

JESUS' PARABLES
in
CONTEXT

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— AN OBSERVATION —

Please note the wonderful PROGRESSION of thought in these Matthew parables:

Chapter 13 deals with the Gospel Age as a prophecy of seven periods.

Chapter 18 deals with the character which those seven Churches must develop.

Chapter 20 deals with individual character weakness.

Chapter 21 explains why the Gospel Age needs to replace the Jewish Age.

Chapter 22 extends the thoughts of Chapter 21 to include the SAME KIND of separation at the ends of BOTH AGES.

Chapters 24 and 25 deal with the end of the age and the Millennium which is the objective of all of Jesus' teachings.

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INTRODUCTION

Parables in the Gospels fall basically into three categories:

1. Some parables are to illustrate character building.
2. Some parables are primarily historic in nature. (We use the word "primarily" because historic parables usually lead into Jesus' day and conclude prophetically with something future from the moment of their utterance.)
3. Some parables are nearly entirely prophetic.

Some of the parables combine the above features. But, perhaps most importantly, and frequently overlooked in their discussion, is that the parables are CONNECTED to their contexts.

To interpret a parable without connecting it to the contextual material is often to miss the most important point. Just as an example: The middle part of Matthew 18 is somewhat LEGAL. It constitutes a three-step PROCEDURE for the righting of wrongs. When we isolate Matthew 18:15-20, as we often do, we lose the MORAL POWER of the lesson which is stressed in verses 1-14 and 21-35. Two parables surround the procedural considerations. Before the procedure comes the parable of the Lost Sheep which deals with RECOVERY. Following the legalities comes the parable of the Unmerciful Servant. This parable deals with FORGIVENESS. Recovery and

Forgiveness are the points of the Matthew 18 legalities. If we apply the isolated procedures without GROWING FROM and APPLYING the lessons of the surrounding two parables, we have a sterile and formalistic religion. We become Pharisees!

Thus the point of this book is to share thoughts which will hopefully enrich our Christian characters — our New Creatures. Explanations of most of these parables are readily available elsewhere, but the tie-ins to context may not be stressed. And these tie-ins are vital to our understanding and to our lives.

On the whole, the interpretations given will be those so well offered by Pastor Russell. Slight variances may occur for reasons which shall be given. In a few cases, Bro. Russell offers a number of interpretations due to what amounts to an uncertainty about the parable. In such cases (like the Penny Parable) we will offer only one solution which we see as satisfactory.

The parables are all masterpieces of spiritual fiction. Some may not like that term. But parables ARE fictional stories — stories made up colorfully to illustrate important lessons we must learn. We remember fiction. We remember stories or illustrations much better than we remember didactic treatises. The stories which Jesus gives us stick with us if we catch their points. It is our prayer that this review will help us learn and retain those points.

It is an imperative part of our learning process in the Narrow Way that we engage in a number of approaches to study for spiritual growth. The Lord richly provided for our needs at this time through the pen of that "faithful and wise servant" (Matthew 24:45). His works are orderly and progressive. They approach the Holy Word in a way that Jesus instituted on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). Jesus "beginning with Moses and with all the prophets... explained to them the things concerning himself in all the Scriptures." This was TOPICAL BIBLE STUDY — the very hallmark of the approach of the Laodicean Messenger. Failure to maintain this manner of pursuit of understanding — failure to continue to hear the Seventh Trumpet — will result only in spiritual shipwreck.

In addition to topical study, Bro. Russell encouraged and taught DISPENSATIONAL application of truths — hence "The Chart of the Ages." (See Appendix A.) He also vigorously pursued the necessity of comprehending SYMBOLISMS — a successful pursuit of which mandates topical study.

Furthermore, Bro. Russell preached constantly about CONTEXTUAL study. But in this area, he was more of an admonisher than a practitioner. This is not to say that Bro. Russell ignored context. To the contrary, he was a far better Bible student than most of us could ever aspire to be. He knew his contexts. But his charge from the Lord was to give dispensational truths and topical consistency to us. He

succeeded. But he never failed to ADMONISH that WE take the time to examine the contexts. Unfortunately, many of us have failed to heed this admonishing. In fact, at least a noticeable segment of our fellowship have FEARED to venture into an area in which Bro. Russell did not lead to any great extent.

Do not misunderstand! The Pastor did, indeed, give summaries of whole books like Romans, for instance. But, as a regular practice, he clearly felt it more beneficial to teach us the TOOLS which make such a contextual study safe and gratifying. What a pity if we've been given the tools but never use them to build with! His admonitions to consider the contexts (large and small) were not casual suggestions. He WANTED us to study Scripture directly along with our studies of Scripture contextually, dispensationally, and in "rightly dividing" literalisms from symbolisms.

We would never urge direct Biblical contextual study without a SIMULTANEOUS study program in the writings of God's appointed Messenger to Laodicea. The real danger in direct Biblical contextual study is to those who are sufficiently new in their exposure to "present truth" that they have no anchors when they directly confront Holy Writ. Also, unfortunately, many who have been in the company of "present truth" even for decades have so failed to imbibe its spirit and detail that they, too, flounder in a direct Bible study. Paul shames them: "You have become dull of hearing. For, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God." (Hebrews

5:11-14) These brethren should never be involved in direct Bible study without being surrounded by those who are grounded, and without simultaneously working on absorbing the principles of seventh-Church truths which God has fed to us through "that servant."

That being said, it is also important to note that the best and most fruitful studies are GROUP studies — studies by the ecclesia assembled. This is Paul's point when he warns about individualism in Hebrews 10:23-26. We must not forsake "our own assembling together, as is the habit of some." Individual private studies are an imperative for success, and they are productive. But the collective wisdom of the spirit-begotten Body is essential in keeping us from falling.

The above is noted because this book is based on a recent small group study — not an entire ecclesia study. However, the entire ecclesia has studied this material — but in its smaller units (as opposed to a dedicated "Parables Study").

Books written solely at the instigation and by the will of the individual elder are far less valuable than books written based on (or even at the request of) an ecclesia after its studies. This is not to say that books by faithful and well-informed elders are of no value. They often are. And they are, when they are truly valuable, based on studies with other contributing saints over the years. But the elder who feels that his accumulated wisdom exalts his understanding over his brethren is, indeed, in serious trouble.

This book on parables is being offered as a help for ecclesias or individuals who wish to delve into the parables and their contexts directly — along with their continuing studies at the feet of the Seventh Trumpeter. May it prove a delight and a strength for New Creature development.

— A NOTE ON INCLUSIONS AND EXCLUSIONS —

It is not always clear whether or not certain passages are parables or not. Some passages just seem to be comparisons or symbolic lessons, not parables. We are omitting these from this book. They include Jesus' comparison of himself to bread in John 6, his comparison of his voice to that of a shepherd in John 10, and his comparison of himself to a vine with us as the branches in John 15.

Other similar instances are the house built on rock of Matthew 7 and Luke 6; the candle under a bushel of Matthew 5, Mark 4, and Luke 8; the new patch on old garments of Matthew 9, Mark 2, and Luke 5; the new wine in old bottles of Matthew 9, Mark 2, and Luke 5; the watching servants of Luke 12:35-40; the steward on trial of Luke 12:42-48; and the master and servant of Luke 17:7-10.

These all seem not to be parables in the generally accepted sense. However, they do have enough of comparison elements that we might legitimately ask, "How are these different from things which tend to begin with "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..."? There is no good answer except that parables seem to be complete STORIES (even if only a verse long) rather than similies or comparisons. We will let it rest at that.

USE YOUR BIBLES!

This book is set up to DISCUSS the parables. Mostly, it will not PRINT them. This book is designed for the reader to have his Bible open to each parable and its context as it is discussed. This may seem obvious and elementary! Yet, many of us when hearing or reading the examination of texts don't actually LOOK AT THE TEXTS. There is an inherent foolishness in this. Scripture is INSPIRED (God-breathed). It is our duty as disciples to value and to wrestle with each and every phrase and word. We will be immeasurably blessed when we do this. We will be impoverished if we are slack in doing it.

[The NAS is the text used throughout this look at the parables. It is not always the best. Where other translations are needed for clarity, they will be identified.]

SECTION II

THE PARABLES of MATTHEW

(Sometimes also Found in Mark and/or Luke)

— Matthew 13 —

Parables Related to the Seven Church Periods

1. The Sower — EPHESUS
2. The Wheat and Tares — SMYRNA
3. The Mustard Seed — PERGAMOS
4. The Leavened Meal — THYATIRA
5. The Hidden Treasure — SARDIS
6. The Pearl of Great Price — PHILADELPHIA
7. The Dragnet — LAODICEA

— The Context —

In Matthew 13 we find a very unique combination of parables. It seems almost certain that this beginning of parable-giving (at least so in Matthew) offers Jesus an opportunity to outline the entire Gospel Age ahead of him and his disciples. While each parable can stand alone, the sequence of them tells a story. The sequence becomes the important context.

Each parable appears in a very special way to apply to one of the seven stages of the Church as we find them listed in Revelation 2 and 3. Obviously, some of them go way beyond the period of the Church which they represent. Thus, the Wheat and Tares parable, while it functionally represents the second stage of the Church as the parable opens, extends all the way to the seventh Church (the Harvest Church) as the parable concludes.

As the chapter ends, verses 51-58 corroborate the thesis about the collective meaning of these parables. These verses are frequently ignored when these parables are discussed; but in doing so, we miss a contextual "punch" that is laden with wonderful information for us.

If we consider Matthew 12:46-50 for a contextual connection, we also find a blessing. These verses separate the multitudes and his natural kin from Jesus' TRUE FAMILY. Jesus is getting ready to speak parables to his TRUE FAMILY — all of his disciples between the two advents. This is quite possibly why Chapter 13 begins with

the revealing CONNECTIVE statement: "On that day Jesus went..." It was on the day that he DEFINED his family that he would prophesy their Gospel Age destinies. Yes, he speaks some of these seven parables to the multitudes, but all of them to us, his family of disciples.

The division of Chapter 13 is also intriguing with these thoughts in mind. The first four parables are spoken in the boat to the multitudes as well as to the disciples. The next three parables are spoken in the house, and only to the disciples.

This four-plus-three concept is present in Revelation to mark divisions in Church history. Thus, the first four seals are deteriorating horses; then we have seals five through seven. The first four trumpets show deteriorating spiritual conditions; then we have trumpets five through seven listed as "woes" because their messages begin to hurt the establishment.

It is, of course, only coincidental, but the listing of Churches in Revelation 2 and 3 has the first four Churches in one chapter, and the final three in the latter. In actual Church history, the fifth Church is the turning point. So much so, that Bro. John Wycliffe (the fifth messenger) is known historically as "the morning star of the Reformation."

It seems at least possible that the change of Jesus from boat to house and from multitudes to disciples, marks this historic change in the sudden upward course of the Church and the downward course of the powers of the apostasy

between the fourth and fifth periods of Church history.
Four parables are spoken before Jesus enters the house;
three are spoken when he is in the house.

In Chapter 13, the chapter is the context. Separating these
parables from each other defeats Jesus' intent for them. We
will consider the end of the chapter in context after we have
reviewed the parables.

— THE SOWER —

Representing the EPHESUS Period

(Matthew 13:3-23)

(Compare Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:4-15.)

The obvious connection of this parable to the first period of the Church is that Jesus does sow the seed of the Gospel Age. The lesson of consequent fruitage, and lack of it, clearly applies to the whole age. But that concept (of application to the whole age) is also found in the messages to the seven Churches (Revelation 2 and 3). Each of them ends with the admonition that that stage hear what the spirit says to all the Churches (PLURAL). In other words, while a message or parable might be directed to a specific period of the Church, Jesus definitely wants its lessons heard and heeded throughout the age.

Two of the seven parables are explained by Jesus. The Sower parable is one of these. Jesus explains it after inserting other information.

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares has two parables and Jesus' physical change of location inserted between the parable and its interpretation. We will look at the possible implications of that when we get there.

Because Jesus interprets the Sower parable, we have no need to do so. But we can discuss some of its implications.

13:3, 19. Jesus doesn't directly identify himself as the sower. But he does identify what was sown (the seed) as

"the Word of the Kingdom." There is no doubt that that was his message throughout his ministry. He engaged his disciples in the same sowing, so we might not be too wrong to include the Apostles in the sowing work. (In I Corinthians 3:6, Paul includes himself in a planting work.)

13:4, 19. Here Jesus gives us the first of four results of the spreading of the Gospel. This seed was misplaced — sown where it was bound not even to sprout. Jesus explains to us that the Gospel will be heard widespread. It has a message which appeals to the heart. But emotion is a fickle thing. The head must also be involved. Jesus says that this first group, indeed, had heart reaction, but they did "not understand it." Satan (being represented as hungry birds) "snatches away" what has been sown.

The meaning is clear. Throughout the Gospel Age, multitudes have been briefly attracted to the message, but they had not the desire to reason on it and, therefore, no desire to spend time or dedication to it. If they called themselves "Christians," it could have been only in the most nominal of senses. They were successfully thwarted by Satan.

13:5, 6, 20, 21. Here we are introduced to the group representing a second kind of reaction to the Gospel. Jesus blames their eventual failure on the lack of a good root system occasioned by shallow soil. They are characterized as having a promising start — an enthusiasm and "joy" from the message which makes them look real.

We have all seen this. We have all probably known religious people with an emotional effervescence — people who preach the "good feelings" and even the "good life" to be experienced because of a belief in the Gospel. Their "heads" may, indeed, even quote Scripture — albeit usually only about the benefits of their belief. They are different from the first group. They do have a commitment with a trifle of knowledge — "shallow roots." That, of course, is the problem. Satisfaction with surface understanding is always subject to disappointment and discouragement. It also guarantees that a person does not fully understand his position before God.

It is likely that this second group is committed to righteousness in their lives. They are probably dwelling on Plane N on the "Chart of the Ages." (See Appendix A.) Thus, they have never attained that spirit-begettal necessary to help roots (perseverant commitment) grow deeply. They may well make claims like being "born again," but they are most likely just "tares." They are a step above the first group who, if they claim Christianity at all, would have to be classified as "hangers-on" — tares less by their profession than by association.

At this point, it seems that "soil" can be interpreted. Since group one was without soil, and group two has shallow soil, and since group one was without understanding, and group two has a weak understanding, it seems reasonable to conclude that soil is understanding — not just

comprehension, but comprehension accompanied by some appreciation.

The English word "understanding" is very defining. It means we have something under us to stand on — a support or foundation. This is not facts; it is an appreciation of the facts which gives us stability.

Verse 21 gives us the result of the conditions which define the second group. This group Jesus calls "temporary" — a word which means that there is a time limit on their enthusiasm and commitment. We are not to assume that these people are "short-term" Christians. That is not Jesus' point. His point is that they have a breaking point — a point in their lives, or even in world events, when conditions make them realize the lack of depth in their understanding. Their "roots" let go because they do not have enough to hold on to. Their faith structure, based on doing good and being happy, collapses when all around them is bad and sad.

Jesus pictures the breaking point by comparing it to being scorched by a rising sun. This could mean that when real truths are revealed (the light of the true Gospel) their positions are so threatened that they fall apart. This is, indeed, what happens to "tares." They are burned. But that event, the revealing of the errors of their expectations, is an event generally at the close of the Gospel Harvest. This parable must apply throughout the age.

(We might remember, however, that events like the "burning of the tares" do happen at other times. See, for example, Revelation 9:18, where a segment of tares are burned with the good result that they become Protestant Christians instead of Catholic tares in the days of Martin Luther.)

But Jesus in this interpretive verse focuses on a more personal kind of crisis rather than on monumental historical upheavals. He interprets their crisis point as "affliction or persecution." Affliction could be disease or personal reversals. But, for our understanding, the word "persecution" is augmented by Jesus with "because of the Word." This suggests to us strongly that their disappointments and discouragements make them fail either (1) because they don't know the Scriptures well enough to support their faith when doubts assail them, or (2) because they receive unexpected oppositions to their religious euphoria which they are unable to handle. In any case, they "fall away." The margin says they are "caused to stumble."

These first two groups are almost certainly non-spirit-begotten "Christians." One must wonder if Pastor Russell was thinking of the four groups of this parable when he drew the four-part truncated pyramid on the "Chart of the Ages." That pyramid represents the four parts of the professing "Christian" world almost exactly as this parable portrays them.

13:7, 22. Group three seems to have adequate soil. These are spirit-begotten Christians. This makes their fate all the more lamentable. When we later consider the Wheat and Tares parable, we will learn that the Christian field is growing more than just wheat. Jesus points out that the growth of other plants (tares) is so profuse as to make it likely that pulling the weeds will uproot the wheat. There is a connection there with the Sower parable. Here we don't have "tares," but we have "thorns" which "choke the Word." In both cases, we are aware that the life of a spirit-begotten saint is perpetually threatened by his surroundings. In this case, truly spirit-begotten individuals (group three) allow the thorns to impede their progress. The "tare" attitude rubs off.

Jesus defines the "thorns" as "the worry of the age and the deceitfulness of riches." These worries and deceits are apparently communicated from the tare class. Much in our lives is contagious from those about us. What Jesus describes is the faith-weakness of the "Great Multitude" class (Revelation 7). It is these who will not "receive a full reward" (II John 8). Here we just call them "group three."

It is well worthy of note that these do not "wither away" like the first group; they do not "fall away" as the second group. Rather, they "become unfruitful." Bearing fruit is how Jesus describes those who are part of the "true vine" (John 15). The expectation that this third group should bear fruit places them at least as having been a part of the vine. In other words, these are spirit-begotten individuals who are "cut off" branches from the vine. These are the

“Great Multitude” who lose the opportunity of being a part of the 144,000 members of the Body of Christ.

Notice how Jesus interprets the event: the thorns "choke the Word." It is not that thorns kill the plant. Rather, they prevent the plants' receiving sufficient nutrients to bear fruit. The worries instilled in us by this age and the lies of the value of wealth combine to make this class focus on earthly attainments — security for the flesh — to the degree that their spiritual pursuits are stunted. They either produce no fruitage or, at the very best, produce useless and immature fruitage. The scales have dipped severely out of balance. THINGS win, and the SPIRIT loses.

13:8, 23. The Parable concludes with the fourth group — the desirable attainments. Not only is the soil good, but the strength of the plant discourages the weeds from growing too close.

Jesus describes each individual in this group as (1) hearing the Word, (2) understanding it, and (3) bearing fruitage — and he adds, (4) brings it forth — a phrase which suggests maturity of the fruitage, unlike the possible unripe fruitage of the Great Multitude. The first element was accomplished in the first group. The first two elements were accomplished in the second group — albeit with an insecure understanding. The first three elements are present in the third group — albeit with lack of usable fruitage. But group number four manifests success in all four areas. They will be the Body of Christ.

It is so important to note that QUANTITY of fruitage IS NOT the measure of success. Group four people are successful in the Lord's sight whether their QUANTITY is 30, 60, or 100. This quantity comparison is given for only one reason — we are not to compare our spiritual output to the output of others. We do what we can individually. That is all that is required. A tiny bit is as successful as an overabundance as long as it reflects our using our ability to the fullest.

