

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 49, Chapter 13 Continued 2

Do you want to understand what the Kingdom of Heaven is like? Assuming you are Believers in the God of Israel and His Son, Yeshua, then little is more important in our faith journey than to pursue this understanding. In Matthew chapter 13 we are in the midst of several parables whose purpose it is to help those listening to Yeshua to comprehend exactly that. I suppose a reasonable question to ask might be: why was this even necessary? Why wouldn't have the Jewish people already had a knowledge of the Kingdom of Heaven? After all, this concept was woven all throughout the ancient Hebrew faith in the Torah, the Prophets, the Psalms, and of the Old Testament in general. Even the Son of Man concept... with the Son of Man (Jesus) being the ruler over the Kingdom Heaven on earth... goes back to times before Daniel (Psalm 8 for example).

Therefore, just like for those 1st century Jews, if we are to fathom the Kingdom of Heaven, we must first understand its history. I spoke to you last week about a premise of the Kingdom of Heaven that may have caught some of you off guard. It is that essentially since the fall from grace of Adam and Eve, planet Earth became Satan's Kingdom. I gave you a handful of Bible verses to back up that premise. Therefore, when the Kingdom of Heaven was inaugurated on Earth upon the work of John the Baptist and upon Christ beginning His short 3 year ministry, it was a Heavenly Kingdom that was born within a Kingdom of evil that had existed for a very long time. I'll put it another way: the banner of the Kingdom of Heaven was planted within the well guarded territory of the Kingdom of Satan.

For the sake of simplicity we could say that prior to the fall of Adam and Eve the earth was indeed part of the Kingdom of Heaven. God had even established a space to dwell for Himself called the Garden of Eden. The Fall interrupted the

immeasurable blessing and ***shalom*** that God had bestowed upon the Earth (and all the Universe for that matter), and as a consequence essentially God and the Kingdom of Heaven withdrew from the physical Earth and would exist ONLY in the spiritual Heaven. That is, God had His original creative purposes for earth put on hold when, as a result of Satan's deception, the first couple put their trust in Satan rather than in their Creator. To say it more plainly: from Adam's fall until Jesus, the Kingdom of Heaven existed only in Heaven. When it returned, it would begin again in a most inconspicuous way. Thus one of Christ's most used illustrations and metaphors appropriately revolves around the word "seed". That is, the Kingdom of Heaven was re-planted on earth as but a small seed in a vast foreign field possessed by the opposition.

Let me be clear by saying that it is not that God ceased being the ultimate ruler over His Creation for a time. God has been ultimately sovereign throughout all the ages. He only ceded rulership over this planet to Satan, to an extent, and for a time, as He carries out a plan to redeem it... and us. That plan is Jesus Christ; Yeshua HaMashiach.

Since up to the time of Yeshua the Kingdom of Heaven had not been present on Planet Earth, the Jewish people... all humanity... needed to understand what it is. And the first thing to understand is that it is the physical shadow of the spiritual Heaven. In the Old Testament the concept of kings and kingdoms are central; especially the kings and kingdom of Israel. With the gentile kings and kingdoms, we get a pattern of what Satan's kingdom is like. With the Hebrew kings and kingdoms we get a rough conceptual idea of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. However, since all kings and their kingdoms are far from pure or entirely upright, then they are full of flaws that won't exist when the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth has matured into its final form. Thus the comparison between earthly kings and kingdoms (both gentile and Hebrew), and the Kingdom of Heaven, can only be taken so far. How does someone communicate this difference? The perfect means for Jesus to tell people about the Kingdom of Heaven is in parables, which are by their nature structured for the purpose of making comparisons using short stories; each parable with a single moral or point to be made.

