

Matthew 13

Overview

This chapter, together with ch. 12, marks the great schism between the Lord and the Jews (Table 1, chart). There, the bulk of the chapter emphasized how the Pharisees reject the Lord. Here, by cloaking his revelation in parables, he rejects the unbelievers. The sequels to each chapter deal with more personal relations, showing the same double rejection.

The structure of ch. 13 has been extensively studied, without much consensus (see notes). But recognizing the theme of division in these two chapters suggests a new approach that accounts for many of the relations recognized by previous students (chart, Figure 1). This approach also respects the scene structure of the chapter.¹

We begin (3-9) and end (51-52) with parables about those who proclaim the kingdom. The first tells us to proclaim *broadly*, emphasizing how common the news must be made, while the last tells us to proclaim *carefully*, emphasizing the treasure for which we are responsible. These correspond to the two ministries that we have seen repeatedly in the preparation of the disciples (4:23; 9:35; 11:1), preaching (the Sower) and teaching (the Scribe), the first laboring out in the field, the second “in the house” (recall our discussion of the city on the hill and the lamp in the house in 5:14-16) (chart, Table 2). This repeated emphasis warns us against two common errors among God’s people. Some emphasize only the gospel, and the people of God are never challenged with the treasures of God’s word. Others are so infatuated with expository details that they never reach

	Ch. 12	Ch. 13
Public Rejection	1-45, the Pharisees reject the Lord	1-52, the Lord rejects unbelievers (by hiding his teaching in parables)
Private Rejection	46-50, the Lord rejects his family	53-58, his home town rejects the Lord

Table 1: The Structure of Matthew 12-13

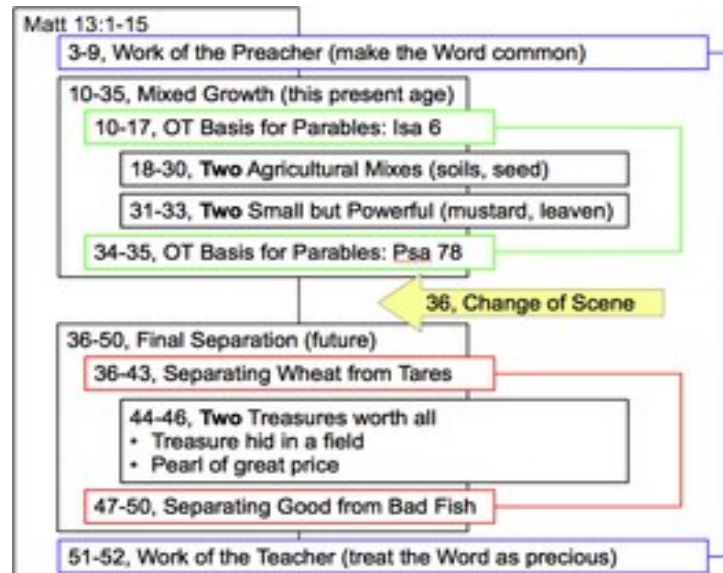


Figure 1: Structure of the Parables of the Kingdom

¹ A scene is a portion of narrative with common characters, in a single place, and over a continuous period of time; if any of these changes, we are in a new scene. Many outlines ignore this important facet of structure. Vorster’s analysis (notes) is an exception. To track his observations, I have colored the verbs indicating the Lord’s movements in lavender.

Matthew 13

	11:1 (4:23; 9:35)	Matt 13	5:14-16	Josh 4	Eph 4:11
Setting	1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence ...	3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying,	14 Ye are the light of the world. ... 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.	23 For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, ...	
Public	... to preach in their cities.	3-8 Behold, a sower went forth to sow; ...	A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.	24 That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty:	Apostles ... Evangelists
Private	... to teach and ...	52 Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.	15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house .	that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.	Prophets ... Pastors and Teachers

Table 2: The Framing Parables of Matthew 13

out and share the simple gospel with the unsaved. Both are necessary if we are to promote the kingdom that our Lord came to establish. The church needs both farmers and scribes, both apostles and prophets, both evangelists and pastor-teachers.

The material between these two parables falls into two main sections, separated by the movement of the Lord into the house in v. 36.² Each of these sections is chiastic.

The first section warns that believers and unbelievers will coexist. This section begins and ends with two OT passages about selective revelation (Isaiah 6 and Psalms 78). Within this inclusio are two pairs: a pair of agricultural mixes with which the preacher-farmer must cope (soils, seeds), and two reassurances that the true seed, though apparently weak, will prevail (mustard, leaven).

The second main section anticipates the final separation of the good from the evil. It begins and ends with parables (the tares and the fish) that now focus on the judgment. In between is another pair: two treasures that are worth whatever we have to spend for them.

Together, they clearly teach that the kingdom of God has an “already...not yet” character. It has come, because the king has come, but its full realization awaits his return. Thus understood, the parables are an encouragement to those who live in a mixed world not to lose hope. The mixture

² This scheme does separate the interpretations of the sower and the tares from the parables themselves. However, the text separates them: in both cases, the parables are public, while the interpretations are private, and that distinction is critical to what is going on. This separation also enables the Lord to make these parables do double duty, and the emphases in the parables differ from those of the interpretations. (For example, the parable of the tares emphasizes joint growth, while the interpretation emphasizes the final separation.)

of the righteous with the wicked does not show that God has been overcome. His pure seed will prevail, and he will vindicate it at the final harvest.

1-52, Parables

1-3a, Setting

1 The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.--Matthew often neglects chronology to gather material topically, but here we have a clear chronological indication. He did eventually leave the house into which his mother and brethren refused to enter,³ to turn again from private instruction to public interaction.

2 And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.--This nautical pulpit takes us back to the beginning of his ministry. In 4:18-22 he called the four to be fishers of men. Luke's account of that call gives us more detail:

Luk 5:1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, 2 And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing *their* nets. 3 And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

Now, in spite of the Pharisees, the crowd is so great that he again preaches from the sea.

3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying,--This is the first instance of the word in Matthew's gospel. The 50 instances in the NT are almost all in the synoptic gospels.⁴ The 34 instances in the OT are concentrated in the prophecies of Balaam (Numbers 23, 7x), and in Ezekiel (10x). It is used regularly for the Hebrew word מִשְׁל, KJV "proverb."

The term appears in parallel with חידה "riddle," "hidden thing" (chart):

Psa 49:4 I will incline mine ear to a **parable**: I will open my **dark saying** upon the harp.

Psa 78:2 I will open my mouth in a **parable**: I will utter **dark sayings** of old:

Eze 17:2 Son of man, put forth a **riddle**, and speak a **parable** unto the house of Israel;

In fact, Ezekiel's contemporaries complained that he spoke so much in parables:⁵

Eze 20:49 Then said I, Ah Lord GOD! they say of me, Doth he not speak **parables**?

3 Luke says that they "could not come at him for the press," but that did not stop the four men with the palsied friend. It simply emphasizes that they were not part of his usual retinue.

4 The exceptions are Heb 9:9; 11:19.

5 John 16:29 records a similar observation by the disciples: "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb." Here the Greek word here is *παροιμια*, another, less common, translation of מִשְׁל. The two are not synonymous; see Abbott, *Essays*, pp. 82ff. But both have to do with indirect speech.

Matthew 13

Regularly, when the Lord speaks in proverbs, the disciples need an explanation:

Mar 4:10 And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable [of the sower]

Mat 13:36 his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.

Mat 15:15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable [about what defiles a man]

Mat 16:6-12 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. 7 And they reasoned among themselves, saying, *It is* because we have taken no bread. 8 *Which* when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, ... 11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake *it* not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?

Parables do not simplify the truth. They are actually a means of hiding the truth from those who are not really interested, and forcing the hearer to think more closely about what is being said. This role of parables explains why this is the first time Matthew uses the term of our Lord's teaching.⁶ Matthew reserves the term for enigmatic sayings that the Lord begins to employ at the Great Schism, when the Pharisees have made up their minds to destroy him.

3b-9, Work of the Preacher (opening)

Like the householder, and unlike the other parables, this one describes the work of one who labors for the kingdom.

Behold, a sower—Some will suggest that this parable should be called the parable of the seed, or the parable of the soils. But our Lord gives it a name when he explains it in v. 18. It is “the parable of the sower,” and is given to explain to those who sow how they should minister, and what they should expect.⁷

went forth to sow;--Sowing refers to scattering seed broadly over the field. We plant some plants (trees, for instance) more carefully, selecting the spot, digging a hole, putting in the seed, and covering it back up. But for grains, the usual manner is to scatter the seed, and in this case, the farmer doesn't control exactly where the seed falls. He is not careless; the threats to the seed are natural, even unavoidable.

The seed may fall in four places, ordered from least productive to most productive. In each case, the Lord describes (chart, Table 3)

6 Mark and Luke use the term of illustrative sayings that appear earlier in Matthew (the patch on the garment, 9:16 → Luke 5:36; Satan casting out Satan, 12:26 → Mark 3:23-24), but Matthew does not call these parables, and no one is confused about their meaning.

7 In Greek, the noun also has the article in v. 3. There is no specific sower in view in the context; this is a use of the Greek article called “generic.” The Lord is discussing sowers as a class. What is said here is true of anyone who engages in sowing seed.

Matthew 13

1. the *location* where the seed falls,
2. the *threat* to which it is exposed there (except in the last case),
3. its subsequent *growth* (except in the first case).

	4	5-6	7	8
Location	Beside the road	Stony places	Among thorns	Good ground
Threat	Birds	Sun	Thorns	(none)
Growth	(none)	Withered	Choked	Bear fruit

Table 3: Characteristics of the Four Soils

4 And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side,--The “way” is the path. The seed falls, not in the center of the road (the sower is not that careless), but along the edge, literally “beside the path,” where the soil was compacted by an occasional footstep, so that the seed cannot settle into the earth. If the farmer wants to be sure the entire field is sowed, some seed will inevitably fall close to the road.

and the fowls came and devoured them up:--The threat to this seed is that the birds peck it up. There is no discussion of subsequent growth. The seed has no chance even to germinate.

5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: 6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.--



Figure 2: Wheat fields in rocky terrain

The farmer is not so careless as to sow upon bare rock. This is a place where the soil is shallow over the underlying bedrock, as we are told three times (“not much earth,” “no deepness of earth” “no root”). Many fields in the Middle East are hillside terraces where soil has been laboriously placed over the rock ledges, and where the soil is too thin, the crop is in danger. Soil and rock are never far apart. Figure 2 (chart) shows how close the fields are to rocky areas. It also lends special poignancy to a prophecy of the Messianic age by Solomon:

Psa 72:16 There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and *they* of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.

Ordinarily one would not sow on top of the mountains—there the soil is too thin, and there is little water. But in the coming kingdom, even the hilltops will bring forth abundantly. The farmer dare not stay too far from the rocks, for fear of missing part of the harvest.

Matthew 13

The threat is the hot sun. But the seed in the good ground needs the same sun to grow! Circumstances in the world are not unambiguously good or bad. The same experiences that produce growth in the life of the true believer can also stifle the superficial disciple.

The result is that the seed germinates, but the tender plant is scorched and dies before it brings forth fruit.

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:--The third kind of ground contains thorn seeds. Note that these grow up after the grain has been sown. Figure 3 (chart) shows one particularly impressive species of thorn⁸ in Israel, and illustrates how densely it grows, choking out other plants.



Figure 3: An aggressive thorn plant

Again, the sower is not wasting seed by casting it into the brambles, but the soil is contaminated with a rival species that grows faster and shades out the grain. As a result the seed germinates, but it can never bear fruit.

8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.--This ground is free from the characteristics of the other three.

- 1) Unlike the wayside, it is plowed up, so the seed can sink in where it is not obvious to the birds.
- 2) Unlike the stony ground, it is deep, so the roots can reach down to moisture.
- 3) Unlike the thorny ground, it does not favor weeds, so the seed has no competition.



Figure 4: Rocks, thorns, and good soil close together

Good ground doesn't come in big chunks in the land of Israel. Figure 4 (chart) shows how close it is to rocks and thorns. But in the good

⁸ Probably the thorny burnet (*Sarcopoterium spinosum* (L.) Spach, Zohary p. 156

Matthew 13

soil, no threat is able to compromise the growth of the seed, and as a result, it not only germinates, but matures to bear fruit that is abundant, though varying in degree.

In sum, much of the seed is unproductive. Yet had the farmer tried to avoid the three bad soils, he would have missed some good soil as well. The bountiful harvest from the good seed more than makes up for what is lost.

9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.--Here is our first clue that the Lord does not intend his words to be understood by all. He is picking up a consistent theme throughout the Scriptures, that begins in the Pentateuch, runs through the prophets and the Psalms, and extends into the Revelation, where it ends each of the letters to the seven churches.⁹ As with other cases of such repetition throughout Scripture, it is worthwhile to trace the development of the idea.

The command to hear lies at the root of God's covenant with Israel. Through Moses, God gave Israel their basic confession, which they were to write upon the doorposts of their homes and bind upon their foreheads and their hands, begins with this central command (chart):

Deu 6:4 **Hear**, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine **heart**, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

This command is called the *Shema*, which is the Hebrew word with which it begins, the command "Hear." The Lord alludes to it repeatedly in this chapter.

Note two features of this command. They are to *hear* attentively, and they are to *love the Lord* exclusively. If you love the Lord with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your might, there isn't any part of you that's left to love anything else.

Now let's recall two characteristics of the Babylonian captivity, when Israel ceased to be a nation. The history of Israel is one of repeated failures to hear, and when the major prophets come to warn of the coming captivity, each of them speaks of ears that do not hear. Jeremiah and Ezekiel in particular use a phrase very like our Lord's (chart):

Jer 5:21 Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; **which have ears, and hear not:**

Eze 12:2 Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; **they have ears to hear, and hear not:** for they *are* a rebellious house.

So the nation violated the first part of Deut 6:4. They did not hear. They also violated the second part, the command to love the Lord alone. The captivity results not only from a failure to hear, but also from Israel's infatuation with pagan gods, going all the way back to the golden calf in the wilderness, the failures in the book of Judges, and Solomon's support of his wives' deities. The captivity was a graphic enforcement of the people's choice of other gods:

Jer 16:10 And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt shew this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? ... 11 Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith

⁹ See notes for a fuller list of references.