13:9. Jesus ends the story with the words, "He who has ears, let him hear." With this opening parable to his Gospel Age disciples, Jesus has set the age-long prediction of the four effects of his words on those who would claim his name. He wants us to be successful; but he knows and he warns of the multitude of mistaken ideas the world would have about Christianity. As he says at the close of each Church message in Revelation: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the Churches." Each of those seven dispensational summaries in Revelation warns in a very particular and timely way how the individuals then living can fall into one of the four categories of this parable.

Among other things, this helps each of the true Church watch and pray concerning his environment and surroundings so that he does not fall prey to Satan's efforts to frustrate the development of the Body.

This is a powerful parable, and we are grateful for its lessons and the sharpened comprehension it gives us in our

relationship to any others who may claim the name of Christ.

— The Mark and Luke Accounts —

As we progress through Matthew 13, we will find that three of the parables have versions in Mark and/or Luke. Those two historians do not have the seven-parable alignment which seems so excitingly prophetic in Matthew.

There is no way that any of us would wish to denigrate two of the four Gospels. Nevertheless, it is important for us to make some careful distinctions in their writings.

Matthew and John are Apostles. By definition this makes them different. They are inspired. Their teachings are, by Divine oversight, flawless. Not even the messengers to the Churches have this advantage (save Paul and John who serve both as Apostles and "Angels" to two of the Churches).

Mark and Luke (and Acts which comes from the pen of Luke) are inherently different. While we find Matthew and John interpreting, we do not find Mark and Luke doing so. They merely report. They are scribes; they are historians. Matthew and John will say something like, "This was done to fulfill the words of the prophet Isaiah." Mark and Luke make no such statements because it is not their place to do

so. They are not authorized to be inspired, authoritative interpreters or makers of doctrine.

Thus, when we read the same parables in more than one Gospel, we are forced to give weight to Matthew's account. (John has no parables in it.) Mark and Luke are reporting what they have been told. Occasionally they have more in their record than Matthew. It is likely in such cases that what they were told and what they recorded is factual, but the additional information may well not have been imperative to the INSPIRED version reported by Matthew. Thus, we can profit from Mark and Luke, but we can never have their accounts supercede Matthew's account.

In the case of the Sower parable, Mark and Luke differ insignificantly from Matthew.

There are some little items worthy of note. Mark 4:13, for instance, says, "Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables?"

The placement of this question is quite different from its placement in Matthew 13:51. But Mark doesn't show all seven parables; and we thus miss the real lesson for the question and its answer. We will see this real lesson when we discuss the end of Matthew 13. The fact is that this question by Jesus seems to have very little importance in Mark's account. But it has immense importance and significance to us in the Matthew account. How can the same question be so lacking in significance in one place and so vital in another? It is not just context; but it is also the inspiration of context.

One other little item will help us to justify our interpretation of the Sower in the Matthew account. In Matthew 13:7 and 22, we inferred by careful reasoning that there was not total lack of fruitage in group three — there was, instead, the lack of mature fruit. Apparently our inferences were correct as Luke suggests in 8:14. Luke says "they are choked...and bring no fruit to maturity." Thus, while we, indeed, deduced the correct idea from the inspired Apostle, we have our deductions verified by the way Luke heard the story reported to him.

— The Intervening Verses —
(Matthew 13:10-18)
(Mark 4:10-13; Luke 8:9, 10.)

In all three Gospels, the material intervening between the parable and its explanation is the same — although Matthew's is the longest. The Mark and Luke accounts do nothing to add or detract from the meaning.

FOLLOWING Jesus' interpretive remarks, however, the accounts differ. In Matthew we immediately have the Wheat and Tares parable. In both Mark and Luke we have Jesus' remarks about hiding light under a bushel. And in Luke, we then have material which Matthew places earlier — including the Matthew 12 item about defining his relatives. These discrepancies again magnify the fact that we must accept Matthew as the inspired account and that his sequencing is for the benefit of our understanding.

Mark and Luke are correct in reporting words, but not sequences. Their writings are not inspired to set doctrine — merely to record items of history.

The INTERVENING WORDS (Matthew 13:10-18), therefore, are not random. They are sequenced to make a point.

We might (mistakenly) conclude that verses 11-18 are primarily about the Jews. While they certainly do apply immediately to the Jewish crowds, the PLACEMENT of the words suggest their primary application is to the multitudes calling themselves "Christianity" in the Gospel Age.

Verse 13 strongly suggests that those who don't hear are a group TO WHOM SOMETHING IS GIVEN, but from whom nothing is expected. Since these words FOLLOW the Sower parable, it seems likely that they refer to the two groups of that parable who hear but don't get the point. And, the fact that (in Matthew) Jesus IMMEDIATELY gives the Wheat and Tares parable suggests, at least in one way, that he is RE-ENFORCING the concept that among those that "hear," only some would understand and become real.

When, in verse 18, Jesus transitions from this intervening material to his explanation of the parable, his words are, "Hear THEN the parable of the sower" — almost as if to say, "if you didn't recognize in the parable what I have just told you in these intervening verses, THEN LOOK AGAIN!"

Thus, once again, context becomes everything!

Verse 12 takes on this paraphrased meaning: "You who have understood will grow in the Holy Spirit and bear fruit. Those who have not gained understanding from the Gospel Message will lose even what they thought they had."

— Connections to Ephesus —

We have noted that this Sower parable has its primary connection to the first Church period, in that Jesus and his Apostles sowed the seed for the age.

In Revelation 2:1-7 we find the Lord's words to the Ephesus "angel" (the Apostle Paul). Within these verses there are five possible "hints" that connect the Church to the parable:

1. In verse 1, Jesus states that he holds the "seven stars." Thus in the Ephesus message, the teachers for all seven Churches are mentioned. In the parable, the seed for all seven Church periods is sown.
2. In verses 2 and 6, Jesus makes mention of evil or false Christians. In the parable he shows two classes who, while a part of the "Christendom" that would grow,

are not spirit-begotten and who,
consequently, are false Christians.

3. In verse 3, Jesus praises perseverance and not growing weary. This well corresponds to his praise in the parable for the class that perseveres in fruit-bearing.
4. In verses 4 and 5, the Ephesus Church is warned that it lost its "first love." In the parable, the Great Multitude loses its first priority — fruit-bearing.
5. In verse 7, but common in all Church messages, are the words about "having an ear." These words are in the first parable in all of its three accounts.

In the "first seal" description (Revelation 6:2), we have Jesus going out and conquering. This may well be the successful spreading of the Gospel seed shown in the parable.

— THE WHEAT AND TARES —
Representing the SMYRNA Period
(Matthew 13:24-30; 13:36-42)

This second parable in the series of seven is not mentioned in the other Gospels. Like the Parable of the Sower, it covers the age through the Harvest period. Indeed, it is primarily from this parable that we get the term "The Harvest." And usually in our discussion of this parable, we focus on its Harvest features. But its connection to the Smyrna period of the Church is somewhat obvious at the beginning of the parable. It says, "But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away."

As soon as the Apostles "fell asleep," their authoritative and watchful eye was no longer present. They could no longer nip heresy in the bud. And there was no one following them with the inspired discernment or authority to prevent the sowing of tares. It is clear that "liars" and "evil men" (Revelation 2:2) were present in Ephesus. But the Ephesus Church did "not endure them." When Smyrna comes along, however, the tares are sown without challenge.

This second parable of the series is the second parable which is given an interpretation by Jesus. He does not interpret the remaining five. Considerable material occurs between the parable and its explanation — including two more parables.

Again, since Jesus interprets the parable, we need not do so. But we would miss great insights if we didn't discuss the many implications found in his exposition. Before doing this, a consideration of the verses intervening between the parable and its interpretation will help us better consider contextual elements.

— The Intervening Context —
(Matthew 13:31-35)

If these parables do, indeed, represent the seven Church epochs, putting off the explanation of the Wheat and Tares until a total of four parables had been spoken might well suggest that something in the parable refers to events beginning during the fifth Church (Sardis). Jesus explains the parable AFTER he has left the boat and gone into the house with only his disciples as hearers. This change becomes contextually significant. It will represent, as we shall see, that the Reformation Churches (numbers 5 and 6) do not represent a separation of wheat and tares. They represent a new channel for Jesus' voice.

In the parable, his servants inquire about gathering up the tares — an action Jesus says will uproot the wheat (13:28-29). In Jesus' explanation, he does not specifically treat this element of the parable. The parable itself had simply said, Wait for significant separation until the Harvest.

But we know from history that a sort of separation did occur due to the Reformation. Jesus, however, is telling us prophetically (by the placement of his interpretation in the context) that the Reformation, while it turned the direction of Church history, DID NOT HAVE AS ITS OBJECTIVE OR ITS RESULTS the separation of wheat from tares. Protestantism retained both classes.

Nevertheless, the Protestant movement is subtly suggested here as a refocusing of Jesus' voice away from the "mother" system and toward the more spiritual Protestant movement. Wheat and tares remain in both venues, but Jesus' voice comes through the "woe" trumpeters, not through the previous monolith of religious "authority" (Revelation 8:13). Hence we have Jesus entering the house with only his disciples and leaving the multitudes behind. This happens just as we are ready to receive the parable representing the fifth Church – the first "woe."

Thus, this very subtle intervention of time and place between the parable and its interpretation speaks volumes to us – but only if this chapter of Matthew forms one large prophecy in the form of seven parables.

Verses 34 and 35 have their obvious surface meaning, but to let them go at that is to leave questions unanswered.

The immediate force of verses 34-36 is to accentuate the change from boat to house and from multitudes to

disciples. It is this change that has helped us to interpret context.

Verses 34 and 35 also echo the lesson we have considered in verses 10-17.

But an important question arises. If Jesus spoke in parables so that the uninitiated might not understand, WHY does he keep speaking in parables when only disciples are with him (verses 36, 44-50)?

There is a reason for this. Jesus from the beginning intended for the release of DISPENSATIONAL TRUTHS. It isn't that he keeps secrets from his disciples, but that he feeds them some truths only when they are due. (See John 6:12.) The understanding of some parables cannot really be had (even by the disciples) until the time comes. They are prophetic; and prophecy needs to be clarified by the "angels" to the various Churches when such clarification is due.

When we consider verses 51-58, this all will become clear.

— The Details —

13:24, 37, 38. "The Kingdom of Heaven" is a phrase which has numerous meanings. Only contexts tell us what is meant by the phrase in its many uses. Jesus, in one sense, is the Kingdom. (He PERSONIFIES it.) The peaceable Kingdom for which we pray is also the Kingdom. The time

intervening between Jesus' return and the peaceable Kingdom is also the Kingdom (Daniel 2:44). But, as regards the parables, "the Kingdom" usually means: any event that occurs as part of the history of the development of the Church (including the apostate Church!). In other words, "Kingdom of Heaven" often refers to the embryo or incipient Church and even its counterfeit (tares).

In this parable, "Kingdom of Heaven" refers to everything between the time Jesus sows "good seed" until the saints "shine forth" in the REALIZED Kingdom.

The parable begins with a clear retrograde reference to the Sower parable wherein Jesus sowed the Gospel message seed. That is the reference of 13:24. Jesus says (13:37) that he is that sower. He then explains that the "field" is the world. It ends up, of course, being only the Christian world, as no seed took hold anywhere else. Thus the four "soils" of the Sower parable are all in the Christian "field" of this parable.

13:25, 38, 39. The sleeping of men (Greek = THE men = the Apostles) is our connection to the Smyrna period of the Church. It is the removal of the Apostles from the scene, leaving an open door for the adversary to make counterfeit Christians. Jesus does not interpret the sleeping of men. We must do so. But the alignment of the parables in this chapter with the seven Church periods leaves us with a simple and logical conclusion.

Jesus leaves no doubt about the "good seed" — later called "wheat" as it grows. He specifies that they are the true

Church — "the sons of the Kingdom" — the sons of God who will inherit the Kingdom.

Verse 25 introduces "his enemy." Jesus identifies him clearly as "the devil." This is a good place to remind ourselves about this enemy. His favorite tactic is to be a forgery. He wants to look like the real thing because it is the only way he can deceive. He knows that the message of the Kingdom (the "seed") is good. He cannot do better! But his ambition is for himself to be in charge. Thus he COUNTERFEITS EVERYTHING so that most will be either confused or deceived. He and his ministers make a practice of appearing as "angels of light."

The devil sows "tares" among the wheat. He doesn't want to be at a distance or appear as a competitor: He wants to be right in the midst of things — so involved as to be indistinguishable from the real. In the real agricultural world, tares look just like wheat until the Harvest arrives. The devil's plans and tactics are so masterful that he only need "plant" the ideas. They are so insidious that they work by their own strength. He doesn't even have to fertilize much! He just "went away" and observes!

Jesus defines the "tares" as "the sons of the evil one." Jesus told the Pharisees that they were of their father, the devil. In both cases he is describing the class seemingly functioning as the true authority. We must have a most delicate balance in our minds and attitudes. We must hate the tare concept; but we must separate the individuals who constitute the tare class from the name they are given. Satan plants falsehoods; but the victims of the falsehoods

are not the falsehoods. We speak of GROUPS (wheat and tares) and not of the individuals which constitute those groups — none of whom can claim their situation as of their own volition or doing. The tares may end up being burned, but the people of the tare class will experience no such end.

13:26-29. As mentioned, these verses do not have a direct reference in Jesus' interpretation of the parable. Historically, the Church began to grow after the departure of the Apostles. It was inevitable that the brethren noted that some among them were fruitful in Christ ("bore grain"), and some, though they professed Christianity, seemed distinctly lacking in new creature growth.

While the brethren during the age couldn't directly approach Jesus about the problem and how to handle it, they were clearly troubled about it — "How then does it have tares?"

In Jesus' messages to Churches two through six (Revelation 2 and 3) he acknowledges this "we-they" (Church-tare) relationship and makes it clear that the problem originated with the adversary. As he states to Smyrna (the Church represented by this parable), they (the tares) "are a synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9).

It is only natural that the saints would want to separate themselves from this distressed field. There would be two ways to this:

1. They could attempt to make a physical separation — "gather them up" — eliminate the apostate ones.
2. They could attempt to live above the problem by a mental separation.

In these verses, Jesus is advising the latter course. He advises that the judgment abilities of the saints are not sufficiently secure to root out apostates. They would also root out true saints — or, by the commotion resulting from the attempt, they would disturb the growth of the true saints. It is not the job of saints to judge all in the field. It is their job to grow. Hence, Jesus says "No."

Historically we must deal with some actual separations. The Waldenses tried to live physically away from Christendom. But they did this in order to live above the fray — feeling that actual distance would help mental distancing. What must be clearly seen is that their efforts were not an attempt to uproot tares. They made no efforts to destroy what had become "Babylon." They only attempted to live beyond its influences. This is not what we will find in "the Harvest."

13:30, 39-43. The parable ends with Jesus' advice to let the field alone. There are reasons for waiting. He says the time will come ("the Harvest") when he will actually instruct his workers to isolate tares in order to secure their bundling, and finally to burn the bundles.

"But," and this is a very important "but," the primary work of the Harvest will be to bring all of the faithful to their rewards.

Note that the Harvest is not represented as a specific length of time. It is represented as a period during which certain works had to be completed. It is defined by its works, not by its calendar.

In the interpretation, Jesus gives five verses to the explanation of this one verse (verse 30) of the parable (13:39-43).

He first explains that "the Harvest" represents "the consummation of the age" (margin). We are clearly faced not with a point of time, but rather a period of time during which numerous things happen. The Harvest is the wrapping-up of the age. It takes care of handling all the details of the age, and all of its consequences.

As in any agricultural season's culmination, the primary agenda is to secure the ripe crop. For this, workers are required. Jesus explains that the workers are "the angels." Christianity's many centuries of misuse of Scripture have most readers failing to realize the very generic meaning of "angel." It simply means "messenger," and it can and does apply equally in Scripture to any thing, any person, any spirit being, or any event that delivers a message. It even applies to evil sources so that Satan also has "angels." Its meaning is determined by its usage.

In Jesus' explanation, he is careful to equate each symbol with a literalism. Thus he specifies, for example, "The field is (or equals) the world." So, we are not to say that "angels" are symbolic. They are not. The angels are quite literal. But unlike Christendom, we are not to take the word "angel" to mean a spirit being. We are to take it in its quite literal sense of someone who is delivering a message. The angels of this parable's explanation are the saints living during the Harvest period (the "end of the age").

With that much defined, we can examine how much focus Jesus gives to the Harvest in his explanation. We should note that "Harvest" in the parable itself is confined to only one sentence in verse 30. It is not the primary lesson of the parable. But Jesus makes it the primary lesson of the interpretation because the Harvest solves the problem of the parable: the coexistence of true and counterfeit Christians.

Beginning in verse 40, after Jesus has defined his terms, he sums up the implications of the Harvest for all of those represented in the parable. In this summary, he does use symbolisms because he is now uttering a prophecy based on the parable.

13:40. Jesus first addresses the problem of the tares. It was the problem which bothered the servants in the parable (13:27).

In the parable itself, the tares were dealt with in three steps (13:30):

1. the gathering of them;
2. the bundling of them;
3. and the burning of them.

In the interpretation, Jesus shortens the process into two basic parts: (1) gathering, and (2) burning.

The gathering and burning features make the point. But considering the three steps of the parable, we can better understand what is happening.

Matthew 13:30 assigns the gathering and the binding and the burning of the tares to the reapers. The reapers gather and bind the tares in bundles "to burn them up" (later). There is a purpose in the sequence. The burning cannot occur until the first two steps are accomplished. It is altogether likely that the first two steps are done by the Church in the flesh; but the final step is instigated from the other side of the veil. The gathering and bundling is preparation work done by the saints (the reapers) in the flesh so that the burning can happen after their glorification.

Verse 40 then says: "So shall it be at the end of the age."

13:41 ELABORATES on the "so shall it be." The process is shown. Jesus sends his messengers. If they have the message, they are the saints who in the Harvest have been enlightened with present truth. He is not sending those who are his but have not heard the seventh angel's trumpet. (Thus, in Matthew 24:31, the "angels" and his

"elect" are both the spirit-begotten ones. The angels are those WITH THE MESSAGE, and they are USING THE MESSAGE to Harvest — "gather" — the ones who have not yet heard.)

Verse 41 takes the position that the field belongs to the Master who sowed the good seed. The tares are imposters — squatters! The angels CLEAN UP "the Kingdom" — the embryo Church in the flesh. How? They do it BY REMOVING "EVERYTHING THAT IS OFFENSIVE" (margin). When the Harvest saints spread the whole truth, it REMOVES the OFFENSIVE ERRORS — the very things that "bind the tares" into their denominational bundles.

The perspective is important. God isn't removing the saints from Babylon in this scenario (compare Revelation 18:4); he is removing Babylon from HIS CHRISTIAN FIELD! He has dumped Babylon overboard. In His eyes (since 1878), He does not favor them with anything. In His sight they are REMOVED from the wheat field.

