the Kingdom Parables

Seven Churches

Rev Chs. 2 & 3

Kingdom Parables

Matthew 13

Ephesus

The Sower & the Four Soils
The planting of the Word in the Early Church

Smyrna

The Tares & the Wheat
The Persecuted Church standing against false doctrines introduced into the church and promised not to be hurt by the second death

Pergamos

The Mustard Seed
The Married Church, the state church married to the world, in which the birds come and lodge

Thyatira

The Woman and the Leaven
Daughter Church of the Married Church in which sin and false doctrine permeated (through a woman...Jezebel)

Sardis

The Treasure in the Field
The Church which is dead (or Israel – a valley of dry bones?)

Philadelphia

The Pearl of Great Price
The Missionary Church which is promised to be raptured

Laodicea

The Drag Net
The Apostate Church at the end of the age

Summary: The Kingdom Parables – Matthew 13

vs. 1-3		Jesus by the sea
vs. 3-9	1.	Sower & Four Soils
vs. 10-17		Why Parables?
vs. 18-23		Sower & Four Soils explained
vs. 24-30	2.	Tares & Wheat
vs. 31-32	3.	Mustard Seed
v. 33	4.	Woman & Leaven
vs. 34-35		Why Parables (continued)
vs. 36-43		Tares & Wheat explained
v. 44	5.	Treasure in the Field
vs. 45-46	6.	Pearl of Great Price
vs. 47-50	7	Dragnet

Why Parables (vs. 10-17 & 34-35)

Jesus explains in v11:

It is given to you (disciples) to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven
But not to them (the people – those who are not disciples)

This is contrary to the normal understanding of why Jesus spoke in parables – but Jesus is quite clear – and expands on the reason in v12

Jesus gives, to those who seek, and dependant on what you do with that truth – He gives more or takes away that which you had

Jesus confirms the prophecy of Isaiah 6: 9-10 in vs.14-15:

Parables conceal truth – only discovered by those

- who have not closed their eyes,
- who have not shut their ears,
- who have not dulled their hearts

Jesus says in v.16 the disciples are blessed because they both see and hear

Jesus says in v.17 that many prophets and righteous men have not seen or heard what the disciples were privileged to see and hear:

Prophets and patriarchs of old saw by faith (Heb. 11)

Prophets and righteous men in Jesus time, and today, often do not see – reflecting perhaps what Jesus said in Matt. 7:21-23

After Jesus had been accused of casting out demons by Beelzebub (Matt12: 24) He only spoke to them in parables (see v. 34)

Jesus' parables are a fulfilment of Ps.78: 2 (see v. 35) – note that in the parables Jesus is revealing things which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world – these are new revelations

The subject of these parables is a thing not found in the Old Testament!

What 'secret' is not revealed in the Old Testament? Paul tells us in Eph. 3: 4-6

It is the Church - Gentiles become fellow heirs of the Promise...one body

Hence these are parables of the Kingdom – The Kingdom of Heaven which is the one new man for which Christ died (Rom. Chs 9-11)

The Sower & the Four Soils

Four Soils:

- v.4 - the wayside where the birds came and ate it
- v.5 - stony places which had no depth of earth and though the seed sprang up, it was scorched by the sun and withered (v.6)
- v.7 - among thorns, which choked the seed
- v.8 - good soil which produced fruit: x100, x60, x30

Interesting Phrase in v9 – 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear!' (re Letters to 7 Churches!)

Jesus' Explanation of the parable

- v.19 the wayside – one who hears the word of the kingdom but does not understand it and the birds (the wicked one) snatch it away
- v.20 the stony places – one who hears the word and receives it with joy, but because he has no root in himself (no spiritual depth) the word in him endures only for a while and dies when tribulation or persecution come because of the word...and he is offended (stumbles) (v.21)
- v.22 the thorns – one who hears the word but it is choked in him by the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches...and he becomes unfruitful
- v.23 – good ground (condition of the heart) – one who hears the word, understands it and bears fruit

The Tares & the Wheat

The kingdom of heaven is like...