It is with this critical understanding that from Yeshua's perspective He is the divine invader of an evil kingdom (Satan's Kingdom... planet Earth) that we must approach all of our understanding about the meaning of His parables. It also puts us on notice that while in no way are His parables intended as fables, unfathomable mysteries or even simple riddles, their deeper meaning could, and

apparently usually did, escape His listeners including, at times, His own disciples. Why? Because the parables were about something (the Kingdom of Heaven) that the Jewish people were generally ignorant of; it was not something they could see or touch. While there were some similarities between earthly kingdoms and God's Kingdom, there were more and greater dissimilarities. So the 1st century folks should not think that God's Kingdom would eventually look just like the common earthly kingdoms nor would its growth and aim occur in the manner of earthly kings. In other words, the Kingdom of Heaven represented a new dynamic that was, and remains, most difficult for humans to comprehend.

Having begun His teaching at the Lake that particular Shabbat with the Parable of the 4 Soils, Christ (after explaining its deeper meaning to His disciples) then quickly moved on in verse 24 to yet another parable about the Kingdom of Heaven (He will, in a few verses, also explain this parable). This next parable, the Parables of the Tares (or Weeds), adds another element to aid in understanding the nature of God's Kingdom. Let's reread some of Matthew 13.

RE-READ MATTHEW 13:24 - 43

So to review: the first thing Yeshua taught about the Kingdom of Heaven (in the Parable of the 4 Soils) is that the benefits of it, and membership to it, all depend upon the hearer of the message of its arrival. There are different types of hearers (people) who respond to the message of the Kingdom's advent differently. In Christ's parable only 1 of the 4 types of hearers responds successfully enough to become a member of the Kingdom; the one that is good, fertile soil. That is, the one who understands the message, acts upon it, and produces good fruit.

So with the Parable of the Tares, another element of understanding the Kingdom of Heaven is given. Then follows two more short parables in quick succession, followed by the disciples asking Jesus to explain the Parable of the Tares. I can only speculate that since they didn't inquire about the Parable the Mustard Seed or the Parable of the Leaven that the disciples must have understood them. So let's then, for the moment, jump to verse 36 and examine Yeshua's explanation of the Tares Parable before we look at the 2 parables that follow it.

He begins by saying that the one who sows the good seed in the field is the Son of Man. Here is yet another time that Son of Man can only refer to a specific and unique person, and not just mean "human being" in a generic sense. Clearly it is referring to Daniel 7's divine Son of Man, so once more Christ is pronouncing His

divine nature (whether anyone gets it or not). Notice that Yeshua has not only separated Himself from the crowds, He has also moved into a house (probably the one in which He has been residing in Capernaum), because He wants privacy with His disciples. Notice as well the thing that the disciples focused upon in this parable. Matthew has them saying "Explain to us the Parable of the Weeds (Tares)" That is, in their description of it they saw this parable as mainly about the weeds and not the sower, the good seed, or anything else. So the disciples immediately see this parable as not about the righteous but rather the wicked and what happens to them. And so it follows that as Yeshua says the Son of Man is the sower of the seeds, it is also He who will be the judge of those that are deemed wicked.

The field that the seeds are sown in is the world, which means the entire earth. Sometimes in the Bible the term "world" can refer only to gentiles, or to a general anti-God attitude of people. In this case it more means something like "the seeds are sown into the entire population of the Earth (the Holy Land included)". The good seed are the members of the Kingdom of Heaven, while the weeds are the members of the Kingdom of Satan. Therefore the one who sows the weeds into the field (the world) is Satan. When the time comes for a collective harvest of the field, says Yeshua, it will be at the end of the age. That is, the end of the present age... the one they and we, today are still living in... or in Hebrew terms, it is the end of the ***Olam Hazeh***. To be clear, what He means by that is that the harvest of this field (both those who are evil and those who are righteous) is the terminating act that marks the end of human history as we know it. Those who perform the harvest will be Heaven's angels.

So Yeshua continues on by further illustrating that just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire (destroyed) during the harvest process, so it will be for weed-people (those who are not deemed members of the Kingdom of Heaven). They will be harvested by God's angels and destroyed. He continues with more explanation by saying that it is He (the Son of Man) who will order the angels to begin the harvest of the weeds and all things (in general) that are evil... those things that result in humans choosing to sin. He adds to this something that I think the CJB has said exactly as Matthew meant it: "and all the people who are far from Torah". Pay attention to this! That is, among those deemed wicked will be those who have purposely distanced themselves from God's biblical Torah.