The verse adds, "They will gather out of His Kingdom... THOSE WHO COMMIT LAWLESSNESS." The phrase is intriguing. The LAW of the New Creation is the Law of Faith, not works. It is living AFTER THE SPIRIT, not after a righteousness-consecrated flesh (as pictured on Plane N). Therefore, the removal of "those who commit lawlessness" is the removal of consideration in the Harvest for all who dwell beneath Plane M — spirit-begettal. This is very much the meaning of Revelation 11:2: "Leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations." The "nations" (Gentiles) are the non-

spirit-begotten tares. The court is a condition of non-spirit-begettal. The "holy" is where the saints dwell. "Gather out of the picture (the field — the embryo Kingdom) those who commit lawlessness."

It has become quite obvious that the Harvest saints root up the tares. The tares, in defense of their errors as exposed by the "angels," have run off into their own corners of belief and have tightened the bands and cords which identify and bind them as apostates. They are rooted out of the Lord's field.

13:42. It will be once the saints are glorified that they will burn the bundles they have secured. This is very much the same picture as we see in Revelation 14. We see in 14:18 that the GLORIFIED SAINTS have "power over fire." The Great Multitude gives a final maneuver (14:18, 19) which throws the bundles (grapes in this picture) into the great winepress — the winepress being the equivalent of the tare-burning in our parable.

The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" represent the great disappointment (and probably anger, too) of the tare class when it realizes that it has been hoodwinked for the entire age into believing that it constituted disciples of Christ. THAT is what is burned: the false professions and understandings and the institutions which have promulgated those errors.

13:43. The final verse of the interpretation is all splendor! From that day forward, the wheat, all gathered into the

barn (heaven itself), will shine to the glory of God and the delight and benefit of mankind.

Jesus adds the words which also closed the Sower parable. "He who has ears, let him hear." It is the message made to all stages of the Church in Revelation 2 and 3. Jesus is emphasizing that there is an inseparable connection between these parables and the seven Churches.

—Connections to Smyrna —

We have noted that the Wheat and Tares parable has its primary connection to the second Church in that it begins when the Apostles "slept."

In Revelation 2:8-11 we find the Lord's words to the Smyrna "angel" (the Apostle John). Within these verses we find the following two "hints" that connect the Church to the parable:

1. In 2:9 we have the introduction of those who are "tares" — they "say they are Jews (Christians) and are not."
2. Also in verse 9 we have the tare class represented as a "synagogue" (Church) of Satan." Jesus said the tares were of Satan's planting.

—THE MUSTARD SEED—

Representing the PERGAMOS Period

(Matthew 13:31, 32)

(Compare Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18, 19.)

The third parable in the series is one of the most obvious in its representation of a specific period in Church history. Pergamos is the period of "earthly elevation." The parable is based on phenomenal growth — from a seed to an impressive tree.

This is one of three parables in the series which also is reported in other accounts. Apparently Mark and Luke found it impressive.

There is no additional material before or after the parable. It stands alone as a prophetic testimonial of the impressive growth in strength of the "tare" element introduced in the verses before it.

13:31. Once again Jesus begins by telling us that this parable represents something regarding the Gospel Age development of "the Kingdom of Heaven." It is, in short, a history (or prophecy in this case) of the growth of the "Christian" World.

Here and in Matthew 17:20 Jesus uses a mustard seed to represent the seed of faith. It apparently differs from the wheat seed of the previous parable — probably because a wheat seed produces a single stalk, whereas a mustard seed results in an impressive plant.

Jesus is still the sower which means that there is nothing sinister about the seed. Instead of representing the Gospel message as the wheat seed did, it represents the beginning of a FAITH STRUCTURE. Here, of course, is the difficulty. A wheat seed bears only wheat; but faith is an elusive thing. Faith can begin with the very best of a foundation but can MUTATE into something unrecognizable from its inception. Thus, the "Christian World" of the Gospel Age began from a true faith, but EVOLVED into a faith which is monstrous. It is not that nominal Christianity doesn't have faith; it is that it is a corrupted faith.

We cannot help but see a sort of parallelism with Revelation 12:1, 2, and 5. There we have the woman (Sarah Covenant) which begins the age with prophecy (moon) as her foundation, with the Gospel light (sun) as her clothing (justification), and with the twelve stars (Apostles) guiding her thoughts. Her purpose of course, is to give birth to the faith seed (Isaac) of the Abrahamic Covenant. But, to her horror, she gives birth to an apostate also — a seed with a corrupted faith and purpose.

13:32. Jesus acknowledges that true faith has small beginnings — smaller than ideas which launch more visible endeavors. Hence, "smaller than all other seeds."

But faith can grow unto the largest thing in our lives. Hence, "when it is full grown it is larger than the garden plants, and becomes a tree." Here we have a dual meaning. It is good when our faith produces a mature and strong result. "Trees" are prominent individuals in the symbolism

of Scripture. Sometimes they are institutions, nations, or even the Old and New Testaments. (See, for example, Revelation 7:3; Mark 8:24; Luke 21:29; Revelation 11:4.) But, in this parable, the tree is the institution of apostate Christianity — a decidedly evil thing.

Jesus borrows from the Sower parable with his use of "birds." In that parable, he defined "birds" as being Satan and his devices. That is the point here also. Just as Satan sowed tares "AMONG THE WHEAT" (13:25), he also DWELLS in this large and impressive tree. (Compare Revelation 18:2.)

That's the parable — short but full of meaning as Jesus forecasts the immense, demon-inhabited, institution to be known as "Christendom" (= Christ's Kingdom!). The "earthly elevation" (the meaning of the name Pergamos) was dramatic. The "Church of Rome" was born!

— The Mark and Luke Accounts —
(Mark 4:30-32 and Luke 13:18, 19)

As before mentioned, the sequencing of parables in Matthew is of inspired significance. We do not find this in Mark and Luke. In Mark, however, we see that Mark at least tries to group his account of parables by similar

subject matter. Thus, Mark 4 contains The Sower, a parable about seed growth, and finally The Mustard Seed.

Mark's account of The Mustard Seed has no significant variance from Matthew's account.

Luke has the parable seemingly in no particular context. He does, however, as Matthew does, follow it with the Leaven parable. Luke, like Mark, offers us no significant variance.

— Connections to Pergamos —

The immediate connection is quickly clear from history. When the third Church period begins, Constantine adopts Christianity as the official religion of the realm. What kind of impetus could more stimulate growth! And it did.

In Revelation 2:12-17 we find the Lord's words to the Pergamos "angel" (Arius). Within these verses we find the following two "hints" that connect this Church to The Mustard Seed parable:

1. In 2:13, the bird has nested! The tree has become "Satan's throne"!
2. In 2:13, the true saints persevere and hold the true mustard seed; "My faith."

— THE HIDDEN LEAVEN —

Representing the THYATIRA Period

(Matthew 13:33)

(Compare Luke 13:20.)

This is one of the three shortest parables — all only one verse in length. It is to the point. During the fourth period of the Church, the elevated Papacy held such complete sway as to control and corrupt all teachings.

This parable builds on The Mustard Seed. That parable showed corrupted faith. This one shows its inevitable results: corrupted doctrine. In the fourth "seal" (Revelation 6:7), the horse (doctrine) has turned green (Greek = chloros). This is a deadly color for a mammal! And its rider (the Papacy) has no lifegiving information to offer for food — only spiritual death. The food is poisoned.

13:33. Jesus again uses "Kingdom of Heaven" to show Church history. Leaven, of course, symbolizes sin and hypocrisy. (Compare Matthew 16:6-12.) We see clearly that "Kingdom of Heaven" can refer to something other than good things. The "Kingdom of Heaven" is like sin, hypocrisy, and erroneous doctrine!

There are three kinds of women in prophecy:

1. Virgins who represent the spirit-begotten ones who have not abandoned Christ;

2. Harlots who represent those who claim Christ but have illicit liaisons with this world and its ways;
3. Women with children who represent covenants. (For some examples: Revelation 12:1; Galatians 4:24.)

The woman of this parable is the apostate Church — a harlot. She had the three basic foundations of good Christian food: Faith, Hope, and Love (I Corinthians 13:13). She corrupted them all. This period was the very core of what is called "The Dark Ages." "Leaven" was endemic.

— The Luke Account —
(Luke 13:20)

There is no significant difference. Luke does have in common with Matthew that The Leaven parable follows The Mustard Seed parable.

— Connections to Thyatira —

We have noted the historical connection of parable to Church period in that clean doctrine was not available.

In Revelation 2:18-29 we find the Lord's words to the Thyatira "angel" (Peter Waldo). Within these verses we

find the following three "hints" that connect the Thyatira Church to the parable:

1. In 2:19 we have "faith and service and perseverance." These are possibly another expression of "faith, love, and hope" — the elements spoiled by "the woman."
2. In 2:20 the saints "tolerate the woman" — the woman of the parable: Jezebel. (There is yet no revolution against her. The Reformation's small beginnings don't come until the fifth stage of the Church.)
3. In 2:20 this woman causes the saints to eat poisoned (or leavened) food.

The "fourth seal" (Revelation 6:7, 8), as mentioned, also describes that the rider kills with famine — no good food to eat.

— THE HIDDEN TREASURE —
Representing the SARDIS Period
(Matthew 13:44)

With this parable we have entered those parables which parallel the final three stages of the Church — the three "woes" predicted of the last three trumpets (Revelation 8:13). This is the first parable given "in the house" with only the disciples present.

This and the next parable (The Pearl) can easily seem on the surface to be remarkably similar. But we will find internal clues to help us make important distinctions between the two. Knowing that The Treasure represents Sardis, and The Pearl represents Philadelphia, will also help us in our differentiation.

13:44. Jesus has already explained that "the field" is the world. In The Wheat and Tares parable, the world was more the "Christian" world due to the nature of the parable. But in this parable, the world is the whole earth.

This parable and the next one both have the man selling all he has to purchase something. In each case, that sale of all he has is manifestly Jesus' giving of the ransom — giving his entire perfect humanity to make the purchase.

But note carefully: In The Treasure parable, he doesn't buy the treasure. He buys the field. In The Pearl parable, he buys only the pearl.

The Treasure parable is about Jesus' buying the world and the treasure in it. The treasure is the human race. The fact is, Jesus did buy the whole "dominion," not just Adam. Everything that would have been Adam's was included in the purchase. (See Micah 4:8.)

The parable states that the man "hid" the treasure. The human race is a treasure. God so loved it that He gave His only begotten son for it. In symbol, He calls the race "Euphrates" — it means "the good and abounding." But all through the permission of evil, the eventual glory of the race is hidden. And it remains so until a GREATER WORK than its purchase is accomplished. The "Pearl" class of the next parable must be completed in order to be the world's blesser before the matter becomes unhidden.

This tiny parable is doctrinally huge in the history of the Church. It is about the RANSOM. The clear vision of Bro. John Wycliffe saw the error of the mass. Wycliffe understood, even if only in basic terms, that Jesus' sacrifice purchased the race. This was, indeed, a "woe" to Papacy, as it undermined the very foundation of its theology and practice — the mass.

This is the first parable which gives sacred information for the ears of the saints — not for the mixed company of saints and court-dwellers. The contextual placement of the parable is so exciting! It helps us interpret the parable; but it also helps us interpret the age. Wycliffe was in a most significant way "The Morning Star of the Reformation."

The parable says that Jesus makes this sacrifice "from the joy over it." The words are echoed in Hebrews 12:2 by Paul who links this joy with the RANSOM. "For the joy set before him (he) endured the cross."

— Connections to Sardis —

The Scriptural connections of this parable to the fifth stage of Church history are sparse. The contextual connection in Matthew 13 is strong.

Nevertheless, a few clues exist in Revelation. In the description of the Sardis Church (3:1-6), we see that the Church has reached its lowest ebb. But the admonition is to "strengthen the things that remain." Wycliffe's short but spectacular career and influence did this very thing.

The marginal literal translation of a little word in 3:3 is helpful. "Remember...HOW you have received and heard." It is a powerful admonition to that Church, and a powerful reminder to all of us, that it is through the messenger to the specific Church that we receive our stability and safety. Note that 3:1 has Jesus reminding the brethren of that Church that the first step out of the ages of darkness is to realize and confirm that Jesus has these "seven stars" in his right hand. Wycliffe knew about and preached the concepts of Jesus' purchase. Hear the "angel." Jesus' purchase was a highlight of Wycliffe's teachings.

The fifth trumpet message (9:1-12) also has a few clues connecting the parable to Sardis.

Remember, the parable is solely about the Ransom. Therefore, any connections we find must be connections related to that topic or to Wycliffe who expounded it. Our only other anchor is Matthew's inspired sequencing of the parables to represent the seven Churches.

In the fifth trumpet message, we see that Wycliffe is given a key to the condition of obscurity or confining to powerlessness (the pit). The Ransom had been effectively condemned to powerlessness and obscurity by Roman Church heresies — the mass in particular. But (9:2) Wycliffe let the Ransom out of the cave.

The brethren of the period, consequently, had doctrine (horses) on their side (9:7). They also had the protection of righteousness (breastplate) outside of the mass by their knowledge of the released truths (9:9). Wycliffe's truths — the fundamental one being Ransom concepts — allowed him to destroy (cause "woe" to) faith in the basic tenant of Catholicism. So God names Wycliffe "The Destroyer" (9:11). He does so in both Hebrew and Greek because Wycliffe has translated both Old and New Testaments into English — setting the truths free which destroy error. The "Morning Star of the Reformation" was a bright shiner! The fifth parable shows why.

— THE PEARL —

Representing the PHILADELPHIA Period

(Matthew 13:45, 46)

The sixth parable of this series corresponds to the Philadelphia period of Church history. Before seeing any Scriptural connections between the parable and Church, an examination of the parable will reveal much.

13:45. We have already remarked on similarities and differences between The Treasure and The Pearl parables. They are both connected to Jesus' ransoming efforts. He sells "all that he has" and buys "the field" and "the pearl." The Treasure in the field was mankind; and Jesus bought the field (the world, the dominion) with mankind in it. But here he buys only the pearl.

The man here is specified to be "a merchant." In the former parable he was a "man" because the topic was the Ransom, and ransoming required a "man." But in The Parable of The Pearl, we have a man specifically SEEKING a special commodity. This is not about the race of mankind; this is about a very select class. This is about Jesus' seeking his Bride class — the Church.

The pearl, itself, is a gem perfected out of difficulty. Its smooth character was produced in order to overcome the extreme discomfort experienced by the oyster due to a scratchy grain of sand or pebble. The pearl is specific to this parable because the Church gains its character by overcoming trials.

The man is a merchant because his purchase in this parable is not so practical as in the preceding parable. As with all merchants, this one purchases because of BEAUTY and VALUE for a specific use. The Church is a purchased gift "FOR GOD" (Revelation 5:9). See also I Corinthians 6:20; Revelation 14:3, 4. These purchased ones (the twelve antitypical tribes of Israel) will form the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem in that their pearl-making efforts will form the standard for all who enter. (Revelation 21:21) All of mankind will find the need to consecrate themselves to righteousness in order to overcome the faults within them.

The "fine pearl" is the true Church. How is it connected to Philadelphia? In one sense, of course, it is the product of the entire age. But it is in Philadelphia that individual consecration, "justification by faith," becomes the standard and the rallying cry for all true saints. It is during Philadelphia, when the early truth is restored, that the individual saint and his personal relationship to God supercedes any institutional religion. Philadelphia is called "Brotherly Love" because the true saints in this period began to have restored to them on a large scale the respect for the Christian walks of their brethren. This brings us to a second — a just-as-valid — interpretation of this parable.

— The Second Interpretation —

In this interpretation, the merchant becomes individual Christians seeking the fine gems of truth — pearls, because

they are truths which have made beauty out of adversity and controversy. These truths have endured and formed beauty through trial of their validity.

The one "pearl of great value" is the faith-justification truth of the Philadelphia period — the INDIVIDUAL standing before, and acceptance by God — due to FAITH; the real doctrine of God's grace so hidden in the rubbish of The Dark Ages. It is the opportunity to gain, through individual consecration, the great prize of joint-heirship with Jesus.

Thus the merchant (we) SELLS ALL HE HAS — he gives his all in total consecration — in order to possess this finest of all pearls — his individual relationship with God.

Both interpretations are true. Perhaps this is one of the great wonders of the Philadelphia period. The blossoming and proliferation of truths as Protestantism expanded allowed great insight into the depths of Scripture — the understanding that a single text could sometimes have multiple valid meanings. This was one of the hallmarks of the period.

— Connections to Philadelphia —

The Philadelphia Church is outlined in Revelation 3:7-13. While verses 7 and 8 might not seem connected to the parable, there is a connection. The "open door" has many implications. "The Time of the End" is a part of this

Church, and Daniel was promised that the messages of his book would be revealed beginning at that point. Martin Luther learned with great joy, and trumpeted his findings from his understanding of Scripture, that the individual Christian stood before God justified by his faith. This was the great pearl — our consecrated sonship.

Under the sixth seal (Revelation 7:1-8) we have the great pearl again specified — the great truth that 144,000 will be in the Body of Christ.

Even in the description of the sixth trumpet (Revelation 9:13), we perceive the secret of the great pearl's being linked to the "horns (power) of the golden altar" (our personal prayer-sacrifice relationship with God).

Also (Revelation 11:1, 2), the great pearl's being found by the saints is symbolized by their being able rightly to measure consecration — to interpret it — and to ignore the "tare" condition of "the court."

— THE DRAGNET —
Representing the LAODICEA Period
(Matthew 13:47-50)

This is the final parable of the series. It represents the HARVEST CHURCH and is, appropriately, about Harvesting. Jesus introduced the Harvest and its concepts in the second parable, The Wheat and Tares. Here we have some additional pertinent and special information.

The symbol of FISH has been important in Christianity since the very inception of the age. Jesus told Peter that he would make the disciples "fishers of men." Early Christians (and some Christian groups even today) adopted the sign of the fish to represent their Christianity. Jesus contributed to this when he used "the sign of Jonah" to represent his own death and resurrection.

Because of this symbol, it seems reasonable to assume that this seventh parable is about true Christians — about spirit-begotten saints. The Sower and The Wheat and Tares parables told us about Greater Christianity — the real saints along with the counterfeit. But here, Jesus seems to take a different perspective, to focus only on fish — only on his disciples.

An additional reason to suspect that this parable focuses on the true, rather than on the mixed company of wheat and tares, is that the final three parables are set aside from the others and are addressed "in house" — only to the disciples. The Laodicean Church description in Revelation 3 has no

reference to the "they" class — only to "you" (the spirit-begotten). It is the only Church description to have this peculiarity.

It must be recognized, however, that an interpretation of this parable which includes apostates is not unreasonable. The bad fish, after all, are described in virtually the same terms as the tares as far as their fates are concerned: they both end up "in the furnace of fire" with "weeping and gnashing of teeth." As with the Pearl parable, it is not out of the question that the parable may have two valid interpretations. But we will focus on the interpretation suggesting that "fish" represent true disciples.

13:47. The "dragnet" represents that which catches fish — the Gospel message (much like the good seed of the first parable). It is "cast into the sea." It is worthy of note that in Revelation, both Church and Great Multitude have their origins in the great sea class of humanity, which Revelation symbolizes by the phrase "peoples and tribes and tongues and nations." Those called are never linked with the establishment class, "those who dwell on the earth." (See for examples, Revelation 11:9 and 10.)