Matthew 13

the LORD, and **have walked after other gods**, and have served them, and have worshipped them, ... 13 Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, *neither* ye nor your fathers; and **there shall ye serve other gods** day and night; where I will not shew you favour.

Because they chose to serve other gods, the Lord put them in a totally pagan environment where they could experience the depravity of those gods to the full.

I've called your attention to two features of the eighth century prophets: their reference to the ear that can't hear, and the idolatry against which they preached and that ultimately led the people into the captivity of which they warn. There is a connection between them. We have seen that already from the Shema, which warns against them both. This same connection is made evident in scriptures that were probably written after the captivity.

The fifth book of the Psalter (107-150) contains many psalms that by their content give evidence of being written during or after the exile. The most notable example is Psalm 137,

Psa 137:1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

Two of these psalms, 115 and 135, draw a striking connection between idols and ears that can't hear. Here is the passage in Psalm 115; 135:15-18 is very similar.

Psa 115:4 Their idols *are* silver and gold, the work of men's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: 6 **They have ears, but they hear not:** noses have they, but they smell not: 7 They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. 8 **They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.**

These Psalms contain a very deep insight. If we have made up our mind to follow our own idols, we are not willing to understand the Lord's commands. It's not so much that we cannot hear, as that we *will* not hear. Spiritual hearing problems can often be traced to a divided loyalty, to something else in our lives that we are not willing to give up, that is pulling us away from the Lord.

Our Lord uses the exhortation of v. 9 three times in Matthew: here, again in v. 43 after the parable of the tares, and once previously in 11:15 after describing John the Baptist as Elijah. The next time we see it is in the Revelation. It concludes the warnings to each of the seven churches:

Rev 2:7 **He that hath an ear, let him hear** what the Spirit saith unto the churches; [also 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22]

When we remember that these are Gentile churches, planted in idolatrous communities, the warning is particularly appropriate. Believers in an unbelieving world are particularly susceptible to being seduced by the idols worshipped by their friends and neighbors, and need to remember their first loyalty. The final occurrence is when the beast out of the sea appears in ch. 13. Again, the encouragement to hear is in contrast with the worship of a false deity:

Matthew 13

Rev 13:8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall **worship** him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. 9 **If any man have an ear, let him hear.**

Not everyone who hears words actually understands what they say. The response to the Lord in Matt 12 suggests that many who might be thought most likely to understand, actually are dull of hearing. And the OT background of the Lord's warning in 13:9 suggests a reason for this hardness: pre-commitment to an alternative god, in this case their own pride and prestige. Here is a sober warning to us not to confuse knowledge of the words of Scripture with understanding and obedience.

10-35, Block 1: Expect Mixture in this Present Age

The first large block of material (chart) teaches us to expect mixture in the church during this present age. It begins and ends with OT passages that bear witness to the principle of limited revelation embodied in the parables.

10-17, OT Basis for parables (Isa 6:9-10)

10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?-- Their question, probably asked quietly in the boat during a lull in the presentation, emphasizes that this is a new turn in the Lord's approach to the crowds.

11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.--This verse is a clear statement that the purpose of the parables is not to make the truth clearer, but to render it more obscure, shut up to a special group. There has been a decision to restrict the further understanding of the kingdom to the disciples, and not to the broader multitude. He explains the basis for this decision in the next verse.

12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.--The disciples have already exhibited a degree of understanding, so the Lord will give them more, but he restricts further revelation to those who have not understood what they have already heard.

This saying appears four more times: two in Mark (4:25) and Luke (8:18) in connection with the parables, but twice (Matt 25:29; Luke 19:26) in connection with the parables of the talents and pounds, when the endowment of the sluggardly servant is taken away and given to the most diligent one.

At first glance this saying appears to be harsh and unfair. But it may actually reflect God's mercy. Consider another saying of our Lord, which arises when he tells of the servants who wait for their lord to return from a trip (chart):

Luk 12:48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten

Matthew 13

with few *stripes*. **For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required:** and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Both sayings have to do with someone to whom something is given. Here in Matthew, we learn what leads to being given much: it is faithfulness with what one has already received. In Luke 12, we learn that being given much leads to greater accountability. We can sketch this as a diagram (Table 4).

Mt 13:12	Whosoever hath	→	to him shall be given
Lk 12:48	Unto whomsoever much is given	→	of him shall much be required

Table 4: God's Grace in Selective Revelation

We have already seen this principle in the Lord's rebuke to the Galilean towns where his ministry was concentrated:

Matt 11:21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say unto you, It shall be **more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you**. 23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say unto you, That it shall be **more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee**.

In the light of Luke 12, our verse is actually a work of God's mercy. The more revelation we have, the more accountable we are, and God does not heap a surfeit of understanding on those who have rejected the little they have been granted.

13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because.--The Lord's explanation is built around Isa 6:10, part of God's charge to Isaiah. Matthew uses the LXX here, though the structural elements are the same in Hebrew.

God's charge to Isaiah in 6:10 was chiasmic: It begins and ends with the heart, the organ of understanding, then moves to the ears and hearing, and finally to the eyes and seeing (chart, Table 5). Note, by the way, how the second half of the chiasm expands upon the first half, a common pattern in even chiasms.¹⁰

Heart	For the heart of this people has become gross,	↑	and understand with their heart ,
Ears	and their ears are dull of hearing,	↓	and hear with their ears ,
Eyes	and their eyes have they closed;	↓	lest they should see with their eyes ,

Table 5: The Chiasm of Isa 6:10

Our Lord extends this chiasm throughout his entire response to the disciples (chart, Table 6).¹¹ Note the prevalence of "hearing" throughout the chiasm, reflecting the emphasis in v.9 and recalling the *Shema*, "Hear, O Israel."

¹⁰ Another example is Rom 2:7-10, where "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile" is added to each member in the second half.

¹¹ <https://bible.org/seriespage/2-parables-matthew-13>

Matthew 13

because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.--This is the reason he gives for the parables: the people have already exhibited a lack of understanding, and in keeping with the principles of v. 12 and Luke 12:48, he graciously withholds further understanding.

Note the three verbs, which anticipate the three parts of Isa 6:10 at the heart of the Lord's chiasm.

See ... Hear	13b because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.
Prophecy	14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith,		17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired ...
Hear	By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand;		and your ears, for they hear .
See	and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:		16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see :
Heart	15 For this people's heart is waxed gross,		and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.
Ears	and their ears are dull of hearing,		and hear with their ears,
Eyes	and their eyes they have closed;		lest at any time they should see with their eyes,

Isa 6:9

Isa 6:10

Table 6: Our Lord extends Isaiah's chiasm

14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith [6:9], By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:--This verse from Isaiah precedes the chiasm in Isa 9:10. In the original setting, the Lord was warning Isaiah to expect that people will not understand what he says. Now the Lord says that the same thing is true of his own day; Isaiah's prophecy (and the behavior of the people of his day, as an acted prophecy) is "fulfilled" in the first century Jews who rejected the Lord.

Our Lord's words citation of Isaiah is closer to the LXX than to the Hebrew, which is often (though not always) the case with NT citations of the OT. In this case, the difference is interesting, because the literal Hebrew suggests that Isaiah's prophecy is the cause of their dullness, while in the LXX (and Matthew's citation) their dullness is simply presented as a fact with which Isaiah must deal. I have discussed this issue more fully in the studies on Isaiah,¹² where I show that the Lord's use of the passage is not inconsistent with the rhetorical devices common in the OT.

The point of the citation is that (as v. 9 has already emphasized) not all ears actually hear (that is understand), and not all eyes actually see (that is, perceive). The next verse in Isaiah spells out the intended functions of each of these organs, and how they failed among the people of Isaiah's day and of our Lord's. We'll consider each organ and its function together, unifying the two branches of the chiasm.

15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, ... lest at any time they ... should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.--The function of the heart is to understand. (In Greek thought, this function is more often associated with the mind, but to the Hebrew, the heart is the locus of understanding.) But people's hearts grow gross, that is, fat,

¹² <http://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/isaiah/notes/Isaiah6.pdf>

Matthew 13

so that they cannot understand.

Recall that in Israel's core confession, the first place one is to devote entirely to the Lord is the heart (chart):

Deu 6:4 **Hear**, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine **heart**, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

If our hearts are not wholly consumed with the Lord, we will not be able to understand his word.

and their ears are dull of hearing, ... lest at any time they should ... hear with their ears,--
The function of the ear is to hear, but their spiritual hearing has become dull.

and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes,--Similarly, the people cannot see. Note the deliberate action they have taken: "their eyes they have closed." They will not see.

16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.--Now the Lord leaves Isaiah's prophecy and continues to speak to the disciples. His first two statements chiasmically balance Isa 6:9, quoted in v. 14b. The unbelievers of Isaiah's day, and of the Lord's, could neither see nor hear, but the disciples have been granted this access.

This statement is amazing, in view of the limited understanding we actually see on the part of the disciples. They repeatedly have to ask what the parables mean. The seeing and hearing that is granted to them is not any special insight, but access to the teacher. Similarly, our spiritual insight is not any special intrinsic capability, but simply the fact that the divine Teacher dwells within us and guides our thoughts to understand his revelation.

17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired—The reference to "prophets" takes us back to the second element in the chiasm, the reference to the prophet Isaiah. The statement reminds us of Peter's observation (chart),

1Pe 1:10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace *that should come* unto you: 11 Searching what [time], or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

They knew what would come, but not when. They longed for it, and finally to Daniel the approximate date was revealed, but until his time, and certainly in the day of Isaiah, there was no indication of when the promised deliverer would come.

to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.--Here the chiasm concludes. As in v. 16, there is a contrast between the first half and the second half. In the first half (v. 13b), the multitudes do not see, hear, or understand, but now the disciples do see and hear.

In considering symmetric structures, broken symmetries can be as important as those that are exact. Here, the final member of the chiasm differs from the first in the omission of reference to understanding (chart, Table 7). This omission is all the more impressive because understanding,

Matthew 13

the role of the heart, is the leading element in Isa 9:10, and the priority in the *Shema*. Why does the Lord omit it here?

One possibility is that in the second half of this chiasm he is emphasizing the blessing given to the disciples. He will reveal to them truth that he will now hide from the multitudes. Their eyes will see, and their ears will hear. But as we will often see, their hearts are still slow to understand, and the omission of understanding in this last element is a gentle reminder to them not to become overconfident in their privileged position.

13b because they seeing see not;	17b ... to see those things which ye see , and have not seen them;
and hearing they hear not,	and to hear those things which ye hear , and have not heard them.
neither do they understand .	???

Table 7: Broken symmetry in vv. 13, 17

18-30, Two Examples of Agricultural Mixture

Having explained from Isa 6:9-10 the OT background of selective revelation, the Lord now points out the consequences of this reality in this present age. The outward manifestation of the kingdom will be characterized by mixture of the genuine with the false. He develops this insight with an interpretation of the parable of the soils, and another parable, of the wheat and tares.

18-23, Mixed Soils

By separating the interpretation from the parable, the Lord

- emphasizes that this is for those who are committed, not the increasingly ambiguous “multitude”;
- allows it to do double duty, since the interpretation is now paired with the parable of the tares to emphasize the diversity that the preacher must expect, in both soils and seed.

This latter point draws on the fact that the interpretation says considerably more than the parable. The interpretation is not obvious. In fact, some modern scholars¹³ maintain that the obvious meaning of the parable is eschatological, the promise of the realization of the kingdom against all odds, and the addition of the details on the different soils is a later expansion by early Christians. There is of course no textual support for such a theory, but it does emphasize that the meaning of a parable is not clear unless it is explained. This is the case even for those like the disciples, who (we have just been told) have seeing eyes and hearing ears (v. 16). And throughout Scripture, when God gives an image, he regularly associates it with a statement of its literal meaning. We

¹³ For example, Gerhardsson comments, “Joachim Jeremias says in his famous study of the parables that when the text itself is heeded, the parable is seen to be inculcating patience and confidence. It is an illustration, drawn from the experience of every farmer, of the fact that God will bring in the End in spite of all ‘failures’ and all opposition, as a magnificent harvest which contrasts so glaringly with its seemingly hopeless beginnings. The parable is thus strongly eschatological. But this has been lost in the interpretation, where the accent is moved to the psychological and where the parable is taken as an exhortation to the converts to examine their hearts.” He cites J Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu* (7th ed., 1965), pp. 75-7, 149-50.

Matthew 13

can expect the meaning of the parable to be given in the context, and be very cautious about interpretations that presume the existence of some consistent code that spans all parables.

18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. 19 ... the word of the kingdom,--The Lord focuses our attention on the sower, who is sowing “the word of the kingdom.” The focus here is on preaching, not teaching—on broadcasting the word broadly to those who have not heard, not giving in-depth instruction to those who are already committed. (He will turn to that ministry in the last parable, of the householder.) In fact, long before the days of radio and television, the word “broadcast” referred to the sowing of seed. The Lord intends that his servants should sow his word broadly, not just present it in a focused way to a selected few.

The main purpose of the parable, revealed in the interpretation, is instructing those who sow what they should expect in their ministry. We are not to be discouraged because of lack of response. The nature of the field in which we labor is that it is beset by birds, stones, and thorns, and we are to expect this full range of responses.

The interpretation emphasizes throughout the importance of hearing. Each section describes a different kind of hearing. As we have noted, this emphasis recalls the *Shema*, Israel’s ancient confession of faith:

Deu 6:4 **Hear**, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: 5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

This verse is recited by pious Jews twice daily, a custom that is attested in the Mishnah (Berakhot 2), which dates to the early third century AD. At that time it was already customary to recite not only Deut 6:4-9, but also 11:13-19 and Num 15:37-41, which deal with similar themes. The second of these is particularly interesting (chart):

Deu 11:13 And it shall come to pass, if ye shall **hearken diligently** unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, 14 That I will give *you* the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. 15 And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.

Deut 11 promises agricultural fruitfulness to those who “hearken diligently,” literally “hear with hearing.” It is very possible that this custom goes back to the time of our Lord, and if so, the promise of fruitfulness coming to those who hear aligns strikingly with this parable.

19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.--The seed that landed by the side of the road was eaten by birds. Our Lord explains that the birds correspond to “the wicked one,” who seeks to snatch away “the word of the kingdom” from those who hear.

