

Seeking My King & His Kingdom

#20 Parable Of The Mustard Seed

During the period of time between the rejection of the King and His promised 2nd Coming to establish His Kingdom, the interim kingdom is now said to be in a "mystery" period. In Matthew 13, the Lord presents seven parables concerning the "mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven". It is interesting to use this passage as an additional overlay while viewing the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, and the timeline of church history.

The Apostolic Age = Church of Ephesus ~ The Parable Of The Sower & The Seed

The Lord explains that the sower is he that spreads the Word of God. Some falls by the wayside and is snatched away by the "fowls," some grows quickly and then fades, some grows among thorns and is unfruitful, and some grows in good earth and bears much fruit.

The analogy to the Apostolic Age is clear, as this was the period when the Apostles, like sowers, were spreading the Word of God and "planting churches."

The Apostolic Age [30 AD- 100AD] began after Christ's Ascension until the death of John. Rev. 2:2-3 [Ephesus] tells of Christ's evaluation of the church during this time: *'I know what you've been doing, your toil, and your endurance. I also know that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles, but are not, and have found them to be false.'*³ *You have endured and suffered because of my name, yet you have not grown weary.*

There was Satanic opposition everywhere they turned.

The evil One attempted to get rid of the Word any way he could.

Acts 19:23-27 *Now about that time a great commotion broke out concerning the Way.*

²⁴ *By making silver shrines of Artemis [Diana], a silversmith named Demetrius provided a large income for skilled workers.* ²⁵ *He called a meeting of these men and others who were engaged in similar trades and said, "Men, you well know that we get a good income from this business.*

²⁶ *You also see and hear that, not only in Ephesus, but almost all over Asia, this man Paul has won over and taken away a large crowd by telling them that gods made by human hands are not gods at all. There is a danger not only that our business will lose its reputation but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis [Diana] will be brought into disrepute and that she will be robbed of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her."*

The church experienced lightning growth with more than 6 million converts in the known world.

The Parable of the Wheat & the Tares ~ The Smyrna Period - 100 AD - 313 AD

The Lord Himself explains this parable. He states that the tares and wheat grow together until the judgment at the "end of this world" [Matt. 13:30].

As the Son of Man is planting His "good seed," Satan plants his counterfeit Christianity, counterfeit gospel, counterfeit Christians. The Mystery Kingdom and Satan's counterfeit kingdom will grow side by side until the end of the age.

During this period, Satan lashed out against the Christians as a Devouring Lion.

1. Domitian, the Roman Emperor who exiled John to the Isle of Patmos, was a murderous dictator who launched an extensive campaign against the Christians.

2. A great evil of Satanic opposition arose against Jesus Christ and His followers.

3. The persecution by the "tares" escalated against the Christians throughout all of Asia.

4. There were 10 attempts by 10 emperors to eradicate Christianity in the Roman Empire.

5. The Jews who rejected Jesus as Messiah were partners in crime.

a. The synagogue of Satan is mentioned in Rev. 2:9b: I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

6. The church was meeting in caves and catacombs.

The synagogue of Satan [tares] was meeting in the best places.

7. The church had to post sentries to warn of enemy approach. There was violent persecution in an attempt to crush out Christianity. 5 million Christians were martyred by the Romans.

8. Smyrna built the 1st Roman temple to honor Emperor Tiberius.

9. They urged everyone to place a pinch of incense on the altar and say "Caesar is lord."

10. Historians report mass executions of Christians in Smyrna who refused to bow the knee.

11. Some offered the Christians a comprising deal if they would outwardly take the pinch of incense and say, "Caesar is lord." We will say we saw you sacrificing and give you the required certificate you need. Then you can go and worship the "god" you want.

a They would suffer persecution, suffering and imprisonment without the certificate.

b. Many were willing to lay down their lives and not compromise their beliefs.

14. One was Polycarp who was a direct disciple of John. He was the pastor at Smyrna for 40 yrs.

a. He was charged as a member of a dangerous cult = Christianity.

b. Satan's tares trying to stop rapid growth of Christianity

c. Sentenced to be burned at the stake.

d. Religious Jews + heathen = burn Polycarp at the stake

e. Polycarp had a dream his pillow was on fire. He told his followers: I must be burned alive.

f. Rulers: Just say Caesar is lord to save yourself. His reply: "Only Jesus Christ is Lord."

Rulers: Swear the oath & take the pinch of incense.

"Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"..."I bless Thee for deeming me worthy of this day and this hour that I may be among Thy martyrs and drink the cup of my Lord Jesus Christ."

"If you think I will swear by the genius of Caesar, then you don't know who I am.

Hear me clearly: I am a Christian."

As they were preparing to burn him, "The fires of the stake last but for a moment; the fires of hell last for an eternity. Why delay, come do what you will."

g. The crowds and religious Jews came running with their sticks. The Jews ran to carry the wood. It was on the Sabbath!

h. The Roman soldiers tried to secure Polycarp with nails or ropes.

He said, "He who grants me to endure the fire will enable me to remain on the pyre unmoved without the security you desire from the nails."

i. News of the peace of Polycarp spread far and wide.

His death attracted non-Christians to Jesus Christ.

Rev. 2:10c Be faithful until death, and I will give you the victor's crown of life. [Smyrna]

Oswald Chambers: "Suffering either gives me myself or destroys myself. If you receive yourself in the fires of sorrow, God will make you nourishment for other people."

After the 10 evil Caesar's [~213 years], it seems Satan concluded that killing the Christians was not effective at defeating Christianity. Since he couldn't make them knuckle under with his hostility and persecution, he changed his tactic.

Satan joined the church and began to DECEIVE it with enticement, corrupt practices and false teachings within.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed ~ The Pergamos Period- 313 AD - 590 AD

Now Satan will encourage a False Growth of Christianity in the world.

Matt. 13:31-32 He presented another parable to them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and planted in his field:

³² Although it is the smallest of all seeds; when it is fully grown, it is the larger than the herbs, and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge [nest] in the branches thereof.

Note: This parable has been used to teach the expansion of the Church until it is universal in its supremacy. However, since this parable begins with the phrase, "The kingdom of heaven is like," it should not contradict the preceding parable of the Wheat and Tares which also begins with the same words.

Recall: 1. The "kingdom of Heaven" [mystery kingdom] is not the church.

2. The mystery kingdom is actually the rise of Christendom in the world.

3. The Church is the "believing element" in the mystery kingdom.

4. The field is the world.

5. For clarity's sake, the Mustard Tree will represent the "visible" Church which is composed of ALL churches called Christian.

6. This parable represents the external growth and condition of the visible Church

Important Points: 1. The "Mustard Plant" is a "garden herb" and is cultivated for its seed.

2. It grows wild, often to a height of 7' or 8.'

3. For best results, it should be cultivated in a garden.

4. In this parable, the mustard seed is sown in a "Field" [Field = World] and not in a garden.

5. It grows wild until it is no longer called an "herb" but a "tree."

6. The seed does not produce after its kind, an humble herb, but becomes a vain-glorious tree, a monstrosity, in which the "birds of the air" lodge.

a. Dan. 4:10-12; Ezek. 17:23 & Ps. 104:12 indicate a tree is a symbol of a world power.

b. Each pictures the prosperity of a person or nation as seen by men. Outward condition

7. Birds = the "fowls" of the Parable of the Sower > same word is used.

a. Therefore, these birds are also agents of the "Wicked One," the Devil. [Matt. 13:4, 19]

- b. These birds are emissaries of Satan who lodge in the tree and "befoul" it by their presence.
- c. Edersheim provides excellent background material relating to the birds and branches.
 - Lodge literally means "make tents" or under the shadow of it.
 - In the land of Israel, the birds would be attracted to the branches or the shadow of the mustard plant.
 - Mustard was mixed with or used as food for pigeons and would be sought by other birds.

Point #1 The Mystery Kingdom will assume huge outer proportions.

Point #2 The Mystery Kingdom, Christendom, will have an abnormal external growth until it becomes a monstrosity.

Point #3 This monstrosity will become a resting place for birds - agents of Satan.

Point #4 Within this monstrosity of Christendom, will be various satanic elements, cultic groups that claim to believe in Jesus but deny something essential, such as His deity. All of this is under the umbrella of "Christianity."

Point #5 This seems to portray a view in which the church will grow into something never intended-- a monstrosity in which the very ministers of the wicked one will find refuge in its branches and in its shadow.

The "Mustard Tree" began with 120 believers who received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The "tree" continued to enlarge until its branches spread out all over the Roman world.