The net, during the age, gathered fish "of every kind." This likely represents the varying degrees of talent-application among the "fish." In The Talent parable (Matthew 25:14-30), we have those who possess varying abilities. Interestingly, in that parable, the man who buries his talent ends up with "weeping and gnashing of teeth," just like the bad fish of this parable. The Talent parable seems clearly only to represent spirit-begotten ones.

13:48. This verse brings us to the Harvest time. The words, "When it was filled," might very well apply to the date of the "end of the general call." The "general call" thus ends when those yet faithful in the flesh and those faithful from the past constitute 144,000. Clearly, then, the general fishing process would end. Thus, all rejections past that date would require replacements throughout the Harvest. If, indeed, the net's being full does represent the end of the general call, it is clear that the fish would have to be spirit-begotten Christians because tares are never counted as part of the full number (net).

The drawing of the net "up on the beach" nicely pictures an end of the general call. One would not leave a net in the sea to catch more fish when the capacity of the net had been reached. The thinning-out of "fish" in the Harvest is done "on the beach" — it is no longer a part of the age of general catching of fish. It is Harvest time.

"And they (the fishermen) sat down." This is an intriguing sentence. It surely doesn't mean an end of activity; but it does show a change of activity. The Harvest Church is less missionary. It is not traversing the world to make converts. Obviously, it is yet evangelical in the sense that it looks for replacements for the rejected fish. But the primary activity has changed. "Present truth" has more of a SEPARATING than an ATTRACTING function. Hence, they "sat down and" SEPARATED: "the good into containers, but the bad they threw away."

The "good" in this case would be the true and ripe saints. The "containers" would likely be the condition of their forehead sealing (Revelation 7). Our sharing of Harvest truths will ripen characters to make them secure for their calling.

The casting away of the bad must not be understood to be anything we do knowledgeably. Our fellowship of saints in the glories of present truth will, unfortunately, place the Great Multitude into a place of their own. The Lord will perceive the separation — we won't. And the Great Multitude is not "bad" in the sense of separation from God, but their unripe status, and their unwillingness to change it, make them "wicked" in the sense of not living up to their contracts. They are malevolent — a word meaning BAD POWER — as far as the high calling is concerned. In terms of the high calling, they are "thrown away." They are the "foolish virgins" of Matthew 25.

13:49. Jesus now interprets. "At the consummation (margin) of the age" — at the Harvest time (13:39) — "the angels (the Harvest-period saints who have the message) shall come forth" — shall be manifest as evangelical voices separate from the rest of the religious world. They will "take out (margin = separate) the wicked from among the righteous." Their message will separate the unripe from the ripe Christians. Again, it is not that the Great Multitude are not "righteous," but that their righteousness (their justification by faith) is INSUFFICIENT for the calling. If any quality can be said to be the quality which makes the Great Multitude fail, it is their insufficiency of faith. It is not their insufficiency of the faith that robed them; it is

their insufficiency of the faith that sustains their walk in the Narrow Way.

It must be noted that the alternative interpretation (that bad fish = tares) is easier in this verse. Tares are not justified to life. They are justified to a Plane N existence of faith in righteousness; but they are not "the righteous" in the sense of those who have received life because of their faith. Both interpretations need a slight "stretching" of definitions!

13:50. The standard of "the angels" is what casts the "wicked" into the "furnace of fire." In the first interpretation, the furnace is the tribulation which burns away the cords which bind the Great Multitude to earthly interests. (Compare Daniel 3:21-25.) In the second interpretation, the furnace is the great time of trouble which burns away the institutions which make and sustain tares.

The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is a general expression for disappointment of great degree. Regardless of interpretation, prophecy confirms that this kind of disappointment will be the lot of both tares and Great Multitude.

— The Connection to Laodicea —

This connection is strong. The Laodicean message is found in Revelation 3:14-22. The very first statement stresses the

Harvesting tool, the TRUTH. Jesus is "the faithful and true witness." He is the "Amen" — the "THUS IT IS!" The power of forceful and absolute truths is wrapped up in this one word! The "angels" of the parable use the Truth as their separating tool.

The greatest part of the Laodicean message in Revelation 3 is aimed at the Great Multitude syndrome. There are no "theys" in this Church. (Compare 1:9 as a contrast.) The message is all directed to "YOU" — the Church and the Great Multitude of the Harvest period.

The "wicked" of the parable are those who display the "wicked" traits here enumerated. The "bad fish" are those who are "lukewarm." They claim the "rich" status of having the truth without knowing that that (the possessing of it) is not the wealth.

The seventh seal (Revelation 8:1) probably is the "half hour" during which the "bad fish" realize the Church is gone. The Great Multitude gets to gnash its teeth until it finally regroups and washes its robes in the final half hour.

Before finishing Chapter 13, a very brief review of the seven parables for their major lessons for us personally is helpful:

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

This parable teaches the saints that all who call themselves "Christians" are not the same. During the age, saints will be bearing fruit to the best of their several abilities, but they will be surrounded by (1) hangers-on, (2) shallow and non-spirit-begotten believers, (3) and a Great Multitude whose worldliness chokes their spirituality.

THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES

This parable teaches us of the Lord's awareness that the age-long mixture of saints with counterfeits will be a severe trial. But it assures the saints that the Lord will ultimately destroy the apostate professions. The parable introduces the period known as "the Harvest" and explains some of its detail.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

This parable warns that the apostasy (the "tares") will grow mightily by the time of the third Church period.

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVENED MEAL

This parable warns that the mightily-grown apostasy will corrupt all Christians' "food" during Thyatira.

THE PARABLE OF THE TREASURE IN THE FIELD

This parable assures that the major doctrine of our faith (the Ransom) will be restored as a foundation during the fifth Church.

THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL

This parable teaches two lovely lessons. (1) It teaches that Jesus bought us as a gift for his Father. (2) It teaches that we, when we discover the beauty of the true Gospel, readily give ourselves in consecration to own the privilege.

THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET

This parable teaches that the spirit-begotten saints will be divided by Harvest truths following the end of the general call.

— The Lesson of the Chapter —
(Matthew 13:51-58)

We have postulated, hopefully with success and evidence, that the seven parables of this chapter constitute a large prophecy by Jesus covering the development and experiences of his Church throughout the entire Gospel Age. These seven parables summarize the "seven eyes" of Jesus, the Lamb (Revelation 5:6), as he sees and oversees with wisdom all of the things that will transpire in the development of his "little flock."

We have seen that the context of these parables actually began in the closing verses of Matthew 12, as Jesus pointed out that his "family" for the Gospel Age to come was not his natural relatives, but rather "whoever does the will of my Father." Thus, all of the successful characters of these parables are successful because they do the will of the Father.

The final eight verses of the chapter complete the context. They are full of meaning when they are considered as a part of the context of these seven parables' being one great prophecy.

13:51. Jesus asks his disciples if they understand all that he has said. It had to be a rhetorical question. Surely Jesus knew that they didn't understand! But, as happens in other places, they innocently blunder into the wrong answer. They say "Yes."

13:52. Jesus knows the real answer is "No!" So, he uses the opportunity, as he frequently does, to plant the seeds of great understanding for us. He begins with "Therefore." We might, on the surface, just think he is saying: "Okay. I know you get it all; so, you must go out and explain it all to others." Yes, on the surface, that could be the meaning. But internal evidence suggests otherwise.

Jesus, in harmony with the context, is saying that there are to be "scribes" — writers who communicate the lessons of the age to others. One of these "scribes" who comes to mind is found in Ezekiel 9:2, 11. It is, indeed, a man "with a writer's inkhorn" — a "scribe." That scribe, as we understand it, is the seventh "angel" or messenger to the Church — the "angel" of Laodicea.

But Jesus speaks of scribes (plural). He speaks of the messenger assigned to each of the periods of the Church represented in these parables. Each has become "a disciple of the Kingdom." The KJV is so good: "... every scribe

which is instructed unto the Kingdom." The implication is strong. These "scribes" have special instruction or teaching in the matters of the Kingdom. The thought in the Greek seems to be "initiated into" — as one who is selected for a special service.

Having been "instructed into the Kingdom," these "scribes" become "like a head of a household." Does this not remind us of the description Jesus gives of the seventh scribe — the messenger present when Jesus returns — in Matthew 24:45? Jesus' description of this one is: "...whom his master put IN CHARGE OF HIS HOUSEHOLD..." Then Jesus adds, "to give them their food at the proper time." Is this not a reflection of Matthew 13:52, "who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old"?

This brings us back to Jesus' question in 13:51. He knew they didn't and couldn't understand dispensational truths. So, Jesus' solution to the problem (paraphrased) is:

"I will send a specially-initiated scribe or messenger to each of the seven Church periods to teach the 'household' (my family) what they need to understand at that time. Thus some things will seem new. (The Greek is new in character; not new in time. Thus, some things will not have been clear previously.) The rest of the teaching of the messenger will be the same 'old, old, story which you have loved so long.' You will recognize its familiar ring of truth."

In other words, "No. You don't understand, but you will because I'll send somebody to explain it to you as each Church stage begins. It is like my reserving the Wheat and Tare explanation until I was in the house with you alone."

How much more we see in these two verses with their contextual implications! And how they support the contextual flow of the seven parables!

13:53-58. But it doesn't even end there! The closing words of this chapter are an allegorical prophecy. They are telling us the experiences-to-be of Jesus' disciples. Once they had heard Jesus' teachings (as summarized in these parables) they would "depart from there." It is like Bible students who depart from receiving the stimulating instruction of a convention and go home. In 13:54, Jesus went home. "Home" for a Christian during the age would seem to be among Christian congregations.

We then attempt to spread the blessings of the Word we have received, going to the very place we think it should be received — Christian congregations — just as Jesus went to the synagogue. But we, as he, have (all through the age) been met with the response: "Where did you get THAT? You're not a trained minister, you're the son of a carpenter, or a farmer, or an automaker! We know your family; you're just a local kid with your family's reputation."

And, as with Jesus (13:57), so it is with us: "They took offense at him."

Our feelings and our responses are the same as was Jesus' response: "The Lord has honored me as proclaimer of The Truth; but in my own town of 'Christianity,' and with those who claim to be my household (Christians), I have no such honor."

We, then, find that, like Jesus (13:58), we can have little success — we can neither "buy nor sell" (Revelation 13:17) in the environs of the religion which claims the name which is legitimately ours.

This tour through the first seven parables of Matthew is stimulating to the extreme. Among its many lessons is the lesson that the context of parables is extremely important. We will see this immediately again as we consider the next two parables.

Matthew, being inspired, has carefully arranged the parables so that we see their contextual import. We are much less blessed by the way Mark and Luke handle the parables. Those parables which are exclusive to those books will teach us much, but we will need to struggle more because of the lack of inspiration given to those historians. We must be very grateful to our Lord for what we have received even in these initial contextual parables.

— Matthew 18 —

Two Parables Relative to Offenses of Brethren:

1. The Lost Sheep
2. The Unmerciful Servant

Probably, with nearly no exception, if only the words "Matthew 18" are spoken among brethren, the PROCEDURE for the righting of offenses among us comes to mind. "Matthew 18" has come to be a shorthand for verses 15 through 20 of that chapter, with almost certain EXCLUSION of everything else in the chapter.

The context of verses 1 through 35, however, forms one large unit. It contains two parables. When we see these parables in their contexts, the procedural verses (15 through 20) will never again read the same for us.

It is altogether possible, even likely, and most frequently the case, that we apply the procedural verses as "law," or as punishment, or as duty, or for many other less-than-correct reasons or attitudes. They become mechanical, procedural, distasteful, or mandatory in our minds. Once, however, we realize that Jesus teaches us by the examples of the surrounding two parables that the entire procedure is RESCUE and FORGIVENESS, we will most likely lose any Pharisaical attitudes we might have had. We must do this. Our spiritual lives depend on it — as the context will make abundantly clear.

Chapter 18 is divided into five sections. They are separate in a sense, but they are all codependent. Distilled to the essence of their meanings, they are as follows:

1. Verses 1-10: True greatness is found
in true concern.
2. Verses 12-14: The Parable of the Lost
Sheep — about RESCUE.
3. Verses 15-20: The procedures of
RESCUE and
FORGIVENESS.
4. Verses 21, 22: The scope of FORGIVENESS.
5. Verses 23-35: The Parable of the
Unmerciful Servant —
about FORGIVENESS.

The whole story speaks to our hearts.

— Section 1 —

(Matthew 18:1-10)

True greatness is found in true concern.

18:1-5. The question from the disciples, ("Who then is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?"), seems to come from nowhere. It may have just been growing over time in the minds of the disciples, or it may have been occasioned by the Mount of Transfiguration experience in Chapter 17. Whatever the catalyst, Jesus uses the question as the launching point for this very important chapter of teaching. We must remember the question throughout the chapter.

Jesus places a child before the disciples. We can analyze this from numerous aspects. But one thing is certain: this child represents all saints. This is a child of God. In verse 10, the child becomes the "little ones" whose angels in heaven have access to the Father on behalf of them. This is talking about saints, not about children!

Jesus suggests to us, by way of our inference, many things about our own standing before God. Among the things we can rightly infer are:

1. Childlikeness — innocence, teachableness, reliance — is a quality we must attain, or our part in the Kingdom arrangement is not secured (18:3).
2. We are children — embryos, in fact! — and must accept that status of having a

Father who looks over us in every situation, and supplies every need. Independence of being is not acceptable.

3. We are part of a family. It is imperative that we share with and respect the other members, as all children are required to do. Under the Law, the incorrigible child was stoned to death!

4. We all have instinctive desires to protect children. This is Jesus' point for the entire chapter. He wants us to have an instinctive desire to protect all of our brethren — to RESCUE them, and to FORGIVE them — as naturally as we all would with a little child. This point alone puts the procedural verses of this chapter into a wonderful light.

Jesus says that these qualities need not be natural in us, but that we can be "turned" (converted) to absorb them as part of ourselves (18:3). If we succeed (18:4), we become, in answer to the disciples' question, "greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Verses 4 and 5 are the turning point in the illustration; the child becomes us. In verse 5, receiving a child has thus become the standard of OUR ACCEPTANCE OF OUR BRETHREN. We do this in his name — in other words, because we are all the family of Christ; any other attitude would be unacceptable.

Thus the lesson: True greatness is found in true concern. Unless we have the attitude of protecting our brethren as a normal person would be concerned over the welfare of a child, we have missed our calling.

18:6. Because of the above lessons, Jesus begins this verse with "But." If, instead of protecting the saints, we cause them to stumble, then we have become the very personification of the ills of Babylon. Compare Revelation 18:21. Oh! What meditation this verse should stimulate!

The marginal literal reading is so very instructive. "It is better for him that a millstone turned by a donkey be hung around his neck." It does not take much imagination to interpret these words. The millstone represents that which grinds out meal. The donkey (as with Balaam) represents our not hearing the Word of the Lord. The total suggestion seems to be that if we miss this point about protecting others in the Body, we have merely become spouters about the content (not the spirit) of God's Word, and that will lead us to the same fate as Babylon. An additional inference from the words "drowned in the depth of the sea" is that we become absorbed into the worldly spirit. The world is selfish and doesn't defend its own. It fights with them and rarely forgives. What a pity if we who preach Christian "meal," don't hear the Word of the Lord in the sense of absorbing its spirit, and become as worldly in our attitudes as all who are around us.

18:7. Jesus says that the world has enough stumbling blocks — enough ways to make saints feel rejected. Saints will be rejected by the world — "it is inevitable." But there is a "woe" to the one who stumbles the Lord's saints. Scripture indicates positively that intentional harm to the saints from the world will have some sort of eventual recompense. We can only imagine the increased degree of recompense if the stumbling comes from a brother in Christ.

18:8, 9. These two verses are for us. They address two parts of our walk that are likely to stumble another saint. One is our "foot" — our path or walk in life — the way we do things. The other is our "eye" — the symbol of wisdom which here is indicative of the way we view things. In other words, are our reasonings Scriptural or natural? Paul deals with these things in Romans 14 with detailed lessons for all of us to absorb. In short, if we go through our Christian lives in ways that lack concerns for the spiritual welfare of the saints, we are not only likely to fall out of the "little flock," but we are setting ourselves up for "Gehenna" — Second Death. The lesson is sobering.

The cutting off of the foot and the plucking out of the eye is part of being "converted" to become like little children as discussed in verse 3. Our walk in life and our way of seeing things must be Scriptural, not that of our human or natural tendencies.

18:10. This is the summary verse for the first section of this chapter. SEE TO IT ("be converted" — verse 3) that you have no lack of sincere concern for the Lord's little

ones. The angels are WATCHING US in this regard, and they are reporting to our Father!

— Section 2 —

(Matthew 18:12-14; compare Luke 15:4-7.)

— THE LOST SHEEP —

About RESCUE

This parable is very much connected to the above lessons. In short, it is about extreme concern for any of our brethren who have gone astray, and about our sincere efforts to RESCUE those saints.

18:11. This verse is spurious. (Not that its sentiments are bad!)

18:12. Jesus begins with a question which clearly is a link to his previous lessons. "What do you think?" Thus Jesus is specifying that this parable is about our concern for our brethren who go astray.

The "man" probably is not Jesus. It probably is "the Body of Christ" — all of us represented as "possessors" of our brethren. The idea goes back to Genesis: "Am I my brother's keeper?" The answer is a resounding YES!

The number of a hundred is likely not arbitrary. A hundred is a number which has typical references to Jesus (as, for example, one hundred square cubits in the door to the Holy of the Tabernacle). Thus the parable is about Jesus' possessions: his Church.

Going "astray" is well-defined by the context. We are speaking of a saint whose behavior is contrary to his own welfare and that of his brethren.

Leaving ninety-nine "on the mountains" begs a good interpretation. First of all, this doesn't mean that the faithful sheep are abandoned! It means that our concern for other children of God is so great that we are troubled into action if we see one who is in danger. Thus we "go and search for the one that is straying." We don't mutter a casual, "Oh well, the Lord will take care of it." RESCUE is the subject of this parable. Rescue is not a casual or passive activity.

As far as leaving "the ninety-nine on the mountains" is concerned, perhaps we have the clue we need in Isaiah 52:7. The saints are perpetually "on the mountains" preaching the good tidings. Thus the suggestion of this phrase is that we leave our normal pursuits of being evangelical in order to save someone who has already received the good tidings. It represents a deliberate interruption in our own normal pursuits in the Lord's service.

18:13. We may not be successful. This is why the parable says "If it turns out." Surely we will mourn if it does not. But there is great rejoicing if there is success. Jesus says the rejoicing is "more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray." This is not to say that we have lost any value in our estimation of the ever-faithful brethren. It is to say that saints — even like the world — find extreme thankfulness when a tragedy results in no loss! And if we

have been so blessed as to be instrumental in a recovery, we have a feeling beyond description. That which we feared has been averted; and we have witnessed the specially-directed POWER OF GOD using us in His service. This is, indeed, "more" than our usual appreciation for what we already had. It is additional appreciation — not appreciation relative to others!