This part of the parable illustrates the behavior of the Pharisees in 12:24, who sought to dissuade one another from believing in Jesus by rationalizing away his miracles. When we studied that

Matthew 13

portion, we suggested that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is opposing his convicting work, “catching away” the seed.

Recall that our Lord accused the Pharisees of being indwelt by very powerful evil spirits. They were the agents of the wicked one, preventing the seed from taking any root at all.

20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; 21 Yet hath he not root in himself,¹⁴ but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.--The seed in the stony place was sprang up, but was withered by the sun. The Lord explains the sun as corresponding to “tribulation or persecution.” Matthew has repeatedly reminded us of our Lord’s teaching that believers will suffer tribulation and persecution. If a person loves worldly comfort more than he loves the Lord, he will succumb.

Our Savior warns of the effect of persecution later, in the Olivet Discourse (chart):

Mat 24:9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. 10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. 11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

We see an example of this in Paul’s history, in 2 Timothy, written during his second imprisonment, which ended in his execution.

2Ti 4:16 At my first answer no man stood with me, but all *men* forsook me: *I pray God* that it may not be laid to their charge. 17 Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

There was a time when Paul could invoke his Roman citizenship for protection against persecution. But later Rome turned hostile to Paul. When that happened, many believers feared for their own well-being, and refused to be associated with him.¹⁵

We already observed that while the sun withers the seed that springs up on rocky soil, it is necessary for the growth and fruitfulness of the seed on good soil. Perhaps the Lord also wishes to remind us that suffering in the life of the true believer brings strength and additional fruit. Our Lord “learned obedience by the things which he suffered,” Heb 5:8, and so may we.

Many students ask about the state of salvation of the people represented by each of the soils. Clearly the first, on which the seed never springs up, is unsaved, and the last is saved, but how about the middle two? We’ll talk about the thorny ground in a moment. With respect to the stony ground, where Matthew records the words, “he ... dureth for a while,” Luke 8:13 records that

14 Of interest for Gerhardsson’s interpretation is the use of the Hebrew expression בנפשו to mean “himself,” which in fact is the KJV translation in Jer 51:14 and Amos 6:8.

15 Phygellus and Hermogenes in 1:15 may be specific examples of this tendency, though they are in Asia and not in Rome.

Matthew 13

such people “for a while believe.” Their belief is transient, passing.

The Scriptures never promise salvation to one who believed (past tense), but always to those who believe (present tense). For example,

Joh 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever **believeth** in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Joh 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and **believeth** on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

A temporary faith is a superficial faith, and cannot save.

22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.--On the third soil, the seed must compete with other, more vigorous plants that crowd it out. The Lord interprets these of worldly cares and the desire for riches. The result is that the plant never produces fruit. We have an example of this behavior in Demas, of whom Paul says (chart),

2Ti 4:10 For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world,

Again, the question naturally arises as to whether these people are saved. We discussed this extensively when we studied this parable in Mark in 1996,¹⁶ and I won't repeat the analysis here. But recall what the Bible says about what happens to fruitless plants and fruitless ground:

Mat 3:10 every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

Joh 15:6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

Jud 1:12 trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

Heb 6:7-8 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: 8 But that which beareth thorns and briers *is* rejected, and *is* nigh unto cursing; whose end *is* to be burned.

Verses like these give no comfort to professors who are careless about fruitfulness. The thorny soil is not included to comfort carnal believers that they will go to heaven, but to instruct us that even with the seed of the Word of God growing within us, we must contend with thorns and press on to fruitfulness. Otherwise, like Israel, we may find the thorns turned into the Lord's rod of discipline against us. Like the readers of Hebrews, we may find ourselves nigh unto cursing and ready to be burned.

23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some

16 http://www.cyber-chapel.org/sermons/mark/notes/Mark4_1_20.pdf

Matthew 13

sixty, some thirty.--But there is good soil, in which the seed is neither caught away by the birds, nor stunted by rocks, nor choked by thorns. There are people in whose lives the Word of God takes root and produces prolifically. The promise that such people exist is what encourages the preacher of the gospel to labor on in the face of disappointment, as did Paul:

2Ti 2:10 Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

It has been plausibly suggested¹⁷ that the three bad soils correspond to violations of the three components of human psychology specified in the *Shema*, the heart, the soul, and the might. Let's review the meaning of each of these three components (chart).

- The heart לבב in Hebrew thought is closely related to our western sense of “mind,” and in fact in one tradition of the LXX is translated by *διανοια* “mind.” It is often the organ involved in pride in the OT. We often read of one’s heart being lifted up (e.g., Ezekiel 28, the prince and king of Tyre), and the expression “proud heart” is common:

Psa 101:5 him that hath an high look and a **proud heart** will not I suffer.

Pro 16:5 Every one that is **proud in heart** is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished.

Pro 21:4 An high look, and a **proud heart**, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.

- The soul נפש refers to the life force, and commonly means “physical life”:
 - Gen 9:4 But flesh with the **life** thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.
 - 5 And surely your blood of your **lives** will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the **life** of man.
- The word translated “might” is not the usual word for “might”; that would be חיל. Instead, it is the word מאד, which is overwhelmingly used as an adverb meaning “very” or “bright.” The only two places in the OT where it appears as a noun are Deut 6:5 and 2 Kings 23:25, which is an allusion to Deut 6:5. But we have some clues:
 - There is a Rabbinic tradition that the word refers to wealth rather than to physical strength.¹⁸
 - The word appears twice as a noun in the Damascus Document (a pre-Christian Hebrew text found at Qumran) with the meaning of “property.”
 - In Deut 11:13-15, the second portion of the *Shema* prayer, after telling the people to “hearken diligently” and to love the Lord with all their heart and with all their soul (the first two elements of Deut 6:5), he goes on to promise abundance, suggesting that it is connected with the third element.

17 B. Gerhardsson, NTS 14, 165-193.

18 Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot* 61b

Matthew 13

So it is likely that as a noun, it means “abundance, wealth,” and is not primarily a reference to physical might.

These three components of human psychology correspond to the three human instincts over which Adam and Eve lost control, and in which our Lord triumphed in his temptation. 1 John 2:16 summaries them as “all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (chart, Table 8).

Deut 6:5	1 John 2:16	Matt 13:18-12
Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with	All that is in the world	
All thine heart	Pride of life	Wayside: 19 that which was sown in his heart
All thy soul / life	Lust of the flesh	Stony: 21 offended by tribulation or persecution
All thy strength / abundance	Lust of the eyes	Thorns: 22 care of this world, deceitfulness of riches

Table 8: The Shema, the World, and the Soils

- The heart in Deut 6:5 is the locus of pride, and the third of the three instincts is the “pride of life,” the sense of self that puts us in conflict with others.
- The soul, or life, is what we coddle when we succumb to the “lust of the flesh.”
- Abundance and wealth is the focus of the “lust of the eyes.”

We have already recognized the importance of John’s three categories throughout the Bible, and now we see that Deut 6:5 reinforces this framework. John warns against these three instincts; Moses exhorts us to devote them entirely to the service of the Lord.

So it’s not surprising, after the repeated emphasis on “hearing” in vv. 9-17, that the three categories of unproductive soil recall these three instincts, which our hearing should warn us to devote entirely to the Lord (Deut 6:4-5).

- The explanation of the first soil, by the wayside, explicitly says that the seed was “sown in his heart,” and because the hearer does not love the Lord with all his heart, the wicked one can remove the seed.
- The second soil fails because of “tribulation or persecution.” The soul is the life-force, and one who does not love God with all his soul will be fearful of death, and led to reject his faith when he faces persecution.
- The third soil fails because of “the deceitfulness of riches.” Riches are a form of power, and one who does not love God with all his power, all the resources available to him, will be misled by the love of money.

In sum, the parable of the sower instructs the evangelist of the realities of the field in which he labors. Different people will respond to the seed of the word in different ways. Not everybody will receive the truth, but those who do will bring forth great fruit.

24-30, Mixed Seeds

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying,--It appears that now the Lord resumes

Matthew 13

speaking to the multitudes. He does not give the disciples the interpretation of the mixed seeds until he goes into the house with them in v. 36. When he does give that interpretation, we will find that in spite of its superficial similarity to the parable of the sower, it uses some of its images in very different ways. For now, we will simply focus on understanding the story that is told.

This parable shifts our attention from the soils to the seed. The first parable teaches that not all who hear the truth will be equally responsive. The second parable emphasizes that the farmer is not the only one working in the field.

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto—This formula introduces the central six parables. They all describe facets of the kingdom—the first three in this present age, the last three (to the disciples in the house) what to expect in the age to come. Neither of the two outermost parables includes this expression (though the final one does relate the scribe to the kingdom).

a man which sowed good seed in his field:--Twice we are assured of the quality of the seed—here and in v. 27.

25 But while men slept, his enemy came—The farmer is not the only person working in the field. There is an enemy, who comes at night and seeks to frustrate the work of the rightful owner of the field.

Recognizing the presence and activity of the adversary is critical to understanding the world in which we live.

and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.--The plant called “tares” is generally agreed to be *Lolium temulentum*, a grass that closely resembles wheat (chart, Figure 5). In the figure we can distinguish a difference in the shape of the seed-heads, but before the seeds appear, the two are virtually indistinguishable.

Wheat is a nourishing food, but tares carry a symbiotic fungus infection that causes a drunken nausea and even death. In fact, the Latin name *temulentum* comes from the word *temulentus* meaning “drunk.” Wheat contaminated with tares would be worthless. The enemy in this story is conducting a particularly vicious form of industrial sabotage, particularly in a subsistence economy, where most people depend on their annual harvest to feed their families for the coming year. And his attack is cruel. If he had done what Samson did in Judges 15:4-5, sending three hundred foxes with torches tied to their tails running through the fields, at



Figure 5: Wheat (left) and tares (*Lolium Temulentum*) (right)

(http://thethoughtsofasimpleman.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/wheat-tares_sermons.jpg)

Matthew 13

least the farmer would know that he has been attacked, but here there is no warning until the plant begins to produce seeds.

26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.--The difference isn't detected until the tares appear.

27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?--The servants call into question the quality of the seed. Perhaps the householder has a problem with his seed supplier.

28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this.--This simple recognition, while sobering, will help keep us focused. The kingdom is not weak or powerless. It is so potent that it attracts the direct attack of the enemy, and a wise pastor, like a wise farmer, will correctly diagnose the problem.

The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?--Now we turn from diagnosis to correction. The servants suggest uprooting the tares.

29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.--But the master forbids this prophylaxis. There are so many tares, and the roots of the plants are so tightly intertwined, that pulling up the tares will inevitably damage the wheat.

30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.--Once the grain heads are mature, the two plants can be distinguished, and the master instructs his servants to wait until that time to separate them.

We will consider the interpretation when we get to v. 36, but it is important to anticipate one point in order to appreciate the next two parables here. The seed is different than in the first parable. There, it was "the word of the kingdom," the gospel. Here, it is people. The farmer and his enemy are sowing, not just teaching, but people who champion the respective doctrines. In the next parable, the seed is yet something else again. All of these details warn us against assuming that there is a "master dictionary" of symbols that we can use to find hidden meaning in the Bible.

31-33, Two Parables about Little Things that Become Big

The Lord gives us no separate interpretation of the next two parables. So, as cautious as we need to be, we must do our best to understand them in the light of the immediate context and the rest of scripture.

31-32, Mustard Seed

31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:--For the third time, we are invited to consider a man sowing seed in his field. But each time the seed is different.

Matthew 13

- In the parable of the sower, the seed is the word of the kingdom (v. 19), and the different soils represent different kinds of people.
- In the parable of the tares, the seed consists of people, “the children of the kingdom” or “the children of the wicked one” (v. 38).
- In this parable, the seed stands for the kingdom of God, which we must always keep in mind is a process, not a place: it is the rule of God over his creation.

32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.--The point of the parable is in the contrast between the tiny seed and the huge shrub (chart, Figure 6, Figure 7). The seeds are on the order of 1mm or less; the resulting plant can be over 2m in height.

The Lord offers no interpretation of this parable, other than to compare God’s rule to the mustard seed, insignificant in its origin, but very large at maturity. The Lord did not bring his kingdom the way people expected in antiquity. The four great empires represented by Daniel’s visions, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, all spread by the power of the sword. They started with great power, but ended small. “The great schemes of this world have a proud beginning, a miserable end” (Trench). Our Savior’s rule begins small and apparently weak, but will grow to dominate.

In comparing a kingdom to a plant, the Lord is continuing a figure that we find throughout the OT, starting with the blessing of Jacob on Joseph and continuing through the time of David down to the prophets (see notes). When we get to Ezekiel and Daniel, the imagery sounds very much like that of our Lord. Ezekiel describes both Israel and Assyria under this figure (chart):

[Israel:] Ezek 17:23 In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell.

[Assyria:] Ezek 31:3 Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon ... 6 All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the



Figure 6: Seeds of black mustard, *Brassica nigra*. The scale on the left is marked in mm. (www.oardc.ohio-state.edu/seedid/images/Brassica_nigra_2.jpg)



Figure 7: *Brassica nigra* at maturity (www.geo.arizona.edu/palynology/socalif/brasnigr.gif)

Matthew 13

field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations.

But when we compare the vocabulary in the gospels with that in the LXX, the closest parallel is in the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in Daniel 4:

Dan 4:20 The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; 21 Whose leaves *were* fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it *was* meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: 22 *It is* thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.

We know what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. Though a great tree, he was chopped down, humbled by God until he confessed that God alone is king:

Dan 4:34 I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom *is* from generation to generation: 35 And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

If the Lord is alluding to this episode, it furnishes a striking contrast to the progress of the kingdom that he has led us to expect. Nebuchadnezzar used the conventional tools of empire, but was brought low. The kingdom of God starts with small, insignificant things, but ultimately will extend over all.

33, Leaven

33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.--The Lord gives us no interpretation for this parable, so we must proceed carefully. Let's begin by considering the picture itself.

Breadmaking was a regular domestic chore in Bible times. The leaven here is probably not yeast, but sourdough, a piece of last week's dough used as starter for this week. Three measures is a large amount of flour. The exact amount is not clear, but it might be as much as 50 pounds. That's a lot of flour, but we can imagine several women working together to prepare the bread for a large household for a week, and it is the amount of flour that Sarah prepared for the angelic visitors (Gen 18:6) and that Gideon prepared as an offering to the angel of the Lord (Judg 6:19; an ephah is equal to three measures¹⁹).