The KJV says it this way: "All those who do iniquity". The NAB says: "And all evil doers". A number of other versions say: "those who commit lawlessness". Let's

pause right here. For those who have followed Torah Class for a while, this might be a familiar subject. For others it might be new; nonetheless it is worth the re-telling. I'll begin with the crux of the matter: what is **lawlessness**? Does this mean being a criminal within one's society (breaking the local law code)? If so, does this mean violating the laws of any nation one may live in, no matter what the law states? Are we to assume that all laws in all societies are seen by God as righteous? The Greek word being translated as lawless is **anomia**. It means "without law". It is self-evident that Christ cannot possibly be referring to breaking the law of any law code on earth (the Roman law code for instance, as in His day), because the world is full of immoral laws that differ from nation to nation. Thus lawlessness can only refer to the law code that mattered to Jews, universally: the one God gave to them. The Law of Moses. Or as Yeshua sometimes calls it, The Torah and The Prophets.

God is not going to send someone to eternal destruction because they did 45 in a 35 mph zone. He is also not going to send anyone to destruction because the local law requires one to bow down and worship the local deity (a common law in that era and today with secularism, it demands the worship of no god at all). It is common in America for laws that don't allow prayer in school; but your child prays anyway. Does this qualify your child as "lawless"? Of course not. This is something highlighted back in chapter 7 when Jesus said that not everyone who calls on His Name will He recognize as being saved. Rather He will tell many to "get away from me you workers of lawlessness". That is, you who slander or separate yourselves from the Law of Moses (the Torah) will not be considered members of Christ's Kingdom. These are the weeds, the tares, of the parable who are gathered up and destroyed at the end of the present age. Let those with ears, hear.

Moving on to Matthew 13 verse 42 Yeshua says that they (those excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven) will be thrown into the fiery furnace. Fiery furnace, Gehenna, Lake of Fire, etc. are all terms meant to illustrate the total destruction that those who aren't saved will face. But even more, these particular terms are chosen to describe the hottest of fires known to people at that time. These fires are not like a cooking fire; not even like the fire of the Temple Altar. The terrible heat of a fiery furnace is meant to indicate the fury and vehemence of God's wrath upon all the evil doers. There will be no humane executions. This is why it is said that there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. This expression means extreme pain and mourning that cannot be comforted. Only once this extinction level event of the wicked occurs, will finally the victory of the overcomers in Christ

become clear.

CJB Matthew 13:43 ⁴³ *Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let him hear!*

In modern times the members of the Kingdom of Heaven are usually said to be the Church. So in the Parable of the Weeds it is common in Christianity to claim that the seeds equals the Church. In a certain sense this is, I think, correct. However the issue that we are forced to consider is: "What is the Church?" It is widely taken for granted that it is widely inclusive of anyone who professes to be a Christian. It is anyone who calls upon the Name of the Lord. But this notion is immediately dispelled in Matthew 7:21 - 23. To sort of rationalize this away it is common especially among Evangelical Christianity to say that those who call on the Lord's Name in those verses of Matthew 7 (and other verses in the New Testament) that will be told by Christ "I don't know you" aren't really Believers; rather they are pretenders. I would say that they are not pretenders because pretenders are trying to deceive others into believing they are something they're not. Rather this is referring not to someone who pretends but rather to the deceived who really do think they are saved in Christ. Or at the least, they think that they are at peace with God and so can expect a happy life and good eternity. They trust in some manmade doctrine or another in their denomination that gives them a false sense of security because this doctrine is a pleasant fiction that is easily believed.

Thus among the weeds will be those who have convinced themselves they are saved. They see themselves as part of the Church. But it is a manmade vision of "The Church" to which they connect, and it is manmade version of "The Church" that most folks picture when the word is uttered, and not truly of people who sincerely represent the extension of Yeshua's body and ministry.

Yeshua has not addressed every part of the Parable of the Tares. For instance, He has not really addressed what He said back in verses 27 - 30.