18:14. The closing verse is not a part of the parable. It is Jesus' remarks about the significance of the parable. Jesus speaks of "the will of your Father who is in heaven." What saint is there who does not want to accomplish the Father's will — or, even better, to have the Father's will accomplished THROUGH HIM? GOD WANTS PRESERVATION AND RESCUE of all who can be preserved and rescued. He allows us to have a major part in that work because it not only rescues the straying one, but it also proves that we haven't strayed in that most important part of our characters: concern for others. This is the lesson of this chapter.

— The Luke Account —
(Luke 15:4-7)

Bro. Russell observes with keen understanding that this is not the same parable. We could well postpone its consideration to parables found only in Luke. But because many conclude (due to its similarity) that it is the same parable, we will here take a parenthetical moment away

from the context of Matthew 18 to consider the Luke parable. It does deal with RESCUE.

15:1-3. Matthew 18 was spoken to the disciples. This parable is spoken to the Pharisees and Scribes.

Immediately we perceive a different audience, purpose, and parable.

The Pharisaical complaint is that Jesus was "receiving" the lower elements of Jewish society. The parable will be about them, not about brethren in the Body of Christ.

15:4. Jesus in this parable is the "man." The hundred sheep are, indeed, possessions of Jesus. (Thus the numerical symbolism remains constant in Matthew and Luke.) But in this case, they are not the saints. They are the nation of Israel. "Michael" is the great prince who stands over this people (Daniel 12:1); they are his. Thus, the number remains appropriate even though it refers to the TYPICAL rather than the ANTITYPICAL sheep under Jesus' care.

The "lost" sheep, in this case, is a reference to the "sinners" in Israel. Obviously, Jesus is sent "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." At his first advent, he wants the repentant, not the haughty. He will make the offer to become "the sons of God" to the ones who do receive him. Thus, Jesus has defined (outside of this parable) who these "lost sheep" in this parable are. The hundred are the whole house of Israel; the one which was lost — and shoved to the side by the Pharisees — are those who will receive him and be transferred from Moses into Christ.

Jesus leaves "the ninety-nine in (margin, literally =) the wilderness." This difference from Matthew's parable is significant. There the sheep were on the mountains. Here Israel will be abandoned to a wilderness condition: the Jewish Double of disfavor. But Jesus goes after the lost — the hungry faithful remnant of Israel, just eagerly awaiting Messiah — "until he finds it." Until the end of the seventieth week of the Daniel 9 prophecy, Jesus faithfully sought out those who would, indeed, be "the most holy" of Israel.

15:5. Jesus carries the lost sheep on his shoulders. This would not have been uncommon for a shepherd to do. It reflects Jesus' care for those who have gone astray but wish to return. He doesn't make them walk under their own strength. He makes up for their weakness by carrying them. This lesson well applies to those of us pictured in the Matthew parable. The Church should always be willing to shoulder the burdens of their brethren. And, as stated in this verse, we do it with REJOICING. It is an honor to help one of the Lord's "little ones."

15:6. "When he comes home" might well be a reference to entry into the Gospel Age. We saw this same kind of reference in our analysis of the end of Matthew 13. When the Gospel Age was entered, Jesus called in his Gentile friends and neighbors to rejoice with him over the ones he used as the first members of his Church — the remnant of Israel, "my sheep which was lost!"

15:7. The parable has ended; but Jesus now epitomizes its lesson. The "repentance" of the remnant of Israel created joy in heaven — especially because it formed the basis for the spirit-begotten class of the new age.

This verse presents a problem. Bro. Russell's application of the parable to the whole human race makes the ninety-nine represent the angelic hosts. That interpretation is wanting in some respects. For instance, the ninety-nine could hardly be said to be left "in the wilderness" if they were the heavenly hosts.

Perhaps the most satisfying interpretation of verse 7 is to have it refer to the incoming age as a whole, and not exclusively to the Jewish remnant. The paraphrase, then would be something like:

I want to tell you that, similar to the experience of the Jews in the parable, heaven will have special rejoicing over anyone who has strayed and is repentant — above and beyond those who are remaining faithful.

This would tie this verse to what we learned in Matthew 18:13 (which please review).

This parable, though definitely different from the Lost Sheep of Matthew, is yet dealing with RESCUE. In that sense, its consideration here was appropriate.

— Section 3 —

(Matthew 18:15-20)

The Procedures of RESCUE and FORGIVENESS

Because the topic of this book is PARABLES, we will not here deal with these verses in the detail they deserve. What we all need to see is the IMPACT that the context should have on us when we do consider these procedural verses. There can be no question that formal, legalistic, or cold application of these verses to our brethren is a direct VIOLATION of Jesus' intent. His intent, as already shown, is RESCUE. His intent, as will be shown in the next parable, is FORGIVENESS. Any application of the procedures of Matthew 18:15-20 with anything less than these two intentions is faulty, dangerous, and, we might even say, demon-inspired.

CONCERN, RECOVERY, and INTENSE LOVE are the ingredients for the use of verses 15-20.

18:15. This verse begins with "And." It does so because the procedures are a direct follow-up to the lesson of the joys of recovery of the parable they follow. Recovery is the objective.

This verse shows concern for the offender's feelings and reputation: "go and reprove him in private." Just the word "go" is important. We seek him; we don't wait for him to come to us.

Notice the objective: "You have won your brother."

18:16, 17. DON'T STOP if that doesn't succeed! The Church must INTERRUPT its usual pursuits — it must leave the other ninety-nine on the mountain. The matter of recovery is SO IMPORTANT that the straying one must see that the willingness of the entire Church to rescue him is there in full force. This is not an inquisition! This is a rescue.

It may fail AT THAT POINT. But the CHURCH can use "psychological warfare" to induce repentance. It can, in love, send the erring one out "as a Gentile" (non-believer) and as a "profit-taking worldling" (margin). In other words, the Church HOPES that the contrast of the world compared to the formerly-enjoyed fellowship in Christ will be such as to bring the lost one home. If it doesn't happen it is a loss. But the Church AS A RESCUER should make it plain to the one sent away that the action is IN HOPE, not in disgust.

18:18. The Church is given complete authority in such moral matters BECAUSE Jesus wants to know whether or not the congregation has "become like children" (18:3). It is so imperative that we realize that this whole chapter IS ABOUT US — not about lost or straying ones! (Read that sentence again!)

18:19-20. Jesus REPEATS. All the way from the meeting of the original "two" (18:15), our Father in heaven (compare 18:10) is going to watch and to bless rescue efforts — and He will "do for them" everything necessary to make the

effort a success. Jesus, likewise, (18:20) will be there in the midst of it all.

— Section 4 —

(Matthew 18:21, 22)

The Scope of FORGIVENESS

18:21. Peter didn't miss the point (although he missed the scope). Peter clearly understands that the procedure is not for REJECTION, but for FORGIVENESS. But he wonders, as might we, if there should be limits on our willingness to forgive.

18:22. Clearly, forgiveness is not just willy-nilly. The offender must be repentant. But with that proviso, there should be no practical limits. (See Luke 17:3.)

— Section 5 —

(Matthew 18:23-35)

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

18:23. Again Jesus makes an inseparable connection of the parable to its context by beginning the parable with the words: "For this reason" — i.e., this parable is being given to show the non-limits of FORGIVENESS as well as the need to have it in order to be acceptable. As we progress through this parable, we must consciously try to link it to the 18:15-20 procedures.

The "King" is God (compare 18:35). His "settling of accounts" with us (his "slaves" or servants) is His judgment of our worthiness. It begins when we begin — at our consecrations. Matthew 7:2 had set the standard from the outset. It is as clear as it can be made. And its spirit pervades this entire chapter — especially the procedural verses: "In the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."

18:24. We can easily miss the staggering debt shown here. In modern terms it is millions of dollars. Why? Because it is an IMPOSSIBLE debt. That is the point. When God accepts us for sonship, He forgives the impossible debt. He is removing death itself from us.

18:25. We, of course, do not have the means to repay. So, God demands our EVERYTHING (our consecrations) — which still doesn't pay our debt!

18:26. We know that we cannot actually repay the debt. But, we know that God will accept our all, and that He will have the patience to work with us toward the goal of total repayment — the goal of giving our entire lives as a thanksgiving for His mercy.

18:27. God complies with His characteristic compassion (based, of course, on the Ransom!). Thus we are released from the IMPOSSIBLE DEBT.

If the parable ended here, the entire lesson of great forgiveness should have been made! But Jesus wants to impress upon us that our impossible debt release must be a constant reminder to us as we deal with any who "go astray." How could we give less consideration to others than God has given to us? The question is basic and sobering. It is also practical. It also is the perfect test to see if we have become as "little children."

18:28. Here begins Jesus' warning to us of how we might mishandle the details of Matthew 18. He does so by showing how this particular servant failed the test.

Jesus shows that this enormously-forgiven saint has someone who owes him a pittance — a hundred pennies — at most a little over three months' wages for a laborer. The evil servant not only requires payment, but he handles the poor debtor with violence and disrespect. He wasn't trying to "gain his brother;" he was nearly murdering him!

18:29. The debtor begs for mercy even as his creditor had done — even though this debt is far from impossible!

18:30. But our scoundrel creditor had no mercy — he had not even the decency to put his debtor in a position where he actually could pay his debt. He imprisoned him. We can do this to our brethren. We can put them under impossible demands. We can "lock them in" to situations that can only harm them and make it impossible to "pay."

18:31. The "fellow servants" are the other saints. They represent us who look aghast in horror that one who is supposed to be a childlike saint can become an unreasonable and exacting monster. This verse is going to provide a direct link to the procedural verses.

This verse has some obscure content. The other servants "reported to their lord all that had happened." Perhaps this is the equivalent in the procedural verses of bringing an errant saint before the ecclesia. After all, the ecclesia in every matter is bringing its business before the Lord — and then attempting to act for Him based on their best Scriptural information. If we see a brother like this cruel servant, we must go after him and, if need be, drag him before the Lord — before the ecclesia.

18:32-34. These verses would seem to express the Lord's judgment in the matter. It is a harsh, but appropriate, judgment. It is very much as if (in the procedural verses) the ecclesia has to mete out a severe disfellowship solution (18:17).

If this is, indeed, the objective of these verses, then we can learn from the details.

(1) The erring one is REMINDED of the compassion he should have learned: "I forgave you...because you entreated me."

(2) Should you not, as a little child, have, therefore, learned innocence and forgiveness toward others? The erring one is given the opportunity to change his character. We call this REPENTANCE.

(3) "Torturers" is not a bad equivalent for the words of 18:17. Anyone having been familiar with and living with the fellowship of saints, and then being sent into the wilderness world of "the Gentiles and tax-gatherers," should (if any conscience be left) find it a torture!

(4) What is the objective of being "handed over to the torturers"? It is not destruction! It is "UNTIL" he learns to repay his vows — which in this case means to learn to have the childlike character without which "you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (18:3).

The two parables of Matthew 18 (as well as the filler materials) are so potent in helping us to interpret the spirit of the application of the procedural verses. Once again, context of the parables heightens the meaning of the parables, explains the details of the parables, and keeps us from misinterpretation of the contexts in which the parables occur. It can save our lives!

—Matthew 20 —

A Parable about Improper Self-Evaluation

The Penny Parable

— THE PENNY PARABLE —
(Matthew 19:30 — 20:16)

— The Lesson —

The first important item to notice about this parable is that Jesus interprets its intent by sandwiching it in between 19:30 and 20:16, both of which state that the first will be last, and the last will be first. Thus the lesson is clearly about the possibility that if we improperly think ourselves privileged now, and that that gives us some special immunities, we will find ourselves at the end of the line later.

— The Context —

Before the parable is offered to us by our Master, we find a very telling incident in Chapter 19. In 19:16, Jesus is approached by the rich young ruler. There can be little question that this incident occurred. But it is likely that it also constitutes an allegory. Just as the "rich man" in the Luke 16 parable represented Israel, it is likely that the young rich man here represents the sincere of that nation. But sincerity is not the whole test. The young man was quite willing to keep the Law, but he was not willing to give up the Law. When Jesus admonishes him to "sell his possessions," the request is too much for him. Yet, it was this very thing that Jesus requested of a faithful remnant from Israel. They were to sell their status as natural Israelites and keepers of the Law, and rather, to spread the

true Gospel to "the poor" — those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. But the rich man "went away grieved." He valued his imagined superior status to be greater than the offer Jesus was making. Hence, he who was first in position (Israel), ultimately becomes last. Jesus acknowledges that giving up status is extremely difficult, but that is imperative before someone can "enter the Kingdom of God."

The disciples were troubled; but Peter acknowledges that they had "left everything and followed" Jesus. Jesus assures that this will put them in first place, sitting "upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" — those represented by the rich man who, indeed, loses the real riches! Jesus thus concludes that "many who are first will be last and the last, first." He then illustrates this with the parable that follows.

After the parable, Jesus demonstrates how his coming crucifixion will make it APPEAR that he is "last," but that "He will be raised up." That is, he will come in FIRST!

Even the little episode which next appears deals with the same concepts. The mother of James and John wants her sons in first place in the Kingdom. Jesus says that it will all depend on their faithful cup-drinking and that his Father will make the determinations.

It cannot be overlooked that Jesus takes James and John aside and repeats the "first-and-last" lesson. He does it in different words; but is that not exactly the meaning of 20:2 and 27? "Whoever wishes to become great among you

shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave (= last)."

Seeing this wonderful contextual placement of the Penny Parable, it is considerably easier to give it a successful interpretation.

— What Kind of Parable Is This? —

Is this parable HISTORIC? No. If it represented the Jewish Age, there was no way the earlier Jews could be around to grumble about the latter Jews. And there seems no way of successfully applying it historically to the Jewish Harvest. It should not be overlooked contextually, however, that at least in part, there is a connection with the thought that the rich young ruler is losing first place to the socially last-place disciples. But the parable also is inseparably connected to the end of the Gospel Age when those disciples will sit on thrones. The fact that the parable is about "the Kingdom of Heaven" most positively excludes its being about the Jewish Age.

Is this parable PROPHETIC? Again, this seems not possible. If it were prophetic of the whole Gospel Age, the same objection applies as it does to the Jewish Age. If it were prophetic of the Gospel Harvest, which at this writing is 140 years old, the same impossibilities apply. We know of a certainty that the grumbling has to be in the flesh, not on the other side of the veil!

NEVERTHELESS, we think the parable will hint within itself of a PARTIAL Gospel Harvest prophetic connection.

The parable unquestionably is PRIMARILY a LESSON or CHARACTER parable. As noted, Jesus says it is to teach that some of "the favored" will find themselves less favored, and some of "the least" will find themselves thrust into a most favored condition. This parable is a lesson as to how this will become apparent.

— Five Dispensational Applications —

We know the basic character lesson of the parable. Thus, we can apply its character concepts to at least five different situations.

(1) The JEWISH AGE was "first" in time. But SPIRITUAL ISRAEL (the "last" in time) will be first in the honors when the Abrahamic promise is fulfilled.

(2) At the FIRST ADVENT, the "first" would be the doctors and adherents of the Law. The "last" would be the publicans, sinners, fishermen, etc.

(3) During the GOSPEL AGE, the "first" would be the "ordained" clerics of "orthodoxy." The "last" would be the questioners, the preachers of reform, and the sincere disciples whose simple lives and services and requests for information were rudely pushed aside.

(4) At the GOSPEL HARVEST, the "first" would be the proponents of traditional Christianity. The "last" would be the "untrained" Bible students of the Harvest whose doctrinal positions appear heretical to the "faithful" bound in their denominations.

(5) Among HARVEST SAINTS, the "first" would be the hyper-authoritarian elders and the Great Multitude of happy and satisfied compromisers. The "last" would be the faithful, persistent, and humble Bride class.

— Definition —

The meaning of the penny (or denarius) is important to any interpretation. It seemingly cannot be the reward.

Everyone receives the same penny. Besides, the reward is not paid on this side of the veil and could not, therefore, be subject to grumbling. The "penny" is paid on this side of the veil and causes grumbling.

The penny is specifically offered at the beginning of the day (20:2). It is specified as the in-common payment to ALL when the day is done (20:9). All of the shorter-period workers (20:3-7) are offered "whatever is right." "Whatever is right" turns out to be THE SAME PAY for the same commitment to enter the vineyard. They end up being paid for commitment — not for the day. Thus, the penny represents FULL INCLUSION. Every consecrated person is offered and receives the same STATUS. All are considered equals. There is not a "first" or a "last" among us. There is

ONE LORD, and the rest of us are brethren sharing the same honors.

Apparently, in the parable, this BOTHERS some of us. We begin to think that our length of service, our abilities to work in one way or another, our mental capabilities, our prominence, or ANY OTHER "difference" actually gives us privileges above others. WOE to us if we so think! This constitutes THE WARNING MESSAGE of this parable.

The penny is simply our Lord's saying, "I have given you all the same great privilege of service."

— A Hint of Prophetic Intent —

There is an easily-missed numerical key in the parable.

First, it is important for us to realize an element of timekeeping. An hour begins 60 minutes before the time for which it is named. Hence, if we begin a day at midnight (12:00 a.m.), the FIRST HOUR of the day runs FROM midnight until 1:00 a.m. Thus the "first hour" ends at 1:00 A.M., but began at midnight. In the parable, the vineyard master goes out at the opening of the day, and then he goes out at the 3rd, 6th, 9th, and 11th hours. (Obviously, the parable does not begin at midnight, but our illustration of timekeeping is easier that way.) So, he did not go out at 3, 6, 9, and 11. He went out at 2, 5, 8, and 10, which constituted the BEGINNINGS of the 3rd, 6th, 9th, and 11th hours.

It should strike us that it is not 3, 6, 9, and 12 — a nicely balanced sequence with 3 hours between each hiring. For some reason — an important one — he goes out to hire at the 11th hour, not the 12th.

Why didn't the master of the vineyard go out at the 12th hour? We believe that Jesus was interjecting a prophetic element into the parable. THIS DAY doesn't have twelve work hours! It is an eleven-hour work day. The "night" was coming early. It was probably late in the year when daylight didn't last twelve hours. They all were "paid" (they had all received all of their vineyard labors finished) when the twelfth hour BEGAN.

In the parable, it says (20:8), "And when evening had come." It was not at the end of twelve hours. It was at the end of eleven hours. How do we know? We know it because the last group went in at the eleventh hour (which began when ten hours had expired), and they "worked only one hour" (20:12). Hence they were paid, and evening (apparently the darkness of night) began as the twelfth hour began. It is altogether possible that Jesus is showing that the Harvest work concludes in the hour which John 9:4 calls "the night wherein no man can work." In other words, the Church is complete and the final hour of the day (which deals mostly with the Great Multitude and the FALSE VINE) remains.

In John 11:9 and 10 we have a related passage which is somewhat intriguing in itself. It reads,

“Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.”

In this passage Jesus says "the light of this world" is what constitutes daylight — normally twelve hours. But Jesus points out elsewhere that HE and HIS CHURCH are "the light of the world." Thus, in the parable, the implication is strong that the Church is gone as the twelfth hour begins. And in John 11:10, he implies that that is when the stumbling begins. Thus we don't want our walk "in the night."