The leaven here is not the purified yeast familiar to us, but a lump of last week's dough. Leavened bread in the Bible was what we call sourdough. The breadmaker would mix a small lump saved from last week's dough into this week's, and it would pervade the entire batch. The

¹⁹ Alexander on Isa 40:12 makes this equivalence by observing that the LXX translates "ephah" as τρια μετρον in Ex 16:36 and Isa 5:10, while rendering "seah" as μετρον.

Matthew 13

overall image, as in the previous parable, is the impressive growth of something initially small and insignificant.

Thus far, we have a reinforcement of the previous parable. But we must be cautious about two conclusions that some expositors draw: a warning of mixture in the church, and an expectation of progressive improvement in this present age.

Leaven is often used in Scripture to indicate the corrupting effect of evil, for example, when Paul is rebuking the Corinthians for tolerating immoral behavior (chart):

1Co 5:6 Your glorying *is* not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

On this basis, the parable is sometimes understood of the corruption that the church must combat in this present age.²⁰ But this seems a strange emphasis in the context. The Lord does not compare the leaven to an isolated influence within the kingdom, but to the kingdom itself. If leaven means evil, then the kingdom of heaven is evil.

At this point, we should recall what we have seen in the symbol of the seed. Its symbolism is not consistent: sometimes it means the word of God, sometimes the believer, and sometimes the entire kingdom. Similarly, Scripture uses the image of a lion to represent the Lord Jesus (Rev 5:5), but also Satan (1 Pet 5:8), and the serpent, the image of Satan (Rev 12:9), also represents the shrewdness that believers are to manifest (Matt 10:16). In the same way, while leaven sometimes stands for something evil (as in 1 Cor 5 or Gal 5:9), it is also part of some of the offerings in the tabernacle that are emblematic of joy and thanksgiving: the thank offering,

Lev 7:11 And this *is* the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings, which he shall offer unto the LORD. 12 If he offer it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and cakes mingled with oil, of fine flour, fried. 13 Besides the cakes, he shall offer *for* his offering **leavened bread** with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offerings.

and the wave offering at the feast of weeks:

Lev 23:17 Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked **with leaven**; *they are* the firstfruits unto the LORD.

It seems best to understand the parable simply as emphasizing the pervasive effect of the kingdom of God, a small influence working from within to transform all around it. But this can lead to another error: that the kingdom will gradually take over this present age. Walvoord associates this teaching with amillennialism and postmillennialism, but in 1870 it seemed credible also to Alford, noted for his millennialism (chart):

²⁰ Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, Chicago: Moody, 1974, p. 103.

Matthew 13

the penetrating of the whole mass of humanity, by degrees, by the influence of the Spirit of God, so strikingly witnessed in the earlier ages by the dropping of heathen customs and worship:—in modern times more gradually and secretly advancing, but still to be plainly seen in the various abandonments of criminal and unholy practices (as e.g. in our own time of slavery and duelling, and the increasing abhorrence of war among Christian men)

This understanding, credible in the Victorian era in which Alford lived, is no longer tenable. We must have the empirical honesty shown by the writer to the Hebrews:

Heb 2:8 But now we see not yet all things put under him.

In light of the events of the last century, we can no longer expect that our preaching of the gospel will lead gradually and incrementally to a conversion of all the earth. Our Lord himself warns his disciples not to expect complete reformation during this age:

Mat 24:11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. 13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Mat 24:24 For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if *it were* possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Paul continues this warning:

2Ti 3:13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

What then does our Lord mean by the leavening influence of the kingdom of God? Perhaps the point is the same that he was making in 5:13 when he called believers the salt of the earth. When we discussed that passage, we suggested that believers as salt restrain the natural corrupting tendencies in the world. There is much wrong with the church-state paradigm that dominated most of European history. But it did make the basic principles of biblical conduct the backbone of Western jurisprudence, and these principles are largely responsible for the economic and social prosperity that the West has enjoyed. Ironically, while the world is rejecting the Lord Jesus more and more, it is trying (with great frustration) to promote the social values of the gospel.

While our distinctiveness as believers may bring persecution upon us, it also retards the forces of evil at work in the world around us. We should take encouragement from this insight. Our testimony for Christ not only glorifies his name, but also makes the world a better place (or at least, less of a bad place) for those around us.

In sum, the point of the parable is that the kingdom of God, though apparently small, will have a pervasive influence on the world. The influence is good, not evil, but it does not completely transform the world, in which evil as well as good will continue to grow together until the end.

34-35, OT Basis for Parables (Psa 78:2)

This is Matthew’s echo of what we already heard the Lord say in vv. 10-17

34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:--In concluding this initial section, Matthew emphasizes the Lord’s new policy. From this point on, his teaching to the multitude will be cloaked in parables, and open teaching reserved for those who have made a commitment to him.²¹

35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet,--The quotation is from Ps 78:2. The author is Asaph, one of David’s choirmasters (1 Chr 16:7), who is called a prophet because he had the gift of a seer (2 Chr 29:30), and many of his psalms have a prophetic impact. Note the climax of Asaph’s cycles: the reign of David as bringing to an end this long history of vacillation. But of course, David’s rule about 1000 BC didn’t bring it to an end. Many of the kings that followed him rebelled as their ancestors had.

This is one of the eleven places where Matthew says something is done “that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”²² Some of these (like 1:22) are direct prophecies, but some (like 2:15, “out of Egypt have I called my son”) are clearly instances of manifold fulfillment, in which a statement is part of a chain of events or statements all leading to a final culmination. This appears to be the case here. Matthew is justifying the Lord’s decision to use parabolic teaching by citing a precedent from the OT.

saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.--The point of Asaph’s psalm is the repeated pattern of rebellion, judgment, repentance, and restoration that marks Israel’s history. He traces seven instances of this cycle (Table 9, chart).²³

Asaph presents his history as a “parable,” something with a hidden meaning. He leaves it for us to discover this pattern. But the attentive reader would recognize that this same pattern also characterized the period of the judges, which falls within the last of Asaph’s cycles (Table 10, chart). In fact, Judges 2 gives a summary before going into the individual examples.

Prolog	1-8							
Care		12-16 Red Sea, Water from Rock	23-29 Manna & Quail			38-39	43-55 Exodus & Conquest	65-72 Reign of David
Rebellion	9-11 Ephraim	17-20 Murmuring for Food	30a Lust	32	36-37	40-42	56-58	
Chastisement		21-22	30b-31	33			59-64 Fall of Shiloh	
Repentance				34-35				

Table 9: Asaph's Summary of Israel's History

21 Note added 4/5/16: This point should be nuanced a bit. Cousland notes that Matthew does use διδάσκω after this point, often in the presence of the multitudes: 13:54; 21:23; 22:16, 33; 26:55.

22 See discussion on 1:22 and notes to that chapter for more detail.

23 See notes on Isa 63:7-11 for Isaiah’s summary of this cycle and charts tracing it through Judges, Ps 78, and Ps 106. There is an interesting mss tradition that inserts “Isaiah” as the name of the prophet; this might be just carelessness, or the scribe may be calling attention to Isaiah’s summary of the pattern in 63:7-11.

Matthew 13

The pattern appears at least twice more in the OT. Isaiah, about 680 BC, summarizes it in ch. 63 (Table 11, chart), describing it as God’s “lovingkindnesses” (הסדי יהוה), where the plural may reflect the repeated nature of God’s gracious acts of blessing and restoration. The fact that God stands with the nation in spite of their repeated failure is evidence of his covenant love toward them. Psalm 106,

Rebellion: <i>Did Evil</i> <i>Forsook/served</i>	2:11 :12-13	3:7 :7	3:12	4:1	6:1	10:6 :6	13:1
Chastisement: <i>Lord angry</i> <i>Spoilers</i> <i>Years</i>	:14 :14-15	:8 :8 <i>Meso-</i> <i>potamia</i> 8	:12-14 <i>Moab</i> 18	:2 <i>Canaan</i> 20	:1-6 <i>Midian</i> 7	:7 :7-9 <i>Philistines,</i> <i>Ammon</i> 18	:1 <i>Philistines</i> 40
Repentance: <i>Cry to Lord</i> <i>Rebuke</i>	:18	:9	:15	:3	:6 :7-10	:10 :11-16	
Care: <i>Judge</i> <i>Land had rest</i> <i>Years</i> <i>He judged Israel</i> <i>Years</i>	:16-19	:9-11 <i>Othniel</i> :11 40	:15-30 <i>Ehud</i> :30 80	:4-5:31 <i>Deborah</i> :31 40	:11-8:28 <i>Gideon</i> :28 40	:17-12:7 <i>Jephthah</i> :7 6	:2-15:19 16:1-31 <i>Samson</i> 15:20, 16:31 20
Supplements:			:32 <i>Shamgar</i>		:29-9:64 <i>Abimelech</i> , 64 10:1,2 <i>Tola</i> , 23 :3-5 <i>Jair</i> , 22	:8-10 <i>Ibzan</i> , 7 :11-12 <i>Elon</i> , 10 :13-15 <i>Abdon</i> , 8	

Table 10: The cycles in Judges

written toward the end of the captivity (as v. 47 shows) provides an analysis of the wilderness period much like Asaph’s (Table 12, chart).

Remember that “parable” literally means “comparison, example.” Asaph wants his readers to meditate on the history that he recounts, and discern the pattern within them: they should recognize their tendency to rebel, and turn to the Lord in gratitude for his forgiveness and restoration. The Lord similarly is challenging his hearers to listen to the stories he tells and think about what is intended.

How is Asaph’s parable connected with our passage?

First, the cycle shows that rebellion brings God’s chastisement. Similarly, the rebellion of the nation through the Pharisees documented in ch. 12 now brings the judgment of parabolic teaching that hides the truth from those who are not truly committed.

Second, Asaph’s cycles culminate in the appointment of David as the shepherd of God’s flock. This is the crowning instance of the restoration that he promises. But the people vacillated throughout the period of the kings. Like so many of the promises concerning David, the ultimate fulfillment is in our Lord. The nation’s rejection of the Lord at his first advent is another of the cycles that Asaph outlines, which will culminate in the rule of the final David. Isaiah’s summary of this cycle closes with a prayer that the Lord himself would come down and intervene on behalf of his people:

Isa 63:18 The people of thy holiness have possessed *it* but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. 19 We are *thine*: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name. 64:1 Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence,

Matthew 13

This pattern assures us that the rejection of ch. 12 will eventually be overcome by God's gracious establishment of his Messiah on David's throne, an assurance that will become clear before Matthew is over.

36-52, Block 2: Expect Separation

36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house:-- Throughout the chapter, the use of parables has been in itself a judgment on the fickle multitudes. But now he stops interacting with them entirely, and restricts his teaching to the Twelve.

It is natural that in moving from the multitudes to the disciples, he moves from outdoors into the house. We have seen this distinction before in Matthew (chart). In the Sermon on the Mount, he distinguishes two kinds of witness that the believer bears: to the world at large,

5:14b A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.

And to the community of the faithful:

15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it

Prolog	7 I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses.
Care	8 For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. 9 In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.
Rebellion	10 But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit:
Chastisement	therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.
Repentance	11 Then he [Israel] remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is he that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of his flock? where is he that put his holy Spirit within him? 12 That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name? 13 That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? 14 As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest:
Summary	so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.

Table 11: Isaiah's summary of the cycle

Prolog	1-6							
Care		8-11 Red Sea						
Rebellion	7 Murmuring at Red Sea		13-14 Wilderness Lusting	16 Rebellion of Dothan	19-22 Golden Calf	24-25 Despised the Land	28-29a Baal-Peor	32-39 Waters of Strife; infant sacrifice
Chastisement			15 Leanness	17-18	23a Promised destruction	26-27	29b Plague	40-42 Subject to Enemies
Repentance		12			23b Moses' intercession		30-31 Phinehas	
Summary								43-48

Table 12: The pattern in Psalm 106

Matthew 13

giveth light unto all that are **in the house**.²⁴

We should not be surprised at this distinction. It reflects the difference between preaching and teaching that is so often reflected structurally in the book.

Again, at the end of ch. 12, the refusal of his family to come into the house reflects the schism between them:

12:46 While he yet talked to the people, behold, *his* mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. 47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

The distinction is not only in Matthew. We see it in Mark as well:

Mar 10:2 And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. ... 10 And **in the house** his disciples asked him again of the same matter.

As in v. 10, he now devotes his attention to helping the disciples understand what is going on.

36b-43, Final Separation of Wheat from Tares

and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.--Their question warns us to be cautious about any interpretation that is based just on the parable, without carefully following the interpretation that the Lord is about to give. The disciples didn't think they understood it, and we should share their caution.

37 He answered and said unto them,--The response has two parts. First, he gives a little dictionary to interpret the parable. Then he focuses on the final disposition of the wheat and the tares.

This section of ch. 13, beginning and ending with parables depicting the final judgment, is the first detailed discussion of our Lord that Matthew presents about last things, so we will pay special attention to these details and show how it relates to eschatological teaching in other portions of the Scripture, both in the OT prophecies and in the Revelation.

37-39, The Dictionary (chart)

He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man;--This point is in contrast with the parable of the sower, where the sower was not identified. There, the parable concerned the work that the disciples were to do in spreading the gospel. Here, the focus is on the unique work of the Lord Jesus, something that he alone can do.

38 The field is the world;--This point is critical in avoiding an error of interpretation with important consequences.

²⁴ See notes on ch. 5, where I analyze the parallel to this saying in Luke, which emphasizes the distinction even more.

Matthew 13

During the period of Christian Europe, it was customary to identify the kingdom of heaven with the church. On this reading, the parable would be about mixture in the church, and would instruct us to tolerate sinful people in the church rather than exercise discipline. Under the covenant theology that was dominant from AD 400 to 1900, every citizen was “baptized” at birth. Many never came to experience rebirth, and as a result the church was full of people who lived sinful lives. They could not be rejected without disrupting the fabric of the society, and the parable was invoked to warn against church discipline. For example, Meyer comments on v. 30 (chart),

The visible church, up till the day of judgment, is to comprise within its pale those who are not members of the invisible church, and who shall have no part in the kingdom that is to be established. The separation is not a thing with which man is competent to deal, but must be left in the hands of the Judge.