1. But the "Birds of the Air" - the Ananias & Sapphiras, Simon the Sorcerer, Hymenaeus and Philetus and other emissaries of Satan, began to lodge in its branches and "befoul" its purity.

a. Hymenaeus and Alexander were men in the early church in Ephesus who had "suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith" and so were "handed over to Satan" by the apostle Paul.

I Tim. 1:19-20 By ignoring their consciences, some people have destroyed their faith like a wrecked ship.²⁰ These include Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I handed over to Satan so that they may learn not to blaspheme. [not to a loss of salvation]

b. Hymenaeus and Alexander are examples of those who reject the true doctrine and follow the false.

c. Later, Hymenaeus is mentioned with Philetus, another false teacher.

II Tim. 2:16-18 However, avoid pointless discussions. For people will become more and more ungodly,¹⁷ and what they say will spread everywhere like gangrene.

Hymenaeus and Philetus are like that.¹⁸ They have abandoned the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place, and so they destroy the faith of others.

d. An opponent of Paul named Alexander the metalworker is mentioned in

II Tim. 4:15 Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will pay him back for what he did.¹⁵ You, too, must watch out for him, for he violently opposed our message.

This parable corresponds with the church at Pergamos and its impurity in doctrine - the Doctrine of Baalam and the Doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

Walvoord: Christendom grew rapidly from a small beginning to an organization with great power and wealth. It encountered an abnormal growth that made it possible for Satan to work in it.

Pember: "The plant becoming a tree began to be developed in the early part of the 4th century when Constantine became emperor of the Roman Empire. The confusing and corrupting effects of Constantine's policy resulted in: Christianity was transformed into a kind of Paganism with new names, and the world ceased to view it with disfavor."

Clarence Larkin: "In 324 AD when the Emperor Constantine united Church and State, thousands and tens of thousands crowded into the Church as a matter of policy, interest and fashion, and crouched beneath its shadow, lodged in its branches, fattened on its fruit, and have continued to do so until this day."

Under Constantine in 313 AD > Edict of Toleration at Milan: (freedom of religion).

Results: 1. Christianity spread unmolested in the empire.

2. The church was joined with the pagan world political system.

3. He favored Christians at court and exempted Christian ministers from taxes.

4. Issued a general exhortation to ALL his subjects to become Christians.

5. He abolished the crucifixion as a means of execution.

6. He reduced the killing of unwelcome children.

7. He advanced Christians to high offices.

8. He forbade work on Sunday.

9. He assumed the headship of the church.

10. Marriage was consummated between the world and the church.

This was a period of deteriorating moral standards and doctrinal corruption. 🎵 Satan had failed to destroy the Church through persecution. Now > destroy her through compromise. Christian standards were lowered, and a union was formed between Christianity and paganism.

11. The church gained supremacy in the empire. > State Religion > Result

a. Forced conversions filled the churches with unregenerates.

b. Ambition to rule, heathenism and pomp emerge in the world church.

c. In exchange for religious tolerance and acceptance, the true principles of Christianity were sacrificed to accommodate pagan beliefs.

d. Heathen priests became Christian priests.

e. Heathen temples became Christian churches.

f. All children were required to be christened. They were therefore supposedly made Christians by putting a little water on their heads.

g. Heathen days of feasting and drunkenness were made in to Christian days like Christmas and other saint days. Christianity got lost in all of this. It was merely a mass state religion.

Note: What persecution didn't accomplish, marriage to the world did.

12. Church began drifting from the foundational truths and doctrines into compromise.

¹ Worship of Mary

³ Worship of Saints

² Prayers for the Dead

⁴ Worship of Angels

⁵ Pre-millennial belief and 1000 year reign of Christ was thrown out of the church.

⁶ A millennialism and Augustine beliefs dominated the church. (There will never be a future literal reign of Jesus.)

Christ's Words to Church At Pergamos [City of the Serpent]

Rev. 2:13 I know where you live. SATAN'S THRONE is there. Yet you hold on to my name and have not denied your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed in your presence, WHERE SATAN LIVES.

Interesting Notes Regarding the " Original Seat of Satan and Idolatry"

a. Original seat of Satan and idolatry on the earth was Babylon.

b. Nimrod, founder of the original Babylonian religion, was the son of Cush and great-grandson of Noah. He is considered the leader of those who built the

Tower of Babel which led to his reputation as a king who was rebellious against God.

c. Nimrod becomes a powerful king, marries his own mother and has a son with her, Tammuz.

d. It developed into the worship of his widow > Semiramis and his posthumous son > Tammuz.

e. People worshipped the sun. In Babylon, they made high towers (Ziggurat). On the top of Ziggurat was the temple, dedicated to the queen of the heaven, whom they worshiped.

f. The Pagan mystery cults at Babylon fled to Pergamos after the death of Belshazzar, the Babylonian Emperor. (Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon.)