It seems, then, that the hours of this parable were not stated in order to divide the age or the Harvest into specific time slots, but rather to impress upon us two things:

1. The length of our earthly service is immaterial.
2. There is a prophetic element present dealing with the John 9:4 prophecy.

— The Parable Outlined —

The parable divides well into five groupings of verses:

VERSES 1-9 show that Jesus has some who work longer than others, but work is NOT the standard.

VERSES 10-12 show the ugly head of pride or jealousy which will pop up among the spirit-begotten at any time.

VERSES 13-15 show that God's dealings are just. Those who don't concur "go their way."

VERSE 15 (last sentence) shows that God's GOOD is viewed as EVIL by those who value works over faith.

VERSE 16 summarizes the lesson: It is IN THIS WAY their loss will occur.

— A Few Details —

- Verse 1 — The parable is expressly about "the Kingdom of Heaven" — the embryo lives of new creatures.
- Verse 2 — The Master offers the very best benefits: "You will get FULL INCLUSION of benefits for your work in the vineyard." The "day" represents the work of the Gospel Age.
- Verses 3-5 — On the "Chart of the Ages," Plane N represents the status of those consecrated only to righteousness (the "marketplace" of the parable). This marketplace represents the standing of those who receive the invitations to come up higher. The "call" goes out

periodically — or regularly — as the age progresses.

They all are promised "whatsoever is right." It is not right to give varying benefits to employees who do the same work just because they are hired at different times, "What is right" is that each and all are offered the same honor for their willingness to participate.

VERSE 6 — When the 11th hour begins, there would normally be two work hours left in the day. There are not in this day. Work will end and payment will be made when the 12th hour begins. The 12th hour will be "the night wherein no man can work" (John 9:4).

VERSE 7 — It seems that at a certain time (1881 — the end of the "general call") a special invitation goes out.

VERSE 8 — "Evening" seems to imply the onset of darkness — making 12th-hour work prohibitive. So payments are concluded at this time.

Payment is given to the last group first. This appears to be a logistical element of the parable designed for practical lesson teaching. If the longest workers

were paid first, they would be off to spend their earning before they could witness the payment to the shorter-period workers. Additionally, the longer-period workers have their jealousy stirred by seeing payment go first to the "part-time" workers.

VERSES 9-12 — Here we have the clue as to what can place us last when we could have been first: We imagine that our "superiority" — whether it is based on term of service, quality of service, esteem, experience, etc. — entitles us to something extra over those whose services seem inferior in our eyes.

VERSES 13 & 14 — It is interesting to note that the Master allows the grumblers to reason with each other on their problem — thus giving them the opportunity to grow and profit from their errors. He does this by telling "ONE OF THEM" what the problem is. This forces the (apparently) Great Multitude of them to reason together. This is all implied in the telling only "one of them." Even among the Great Multitude, individual isolation is bad. There must be learned a group reliance, even as the Church must respect and function as "the Body" of Christ.

These are told to "go your way." It sounds much like the fate of the scapegoat in Leviticus 16.

The Master reiterates his fairness: "I wish to give to this last man the same as to you." In other words, the "last man" was every bit as much granted FULL INCLUSION, full opportunity, full benefits, or full honor as was given to all of them who had been called.

VERSE 15 — The implication here seemingly is that those who value works over faith are guilty of not comprehending the generosity of God. We are not under Law (works), but under Grace (which justifies to ALL equally by FAITH).

VERSE 16 — It is "THUS" that the last shall be first, and the first last. The "thus" seems to refer to the failure of valuing faith over personal merits or efforts.

— Conclusion —

This is a wonderful, if difficult, parable. Many have struggled with its interpretation over the years. Context plays a great part in allowing us to comprehend its lessons.

But subtleties about numbers also contribute greatly in allowing us to see its connection to an important prophecy at the end of the Gospel Harvest.

It is our prayer that its primary lesson will not be lost to any of us. Especially during Laodicea, we are subject to the test of thinking we are rich when we actually are "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17). This comes in part from HAVING the truth but failing to APPLY its most important features — such as valuing to the utmost each and every member of the Body.

— Summary —

Because of the intricacies of this parable and the general confusion of saints regarding its meaning, it is probably wise to end with an interpretive summary.

1. This parable is not about a penny. It is not even about payment. Focusing on the penny or its payment will OBSCURE the meaning of the parable.
2. This is a LESSON parable. The lesson is about attitudes in those who receive the penny — the honor or privilege of service.

3. This parable is not about TIME. The parable is a story about events which occur during ONE NORMAL WORKDAY — i.e., sunup to sundown. Trying to force a TIME ELEMENT into the lesson OBSCURES the parable.
4. The Lord DID hide a time element in the parable for the sake of those who live during the Laodicean (or Harvest) period of the Church. This little prophetic element is for our special blessing and should be greatly valued. BUT it is not a part of the lesson of this parable.
5. The true lesson of this parable (19:30 and 20:16) is that our attitudes about our own importance in the Lord's service, our thinking that works are important, and our judgment of how the Lord deals with other saints, are the three things that will determine our standing FIRST or LAST in His estimation.

— Matthew 21 —

Two Parables about Jewish to Gospel Age Changes

1. The Two Sons
2. The Vineyard

— THE TWO SONS —
(Matthew 21:28-32)

This parable is in direct response to the Pharisaical questioning recorded in 21:23-27. John the Baptist's work had created a great controversy in Israel. By it, the common man was receiving truths which the Pharisaical community was both incapable of receiving and unwilling to propagate. Jesus caught the Pharisees in their own trap (verses 25, 26). He then proceeded to offer this parable to illustrate what was happening as the Jewish Age was giving way to the Gospel Age.

21:28, 29. The "man" of the parable likely is Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, and who, consequently, has the two classes of sons of Israel reflected in this parable. As the parable concludes, the "father" grows to represent the standards of God, which become the end-of-the-age extension of Jacob's faith in the Abrahamic covenant.

Jesus poses a question to the Pharisees as he begins the parable. When we finally get to verse 45, we see the Pharisees' realization that they were the unfavorable objects of two parables. They wanted to apprehend Jesus, but their fear of losing a grasp on the multitudes made them desist.

The first son is the Pharisaical class. Jesus summarizes their deficiencies by showing that they gave lip service to God, but never really served God's cause.

21:30. The second son represents that class of Israelites who clearly were not living up to the Law — publicans, sinners, harlots, etc.

[NOTE: Because better manuscript evidence has surfaced since Bro. Russell's day, his comments (R. 4678) regarding which group is which, end up being backwards! Thus, the interpretation here offered (based on the NAS and better manuscripts) looks to be different from Bro. Russell's. IT IS NOT DIFFERENT. The lesson of the parable remains as he interpreted it; only the numbering of the groups is changed.]

The common people of Israel openly lived in defiance of the minutiae of the Law. But when John came along and created mass reformation and repentance, this class "afterward regretted" their conduct, "and went" after John, Jesus, and the incoming Gospel movement.

21:31. The parable has ended; but Jesus continues the question begun in verse 28. He now adds: "Which of the two did the will of his father?" — which is exhibiting the faith of Jacob in God's will?

The Pharisees don't hesitate to give the correct answer — at this point probably not realizing that they are condemning their own position.

Jesus, of course, then explains that it is the formerly openly-rebellious, but now-repentant, sinners who are finding acceptance.

21:32. Jesus clarifies the point in order to connect his lesson to their tricky questioning regarding John (21:25). He answers that John's work was of God, but that they (the Pharisees) had rejected it despite its power; but the sinners believed and were converted to a righteous course.

— THE VINEYARD AND THE HUSBANDMAN —
(Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-11; and Luke 20:9-18)

We have here a great shortcoming in the NAS version of this parable. A proper interpretation necessitates our understanding that this parable is about the entire Jewish Age and its transition into the Gospel Age. The NAS says "HARVEST" in Matthew 21:34. THIS IS INCORRECT! This passage is about the entire Jewish Age, not only its Harvest. The NAS margin (for "Harvest") at least acknowledges that the literal Greek is "the season of the fruits." It is easy to see why this might imply "Harvest" to the translators; but "Harvest" ruins the interpretation. The ENTIRE AGE was supposed to bring forth fruitage. The same is true of the Gospel Age. All saints throughout the age must bear fruitage. The point is this: Harvest is to REAP the whole matured crop. So, if the Greek had said "the season of the reaping of the fruits," then "Harvest" might have been justified. But, instead, this is the age of fruitage and "receiving the produce" (appreciating and aiding the growth of others). With this stipulation in mind, most of the difficulties of interpretation disappear.

[It might be noted here that "Harvest" in Mark 12:2 and in Luke 20:10 are italicized (NAS). The word has been (unfortunately) interpolated by the translators. The KJV does not use "Harvest" in any of the three passages.]

21:33. The basic scene for the Jewish Age is set in this verse. God planted a vineyard. (Isaiah 5:7 identified this vineyard as the "house of Israel" — the fleshly house as this

parable begins. Eventually, of course, the spiritual house of Israel becomes the same vineyard, except that Jesus instead of Jacob is the root of the vine, and we instead of Jews are the branches.) The fact that the parable begins with planting emphasizes that the parable covers the whole age.

We must be prepared to have what seems like a dichotomy of symbolisms. Just as in the Gospel Harvest (Matthew 24:31), the "angels" and the "elect" both represent saints, in this vineyard the branches, the fruit, and the vinegrowers are all the same; they are Israel.

Thus, God plants the vine which will ultimately produce the seed of Abraham. He walls it in for the age with the Law Covenant; He provides a "winepress" to extract the desired results; He builds a tower for the "watchmen" — the prophets — to keep an eye on progress. In other words, He provided everything necessary for the purpose of the age.

The "vinegrowers" (the keepers of the arrangement) well represent the Jews who were supposed to manage the arrangement — i.e., the Priesthood, Kings, etc.

The planter "went on a journey." He left the arrangement in charge of those who were commissioned to produce fruit and who had vowed to do so. As was said in oath to Moses, "All these things we will do."

21:34. When enough time elapses to produce fruitage, God expects that Israel should have grown toward Him and His

ways as would be illustrated by a faithfulness toward the Law. This would probably be early in Israel's history — likely the time of the Judges whom "He sent...to receive His produce."

— An Important Aside —

Before we can catch the lovely details implied in this parable, we must review the history of Israel as shown in Leviticus 26. In that detailed overview of Israel's history-to-be, we find that Israel has its pre-Gentile-Times experiences (Leviticus 26:1-17), and it has its during-Gentile-Times experiences (Leviticus 26:18-39). In Jesus' reference to this prophecy (Luke 21:20-24), he shows the END of the JEWISH AGE due to the fall of Jerusalem just after his death. Thus we have THREE clear references which fit the details of this parable:

1. Matthew 21:34 and 35 represent Israel's rejection of the Lord's prophets BEFORE 606 B.C.
2. Matthew 21:36 represents Israel's rejection of the prophets from just before 606 B.C. through John the Baptist.
3. Matthew 21:37-39 represents Israel's rejection of Messiah and the consequent end of the Jewish Age.

21:35. This verse is probably a reference to the judges and a few prophets in the time leading up to the days just before the Babylonian captivity.

21:36. This verse is probably a reference to the multitude of great prophets just before the Babylonian captivity, through that captivity, and on to the time of John the Baptist.

21:37. In this verse, Jesus appears on the scene. Considering the miracles worked by him in Israel, God could well expect (even considering the foibles of human reasoning!) that "They will respect my son." Actually, many did. But the point of this parable is to focus on why the Jewish Age is abandoned. The focus is on the rejectors of the son.

21:38, 39. The keepers of the arrangement (basically the priests, Scribes, and Pharisees) had become so corrupt they truly thought they owned the place — owned the right to determine everything for Israel. They were fighting for their very existence as well as their dominance because they realized that Jesus' teachings would "ruin everything" they were holding on to. So, they "threw him out of the vineyard" — they excommunicated him as a blasphemer. And they killed him.

21:40, 41. The parable is over. It has encapsulated the Jewish Age into even a shorter summary than Leviticus 26 had done.

Jesus asks a question of the Pharisees and then comments on their response. It leaves them with the realization (verse 45) that all in these parables was about them.

The question justifies the end of the Jewish Age. Their answer is prophetic. What will God do? He will bring a "wretched end" to the Jewish Age and He will bring in new tenders of the vine — the Gentile-based Gospel Age.

21:42-44. Jesus then uses the occasion to quote Scripture to establish what he had said. He tells (from Psalm 118:22ff) that he would be REJECTED, but that the rejection would eventuate in his being placed as ruler over all. He plainly states that the heavenly Kingdom opportunity would go to a "nation" that would produce fruitage.

Verse 44 shows a long-term forecast. Jesus would be a "stone of stumbling" not only at the end of the Jewish Age, but also for Christendom at the close of the Gospel Age. Stumbling, of course, is not fatal; it only changes your future. But Jesus adds that this "stone" would ultimately crush the very existence of all institutions and individuals who refuse the new edifice, of which he will be the chief cornerstone.

When we look at the Mark and Luke accounts, there is nothing with much significance that differs. Matthew's account fits better the Leviticus profile of Israel's divided

history. Mark's and Luke's accounts of varying waves of prophets might not seem as clear.

— Matthew 22 —

A Third Parable about the Change of Age and Beyond

The Invitations

— THE INVITATIONS —
(Matthew 22:1-12)

We have here the third and last parable in a series which teaches about the transition from the Jewish Age into the Gospel Age. This one has its particular focus on Gospel-Age privileges which are declined by those who cannot break their ties to Judaism. Then, the parable shows how some at the end of the Gospel Age will do similarly.

There seems an inseparable link between this parable and the two given just before it. They should be considered as a trio. The TWO SONS parable (21:28-31) is designed to show how Israel will be divided as to its acceptance and rejection of Messiah. It is akin to John's prophecy that Messiah would baptize the nation with the Holy Spirit and with fire. This "Two Sons" parable tells which group would get which baptism.

The VINEYARD parable (21:33-41) stresses the reason for Israel's failure — poor stewardship and ungodly behavior. The vineyard is then turned over to new stewards (Gentiles).

Now, the final parable in the series, THE INVITATIONS (21:1-14), explains how Israel's refusal to accept Messiah necessitated the invitation to others (Gentiles) to fill the needed number. The parable ends with a situation JUST LIKE that of the other two parables — a group of FRAUDULENT followers.

This parable poses a number of subtle problems in its interpretation — particularly toward its end. Bro. Russell's focus and interpretation was intensified and prompted by his experiences with Barbour. (See R. 3823.) The interpretive difficulty primarily is in discerning whether the end of the parable deals only with a spirit-begotten class, with wheat versus tares, or with both situations. We will examine the hints as they arise in the text.

A brief summary of the parable's chronological construction will be helpful before looking at its detail.

- Verses 1-3 refer to the period from Jesus' baptism until Pentecost.
- Verses 4-7 refer to the period from Pentecost until Cornelius — with an obvious extension to include the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem.
- Verses 8-10 refer to the bulk of the Gospel Age — from Cornelius to the Lord's return (the Harvest).
- Verses 11-14 detail events of the Harvest period.

22:1-3. The previous two parables did not begin with the Kingdom of Heaven..." The use of the phrase here is an initial hint that, while the parable begins with Israel, it is primarily about what replaces Israel as the Divine plan progresses. Israel was offered an invitation to become the spiritual seed of Abraham, but their collective refusal

ensured that others would be invited. So, "The Kingdom of Heaven" — in its Gospel-Age incipient stage — is the real subject of this parable.

The King is God, Himself. The very purpose of the Gospel Age is to prepare for the "wedding" for His son, Jesus. The reason that the saints are referred to as "guests" rather than as the "Bride" should be obvious. The parable is dealing with a large number of people. The use of "Bride" simply would not fit! A Bride cannot be divided. Besides, the point of the parable is the PREPARATION, not the EVENT.

The invitations to the event are first sent to the entire Jewish nation during the three-and-a-half-year ministry of Jesus. He went to "his own," but his own "received him not" — the equivalent of "They were unwilling to come."

The prophecy of Daniel 9 chronologically fits this parable perfectly. The first half of the seventieth week is the presence of Messiah. He is "cut off" in its midst — a PROOF that the Jews didn't receive him! But during the next half-week, he anoints the most holy ones of Israel with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That period is the subject of verses 4-6.

22:4-6. This parable is not about the faithful remnant of Jews who do receive Messiah. They were insufficient in number to fill the "wedding hall." But they did constitute a part of the ultimate guest list — "But to as many as did receive him, he gave the power to become the sons of God."

Thus verse 4 begins in the middle of Daniel's seventieth week — A.D. 33. It is the spirit-begotten Apostles and the faithful-remnant disciples who spend three-and-a-half-years yet focusing on Israelites who might accept the Gospel message. Thus the reference to the "butchered" livestock. The disciples of this half-week can point to Jesus' sacrifice. But most of Israel continued to ignore the call — "they paid no attention." Their attentions were absorbed by their land or their connections to their temporal welfare. And some (like Saul of Tarsus!) persecuted and even killed the disciples.

22:7. God was not pleased with their behavior! And true to the prediction by Daniel (and by Jesus in Luke 21:20), the Roman armies fulfilled God's wrath toward Israel by destroying "those murderers and (by) set(ting) their city on fire" (A.D. 70).

22:8-10. These verses epitomize the work from Cornelius to the Harvest — the bulk of the Gospel Age.

"The wedding is ready" is a phrase which functionally says, "My plans will not change. There will be a wedding even though those originally invited have refused to come."

So, Christians are given the commission to "Go, therefore, to the main highways" — the rest of the world. The invitation has gone out for nearly two millennia on a rather large scale.

Invitations to the "high calling" are provided by God only to those who do or will first profess a consecration to

righteousness based on faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice. Thus, we must not assume that invitations were given without regard to some provisos.

We bring this up because it may be key to the primary meaning of the end of this parable. Verse 14, Jesus' final words in this sequence, has our Lord saying that "many are called, but few are chosen." It is consistent throughout the New Testament that the CALL is from Plane N to come upward. (See Appendix A.) Plane M (spirit-begettal) is the plane referred to by the word CHOSEN. This does not mean ultimate success! "Chosen" means ACCEPTANCE AS BEING IN THE RUNNING. Ultimate success is represented in the word FAITHFUL. Hence, in Revelation 17:14, we have the ultimate sequence: the CALLED, the CHOSEN, and the FAITHFUL.

Jesus' stating the lesson of the parable (22:14) as being a contrast between the "calling" (plane N) and the "chosen" (plane M), just about ensures that the division of persons in verses 11 and 12 is a division of wheat from tares.

Verse 10 provides additional information. Who are the "evil and good"? There seem only two possibilities: (1) The "evil" are tares, and the "good" are wheat; (2) The "evil" are Second Death candidates, and the "good" are the Bride class. In this second scenario, the Great Multitude would have to be ignored. We cannot assume the "evil" are Great Multitude because they (Great Multitude) do have "wedding garments," and they don't take them off! We think this parable is dealing with option 1.