CJB Matthew 13:27-30 ²⁷ *The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?' ²⁸ He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants asked him, 'Then do you want us to go and pull them up?' ²⁹ But he said, 'No, because if you pull up the weeds, you might uproot some of the wheat at the same time. ³⁰ Let them both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest-time I*

will tell the reapers to collect the weeds first and tie them in bundles to be burned, but to gather the wheat into my barn."

Returning to my comments that not everyone who claims to be part of the Church, and believes they are, actually are. Yeshua puts it in terms of the grain (that comes from the good seed) becoming entangled with the weeds. The farmer's servants want to know if they should go out and pull the weeds from the field since it is known that an evil enemy put them there. The farmer says not to because when pulling up the weeds, the grain from the good seeds might get pulled up as well. What happens to the weeds when they're pulled up? They are burned up with fire. So, the Lord wants no accidental or collateral damage to even one stalk of grain produced from the good seed. Rather, the farmer says that he'll be patient and wait until harvest time, and then pull them both up. At that moment the weeds will be separated away and disposed of; but the grain will be gathered into the farmer's barn for safekeeping.

This is an important lesson for congregations to apprehend and especially for the ministers and Rabbis who lead them. Every congregation has its "problem child". Sometimes the person that is a problem has more to do with quirks and flaws (even annoyances) that bother people rather than it being an issue of evil or deception. At other times the person is clearly behaving in ways that God's Word says he or she shouldn't. Or they disrupt the congregation wanting personal attention or at other times to be an anti-leader. An anti-leader is a person who isn't a good enough leader to assemble their own flock so seeks, instead, to take-over that which another has created and led. Satan is an anti-leader. He didn't create anything; but He sought to take over that which God has created. Human anti-leaders are in imitation of Satan even if they don't realize it. It can be a difficult call for a congregation leader to know when to ask that individual to leave, and when to just try to figure out how to put up with it. That is: do we as congregation leaders identify the tares and do the weeding ourselves? Or do we wait and let the Lord do it... perhaps not even until the harvest: Judgment Day?

In the 7 letters to the Congregations of Revelation chapters 1-3, there are a couple of congregations that are admonished for allowing a few weeds to continue to thrive among them instead of the leaders dealing severely with them, or even pulling them out. One occurs within the congregation of Thyatira.

CJB **Revelation 2:18-22** ¹⁸ ***"To the angel of the Messianic Community in Thyatira, write: 'Here is the message from the Son of God, whose eyes are***

like a fiery flame and whose feet are like burnished brass: ¹⁹ I know what you are doing, your love, trust, service and perseverance. And I know that you are doing more now than before. ²⁰ But I have this against you: you continue to tolerate that Izevel woman, the one who claims to be a prophet, but is teaching and deceiving my servants to commit sexual sin and eat food that has been sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to turn from her sin, but she doesn't want to repent of her immorality. ²² So I am throwing her into a sickbed; and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great trouble, unless they turn from the sins connected with what she does;

So the issue of the weeds and grain planted in the same field and growing up together is not an easy one to resolve when it happens. But Jesus makes the overall meaning of the parable quite straightforward. One way or another, the weeds, the wicked, the excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven, will be judged and destroyed.

Let's back up now to verse 31 and discuss the Parable of the Mustard Seed. This parable has some facets to it that aren't easily recognizable by gentile Christians and so this complicates the unwinding of its meaning. It begins with the standard opening for a parable: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like...or, can be compared to... a mustard seed". A man took this tiny mustard seed and put it in his field. The gist of the short story is that even though the seed is super tiny, it eventually grows up into a huge plant, as big as a tree. So big that birds can build nests in it. What the Jews of Yeshua's day would have focused on is quite different from what Believers today typically focus in on.

The first thing a Jewish farmer from the 1st century would ask is: why in the world would a farmer intentionally put a mustard seed in his field? There's a couple of reasons this would raise some red flags for Jews. First is this instruction from Leviticus.

CJB Leviticus 19:19 "Observe my regulations. "Don't let your livestock mate with those of another kind, don't sow your field with two different kinds of grain, and don't wear a garment of cloth made with two different kinds of thread.