But this interpretation would violate other teaching in the NT, including our Lord’s own instructions for church discipline in Matt 18:15-17 (and Meyer recognizes this, and waffles):

Mat 18:15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Discipline is to be cautious, but it certainly is not to wait until the end of the world.

The Lord says, “the field is the world *κοσμος*,” suggesting that the reference is to much more than the church. In our age, the difference between the church and the broader society is much clearer than it was to people in the age of “Christian Europe.” While some of the tares may indeed infect the church, the parable is not focused on how the church should handle impurity, but rather on understanding why the Lord allows the tares to persist in the world at large.

the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one;--This parable uses the seed as a different image than did the parable of the sower. There, the seed was the word of the kingdom, the gospel. Here, it represents people, in two categories: believers, and unbelievers. The change is a warning to us not to think that there is a secret code that, once learned, we can apply to all parables. Each one may use the same images in different ways.

Now we see the importance of limiting the sower to the Son of man. We can all sow the seed of the gospel, but only he can establish people as “children of the kingdom,” as he taught at the end of ch. 11 (chart),

Mat 11:27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and *he* to whomsoever the Son will reveal *him*.

The relation between the sower and the seed here is also important to resolving an interesting

Matthew 13

tension with 8:12. There, “children of the kingdom” referred to Jews who would be supplanted in the kingdom by the Gentiles:

Mat 8:10 When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. 11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Those “children of the kingdom” were not planted by anybody. They trust in their physical descent rather than in the Lord. Here, the very same expression refers to those whom the Son draws into a special relation with the Father. The same tension appears in John 8:

Joh 8:39 [The pharisees] answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. 41 Ye do the deeds of your father. ... 44 Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.

39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil;--the same one called “the wicked one” in v. 38. These, and Satan, are the three titles by which our adversary is called in Matthew. We saw his direct, personal attempt to block the Lord’s work in the temptation in ch. 4, and here again he is in personal opposition to the Lord’s work.

the harvest is the end of the world;--Or, “the end of the age,” as the Greek word *αιων* can also be translated (not *κοσμος* as in v. 38). It has aspects of both ideas, since it describes not just a period of time, but the order of things that persists during that period. To understand this concept, we need to review some details of eschatology, the doctrine of the last days.

The Scriptures repeatedly remind us that the world is not one continuous process, contrary to the mantra of the unbelievers (chart),

2Pe 3:3 there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of the creation.

The NT speaks of two ages:

Mat 12:32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, **neither in this world, neither in the world to come.**

Eph 1:20 he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, **not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:**

Isaiah anticipated a “new heavens and new earth”:

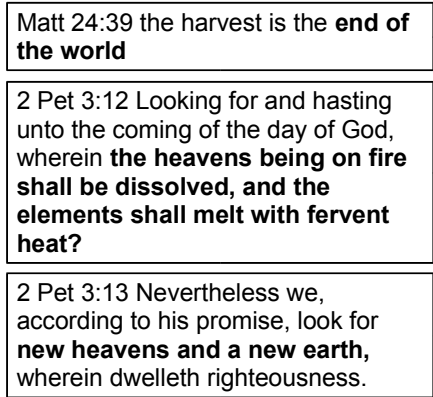
Isa 65:17 For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be

Matthew 13

remembered, nor come into mind.²⁵

Isa 66:22 For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.

The transition between the two ages is recounted most clearly in 2 Peter and the Revelation (Figure 8, Chart). Revelation 20 recounts the millennial reign of Christ, followed by the last judgment, followed in turn in 21:1 by the notice, “the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.” Then in ch. 21-22 we have the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem descending to earth. But it is a world very different from our current one. In particular, two prominent features of our world are no longer present: the sea (21:1, cf. Gen 1:10) and the night (22:5, cf. Gen 1:5) (Table 13, chart)



Sequence of Events in the Revelation

- 19:11-16 Return of Christ with his saints
- 19:17-21 Defeat of beast and false prophet
- 20:1-3 Satan bound
- 20:4-6 Millennial reign
- 20:7-10 Final rebellion and defeat of Satan
- 20:11-15 Second resurrection and final judgment
- 21:1 “the 1st heaven and 1st earth were passed away”
- 21:2-22:5 Vision of new heavens and new earth

Figure 8: The end of the age in the Revelation

This World, Genesis	New Heavens and New Earth. Revelation
1:4 God divided the light from the darkness. 5 And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night . 8:22 While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.	21:25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. 22:5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.
1:9 And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. 10 And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas :	21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

Table 13: Differences between the Old and the New Ages

Peter describes in more detail the destruction of the first world that opens the way for the creation of the second:

2Pe 3:11 *Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the*

25 See notes and charts on this passage for an alignment of 1 Cor 15, Rev 19-20, and 2 Pet 3.

Matthew 13

elements shall melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Our Lord says that the harvest is the end of the world, that is, the present age, and indeed, the last event in Revelation 20, before the revelation of the new heaven and the new earth, is the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment at the great white throne:

Rev 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

This appears to be the event the Lord is describing as the harvest in his parable.

and the reapers are the angels.--Revelation 14, another image of judgment as harvest, also describes the angels as involved in gathering the wicked:

Rev 14:19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God.²⁶

40-43, The Explanation

40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. 41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;--Unlike the parable itself, the interpretation doesn't mention the harvest of the wheat, but only of the tares. In the body of the parable (v. 30), the instruction is,

Gather ye together **first** the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Daniel Whedon, a 19th century Methodist who taught from 1845 to 1852 at UM, finds in v. 30 "a very clear contradiction of the millenarian theory that there are two resurrections, one of the righteous, another of the wicked, a thousand years apart."²⁷ But in the interpretation the Lord gives, he describes only one part of the harvest, that of the tares. His focus is on how God will deal with the wicked, not the future of the just.

42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire:--This image, which is repeated in v. 50 at the end of this group of parables, inevitably calls to mind Nebuchadnezzar's furnace in Daniel 3. There, one like a son of God (in the LXX, an angel of God) delivered the three lads, but here the angels

26 Rev 14:14-20 distinguishes the angel who gathers the grapes for judgment from the son of Man, who gathers in the good harvest. It is tempting to see that distinction here as well, but the imagery is different, and if Matt 24:31, is describing the parousia, has the angels gathering the elect as well. See notes.

27 <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/whe/matthew-13.html>

Matthew 13

themselves are casting the wicked into the furnace, and there is no recourse.

The image of the final punishment as burning fire draws on OT prophecies (chart):

Isa 66:24 for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

It is common in our Lord's teaching:

Mat 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

It continues throughout the NT to the final description in the Revelation:

Rev 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

It is fashionable in modern churches to downplay or even deny the teaching of a fiery hell, but the consistent testimony of Scripture uses this image to warn of the consequences of persisting in our sin and not receiving the Father's gracious offer of forgiveness in the Lord Jesus.

there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.--Matthew recalls this expression of our Lord most often (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; of the other evangelists, only Luke mentions it, just once, at 13:38.) We may distinguish the two verbs (chart):

- Wailing (sometimes translated "weeping") reflects the discomfort of those who experience this fate. It is focused on oneself:

Lam 1:1-2 How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary! 2 She **weepeth sore** in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies.

Joe 1:5 Awake, ye drunkards, and **weep**; and howl, all ye drinkers of wine, because of the new wine; for it is cut off from your mouth.

- Gnashing βρῦγμος shows their attitude under this punishment toward others. The verbal form of the expression βρῦχω τοὺς ὀδόντους appears once in the NT, and five times in the LXX, always in the sense of a raging anger, and usually of the wicked against the just:

Act 7:54 When [the Sanhedrin] heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they **gnashed on him** with their teeth.

Psa 37:12 The wicked plotteth against the just, and **gnasheth upon him with his teeth.**

This expression is a poignant image of the suffering of the wicked: very uncomfortable, but completely unrepentant. In the midst of the suffering that God justly imposes on them for their sin, they continue to rage at him. This attitude does not start in the lake of fire. The Revelation attests it as a result of the sixth trumpet (9:20), and again after the fourth and fifth bowls (Table

Matthew 13

14, chart). In fact, we often hear such an attitude today: when unbelievers suffer, they often criticize God for allowing misfortunate to fall upon them. Recently, in the wake of mass shootings, we repeatedly hear, “Why didn’t God stop that from happening?”

43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.--The wicked are assigned to a place of dishonor and suffering. In contrast, the righteous are exalted.

The sequence here aligns with Daniel’s vision of the last times in ch. 12 (Table 15, chart). With Rashi and other Jewish scholars, I understand Michael’s standing not as arising to action, but as standing still and taking no action.²⁸ His inaction allows the ravages of Antichrist, summarized in

the second half of the verse as “a time of trouble,” and described in more detail in Rev. 12-18. Daniel goes on to see the deliverance of Revelation 19, and two distinct resurrections corresponding to one at the start of the Millennium and the one at the end, when the wicked are judged. This is the point where our Lord’s parable picks up the story, and v. 43 then echoes Dan 12:3 (using Theodotian’s verb, but not the earlier LXX’s).

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.--The Lord repeats the exhortation from v. 9. There (as usually) it concludes a parable, challenging the hearer to figure out the meaning. Here it follows the interpretation of a parable, but the Lord apparently realizes the offensiveness of what he is teaching, and reminds his disciples not to allow the natural attachment to this world to draw them

	Matt 13:42	Rev 16	
Judgment	Angels ... shall cast them into a furnace of fire	8 And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.	10 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness;
Suffering	There shall be wailing ...	9 And men were scorched with great heat,	and they gnawed their tongues for pain,
Anger	... and gnashing of teeth	and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.	11 And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

Table 14: Wailing and gnashing of teeth during the Tribulation

	Matt 13	Revelation	Daniel 12
Rule of Antichrist		ch. 12-18	1 And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time:
Return of Christ		ch. 19	and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.
First resurrection		20:4-5	2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life,
Second resurrection, Great White Throne	vv. 41-42	20:11-15	and some to shame and everlasting contempt.
New heavens and new earth	v. 43	ch. 21-22	3 And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Table 15: The Background of Matt 13:43

28 HALOT עמד Qal, sense 3 (rather than 2, where it puts Dan 12:1); Clines, Dict. Classical Hebrew, senses 9, 10.

away from it.

44-46, Two Parables about Things of Great Value

The two short parables that make up the body of this section both emphasize the importance of devoting all of one's resources to acquiring something of great value.

44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath ὑπάγει, καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἔχει πωλεῖ, **and buyeth that field.**

45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: 46 Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had ἀπελθὼν πέπρακεν πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν, **and bought it.**

Both parables are commonly understood along the lines of the parable of the rich young man in 19:16-22, of whom the Lord required (chart):

Mat 19:21 If thou wilt be perfect, go *and sell that thou hast*, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and follow me*.

Compare his challenge to the multitudes in Luke 14:25-33:

Luk 14:33 So likewise, whosoever he be of you that **forsaketh not all that he hath**, he cannot be my disciple.

The kingdom of heaven is of such incomparable value that it is worth everything that one has. We have already considered the relevance of the *SHEMA* to the parables, requiring that we love the Lord with everything we are, not just partially and superficially. The examples of the disciples and of Paul show this decision in action:

Mat 19:27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, **we have forsaken all**, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

Phi 3:7 But what things were gain to me, **those I counted loss** for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and **I count all things but loss** for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but dung*, that I may win Christ,

But if this is all that the parables are saying, we are left with a puzzle, for there are important differences between them (chart).

- In the first the kingdom is the treasure; in the second, it is the merchant.
- In the first, the purchaser stumbles across the treasure, which is not visible, and rejoices at a discovery he had not anticipated. In the second, the merchant is deliberately seeking pearls.

Matthew 13

- In the first, the purchaser gets the treasure for a fraction of its price. He pays for the field, not the true value of the treasure. In the second, the merchant pays an agreed-upon price for one particularly excellent pearl.
- In the first, the verbs describing the man's actions are in the present tense, describing something repeated or ongoing. In the second, they are a perfect and two aorists, looking at some unique event in the past.
- The verb for going is different in the two cases (υπαγω in the first, απερχομαι in the second).
- The verb for "sell" is different in the two cases (πωλεω in the first, πιπρασκω in the second).

The differences in the two phrases for going and selling are particularly interesting. A common feature of biblical parallelism is the repetition of a stock phrase to make a point. Within Matthew, we have "wailing and gnashing of teeth" (8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30) and "who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (11:15; 13:9, 43). In both examples, the Greek is consistent across the instances, in spite of the variations introduced by our translators. If these two phrases are meant to describe the same action by the same person, the changes in vocabulary and verb tense are quite unexpected.

These differences suggest that the two parables may not in fact be talking about the same thing. I will suggest that the first parable has the meaning usually associated with it, a person discovering the kingdom and preferring it above everything else. But (following Gibbs²⁹), the second describes our Lord, who has borne God's wrath in our place because of the great value that he places on us. Consider how this interpretation explains the differences.

What is the kingdom? The first parable presents the kingdom as a treasure for which a wise person will give up everything else. This fits the traditional interpretation. But in the second parable, the kingdom is the merchant. It is difficult to see how the kingdom can be described as the believer. But our Lord embodies the kingdom. He is the king, and the kingdom is his rule over all the earth.

How is the prize found? In the first parable, the man happens to find the treasure. It is not obvious to him, and certainly not to others. This is exactly the condition of the kingdom (chart):

Mat 11:25 At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Mat 13:11 it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.

29 Jeffery A. Gibbs, Parables of Atonement and Assurance: Matthew 13:44-46. Concordia Theological Quarterly 51:1 (1987), 19-43, <http://www.ctsfw.net/media/pdfs/gibbsparables.pdf>. This study deserves attention. Gibbs sees both parables as referring to Christ, but this neglects the differences between them. Thus Darby, and others (Salmeron, Drexilius)--see Trench for refs. Larken, *Disp Truth*: treasure = Israel, pearl = church. Scofield.