Pontifex Maximus became the high priest of the pagan system in Pergamos.

The leader of Pergamos used the same ancient title and vestments as Babylonian priests.

g. As we trace the seat of Satan, we discover how it moved from Pergamos eventually to Rome - and many of the trends we find in the Roman Catholic Church are owed to paganism.

Satan's influence (evil) controls the city.

"It was one of the darkest, eeriest cities in the whole Roman Empire."

1. The religious climate at Pergamos was not conducive to the Christian life.

It symbolized secular power and civil religion working together to accomplish Satan's plan.

This church operated in the middle of a city chosen by Satan as his headquarters on earth.

2. Center of Religion of Emperor Worship - Center of Imperial Cult of Evil

Pergamum distinguished itself by becoming the site of the first cult of a living Roman emperor.

^{1st} city in ancient Roman Empire to build a temple to Caesar in 27 BC

Three temples were devoted to worship the emperor who was viewed as a god.

"Here the highest capacity in mankind, the capacity to worship, was degraded into corruption.

The city reeked with the stench of its heathenism; evil hung in its streets like a clammy fog."

Massive Altar to the Worship of Zeus (king of the Greek gods) on the Acropolis

a. His altar stood on a hill 1,000 feet high, which rose behind the town.

Eight hundred feet up, a ledge jutted out from the mountain, and on it stood the altar of Zeus.

All day long this altar smoked with the smoke of endless sacrifices.

It dominated the city, like a pillar of cloud by day and a column of fire by night.

b. They also worshipped the god's Apollo, Athena, Aphrodite, Bacchus the god of wine, and of Dionysus whose worship involved obscenities impossible to describe.

c. Looked like a "Satanic" throne and reflected a false religion

Question: Could this massive altar refer to Satan's throne in Rev. 2:13?

d. Many scholars believe it refers to the great altar of Zeus which was on the hillside looming over the city. It was a great chair, or throne, 50 feet high, and one could look up there at any time and see what Jesus calls "Satan's throne."

Fascinating footnote of history: In the 1880's, a German archaeologist working in the city of Pergamum removed that throne, that Satanic seat, from the hillside and took it to Europe.

Today it is visible in the Pergamum Museum in the city of East Berlin!

Satan's throne has been in East Berlin since 1930's. Is there any connection with the rise of Hitler, and the Nazis? East Berlin is where Hitler's headquarters were located.

Satan's birds have continued to crowd into the visible Church and polluted the branches, sects and denominations with false teaching. Today Christendom has become a worldwide power with a complex organization of many branches.

Arno Gaebelein "Christendom is an unnatural thing, this monstrosity, is professing Christendom as a system of the world, professing Christ, without possessing Him and His Spirit."

Consider: Since the birds remain in the tree, this parable does not teach a conversion of the world to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It teaches of a vast worldly system, rooted in the earth [field=world], bearing the name of Christ, possessed of wealth, standing and power, but sheltering the agents of the "Ruler of the Darkness of This Age."

Conclusion: Although the Messianic Kingdom will be postponed until the Messiah's 2nd Coming, the "interregnum" age will be a time in which God will still be at work.

1. The Word of God will be sown into the world. [field]

2. There will be various responses to His Word. [seed]

3. It is apparent that many will reject this Word, but many will respond positively by faith.

4. Counter-sowing will take place by the Devil as he attempts to counterfeit God's program through the spread of false doctrine within the same field. [world]

5. This parable teaches that God's program for this interim will start out small and grow into a very large movement that we call Christendom, which will include both believers and unbelievers.

6. Later parables support the fact that the larger Christendom becomes the more apostate it becomes.

Question: Where is the picture of pure Christianity spreading through the world until the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the deep, [Hab. 2:14] thus ushering in a Millennium?

It is not to be found in this parable. It teaches the contrary and gives evidence for Jesus' own declaration that when He shall come back He shall not find "The Faith" on the earth. [Luke 18:8]

Jude 1:3b Continue your vigorous defense of The Faith that was passed down to the saints once and for all.