A second Torah instruction is like it.

^{CJB} **Deuteronomy 22:9** *You are not to sow two kinds of seed between your rows of vines; if you do, both the two harvested crops and the yield from the vines must be forfeited.*

So clearly it would not be kosher, so to speak, for a farmer to intentionally throw a mustard seed into his grain field because it violates the Laws of Moses. This issue of the prohibition of mixed kinds has always played a large role in the Hebrew religion. The Mishnah has an entire section called ***Kil'ayim*** that deals with illicit mixtures and especially with the planting of seeds of different kinds into the same space. So in Yeshua's parable the intentional throwing of a mustard seed into a field that was meant for grain (nobody planted mustard plants in a field because they were considered as pests) was not something anyone would normally do.

Further, as verse 32 explains, this tiny, nearly invisible seed ironically grows into the largest of all herb plants; so large it is tree-like such that birds can land on its branches and build nests upon it. Christians have always looked at this and said: "Oh my, this is so wonderful!" But in reality, to the Jewish farmer listening to Jesus the mustard plant is but an invasive species; the biggest of all weeds that grows so large that it crowds out the grain crop and even throws shade over some of it, thereby not allowing enough sunlight to get through so that the grain plants can grow to their optimum.

So how are we actually meant to take this since the Jews wouldn't have seen the subject matter of this parable as a good thing at all? They might actually have laughed a bit. To arrive at the message let's realize something that I told you about parables in general; don't get too caught up in the details because that will usually lead us down rabbit trails. Christian teachers have become caught in this self-made trap for centuries, resorting to allegory to try to flesh out every detail, even as it pertains to deciding the many different meanings they come up with. The details of a parable are only there to embellish the story... they are the icing on the cake... they are there to create something that can be remembered and retold.

The next thing to recall is what we started today's lesson with: whose Kingdom is the Earth right now? It is Satan's. So the field in Christ's parable belongs to Satan. The field is the world just as it was then and is now; it represents the entire population of our planet. And along comes a farmer who does something that other farmers typically wouldn't do; he casts a seed (a mustard seed) into the

field that is different from the other type of seed that has already been planted there. This story jolts the Jew listening because instantly his mind goes to *kill'ayim*... prohibited mixtures. But even that's not the point. What we have is God casting the seed of His Kingdom... starting an invasion... into the same field that belongs to Satan where Satan has already cast his seed. The seed of God are the members of the Kingdom of Heaven. The invasive species (Believers), as they grow and mature, are going to eventually squeeze out areas that the seed of Satan has been thriving in, and even throwing shade on other parts of Satan's crop (his wicked followers) stunting the growth of his evil kingdom.

This parable is a statement of recognition of whom the current lessee of the field is: Satan. But, the true owner of the field, God, has just dropped a tiny time bomb into the field... a hardly noticeable one... and it is messing with Satan's plan and its only going to get worse for him. That is, as far as the wicked world is concerned, God planting his own seed onto the field is the one who is causing all the trouble and chaos, and the world is aghast at it. God should not be intervening into Satan's territory; it's just not kosher. But that is exactly what God is doing.

The next parable is the shortest one yet: one verse. Verse 33 is the parable of the woman who takes some leaven and secretly adds it to a bushel of flour, until the entire batch was full of the leaven... so it rose.

There is no getting around it that in the Bible leaven is symbolic of sin. And yet in this parable we're told that the Kingdom of Heaven is comparable to leaven. So is this saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is the same as sin? Or that there is some relationship between sin and the Kingdom of Heaven? Not at all. Again; don't get distracted by the details. The details are not about any relationship between sin and leaven, but rather that everyone knows that when you add leaven to flour the mixture rises... it expands. What is a little harder to come to grips with is that it is specifically said that it is a woman who performs this function in Yeshua's parable. If we assume that the one who added in the leaven was representative of God (or the Son of Man) how do we square that with the figure of the metaphor being that of a woman? There's at least a couple of ways to think about it. First: in the 1st century Jewish culture bread making was considered as woman's work. So it wouldn't have made sense to listeners (and may even have been offensive) to hear of a male adding leaven to flour and making bread that rises. Second: it may have been referring to Yeshua as the embodiment of Wisdom. We've already encountered references to His nature of wisdom, and to folks wanting to

know if He might not be The Son of David (Solomon). Further, in Jewish thought and literature, wisdom is given female attributes (she) and wisdom is always spoken of, grammatically, in the feminine gender. I rather favor the first explanation over the second, but I can't rule out either.