Matthew 13

But in the second parable, the merchant is deliberately seeking pearls, and the one that he discovers is visible to everybody around. There's nothing secret about the lost condition of humanity. Compare the merchant here with our Lord's teaching about himself:

Luk 19:10 For the Son of man is come to **seek** and to save that which was lost.³⁰

Mat 18:12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and **seeketh** that which is gone astray?

Why the difference in price? The man cannot afford to pay what the treasure is worth. He gets it for a "steal." Commentators often question the morality of the transaction: shouldn't he have told the owner of the field, rather than contriving to get something of great value for very little money? But in salvation, we indeed give something very small (our miserable right to rule our own lives) in exchange for something of incomparable worth. In our case, we do not fool the owner of the field, but we still get salvation "for a steal." The Lord invites us,

Isa 55:1 Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

In contrast, the merchant pays the full price of the pearl. The Lord Jesus made a full and just recompense for our sin.

Why the difference in tense? The work of the merchant is described in past tenses, reflecting the one-time work of redemption. The discovery of the treasure in the field is in the present tense. It is something that happens again and again, as each believer is drawn to the Lord Jesus.

Why are the verbs for going different? The merchant is said to "go away" *απερχομαι*, while the man is said simply to "go" *υπαγω*, without the nuance of changing his location. The verb for the merchant may reflect the incarnation, the Lord's leaving the Father in order to do the work of redemption. Having identified this priceless treasure (in heaven, in the counsels of the godhead), he then "goes away" to earth to procure it. The verb used of the man is the same one used in the Lord's instruction to the rich young man in 19:21, "go and sell that thou hast"

Why are the verbs for selling different? It is very difficult to discern any difference in meaning between these verbs (see the notes). But they are used in two different episodes later in Matthew that may correspond to their use here (chart).

The verb used of the field, *πωλεω*, is what the Lord requires of the rich ruler in 19:21, "go and sell" The verb describing what the merchant does appears in 18:25, in the parable of the debtor:

Mat 18:25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be **sold**, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

Here, the selling represents the penalty imposed by the king on the debtor, a penalty that the

³⁰ It is interesting that Matthew's version of this saying, in 18:11, does not include the "seek." But 18:12 shows that the seeking is certainly within the purview of Matthew's thought.

Matthew 13

debtor was unable to bear, and that the king revoked. The image here is well suited to describe what the Lord did for us, bearing the penalty of the wrath of God that we could not sustain in ourselves.

Set off by the two parables of the final judgment, these two little parables exhort us to act in the light of the inestimable value of the kingdom of heaven, realizing that the Lord Jesus has already given all that he has to make this kingdom accessible to us.

47-50, Final Separation of Good and Bad Fish

This parable is similar to that of the tares, in that it describes the coexistence of the righteous and the wicked. But note the distinction in the object with which the kingdom is compared. In the tares (v. 24), the focus is on the *sowing* of the good seed. Here, it is compared with the *gathering* of all people at the end of the age. Remember that “kingdom” βασιλεια refers to a process, not a place, and that process of God’s sovereign rule encompasses both the planting of the seed and the final judgment. As Rev 4:8 reminds us, he is sovereign over all time.

47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:--The net in question is called a “seine net,” which hangs vertically with floats along the top and weights along the bottom (Figure 9, chart). It is drawn around an area of the lake, pulled together, and then towed to shore, and it captures everything within its compass. The central image



Figure 9: Seine fishing
(https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PSM_V45_D083_Purse_seine_fishing.jpg)

here appears to be the universal authority of God’s kingdom. Nothing escapes its sovereign rule. Isa 6:3 reminds us that he is sovereign over all space.

48 Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.--Not every kind of fish gathered by such a net will be marketable, so the fishermen have to sort through the catch to preserve what is useful.

49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, 50 And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.--The parable ends as did the interpretation of the tares. In this present age, the wicked and the just exist together, but God’s sovereign rule is seen in his ability to bring them all to judgment and deal appropriately with them.

51-52, Work of the Teacher (closing)

51 Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things?--Recall the broken symmetry in v. 17 (Table 6, Table 7, chart). In explaining the reason for parables, the Lord extends Isaiah's chiasm in Isa 6:10. The Lord had warned Isaiah (quoted in Matt 13:15) about people who cannot see, hear, or understand, because of defects in their eyes, ears, and hearts:

Mat 13:15 For this people's **heart** is waxed gross, and *their ears* are dull of hearing, and their **eyes** they have closed; lest at any time they should **see** with *their* eyes, and **hear** with *their* ears, and should **understand** with *their* heart,

The Lord's chiasmic expansion begins (v. 13) by observing that the people cannot do these three things:

Mat 13:13b because they **seeing** see not; and **hearing** they hear not, neither do they **understand**.

He ends by asserting that the disciples are privileged to enter into this knowledge that he is now hiding from the multitudes because of the growing rejection:

Matt 13:17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to **see** those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to **hear** those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

In light of the central chiasm and how the larger chiasm begins, we are surprised that he does not continue his statement about the disciples to say, "Many prophets and righteous men have desired ... to understand those things which ye understand, and have not understood them." That omission left us hanging, in suspense. Now the Lord comes back to that theme.

The verb "understand" $\sigma\upsilon\nu\eta\mu\iota$ appears two other times in this chapter, at the beginning and end of the interpretation of the parable of the sower (chart). The roadside is void of understanding:

Mat 13:19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and **understandeth** it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

The fruitful ground represents understanding:

Mat 13:23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and **understandeth** it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

So the Lord's question here to the disciples is, "What kind of ground are you?" It is a question each of us should ponder. Only the good ground brings forth fruit, and that ground represents the person who brings God's word into his heart and understands it.

They say unto him, Yea, Lord.--The disciples naturally do not want to disappoint their teacher. They are eager to say, "Yes, we understand. We're not like that hard-packed soil that cannot understand the word."

Matthew 13

52 Then said he unto them, Therefore—We should not miss the logical connective. The final parable challenges those who claim to have understanding. Such people will show that understanding in a particular way. In particular, since the disciples claim to have understanding, they are called to be scribes “instructed unto the kingdom of heaven.” To understand the implications of this title, we need to examine both parts of it.

every scribe—In general, the scribes do not come off well in the gospels. They are often associated with the pharisees, and are the target of the Lord’s condemnation of them both as hypocrites in ch. 23. But the role of the scribe has honorable roots.

In the OT, scribes are often mentioned in connection with the royal court. The production of a written document was a complicated process. It required not only literacy, but also the preparation of the writing material, the ink, and the pens, all by hand. Even in our memory, business executives would not write their own documents, but dictate them to a secretary who would type them. How much more was this needed when the technology was even more primitive and manually controlled.

Two OT scribes are examples of godliness (chart). The first is Baruch, Jeremiah’s scribe. This is the man who actually put the book of Jeremiah down on parchment. He is in focus in ch. 36. When the Lord commands Jeremiah to “write all the words that I have spoken unto thee,” here is how he does it (chart):

Jer 36:4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book.

Jeremiah sends Baruch to read the book in the temple. The princes, including the royal scribes (v. 12) are alarmed by the warnings it contains, and take it to the king, but neither the king nor his advisors are moved. In fact, they cut it into pieces and burn it in the fire. The king then put out a warrant to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch, which is the first time he is formally called a scribe:

Jer 36:26 But the king commanded Jerahmeel the son of Hammelech, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take **Baruch the scribe** and Jeremiah the prophet: but the LORD hid them.

Subsequently, Jeremiah dictated an expanded version of the revelation, and Baruch wrote it again:

Jer 36:32 Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to **Baruch the scribe**, the son of Neriah; who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire: and there were added besides unto them many like words.

Another important OT scribe is Ezra, who led the second phase of the return from Babylon. He is identified as a scribe ten times in Ezra and Nehemiah. He is introduced as a “ready scribe,” that is, a fast scribe (he could write quickly), and his focus was on the law of Moses:

Matthew 13

Ezr 7:6 This Ezra went up from Babylon; and he was a **ready scribe** in the law of Moses, which the LORD God of Israel had given:

He was also a priest:

Ezr 7:11 Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto **Ezra the priest, the scribe**, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of his statutes to Israel.

We have here the example of someone who treasures God's revelation and devotes his energies to studying it. Scribes were an essential part of the royal court as record-keepers and administrators, and so they enjoyed social prestige. The overseers of the people in Exodus, responsible for keeping track of the number of bricks made, are called "scribes" in the LXX. But the focus of Baruch and Ezra was not on warehouse inventories, army rations, or the chronicles of the king. They were concerned with preserving and understanding the Lord's verbal revelation. They and others like them were the instruments through whom God recorded and preserved our Bible.

So the first thing that the Lord expects of his understanding disciples is that they will be scribes like Ezra, diligent students of the scriptures. There has been a movement in recent years to devalue diligent exposition in favor of direct dependence on the Holy Spirit, or pursuit of social values. But a faithful disciple of the Lord, one who truly understands his teaching, will be first of all a scribe.

which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven—The second characteristic of the disciples is that they will be "instructed unto the kingdom of God."

The verb "instructed" is literally "disciplined," reinforcing our understanding that he is addressing this exhortation to them. What does it mean to be "disciplined unto the kingdom"? This combination of verb and preposition appears only here in the Greek Bible, and not in the critical texts.³¹ The meaning of the construction can be seen with other verbs (chart):

Rom 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, **separated unto** the gospel of God,

Act 13:2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work **whereunto** I have **called** them.

Paul was separated *for the sake of, for the purpose of*, the gospel. God called Barnabas and Saul *for the purpose of* doing a specific work. Just so, the purpose for which the scribe is instructed is not just to have knowledge, but for the purpose of advancing the kingdom of God. Compare Paul's motto, bearing in mind that the verb "edify" always refers to what believers do for one another:

1Co 8:1 Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge.

³¹ They read simply μαθητευθεις probably due to haplography from the original μαθητευθεις εις, enhanced by the relative uncommonness of the idiom. The meaning is, however, not unprecedented: BDAG εις 4d.

Matthew 13

Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

The kind of scribe that the Lord wants is not one who hoards up spiritual knowledge for his own enjoyment, but one whose discipleship advances the kingdom, a point reinforced in the comparison that he is about to make.

is like unto a man *that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*--The verse recalls our Lord's words in the previous chapter,

Mat 12:35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

In both cases, the verb "bring forth" is *εκβαλλω*, which literally means "to cast out." Its most common meaning is to expel forcibly, and it is the usual term used for casting out demons. It is used of the good Samaritan taking two days' wages out of his wallet to pay for the care of the wounded man (Luke 10:35). The homeowner is generous, eagerly distributing his treasure to others.³² Even so, the scribe who has been instructed unto the kingdom will be eagerly, pro-actively, sharing with those around him what he has found in the Scriptures.

Not only so, but he will be sharing "things new and old." He will treasure the old insights, those from others, but also will find new understanding that he will eagerly pass on to his brethren.

53-58, Sequel

53 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables,--

This phrase is Matthew's standard way of indicating the end of one of the Lord's five major discourses (Table 16, chart). Matthew described the birth of our Lord in a way that recalls the birth of Moses, and the Sermon on the Mount reflects the structure of Deuteronomy, emphasizing that the Lord is indeed the promised prophet like unto Moses (Deut 18). This parallel is reinforced by these five discourses, reminding us of the five books of Moses.

he departed thence. 54 And when he was come into his own country,--

Figure 10 shows the relative locations of "thence" (Carpenternaum, by the Sea of Galilee) and "his own country" (Nazareth, in the hills

5-7, Sermon on the Mount	7:28-29 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: 29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.
10, Missionary Discourse	11:1 And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.
13, Parables	13:53-54 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. 54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue
18, Life in the Body	19:1 And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan;
24-25, Olivet Discourse	26:1-2 And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, 2 Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.

Table 16: *The Lord's Major Discourses in Matthew*

³² Nolland on 12:35, "the imagery is of disposal and not of display."

Matthew 13

above the northern arm of the Valley of Jezreel. The distance between the two is about 20 miles as the crow flies, but two or three times longer by foot, perhaps a three-day journey.

he taught them in their synagogue,--

This is a summary of the episode reported in Luke 4, when he quoted Isa 61:1-2 and claimed to fulfill it.

Luke 4:17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. 20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. 21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.



Figure 10: The relative locations of Nazareth (blue) and Capernaum (red)

Luke goes on to tell us that the townspeople were so angry, they tried to throw him off the cliff. Note the chiasm that follows (Table 17, chart). Luke focuses on the content of his teaching, but Matthew analyzes the motive for their rejection of his claim. Consider each pair of members.

54 he taught them in their synagogue,	But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.
insomuch that they were astonished , and said,	57 And they were offended in him.
Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?	Whence then hath this man all these things?
55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? 56 And his sisters, are they not all with us?	

Table 17: Chiasm in 13:54-57

insomuch that they were astonished *εκπλησσω*, ... **57 And they were offended** *σκανδαλιζω* **in him.**--

The first verb is commonly used in the NT to describe an emotional response of confusion, mainly to what someone says (see Notes). In some cases, it can be followed by a positive response (as in 7:58, where the next verse reports that the multitudes followed him). But here, the emotional energy generated by his teaching is directed into antagonism.

and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? ... 57b Whence then hath this man all these things?--They do not deny his insight or his miracles. But they can't

Matthew 13

imagine where he could have gotten them. The reason for their confusion is that they think they know all about him:

55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? 56 And his sisters, are they not all with us?--We have here a closer view of the group identified already at the end of ch. 12. As we saw there (and as John 7:5 makes explicit), his siblings had not yet come to faith, though there is strong evidence that the authors of our books of James and Jude are in fact two of the brothers named here.³³ The nature of the offense is that "He's just like us, yet he can do things that we can't do." In other words, they're jealous.

But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.--The saying appears to be original with our Lord. But the dynamic is understandable, and may be why the Lord sometimes has to bring in an outsider to say things that ought to be clear from local folk. Perhaps this is why the Lord had to send the young prophet from Judah to rebuke Jeroboam at Bethel in 1 Kings 13, when there was an old prophet of the Lord already there.

58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.--The first part of the chapter emphasizes the withdrawal of clear teaching from unbelievers. Now he withdraws his miracles as well (chart, Table 1).

³³ See Alford's introductions to these books for detailed discussion.