This would make a paraphrase of verse 10 read something like this:

When the age was concluding, and both wheat and tares were growing together, the date arrived when the full number of "high calling" invitations had been accepted, and open invitations ceased. It was now time to check Christendom's credentials.

22:11, 12. "When the king came in" — when and who is this? The "king," when the parable opens, is God. At this verse, it seems more like Jesus. But this may not be a problem. A king's son will ultimately also be a king. Indeed, God is always a king, but Jesus is also a king upon his return. This seems a small point for quibbling! The "king" continuing to represent God is not a problem. The entire Gospel-Age scenario is His design. Jesus administers it.

Jesus "came in" in 1874. For three-and-a-half-years he "looked over the dinner guests." When the king came in, (with his first priority being the examination of Christianity), he cast off (1878) the system and gave its inhabitants a little grace period (until 1881), until the number he needed had been attained. This is very much parallel to his treatment of natural Israel during Daniel's seventieth week. (See Revelation 18:2-4.)

Verse 11 becomes a vital part of the narrative. (Compare Zephaniah 1:7, 8.) If this part of the parable is about the separation of wheat and tares, this verse shows that the king immediately began distinguishing true from counterfeit. Jesus, in Matthew 13, had clearly stated that

wheat and tares should be left to grow together until the Harvest. In 22:11 we are in the Harvest, and the King's prohibition against separation is no longer valid. The distinction between Plane N and Plane M must now be made. Tares must be rooted out. "You are on Plane N, you have no wedding garment!" Hence:

"Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?" In other words, tares were never a part of the "wedding hall" — they just THOUGHT they were invited. The word "friend" may be significant. Plane N dwellers are "friends." They just don't belong in the wedding hall. And when the time comes which is exclusively for those on Plane M, all others must be evicted. This tare "was speechless." Nominal Christians during the Harvest have no answers.

22:13. The "tare" is BOUND — exactly — what was to be done to tares in Matthew 13:30. The binding is "hand and foot" — both his doings and his goings in the name of Christ are functionally ended. (Compare Matthew 7:22, 23.) The outer darkness — lack of light due to being outside the Harvest hall — is the condition of tares until they are burned. Burning the tares, of course, is their REALIZATION that their professions have been spurious. That has not yet happened. When it does, the traditional symbol for intense disappointment and chagrin will ensue: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

22:14. We must review what has been said earlier regarding this verse. It is Jesus' PURPOSE-SUMMARY for the parable. Hence it begins with "For" — BECAUSE. And

what is the "because"? The whole invitation process with its successes and failures is BECAUSE many will have been "called" from Plane N, but will have decided to remain there. Only a few will attain Plane M and receive spirit-begettal — and, hence, an authorized seat in the "wedding hall."

— Matthew 24 and 25 —

Four Parables in Our Lord's Great Prophecy

1. The Fig Tree
2. The Wise and Foolish Virgins
3. The Talents
4. The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 24

A Parable About the End of the Gospel Age –
Related to Israel

The Fig Tree

— THE FIG TREE —

(Matthew 24:32-36 with Mark 13:32 and Luke 21:29-33)

This parable is a part of what we frequently call "The Lord's Great Prophecy." It spans (in Matthew) Chapters 24 and 25 and contains four parables. They are all (except the final one) about the end of the Gospel Age.

The first three parables (about the end of the Gospel Age) are the FIG TREE, the WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS, and the TALENTS. The first deals with Israel as a sign of the nearness of the Kingdom; the second is about "Time-of-the-End" experiences (1799 and following) of the saints up to the "closing of the door." It is designed to show one of the judgment factors that would distinguish the Great Multitude from the Little Flock. The third in the series is designed to show the same division, but this time based on another judgment factor. This TALENTS parable, unlike the other two, implies an age-long application with an end-of-the-age settling of accounts. It is likely given here, at least in part, so that we do not conclude that the Great Multitude is only a "Time of the End" class.

The fourth parable (THE SHEEP AND GOATS) does not deal with the end of the age. It deals with the Mediation for the world.

It is appropriate to ask why the Lord chose these four parables to form a part of the context of this "Great Prophecy." It is likely, at least in part, because within these

parables we have the major groupings of mankind: Israel, Church, Great Multitude, and World of Mankind.

We might ask why the "Ancient Worthies" (the "better resurrection") of Hebrews 11 are omitted. Perhaps they aren't. They are so closely associated with Israel and its deliverance that the Lord may have omitted special mention of them because of their inseparable connection to Israel and its deliverance.

The FIG TREE parable occurs in that part of Matthew's account dealing with 1799 (verse 29) and with the appearance of Jesus and the prosecution of the Harvest work (verses 30, 31). This covers a long span of time. At this writing, 215 years have passed since verse 29 took place! Consequently, the saints since 1799 (where the VIRGINS parable possibly begins) NEED some sort of chronological anchor — NOT A DATE, but an anchor regarding a WINDOW OF TIME for the establishment of the peaceable Kingdom. II Peter 3:3, 4 teaches us the likely attitude of those WITHOUT SUCH AN ANCHOR.

Revelation 14:12 WARNED that the saints would need "perseverance" due to the long-term grinding-on of the events of the Harvest. The FIG TREE parable seems to be Jesus' answer to the need for the anchor. It seems that he is virtually telling us, "I can't give you a date for the peaceable Kingdom (verses 35 and 36), but I can give you a WINDOW OF TIME — an indicator of when, during that

long Harvest, you can have an expectation for the fulfillment of your hopes."

Thus, the FIG TREE parable is in one sense a MERCY! It is a parable given for the very specific purpose of comforting and encouraging a Church caught in "the hour of temptation" — a Church so very steeped in chronology, but yet without a date for the very event it most desires!

The philosophy of why Jesus gives this parable (as above outlined) becomes a true aid in interpreting it. If any interpretation that we settle upon doesn't meet the reason for which the parable was given, then we might want to look again at our interpretation.

24:32. It is interesting to note Jesus' first preposition. He does not say, "The parable OF the Fig Tree;" he says "Learn the parable FROM the Fig Tree." It may be a very significant choice of a seemingly small word. If the parable were OF the Fig Tree, its objective would be to teach us about Israel. But since it is FROM the Fig Tree, its objective seems to be about something else — but something CONNECTED to Israel. And that seems to be Jesus' point. He is telling us a window of time for the peaceable Kingdom (summer) rather than telling us about Israel. But that window of time can be discerned only if we watch the nation of Israel.

The fact that the Fig Tree symbolizes Israel (not only here, but throughout prophecy) is suggested by Jeremiah 24.

(That is easy to remember since the Matthew and Jeremiah references are both in chapters numbered 24.)

The "summer" which ends this verse is the peaceable Kingdom. This clarity is established in the Luke account (Luke 21:30, 31). This seasonal prophetic element becomes helpful in other prophecies. Apparently the Gospel Harvest begins as a "summer" as is witnessed by Daniel 2:35. But the Harvest ends as a "winter" of severe troubles as is witnessed by Matthew 24:20 in conjunction with Jeremiah 8:20. That season ends with the prayed-for "summer" of the Mediation as witnessed by Luke 21:30, 31.

Matthew 24:32 lists TWO things to look for in Israel. (1) The branch has become tender; and (2) it puts forth leaves. Mark 13:28 contains the same two elements. Luke omits reference to the branch. We are left to speculate. Obviously, sap flows BEFORE leaves appear. BUT the proximity of sap-flow and budding of leaves is such as to make the two items nearly into one event.

24:33. Since this verse says "When you see all these things...", we are left to wonder if the PLURAL "things" are the sap-flow and the buds, or if "things" refers to items before the parable, but INCLUDING the "leafing" of the parable.

Luke, of course, doesn't mention both items, but his account ADDS other items: "ALL THE TREES."

We are spending much effort on this verse because it is at the crux of the matter of interpretation. The key word of

the verse is "WHEN." Since "when" is tied to seeing these "things," we really need to know what the "things" are.

We are admonished by Jesus to see "these things." Two possibilities exist: (1) he is referring just to the "things" in the parable (tender branch, leaves, and [from Luke] possibly leaves on other trees); or (2) the "things" mentioned before the parable (the darkening of verse 29; the sign of verse 30; the gathering work of verse 31) PLUS the things IN the parable.

From a practical standpoint, it may make no difference . Since these "things" occur in SEQUENTIAL ORDER, if we see the "things" in the parable, we will automatically have seen "all these things." Since this seems to be true, our special need is to see THE LAST THING MENTIONED. The last thing mentioned is the leaves of the Fig Tree.

Obviously, interpretive differences can come into play here. But from a purely practical point of review: How do we know that a tree is alive? It is because it has leaves. How do we know that a nation is alive? Because it has statehood. Thus it seems the most logical of interpretations that when Jesus says "it puts forth its leaves," he means that it obtains statehood.

Usually brethren interpret "leaves" as being a symbol of PROFESSION. It is a good symbol. A tree professes to be alive by having leaves. Even when Jesus is disgusted with Israel for lack of fruitage (Matthew 21:19), he acknowledges that he "found nothing on it except leaves

only." He admits that the Jews yet were full of profession — but profession without fruitage.

24:33. It is at THIS POINT that Jesus tells us what we should "KNOW" — "Even so you, too, when you see these things happening, KNOW (NAS = recognize) that the Kingdom of God is near." The NAS (Matthew 24:33) says "that He is near, right at the door." The margin acknowledges that the reading could be "It is near," rather than "He is near." Luke demonstrates that "IT" is correct.

Thus verse 33 is the "mercy" verse — it gives a POINT IN TIME that acknowledges the nearness of the peaceable Kingdom. As Jesus continues, he will be a bit more specific.

The parable really ended in the verse where it began. It is a one-verse parable. But Jesus' comments on it take us into verses 33-36.

Verse 33 said the Kingdom was "right at the door" once we "see these things." This must be encouraging. It certainly doesn't imply remote!

24:34. This verse clearly is meant to be INSTRUCTIVE as to what is meant by "right at the door."

Brethren have chewed over these words and have, unfortunately, extracted many flavors from their chewing!

Some have concluded that the Church is the generation, and that the Church will not be gone until "these things" all have happened. The true weakness of this perspective is

that it seems to miss Jesus' OBJECTIVE in giving the parable. His objective was to give us a window of time for the peaceable Kingdom. If the "generation" is the Church, the only benefit of this verse would be to prove the 1914 glorification was an inaccurate concept.

It is to our advantage that Jesus uses this same word (generation) in another verse on the same day that he issues this parable. We are thus able to use his own application of the word in order to interpret 24:34. In 23:36, we have Jesus in A.D. 33 saying, "Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation." The contextual "these things" was the end of the Jewish order — the destruction of Jerusalem and the Diaspora. In this case in Matthew 23, Jesus meant, "Those of you who are standing here and are hearing my words will experience these things in your natural lifetimes."

Some have extrapolated that, since the destruction of Jerusalem was A.D. 70, Jesus was defining the "generation" as 37 years. THAT is not the point! In Matthew 24, Jesus makes it plain that he cannot give us a date! Therefore, he cannot define "generation" as a specific number of years. He can only use the word in its most practical sense. "YOU will not be gone before this happens."

To some of us it might be worth noticing that the end of this verse uses a special Greek word. The NAS reads, "take place." The KJV reads, "fulfilled." It is the same Greek word used in Matthew 5:18. USUALLY "fulfilled" means accomplished, or finished, or past, or some such

COMPLETED-action meaning. But the word here means "come into being" — in other words, **STARTED**, not finished.

But the point to remember from this verse is this: Once all the listed things have begun, you have your window of time for the "summer." It may, indeed, BE A WHILE! But those alive when the last of "these things" began can well expect that in a natural lifetime, the peaceable Kingdom will arrive.

Israel received statehood in 1948. This writer remembers the event and, therefore, expects that within his natural lifetime (give or take a little) the peaceable Kingdom will arrive. That does not allow much more time. Thus, this interpretation will **PROVE ITSELF** correct or incorrect before too many years have passed. However, if we read the **INTENT** of the parable correctly, there seems no other legitimate interpretation.

Nevertheless, Luke's additional words do provide a caveat as to when the window of time might expire. When Luke adds, "and **ALL THE TREES**...as soon as **THEY** put forth leaves," he allows more leafings than just Israel's.

Every modern historian knows that following World War II there was a plethora of nations coming into existence ("putting forth leaves") due to the independence they were gaining from colonial powers. It was all well-documented as the United Nations' memberships skyrocketed from dozens into the hundreds. So, even though 1948 marks the "beginning" of leaves (as represented only in Israel), a late

date might apply — when THEY (all the little new nations of that independence movement) put forth their leaves. This might extend our window a decade or so.

24:35. Jesus still is remarking about the coming of the peaceable Kingdom. THAT occurrence will be the passing away of the old "heaven and earth" (compare Revelation 20:11). While THEY will pass away, the promises (the "words") which Jesus had just spoken will not pass away. They will prove true.

24:36. This verse, of course, is universally misapplied in the Churches — and sometimes even among Laodicean saints! The "day and hour" which no one knows is NOT Jesus return! It is the date of the passing of the old "heaven and earth" — i.e., the onset of the peaceable Kingdom. THAT DATE Jesus could not give. That is WHY, instead, he gave its "window of time" by giving the parable.

It is possible (although nearly none of us thinks it to be this way) that Jesus, himself, to this day doesn't know THAT date. By the way, the NAS is correct in this verse, whereas the KJV has an omission. It should read: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." This makes it clear that "generation" cannot be defined as an established number of years.

– Matthew 25 –

- (1) Another Parable about the End of the Gospel Age -
Related to the Saints:

The Wise and Foolish Virgins

- (2) A Parable about Gospel Age Judgment Standards &
Rewards Handed Out at the End of the Age:

The Talents

- (3) A Parable about Millennial Age Judgments of Mankind:

The Sheep and Goats

— THE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS —
(Matthew 25:1-13)

Matthew 25 is an extension of "The Lord's Great Prophecy" of Matthew 24. The entire 25th chapter is a barrage of three parables without so much as a breath between them. It is as if Jesus is telling us that the prophetic material of Chapter 24 needs three stories to complete the message.

The first of these three stories deals with his Church just prior to his advent and up to the completion of the "Bride" class. Those who are familiar with Church history since the French Revolution will find it quite easy to recognize the chronological markers in this parable.

The subject of this parable is meeting the Bridegroom — i.e., recognizing his presence — verses 1, 6. The lesson of the parable relates to two kinds of attitudes that develop among the virgins as the advent approaches and progresses.

25:1. The story begins with "Then." This is our connection to Matthew 24. "Then" is a prominent word in Chapter 24. It deals with the beginning of the Harvest in verses 14, 16, 21, 23, 30, 40, and 45. As the parable begins, "then" is probably yet a reference to events of the Harvest time, but the context within the parable unmistakably shows that some of its events PRECEDE the beginning of the Harvest — precede the coming of the Bridegroom. Thus, we can

properly read the first sentence of this parable as an historical paraphrase meaning: "Then, as the Harvest I have been talking about is approaching, the events among the saints (the embryo Kingdom) will be like a group of anxious disciples, fervently entering their newly-found opportunity for Bible study when the French Revolution ends. They discover that my return must be imminent." THAT is the setting for this parable.

Daniel had predicted (Chapter 12) that the opening of his prophecy would be a stepwise process beginning in 1799 and progressing to the end of its mysteries by 1874. This parable confirms Daniel 12, and is strongly connected to the prophetic history outlined in Revelation 10:8-11 and verses 6 and 7.

The number 10 may be suggestive of the numerical symbolism for Jesus. Jesus' prophetic number is 100. In prophecy, however, the number of zeroes attached, frequently does not alter the significance — although they might suggest subtleties of interpretation. Thus, though Jesus' number is 100, his reign is 1,000. Perhaps 10 in this parable is showing that these virgins are a portion of those called to be his Body members. Their even division (5+5, representing Church and Great Multitude) is not a proportional division, but an arbitrary division into two classes. This is similar to Leviticus 16 where two candidate-goats end up representing two classes: Church and Great Multitude.

The "lamps" are the Scriptures. History proved the phenomenal proliferation of Bibles subsequent to 1799.

The meeting of the Bridegroom (the Second Advent Movement) which quickly became a fervor once widespread Bible study progressed, was such a phenomenon in the early 19th Century that, in the United States, one of every fifteen people was either directly or indirectly affiliated with the movement. History has confirmed the details of this parable's predictions.

25:2-4. These verses divide the spirit-begotten ones into two groups. But it is first imperative that we note that they are and they remain virgins. Their faith in the Lord is not compromised. However, they do become characterized as being wise or foolish.

Verses 3 and 4 explain what constitutes a wise versus a foolish character. The difference is the location of the "oil."

Until we get further into the parable, the generally-accepted definition of "oil" as being representative of the Holy Spirit will suffice.

The foolish have enough Holy Spirit to allow their search of Scripture. They have the enlightenment of their "lamps" (Bibles), but they have neglected to have it within self.

The wise, on the other hand, have the Holy Spirit's aid in Scriptural searching, but they also have the Holy Spirit "in flasks" — in themselves as containers of its personal influence on them. They are storing it up.

The initial lesson has become clear. It is not how much we study or understand, but ADDITIONALLY how much we apply to personal character development.

Note here that LACK OF STUDY is not an issue in this parable. BOTH classes have and use their lamps and the Holy Spirit's help within the lamps.

25:5. The Second Advent Movement was intense. Bro. Miller and his European counterparts had Christians in an excited state in anticipation of the Lord's return. Their predictions failed. They gained a spiritual stomach ache from the failure (Revelation 10:10). According to their expectations and predictions, "The Bridegroom delayed." The result was a mass disappointment in chronological prophecy and a general malaise among Christians on the topic — "they all got drowsy and began to sleep."

It is imperative to note here that all slept! The parable is not about the sin of sleeping! They all slept, and they all awoke. It is also not about study. They all did it (verse 7). The parable is about meeting the Bridegroom and being ready for him.

One more caution: the Bridegroom didn't delay. It was their perception that he did, and they all had it. This "all" is suggested in Daniel 12. Even though the "little book" (Revelation 10) of Daniel did begin to be opened at the "Time of the End," many would be "purged, purified, and refined" by the predictions issued when the 1,290 days would begin to test their mettle (1829 — The Second Advent Movement). It would not be until the 1,335 days

(1874) that the blessedness of understanding would be secure — the "mystery...is finished" (Revelation 10:7).

Miller predicted that the Lord would return in 1843. After that date and until Laodicea, most Christians gave up confidence in any such predictions.

25:6. This is in many respects the CENTRAL VERSE of the parable. It represents the ACTUAL return of our Lord in the autumn of 1874.

"Midnight" is, of course, our modern moment when one day changes to another. The Biblical usage was always that the new day began at sundown. But Jesus was looking forward to our day because the parable is about our day.

At the time for the application of this parable, Biblical chronologers, particularly Mr. Bowen, were demonstrating that 6,000 years from Adam would end in the 1870's. Thus, the 7th day — a new day — would begin at that point in history. THAT, of course, is when (as this verse predicts) a shout went out (at "midnight") that the Bridegroom had arrived. (The KJV is wrong. It is not "cometh;" it is "Behold the Bridegroom." He was here.)