Nonetheless the point of the parable of the Leaven connects with the parable of the mustard seed in that they are both about growing and expansion. They both also include the idea of concealment. That is, a mustard seed is nearly impossible to see, especially if it falls onto soil; so it could be planted without anyone else knowing. But as it matures, what was once nearly invisible grows into something formidable and the concealment ends. The amount of leaven needed to leaven a batch of bread is also tiny, and is usually in the form of a pinch of dough from a previous leavened batch. So when the pinch is thrown in, it is nearly imperceptible; once it is mixed in no one would be able to see it or know it is there, and yet soon the leaven starts to react with the flour and the batch perceptibly grows on account of it. So obviously leaven had been added. So the aim of the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven is that the Kingdom of Heaven is like the growth of something that at first is very small and intentionally hidden from view, but eventually it will expand into something great and visible and the concealment of it ends. It is almost magical the way it works. On the other hand, when what is concealed becomes revealed, those in opposition will rise against it.

For those of us who aren't farmers or bread makers from the 1st century, then we need to give those people credit for at least acknowledging what they could see happening with their own eyes, even if they didn't understand the process. We know today that the size of a seed has little to do with the ultimate size of the plant. But to the people 2000 years ago it was wondrous. We scientifically understand the chemical and organic reaction of yeast to flour; but for the ancients, it was a mystery without explanation... yet it happened the same way every time so they did it. We could say that they had unshakable faith in the improbable, the invisible, and the unexplainable growth of a mustard seed and of leavened bread into something larger.

So to make an application for us, Christ's followers, it is that we need to have an overcoming faith that the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, which is so relatively small compared to the Kingdom of Satan, will one day surpass it because we have been promised that it will. As we look around today we cannot avoid being drawn into all the despair, worry, anxiety, death and war, and the sad

degradation and weakness of so many Christian and Jewish institutions. That makes it so very hard to see that God's mustard plant, the body of Yeshua Believers, is continuing its growth. Ironically, it is the presence of all the chaos and hatred that reveals the growth of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth because this is Satan's ever-increasing violent reaction to it.

CJB 2 Timothy 3:12-13 ¹² And indeed, all who want to live a godly life united with the Messiah Yeshua will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves.

A reality that most of us wish wasn't the case is that things are only going to get worse. What is our reaction to this knowledge to be? The world sinks into despair when they see no hope in the things the world naturally hopes in. Material prosperity. Human leadership. A false belief that mankind is inherently good. And of course hope in these things can be fleeting, and eventually it always lets us down. As Believers we must react differently. We need to double-down on our determination and our efforts to get out the message that the Kingdom of Heaven is near, even upon us, and that Yeshua is the Lord of that Kingdom. Our hope is the only hope there is that is certain to win out.

CJB John 9:4 ⁴ As long as it is day, we must keep doing the work of the One who sent me; the night is coming, when no one can work.

So even in our hope, the day is nearing when we will not be able to do work for the Kingdom by telling others the Good News. The telling of the Gospel has an expiration date. What this means for the non-Believers is that they will no longer have an opportunity to hear the message and repent. It means that at some point known only to the Father, nearly all who don't accept Yeshua as their Savior will have their fates sealed in concrete.

But for Believers it means that we only need to hang on a little longer. The harvest is just around the corner; the ever-darkening world is the evidence of it. Satan's Kingdom is about to be driven into extinction even though we can't understand with our human senses and intellect how it can happen. Yet this is because God's takeover of the Earth, the expansion of the Kingdom of Heaven, is far more a spiritual rather than physical process.

We'll continue, next time, with the Parable of the Hidden Treasure.