Notes

Ch. 12-13 the Great Division

Both ch. 12 (46-50) and ch. 13 (53-58) end with paragraphs dissociating the Lord from his physical family. Vorster suggests that these form an inclusio. But the break between 12:45/46 is weaker (no name resumption) than that between 12:50/13:1 (“the same day went Jesus out”). 13:53-58 begins with name resumption and so does 14:1. Perhaps these two sections are to be understood as alternation: Unbelievers reject him, and he then rejects unbelievers. In fact, they would then form inverted summaries

- 12:1-45, the Pharisees reject the Lord (chiastic center: he turns to the Gentiles)
- 12:46-50, he rejects those who do not do the will of the Father. (summary of what he is about to do in the parables)
- 13:1-52, he rejects unbelievers by hiding his truth in parables
- 13:53-58, his own people reject him (as the Pharisees did in 12:1-45).

So the theme throughout is rejection, and the distinction is on who is doing the rejecting.

Structure of Matthew 13

Wenham: Chiasm

Bailey, modifying Wenham:

Sower and the Soils (vv. 1-9)--lesson for the laborer

 Question by Disciples/Answer by Jesus (Understanding) (vv. 10-17)

 Interpretation of the Sower and the Soils (vv. 18—23)

 Tares (vv. 24—30)--mix of righteous and unrighteous

 Mustard Seed (vv. 31—32)

 Leavening Process (v. 33)

 Fulfillment of Prophecy (vv. 34—35)³⁴

 (The Lord moves into the house)

 Interpretation of the Tares (vv. 36—43)

 Hidden Treasure (v. 44)

 Pearl Merchant (vv. 45—46)

 Dragnet (vv. 47—48)--mix of righteous and unrighteous

 Interpretation of the Dragnet (vv. 49—50)

 Question by Jesus/Answer by the Disciples (Understanding) (v. 51)

Householder (v. 52)--lesson for the laborer

³⁴ Loses parallel with 10-17

Matthew 13

Many of the correspondences are undeniable, but the overall pattern doesn't cohere rhetorically.

Davies and Allison: The chapter is a triple, an irregular alternation

The section is organized as three sets (note also Matthew's use of triads elsewhere)

First set

- 1-9 Parable of the **sower**
- 10-17 Discussion of parables { + scriptural allusion}
- 18-23 Interpretation of the **sower**

Second set

- 24-30 Parable of the **tares**
- 31-32 Parable of the mustard seed
- 33 Parable of the leaven
- 34-35 Discussion of parables { + scriptural citation}
- 36-43 Interpretation of the **tares**

Third set

- 44 Parable of the **treasure**
- 45-46 Parable of the pearl
- 47-48 Parable of the net
- 49-50 Interpretation of the net
- 51-52 Parable of the householder and his **treasure**³⁵

Benefits:

- Each section with a parable, and each begins and ends on the same note {inclusio}.
- No parable is separated from its interpretation.
- Highlights the undeniable parallelism between 13.11-23 and 34-43
- Explains why the interpretation of the parable of the tares is put off until after 34-5
- The sections end in the same way: after 3-5 the disciples ask Jesus a question, after 24-33 they ask for an explanation of the parable of the tares; and in 44-52, after the third parable, Jesus asks. 'Have you understood all this?' In other words, a short conversation--introduced by a question--follows the parabolic part of each section.'

There is much to commend this structure, but it is interrupted awkwardly by the Lord's movement in v. 36, so that the whole scene structure is at odds with this.

Gerhardson: First Parable as Outline

Summary from Davies and Allison:

35 D&A do not agree that this is a parable, but I find Wenham's position persuasive.

Matthew 13

- “the parable of the tares helps explain the first category of people described in 13.1-13. those represented by the seed which falls by the way;
- the parables of the mustard seed and leaven help explain the second category of people. those represented by the seed on stony ground;
- the parables of the treasure and of the pearl help explain the third category, the seed among the thorns:
- and the parable of the net helps explain those represented by the good seed;

The correspondences don't seem persuasive to me.

Vorster

A very complex structure, but his main point is that we must take the narrative statements about the Lord's movement seriously.

My Result

There's a recurring theme of mixture here.

First, take 1-9 and 51-52 as inclusio, focusing on the laborer's responsibility.

- 1-9, do not expect universal success
- 51-52, be diligent in what you present

Second, let 10-17 and 34-35 be an inclusio around the second section, marked by the disciples' question. The theme of these allusions to the OT is selective revelation. Within this, we have

- Two paragraphs about the mix of righteous and unrighteous
 - Interpretation of the Sower and the Soils (vv. 18—23)
 - Tares (vv. 24—30)--mix of righteous and unrighteous
- Two paragraphs about the impact of small things
 - Mustard Seed (vv. 31—32)
 - Leavening Process (v. 33)

Third, initiated by the Lord's movement into the house, we have an inclusio of the interpretation of the tares (36-43) and the dragnet parable and interpretation (47-50), both emphasizing the mix of righteous and unrighteous. In the center are two parables emphasizing precious things:

- Hidden Treasure (v. 44)
- Pearl Merchant (vv. 45-46)

v. 9 “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear”

Other uses by the Lord:

Mat 11:14 And if ye will receive *it*, this is Elias, which was for to come. 15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Mat 13:16 But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

[explaining the tares] Mat 13:41-43 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; 42 And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. **Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.**

Roots in the OT:

Isa 6:10 LXX For the heart of this people has become gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. [cited by the Lord in Matt 13:15]

Jer 5:21 Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not:

Eze 12:2 Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they *are* a rebellious house.

Two post-exilic psalms recognize the unhearing ear as characteristic of idols, and of those who worship them:

Psa 115:4 Their idols *are* silver and gold, the work of men's hands. 5 They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: 6 They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: 7 They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. 8 They that make them are like unto them; *so is* every one that trusteth in them. [cf. 135:15-18]

Later: the formula comes at the end of each of the letters to the seven churches:

Rev 2:7 **He that hath an ear, let him hear** what the Spirit saith unto the churches; [also 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22]

And once in the warning of the beast out of the sea in ch. 13:

Rev 13:8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. 9 **If any man have an ear, let him hear.**

Cole cites rabbinic parallels: Mekilta 19:5; Sifre Lev 7:18.

relation to the *shema*, Deut 6:4? Cf. שמעו תשמעו "hearken diligently" (Exod. 15:26; 19:5; Deut.

Matthew 13

11:13; 15:5; 28:1; Jer. 17:24; Zech. 6:15) or with imperative (Isa 6:9; 55:2). One might think that this is a command to avoid the problem of hearing without understanding, but Isa 6:9 envisions that one can do this and still not understand.

Echoes of v. 12

This saying appears in both Luke (8:18) and Mark (4:25) as well as Matthew.

[Understanding and parables:] Mat 13:12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. [Luke 8:18, also in connection with parable of the sower; Mark 4:25, after saying about the ear]

[Parable of the talents:] Mat 25:29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. [Luke 19:26]

How is this related to the logion about what we have and what is required of us? Judgment is proportional to the revelation received:

Luk 12:48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

1Ti 1:13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it **ignorantly** in unbelief.

Joh 15:22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.

Mat 11:20-24 Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: 21 Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I say unto you, It shall be **more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you**. 23 And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. 24 But I say unto you, That it shall be **more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee**.

Perhaps the point is that the Lord withholds further revelation from those who show little understanding, as an act of mercy, to relieve them of the additional responsibility that would be theirs if he continued to teach openly.

The Parable of the Sower, and the Shema

Gerhardsson (NTS 14, pp. 165-193) argues that each of the three nonproductive soils corresponds to a failure to obey one clause of the *Shema* (Deut 6:4), as it was understood by the Jewish scribes. He finds the same pattern in the Lord’s temptation. Can these further be aligned with the three failings of 1 John 2, the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life?

“Might” in Deut 6:5 is מאד, which is almost always an adverb meaning “exceedingly, very.” The only two instances I can find where it is a substantive are here and in 2 Kings 23:25, the description of Josiah, which plainly echoes the *Shema*.

	חיל	צבא	כח	מאד
δυναμις	157	124	7	1 (Dt 6:5)
ισχυς	25		95	1 (2 K 23:25)
παντοκρατωρ		119		
Σαβαωθ		52		
σφοδρα				256

Talmud Bab. Ber. 61b: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God etc. It has been taught: R. Eliezer says: If it says “with all thy soul”, why should it also say, ‘with all thy might’, and if it says, ‘with all thy might,’ why should it also say ‘with all thy soul’? Should there be a man who values his life more than his money, for him it says; ‘with all thy soul’; and should there be a man who values his money more than his life, for him it says, ‘with all thy might’ . R. Akiba says: With all thy soul’: even if He takes away thy soul.

Clines’ dictionary cites two examples from the Damascus Document where the word has the sense “property”:

CD 9:10-12 וכל האובד 11 ולא נודע מי גנבו ממאד המחנה אשר גנב בו ישביע בעליו 12 בשבועת האלה

And any thing that is lost, and it is not known who stole it from the property of the camp ממאד המחנה, because he stole it, let its owner swear an oath with swearing ...

CD 12:9-10 ומגורנו 10 ומגתו אל ימכר להם בכל מאדו

And from his threshingfloor and from his winepress he is not to sell to them from all his substance מכל מאדו.

Ὀμοιω and derivatives with Matthew’s Parables

Carson (NTS 35) suggests that differences in the tense of this verb may indicate present vs. future realization. Let’s gather the evidence. We want instances of the verb or its derivatives

Matthew 13

applied to parables in Matthew.

Future:

Mat 7:24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I **will liken** him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

Mat 7:26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, **shall be likened** unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

Mat 11:16 But whereunto **shall I liken** this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

Mat 25:1 Then **shall** the kingdom of heaven **be likened** unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

Aorist:

Mat 13:24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven **is likened** unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

Mat 18:23 Therefore **is** the kingdom of heaven **likened** unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

Mat 22:2 The kingdom of heaven **is like** unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

Adjective ομοιος

Mat 11:16 But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is **like** unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

Mat 13:31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is **like** to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

Mat 13:33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is **like** unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Mat 13:44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is **like** unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Mat 13:45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is **like** unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls:

Mat 13:47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is **like** unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind:

Matthew 13

Mat 13:52 Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe *which is* instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is **like** unto a man *that is* an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure *things* new and old.

Mat 20:1 For the kingdom of heaven is **like** unto a man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

Analysis:

11:16 shows the interchangeability of the verb (at least the future) and the adjective.

The adjectives in ch. 13 are used on both sides of v. 36, where the structural analysis above suggests that the focus shifts from the present age to the future. So tense is not everything.

The Mustard Tree in Matt 13:32

Description of a mustard plant as a tree seems far-fetched. It is a large herb (Figure 7), but not what one usually thinks of as a tree. But the expression may be explained by the Lord's desire to relate what he is saying to some OT passages with which his kingdom is compared.

Here's the text in the gospels: the key elements are a **tree**, in whose **branches** the **birds nest**.

Mat 13:32 και γίνεται **δένδρον**, ὥστε ἐλθεῖν τὰ **πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ** και **κατασκηνοῦν** ἐν τοῖς **κλάδοις** αὐτοῦ.

Mar 4:30 και ὅταν σπαρῆ, ἀναβαίνει, και γίνεται πάντων τῶν λαχάνων μείζων, και ποιεῖ **κλάδους** μεγάλους, ὥστε δύνασθαι ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ τὰ **πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ** **κατασκηνοῦν**.

Luk 13:19 και ἐγένετο εἰς **δένδρον** μέγα, και τὰ **πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ** **κατεσκήνωσεν** ἐν τοῖς **κλάδοις** αὐτοῦ.

Ezekiel prophesies the restoration of Israel using a similar image, but the tree is specifically named as a cedar, and when it is compared with other trees, they are called ξύλα. The branches are κληματα, not κλαδοι, and their rest is αναπαυω rather than κατασκηνωω.

Eze 17:23 ἐν ὄρει μετεώρω τοῦ Ἰσραηλ και καταφυτεύσω και ἐξοίσει βλαστὸν και ποιήσει καρπὸν και ἔσται εἰς **κέδρον** μεγάλην και **ἀναπαύσεται** ὑποκάτω αὐτοῦ πᾶν θηρίον και πᾶν **πετεινὸν** ὑπὸ τὴν σκιὰν αὐτοῦ ἀναπαύσεται τὰ **κλήματα** αὐτοῦ ἀποκατασταθήσεται 24 και γνώσονται πάντα τὰ **ξύλα** τοῦ πεδίου διότι ἐγὼ κύριος ὁ ταπεινῶν ξύλον ὑψηλὸν και ὑψῶν ξύλον ταπεινὸν και ξηραίνων ξύλον χλωρὸν και ἀναθάλλων ξύλον ξηρὸν ἐγὼ κύριος λελάληκα και ποιήσω

Later, he uses the same image of the Assyrian. Again, it is a cedar, compared to a ξύλον. It has κλαδοι, but not as a dwelling place for the birds,

Eze 31:5 ἔνεκεν τούτου ὑψώθη τὸ μέγεθος αὐτοῦ παρὰ πάντα τὰ **ξύλα** τοῦ πεδίου και ἐπλατύνθησαν οἱ **κλάδοι** αὐτοῦ ἅφ' ὕδατος πολλοῦ 6 ἐν ταῖς παραφύσιν αὐτοῦ **ἐνόσσευσαν** πάντα τὰ **πετεινὰ τοῦ**

Matthew 13

οὐρανοῦ καὶ ὑποκάτω τῶν κλάδων αὐτοῦ ἐγεννώσαν πάντα τὰ θηρία τοῦ πεδίου ἐν τῇ σκιᾷ αὐτοῦ κατώκησεν πᾶν πλῆθος ἐθνῶν

Nebuchadnezzar has a similar dream.