- a man sows good seed in his field

- and enemy sows tares
 - tares (Greek: *zizanon*) a weed which looks like wheat but when it matures it turns black – if it is mixed with wheat in bread it is poisonous
- both wheat and tares grow
- the servants query the master and ask whether to root out the tares
- the master instructs the servants to wait until harvest-time to sort the tares from the wheat

Jesus' Explanation of the parable (similar idioms to the sower & four soils parable)

- v.37 the sower is the Son of Man (Jesus)
- v.38 the field is the world, the good seed are the sons of the kingdom and the bad seed are the sons of the wicked one
- v.39 the enemy who sows is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels
- vs.40-43 the reaping – tares gathered and burned at the end of this age, the Son of Man sends his angels to gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness – they are cast into the furnace of fire (see Rev. 20: 11-15)
- v.43 interesting phrase – ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’

The other parables are short, sometimes just one verse, and their explanation by Jesus is not recorded (except for ‘The Dragnet’), if indeed he gave one.

The Mustard Seed

The kingdom of heaven is like...

- a grain of mustard seed, a man sows in his field
- it is the least of seeds (small) but when it grows it is the greatest amongst herbs...and becomes a tree...the birds come and lodge in it

Points about the parable

- a man (in v.24 and its explanation in v.37 the man is the Son of Man, Jesus)
- his field (His!) (the field is the world in v.24 and its explanation in v.38)
- the mustard plant is meant to be a herb – grows in Israel to 2 or 3 ft high
- this seed grows to become a tree – not what it is meant to be – and birds of the air come and nest in it (biblical type – see v.4 and its explanation in v.19)

The Leaven

The kingdom of heaven is like...

- leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal
- until it was all leavened

Points about the parable

- leaven is always a biblical idiom for sin (it corrupts by puffing up)
- hid – something concealed
- three measures of meal is symbolic of the fellowship offering – see Gen. 18
- a fellowship offering would not contain leaven
- the whole becomes leavened – sin permeates throughout it

The Hidden Treasure

The kingdom of heaven is like...

- treasure hidden in a field

- a man - in v.24 and its explanation in v.37 the man is the Son of Man, but here it is probably The Father
- the man gave all he had to buy the field

Points about the parable

- the field is the world – as in v.24 and its explanation in v.38
- the man (The Father) gave all He had (The Son) to buy the field
- a treasure is hidden in that field
 - the treasure could be mankind generally (Jesus died for all)
 - the treasure could be the Jewish people (Ex. 19: 5; Ps. 135: 4)
- the man buys the field – the rightful ownership of the world is God’s

The Pearl of Great Price

The kingdom of heaven is like...

- a merchant seeking beautiful (excellent) pearls
- finding one of great price – he sells all he has to buy it

Points about the parable

- this parable sounds similar to that of the hidden treasure...but: oysters are not kosher – Jews do not prize pearls (though they may trade in them)
- the idiom is a gentile idiom
 - the pearl is a response to an irritation
 - it grows by accretion
 - it is removed from its place of growth to become an item of adornment
- the pearl is an idiom of the church

The Drag Net

The kingdom of heaven is like...

- a drag net cast into the sea which gathers some of every kind
- when full it is drawn to shore and the catch sorted

Points about the parable

- a parable about the end of the age (v. 49)
- the angels will come and separate the wicked from the just – similar to the parable of The Tares & The Wheat (vs. 41-43)
- the wicked are cast into the fire (v. 49) and there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth (see v. 42 and Matt. 22: 13, 24: 51 and 25:30)

In vs. 51-52 Jesus completes these parables by asking the disciples “Have you understood?” and they say “Yes Lord”

He then says:

- Every scribe...scribes study and copy The Word
- Is instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven...the disciples (and us)
- Is like a householder...the owner/resident of a house
- Brings out of his (His!) treasure things new and old...there are both treasures (secrets or mysteries) new and old revealed here