Dan 4:11 καὶ ἡ ὄρασις αὐτοῦ μεγάλη ἡ κορυφή αὐτοῦ ἤγγιζεν ἕως τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τὸ κύτος αὐτοῦ ἕως τῶν νεφελῶν πληροῦν τὰ ὑποκάτω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη ἐν αὐτῷ ὥκουν καὶ ἐφώτιζον πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν 12 οἱ κλάδοι αὐτοῦ τῷ μήκει ὡς σταδίων τριάκοντα καὶ ὑποκάτω αὐτοῦ ἐσκίαζον πάντα τὰ θηρία τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐνόσσευον ὁ καρπὸς αὐτοῦ πολὺς καὶ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἐχορήγει πᾶσι τοῖς ζώοις

Dan 4:20 τὸ δένδρον τὸ ἐν τῇ γῇ πεφυτευμένον οὐ ἡ ὄρασις μεγάλη σὺ εἶ βασιλεῦ 21 καὶ πάντα τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τὰ νοσσεύοντα ἐν αὐτῷ ἡ ἰσχύς τῆς γῆς καὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ τῶν γλωσσῶν πασῶν ἕως τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ χῶραι σοὶ δουλεύουσι

κατασκηνω appears only in Theodotion's revision of the LXX of Dan 4, which is post-Christian and may reflect an allusion to the parable, though TDNT appeals to it as a source for the gospels. The verb is used of birds in Ps 104:12 (LXX 103:12).

Here's a table of agreements:

	Gospels	Ezekiel 17	Ezekiel 31	Daniel 4
Tree	δενδρον	Κεδρον, ξυλον	Κεδρον, ξυλον	δενδρον
Birds	Πτεεινα του ουρανου	Πτεεινα	Πτεεινα του ουρανου	Πτεεινα του ουρανου
Branches	καλδοι	κληματα	καλδοι	καλδοι
Nesting	κατασκηνω	αναπαυω	νοσσευω	Νοσσευω (Th. κατασκηνω)
Total correspondences		1	2	3

Summary: the imagery is most closely linked to Daniel, particularly if we admit Theodotion's readings as primitive.

All of the images concern the transitoriness of mighty trees, which stands in contrast to the growth of God's rule.

OT Images of Nations as Trees

The comparison of a kingdom with a tree that shelters the birds draws on several precedents from the Old Testament.

Jacob blessed Joseph with this image:

Gen 49:22 Joseph *is* a fruitful bough, *even* a fruitful bough by a well; *whose* branches run over the wall:

Matthew 13

Asaph, one of David's musicians (1 Chr 15:16, 17), applied it to Israel:

Psa 80:8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. 9 Thou preparedst *room* before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. 10 The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof *were like* the goodly cedars. 11 She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river.

Isaiah has already introduced us to his metaphor of people as plants:

- It is central to the parable of the vineyard in ch. 5, echoed in Ezekiel 15.
- In 9:14, 17, the young warriors are described as the lofty branch (כִּפְּהַ) of a palm tree, and the fatherless and widows as rushes in the marsh.
- A forest represents Ephraim in 9:18

In Isaiah 10, the role of the Assyrian as God's instrument of judgment is compared with a saw or an ax that is devastating the forests:

Isa 10:15 Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? *or* shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?

But because of his pride, he will be judged, a judgment that is itself described as the destruction of trees:

Isa 10:17 And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day; 18 And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standardbearer fainteth. 19 And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them. ... 33 Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature *shall be* hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. 34 And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.

This imagery sets the context for the promise of Israel's restoration; formerly a cut-off tree, it will sprout again.

Isa 11:1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

Ezekiel 17 picks up this image in an elaborate parable of Israel's fortunes at the end of the seventh century. She is a clipping from a cedar, transplanted first in Babylon, then extending her branches toward Egypt in rebellion against Babylon, for which she is judged. But finally the Lord promises to restore her:

Eze 17:22 Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set *it*; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant *it* upon an high mountain and eminent: 23 In the mountain of the height of Israel

Matthew 13

will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I the LORD have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the LORD have spoken and have done *it*.

Ezekiel 31 applies the same imagery to Assyria, before its downfall:

Eze 31:3 Behold, the Assyrian *was* a cedar in Lebanon with fair branches, and with a shadowing shroud, and of an high stature; and his top was among the thick boughs. 4 The waters made him great, the deep set him up on high with her rivers running round about his plants, and sent out her little rivers unto all the trees of the field. 5 Therefore his height was exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches became long because of the multitude of waters, when he shot forth. 6 All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young, and under his shadow dwelt all great nations. 7 Thus was he fair in his greatness, in the length of his branches: for his root was by great waters. ... 12 And strangers, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off, and have left him: upon the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the rivers of the land; and all the people of the earth are gone down from his shadow, and have left him. 13 Upon his ruin shall all the fowls of the heaven remain, and all the beasts of the field shall be upon his branches:

The image that is closest to our Lord's language in the parable of the mustard seeds concerns Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 4. Nebuchadnezzar reports his dream:

Dan 4:10 Thus *were* the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof *was* great. 11 The tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth: 12 The leaves thereof *were* fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it *was* meat for all: the beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. 13 I saw in the visions of my head upon my bed, and, behold, a watcher and an holy one came down from heaven; 14 He cried aloud, and said thus, Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit: let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches: 15 Nevertheless leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and *let* his portion *be* with the beasts in the grass of the earth:

Daniel interprets it:

Dan 4:20 The tree that thou sawest, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached unto the heaven, and the sight thereof to all the earth; 21 Whose leaves *were* fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it *was* meat for all; under which the beasts of the field dwelt, and upon whose branches the fowls of the heaven had their habitation: 22 *It is* thou, O

Matthew 13

king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.

References to Satan σατανας, The Devil ο διαβολος, and The Wicked One ο πονηρος in Matthew

The first two are the most common. The last one is ambiguous, sometimes referring to a wicked person and sometimes to the principle of wickedness; see discussion under 5:39.

Figure 11 shows these three terms in Matthew. They are concentrated in the temptation and ch. 12-13. Ch. 4 shows the identity of the person described as ο διαβολος and σατανας, while ch. 13 shows the identity of ο πονηρος and ο διαβολος.

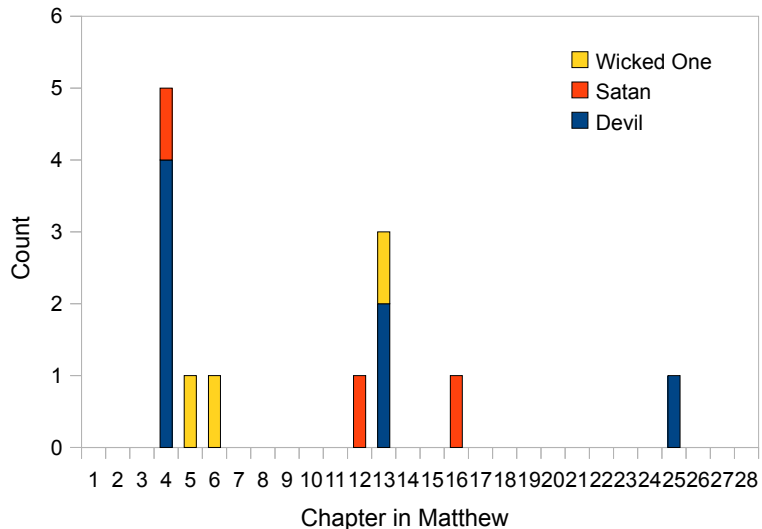


Figure 11: References to our adversary in Matthew

vv. 39, 41, Angels as reapers

The focus here is on their role in gathering the tares:

Mat 13:39 the reapers are the angels. ... 41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

It is tempting to distinguish their work from that of the Lord himself, gathering the righteous. John clearly distinguishes these two roles in the Revelation, where the two kinds of people are represented not as wheat and tares, but as wheat and grapes, to support the image of the winepress.

Rev 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed *are* the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them. 14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

Matthew 13

17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. 19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand *and* six hundred furlongs.

But within Matthew, the angels are charged with gathering the elect as well as the reprobate:

Mat 24:31 And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Of course, this latter verse, on France's reading, refers not to the parousia at the end of the world, but to the gathering of the church prior to the end of the second temple. But Paul seems to have it in mind in his description of the parousia:

1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

vv. 42, 50, Weeping and gnashing of teeth

Matthew recalls this expression of our Lord most often (Matt. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; of the other evangelists, only Luke mentions it, just once, at 13:38.) Our Lord sometimes associates it with outer darkness (8:12; 22:13; 25:30), and in this chapter with burning fire (13:42, 50). Gill:

The allusion in the text is, to the customs of the ancients at their feasts and entertainments; which were commonly made in the evening, when the hall or dining room, in which they sat down, was very much illuminated with lamps and torches; but without in the streets, were entire darkness: and where were heard nothing but the cries of the poor, for something to be given them, and of the persons that were turned out as unworthy guests; and the gnashing of their teeth, either with cold in winter nights, or with indignation at their being kept out.

Differences in wording in vv. 44 and 46

We are accustomed to highly parallel wording in parables, but the Lord changes the vocabulary (not to mention the verb tenses) in the parables of the treasure and the pearl:

Mat 13:44 *ὁπάγει, καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἔχει πωλεῖ*

	Go away	Sell
Treasure	ὑπαγω	πωλεω
Pearl	απερχομαι	πιπρασκω

Matthew 13

Mat 13:46 ἀπελθὼν πέπρακεν πάντα ὅσα εἶχεν

Verbs for going away

Hebrew equivalents: *υπαγω* appears only once in the canonical OT (Exod 14:21), but 5xx in Tobit and 4 Macc.

Verbs for selling

Look at the Hebrew antecedents:

What is sold?

Πωλεω: grain, slaves, fish and other wares in the market (Neh 13:16)

πιπρασκω: land, family members as slaves, oneself (1 Kings 21:25), temple vessels (2 Mac 4:32)

	Πωλεω	πιπρασκω	αποδιδωμι
מכר	9	22	40
שבר	2		
שוב			55
שלם			22
נתן			21

If there is a distinction, *πωλεω* appears to be the generic word for selling (though it is the less common one), while *πιπρασκω* is used for things that ought to be precious to the family or the community. 2 Macc 8:14 may carry this nuance:

2Ma 8:14 Others sold *πωλεω* all that they had left, and withal besought the Lord to deliver them, sold *πιπρασκω* by the wicked Nicanor before they met together:

the people sold their goods in the usual way, but Nicanor abusively sold the holy people. But this distinction would run counter to Acts 4:34,

Act 4:34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold *πωλεω* them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold *πιπρασκω*,

I can't discern any useful distinction. Luz cites Wolfgang Schenk, *Die Sprache des Matthäus: Die Test-Konstituenten in ihren makro- und mikro-strukturellen Relationen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987) to the effect that “*πιπρασκω* refers to larger business transactions (Schenk, *Sprache* 11) and fits well with the merchant”³⁶

Gibbs, in his explanation of the parables as describing the action of the Lord, leverages the reference to selling all that one has in 18:25 as a reference to paying the judgment of God.

Mat 18:25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

The verb there is *πιπρασκω*, supporting the idea that the second parable, but perhaps not the first, describes the work of the Redeemer.

36 Luz, U. (2001). *Matthew: a commentary*. (H. Koester, Ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg.

Matthew 13

On the other hand, *πωλεω* is used of what the Lord requires of the rich young ruler in 19:21!

Mat 19:21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.

Other Differences

Theme of the story (what is the kingdom compared to?)	The treasure (the thing of value)	The merchant (the one discovering the thing of value)
Tense	Present	Past
Nature of the prize	Hidden, secret, known only to the finder	Publicly known
Nature of the discovery	Accidental	Deliberate, his business

Εκπλησσω (v. 54) vs. θαυμαζω and εξιστημι

Matthew and Mark describe the response of the people in Nazareth to our Lord's teaching first as amazement, then as offense, but the word used for amazement, *εκπλησσω*, is relatively uncommon. How does its meaning compare with that of the more common terms *θαυμαζω* *εξιστημι*?

Εκπλησσω “to be knocked out”

In the NT it appears only 13x, all in the gospels with the exception of once in Acts:

Act 13:12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being **astonished** at the doctrine of the Lord.

There are only 5 instances in the LXX, of which only one (Eccl 7:16) is in a canonical book. Mostly it refers to astonishment at doctrine, though Mark 7:37 and Luke 9:43 refer to the Lord's miracles. The subject is always people, never the Lord.

Θαυμαζω

46x in the NT, 56 in the OT, rendering תמה(4) ממש(2) נשא (7). It is predicated of the Lord, with respect to people's faith (Matt 8:10) and unbelief (Mark 6:6). Perhaps this term focuses more on the rational questioning than on the emotional impact. Often followed by a reference to speaking, “they marveled and said ...”

Εξιστημι “to be beside oneself”

17x in NT (2 Co 5:13, 8x Acts, others in gospels), 75x in OT, translations דרר a(16), also ממש a(5), הממ a(6), תמה נדד a(4x each). Describes a lack of mental capacity, Mark 3:21 “he is beside himself”; Acts 8:9 “fooled”. Never predicated of the Lord; suggests a lack of mental capacity. Mostly the response to miracles, though Luke 2:47 his teaching (but as a child, which has an

Matthew 13

aspect of miracle); Acts 9:20 Paul's teaching (but again, what astonishes them is the inappropriateness that he is the one doing this).

	Emotional	Rational
Response to doctrine	εκπλησσω	θαυμαζω
Response to Action	Εξιστημι	

Proximity to synonyms:

Luk 2:46-48 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. 47 And all that heard him were **astonished** **εξιστημι** at his understanding and answers. 48 And when they saw him, they were **amazed** **εκπλησσω**: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

Mar 5:42 And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was *of the age* of twelve years. And they were **astonished** **εξιστημι** with a great astonishment. ... Mar 6:2 And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing *him* were **astonished** **εκπλησσω**, saying, From whence hath this *man* these things? ... 6 And he **marvelled** **θαυμαζω** because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.

[after the healing of the demon-possessed boy] Luk 9:43 And they were all **amazed** **εκπλησσω** at the mighty power of God. But while they **wondered** **θαυμαζω** every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples,

Mar 6:51 And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore **amazed** **εξιστημι** in themselves beyond measure, and **wondered** **θαυμαζω**.

Act 2:7 And they were all **amazed** **εξιστημι** and **marvelled** **θαυμαζω**, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

Isa 52:14 As many were **astonied** **נִמְשׁ עֲשִׂיתִי** at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: 15 So shall he **sprinkle** **הִמְשׁ תְּהִי תְהִי** many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for *that* which had not been told them shall they see; and *that* which they had not heard shall they consider.

Jer 4:9 And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the LORD, *that* the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be **astonished** **נִמְשׁ עֲשִׂיתִי**, and the prophets shall **wonder** **הִמְשׁ תְּהִי תְהִי**.