The "shout" is reflected in Revelation 11:15. The 7th Trumpet sounds, and many voices in the religious world concur with the sounding: in essence, the Lord has returned. The subtitle of Bro. Russell's journal was "Herald of Christ's Presence."

The KJV reads, "Go ye out." But the NAS is correct in saying, "Come out to meet him." This is the equivalent of Revelation 18:4. It is a time of separation (of "Harvest") from the old, erroneous, and worn out system of "Christian" theology. "Come out of her, my people."

The "Behold" of this verse is important. ONLY those hearing the 7th Trumpet made this claim. Nearly none in Christendom does. They do not "behold."

This verse changes everything. The 75 years of preparation (since 1799) has resulted in the total ending of "the mystery." The objective of the virgins' studies has been realized. The parable turns a new page in Church history at this verse. The Harvest has begun.

25:7. The sounding of the 7th Trumpet awakened the slumbering disciples. They again entered a period of deep and sincere study — they "trimmed their lamps." They cut off all of the old misinterpretations and presumptions, the superstitions and assumptions.

This trimming resulted in such exquisite Bible study that the saints began to know that they had "the truth." They became very jealous of their newly found "meat in due season." Such positiveness inevitably creates frictions between the positive ones and those whose love of truth might be slightly compromised by their parallel love of comfort — comfort in life, or (more importantly) comfort or ease with a casualness of belief. That is what happened historically as verse 7 merges into verse 8.

25:8, 9. These verses are the TURNING POINT regarding a noticeable separation between the wise and the foolish. This attitude separation probably began slowly early in the Harvest period; but by the time 1914 had passed, providing particular challenges for prophetic interpretation and character laxness, standards for study and for character development showed a marked change.

SPIRITUALITY (not knowledge) becomes the test — not that knowledge isn't a factor! When the foolish proclaim "Our lamps are going out," they are admitting that their COMPREHENSION cannot support the needed zeal of their CONSECRATIONS. Suddenly, CLARITY becomes an issue between the two groups. This all happens subsequent to midnight. In other words, the division into character groups is entirely made manifest in the Laodicean period — even though the parable begins before that date.

25:8. Before we can comprehend the significance of the request by the foolish, we have to define "oil" in a more restrictive way than merely to say it represents the Holy Spirit. After all, we cannot give the Holy Spirit. Thus the request (under the normal definition) makes no sense. Nevertheless, the parable shows clearly that it IS POSSIBLE to give of this "oil" — just not advisable to do so.

— An Aside—

The following points may help us to see what this oil is or is not.

1. This oil is not simply the Holy Spirit, because we cannot give it. But, according to verse 9, the wise **COULD HAVE COMPLIED** with this request.
2. In defining this oil, we must note that it would seem contrary to a true Christian attitude that the wise would **NOT BE WILLING** to share! Therefore, these verses do not represent a lack of generosity. The parable shows that complying would be a **LACK OF WISDOM**.
3. The oil is not **KNOWLEDGE**. We would gladly share knowledge with anyone who asks. Besides, **BOTH CLASSES HAD TRIMMED LAMPS!**
4. Whatever the oil is, the foolish had the money (the ability) to obtain it (verse 9).
5. In commenting on verse 2, Bro. Russell says that the foolish lived **CARELESSLY**. This is a valuable clue. "Careless" living implies a lack of ability to put a proper value on things. Hence, whatever the foolish virgins are missing is probably due to their lack of proper EVALUATION — internal, not intellectual.

6. This LACK OF PROPER VALUE can be understood by the content of the parable:
 - a. TIME is not adequately valued. It is the Laodicean advent that precipitates the problem. (The division happens after midnight.) So the special import of "present truth" – the truth now due – seems to be undervalued.
 - b. CONVICTIONS regarding the absolute nature of "present truth" are weak or fuzzy. It is the lack of SHARP FOCUS that precipitates the problem: "Our lamps are going out!" – i.e., "I don't see it so clearly as you do." Intellect (knowledge) has not met "cellular conviction" (internal change).

7. The essence of the request is: "DIVIDE WITH US." In other words, "Average things out; lower your picky standards; compromise Harvest truths (information and character standards) so that we can get along together without constant bickering."

The foolish are requesting of the wise: "At your expense, make us happy!"

They are not asking to get the oil, they are asking for the SPIRIT OF CONSECRATION to be DILUTED. So the request is more "Give in with your oil. We all have

Harvest truth; don't be so defensive of it and its application."

All the virgins had enough oil (spirit of consecration) to take them TO midnight. But only 5 had what it took to go beyond that point. All "went forth" (verse 1) — they all were cleansed by Daniel 8 ("The Cleansing of the Sanctuary"). But EXTRA OIL (present truth WITHIN — without the compromise of it) is necessary past the midnight hour. (Compare Revelation 14:12.)

8. The wise learned from the Miller disappointments the need for their "FIRST LOVE." The foolish actually thought that their Scriptural Gymnastics were what was needed. ("You think you are rich," Revelation 3:17.) The Bride never loses her "first love." Bridesmaids can afford to be a little indifferent. It's only a party for them!
9. The conclusion, then, of the meaning of verse 8 seems to be that: "Our lamps are going out." It is a plea saying, "We don't get from our studies the personal vehemence, zeal, and seemingly stubborn tenacity you wise virgins insist on in the Harvest message. You seem to think it is so different and exclusive of what other Christians have. COMPROMISE with us, and we will all get along fine. DILUTE your oil a bit!"
10. The wise and foolish represent classes, not individuals. Thus these concepts continue ever since midnight, and they will apply until the Bride is complete.

11. The EXTRA OIL is what the wise had internalized which made them able to recognize Christ's presence and to welcome it along with VALUING AS A TREASURE the FOOD IT PROVIDES. They COULD give it away in the sense of devaluing it to the point where it has less value than having the fellowship of their easygoing comrades.

John 6:24 applies here. We must worship in SPIRIT and in TRUTH. The "truth" is the "lamp." The "Spirit" is the "vessel" — our new creature development.

25:9. The answer of the wise is what is and should be said: "There is no room for compromise of our standards and your request for laxities and tolerances. It is not a group average (a lukewarmness) that will constitute success."

When the wise say "Go," they are suggesting: "Each must fill his own vessel with the standards and zeal needed. We implore you to reexamine the matter. Go to the dealers of Laodicean truth (the Scriptures, Bro. Russell, and his spiritual descendants). Fill yourselves with the vision (not the arguments and rationalizations)!"

25:10. The above has been going on at least since 1914 if not earlier. The foolish do wash their robes, but on a too-late basis. The process is still going on. It will continue until the next feature mentioned in the parable.

A VERY IMPORTANT CAUTION: The reference in this verse to the coming of the Bridegroom is not about Jesus'

return! The Bridegroom came in verse 6. He is here; he doesn't "come" again.

TO "COME" in the New Testament (and even in the Old) frequently means TO TAKE AN ACTION. Many instances could be cited. But just to provide examples quickly, note Revelation 2:5, 16, and 3:3. In none of these references is Jesus threatening an early second advent — not even a temporary return to earth. In each instance he is threatening TO TAKE AN ACTION. THAT is exactly the meaning in Matthew 25:10 in our parable. Jesus is present, but, at a time inconvenient for the foolish virgins, HE TAKES THE ACTION of shutting the door to the marriage. In other words, the Bride is complete, and no more individuals will ever have the opportunity of entering this very special reward.

Fortunately, at the date of this writing, the door is still open.

25:11, 12. These two verses are summarized in places like Jeremiah 8:20; Habakkuk 3:16-19, etc.

"I do not know you" means that as far as their calling is concerned — to be of the Bride — they have become strangers.

25:13. Jesus summarizes the importance of the parable for the Harvest saints. "Do not wait to get oil in your vessels — to understand internally the value and application of the UNCOMPROMISABLE beauties." Last-minute attempts will be dangerous.

"You do not know the day nor the hour." The time to which Jesus refers are the two unknowable dates shown in Matthew 24:35, 36 and here in Matthew 25:10:

1. The passing of heaven and earth — the date of the Mediation's beginning; and
2. The closing of the door — the day that 144,000 have been securely sealed into their positions.

Thus, the SPIRIT OF WATCHFULNESS (an internal desire rather than an intellectual calculation) will be imperative — not the spirit of compromise and laxity. In other words, have the oil in self; and that is an attitude — "the spirit of consecration" as Bro. Russell defines this oil.

— THE TALENTS —
(Matthew 25:14-30)

Jesus doesn't miss a heartbeat before beginning this parable in the wake of the WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS. We should notice the power of contextual concepts when we view the three parables of Matthew 25. All three parables, as diverse as they are in many respects, point out ONE COMMON thought. THAT thought is attitude deficiency — character weakness.

The foolish virgins don't grasp that the Holy Spirit has to be internalized so that their characters become like God's. The one-talented man of the TALENTS parable never grasps the character of his master. He never realizes that what is given to us is given for the growth of the new creature — not for us to protect the master's goods. When we reach the SHEEP AND GOATS parable, we will again see this lesson. The goats never grasp that the character they must attain is not self-centered. This is the common error in all three parables.

While we can ascribe numerous other objectives for Jesus' giving these three parables in the context he uses, we must be struck by this most basic of lessons. Those judged in the Gospel or Millennial Ages all have this one thing in common. Their success or their failure will be directly related to their becoming like God — not related to their obedience or their intellect.

25:14. This parable begins with Jesus' departure from this earth just before Pentecost.

"For" is the word which opens this parable. No one can successfully deny that this word is Jesus' attempt to CONNECT this parable to the previous one. If we don't see the connection, we must look for it. The "For" with which this verse begins is not a short-space connection. It is not referring to not knowing the day nor the hour of 25:13. It is referring to the kind of test that will separate Church from Great Multitude.

The WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS parable had pointed out one of the tests that divides. That test was slackness in applying truth to character growth.

Now, however, Jesus suggests a second test. And he also wants to provide a cautionary point.

The second test is to see whether we appreciate what we have been given to be a gift or an opportunity. The successful ones of this parable use their "talents" as MEANS TO AN END — to accomplish something for their master. Those failing the test use the "talent" as AN END IN ITSELF — as if the master gave him something to protect. This is a sobering and searching test.

This parable provides a PRECAUTION. It cautions that the Great Multitude is not a mostly end-of-the-age class.

When Jesus gave the WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS parable, it centered in on the "Time of the End." And,

indeed, it did not really have a noticeable separation of the two groups until after "midnight." Thus we might erroneously conclude that Church versus Great Multitude is a Harvest doctrine. It is not. Consequently, one reason Jesus offers this parable is to stress that this "talent" test is age-long. It will result in the end-of-age judgment into two classes. But it is not an end-of-age doctrine.

We might easily forget that the doctrine of the Great Multitude class has been generally lost ever since the Ephesus stage of the Church. Because the doctrine is resurrected and polished for the Harvest Church, Jesus devotes two parables to a subject brought to light again in the Harvest — the period of focus in his "Great Prophecy."

We must recall that Matthew 25 is a part of the "Lord's Great Prophecy" begun in Chapter 24. Most of Chapter 24 is centered on Harvest or second-advent items — as is the WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS parable. This TALENTS parable is placed where it is as a caveat against misunderstanding the Great Multitude doctrine, AND as an opportunity to warn Harvest saints against the additional PITFALL of thinking that we were given the truth so that our primary objective is to PROTECT IT — a prevalent and serious error found sometimes among Harvest saints.

Jesus "entrusted his possessions to" his servants. What better way is there to see what their objectives in stewardship will be!

25:15. Verse 15 contains a very important lesson. The number of talents is distributed "according to ability." Thus there is absolutely no difference as far as faithfulness is concerned. Success in the Narrow Way is just as possible for the one-talented person as it is for the five-talented person. This is not a contest to see who has more or who does more. The five-talented man and the one-talented man both start out as equals. Each has all he can (and should) handle.

25:16, 17. "Immediately" is a wonderful word in this story. Both the five-talented and the two-talented servants **DON'T HESITATE**. The Lord gave them something to use, and they "immediately" started using it. They had the spirit of the joy of service.

The "gains" they made are, in themselves, seemingly insignificant. The numbers (five from five, and two from two) probably are telling us to use the equivalent of what we have received.

25:18. But here we have the sad story — and one which must show one of the deficiencies of foolish virgins. There is no "immediately" here. Instead there is a going away — a straying from the spirit and the intent of our begettal.

The digging in the ground is activity in the wrong direction. This man's concepts were GROUNDED — they were stuck in earthly thinking. He actually thought he was given possessions **ONLY TO PRESERVE THEM**.

If we were given stewardship over a Stradivarius Violin, YES, we would be expected to protect it! But, we all should reason that a violin was meant to be PLAYED! We wouldn't put it in careless hands, but we would send it out to be heard in the hand of a virtuoso. Looking at a violin or a pile of money is useless; so is storing it in a vault. Both items were designed FOR USE.

25:19. This verse is the parallel of 25:10. Jesus, at the close of the age rewards wise versus foolish stewardship — Church versus Great Multitude.

25:20-23. The five-talent and the two-talent receivers both did well. They used the Lord's goods for profit. In the non-comparable world, we would say that the Little Flock used everything from the Lord to do everything for the Lord that they could. Both receive the same commendation: "Well done; you are worthy of receiving more; enter the realm of eternal service for good."

25:24. The misguided servant, on the other hand, had not grasped his duty. He focused on the EXACTITUDE of his master, not on the PURPOSE of his master. It is genuinely warped thinking stemming from FEAR. This poor fellow was frightened of his Lord rather than exuberant about his Lord's work. This fellow had a "servitude" attitude rather than a "service" attitude. This man is not the kind of man you want to work with for the rest of your life!

25:25. He admits that FEAR is what dominated him. And, instead of being apologetic and transformed by this realization, he uses it as an excuse — a rationalization — for

what he did. He virtually (and very unwisely) seems to say, "You should be pleased that I have kept it exactly the way you gave it to me!"

25:26, 27. But the master views it differently. He views this attitude as "wicked" and "lazy." Wickedness in this application is attributed because it is unrighteous to withhold blessings from others when we have the means to provide those blessings. Laziness is attributed because the foolish virgins seem to have an attitude of complacency which keeps them from constant character growth and application. As this man had fear, the Great Multitude also may well have the fear of personalizing truth. This requires stepping out on faith to express truth as a personal application. Instead, this class receives it and says, in practice, "I'm keeping it as I get it. Don't even suggest to me that I can make it expand and grow."

The master admits to a kind of EXACTITUDE in his nature. But he corrects the foolish servant in his misunderstanding of it. Jesus is exacting in valuing truth; but he knows truth is a tool. Hence he says, "The least you could do is give it to someone who will get a little interest out of it!"

25:28, 29. Just as the foolish virgins were denied entrance to the wedding, and just as they had to hear the most discouraging words, "I do not know you," this poor servant loses stewardship completely. He can remain as a menial servant, but he cannot be entrusted with creative use of the Lord's possessions.

The gift of stewardship which he had received goes to the one who can handle it. In the world it is often said, "When you want something done, give it to the one who is busy." So the stewardship here goes to the man who had the most — the now-ten-talented man. This concept is the message of verse 29. Thus, on the other side, the initial equality of the two successful servants (verse 15 — "each according to his own ability") will no longer exist. Star will differ from star in glory. Those having demonstrated the greatest productivity in their characters and in the Lord's service will receive INCREASED opportunity. "Give it to the one who has ten talents." He will then have eleven.

25:30. The "outer darkness" and the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" seem to be used in the New Testament for (1) The Scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 8:12); (2) The Tare-class of Christianity (Matthew 13:42 [possibly 13:50]; 23:13; and Luke 13:28); (3) An Evil Servant and Hypocrites (Matthew 24:51); and (4) The Great Multitude (possibly Matthew 13:50, and here in Matthew 25:30).

"Outer Darkness" appears to be symbolic of the judgment state of those who thought they were in the "inner circle" — the Lord's favorites. Hence, when their anticipated reward escapes them, they seem to be "in the dark" — without explanation or comprehension of how this could have happened to them. (This expression occurs only in Matthew 8:12; 22:13; and 25:30 — thus applying to the Jewish Leaders, the Tares, and the Great Multitude.)

"Weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth" (all instances recorded in the paragraph preceding the above paragraph) are the universal symbolic expressions for two things:

- "Weeping and Wailing" shows great sadness or regret.
- "Gnashing of Teeth" (the clenching of teeth together with great pressure) shows great disappointment or chagrin.

In none of the above instances does Second Death appear to be a factor. In the next parable, the goats do have a Second Death sentence. But in that state there is no regret nor disappointment. The above symbols do not apply to them. Yet they do seem to have the same "outer darkness" in that they can't seem to understand their plight.

— THE SHEEP AND GOATS —
(Matthew 25:31-46)

As before noted, this parable constitutes the official end of "Our Lord's Great Prophecy" which has spanned Chapters 24 and 25. This parable is the only part of the entire context that carries us into the period of Mediation for mankind. As also noted earlier, its presence in this prophecy is so that the prophecy will have dealt with all classes of mankind. And this parable contains one thing in common with its two predecessors: All three show that judgment will be based on internal character growth into the likeness of God.

This is not only the final parable in the "Great Prophecy," but it is the last parable in Matthew's Gospel.

25:31. Jesus begins by defining the time for the application of this parable. It is not when he comes, but, rather, when he "comes in his glory, and all the angels (the Church glorified) with him." This is the Mediatorial reign of the Millennial Age.

Matthew is unique in using the term "the throne of his glory." (NAS = "his glorious throne.") It seems a code name for the time when individuals are to be judged. (Compare Revelation 20:12.) Jesus has been on a throne since his return (Revelation 20:11). And he has been judging (Revelation 19:11). But this in-progress judgment is of institutions, not individuals. Earth and heaven (social and

religious institutions) are currently fleeing from his presence; and, ultimately no place will be found for them.

Revelation 20:11 is set aside as one verse by John's interpretive marker: "And I saw." Verse 12 begins with the same words. THIS IS IMPERATIVE! The old order must be destroyed (verse 11) before individual judgment can begin. Revelation 20:12 begins to discuss individual judgment — but ONLY AFTER verse 11 has made the old order "flee away." Thus, Matthew 25:31 is a reference to the "glorious throne" that begins its function in Revelation 20:12 — not his reigning throne (20:11) that began in 1874 to sweep away the old order.

25:32, 33. Once Mediation has begun, it will be worldwide — "all nations will be gathered before him."

The Mediation is a period of separation. Separation, however, is not the object of the period! Salvation is. But "separation" is in this parable in order to make the sobering point that this period will separate the successes from the failures. It is the great judgment day of the world. The Gospel Age has not been — despite the contrary ravings of nearly all religions.

Jesus will separate them "AS the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." The simile is SHORT-lived. The parable is not about these animals! Two items need consideration. (1) Jesus is a shepherd of humans. This parable mentions "sheep and goats" only in verses 32 and 33 — even though we name the entire parable after these two animals. A more suitable name for the parable might

be THE SEPARATION OF THE PEOPLES. The parable doesn't explain WHY a shepherd would do this separating. We must speculate — but with HUMANITY in mind. The implication is that the flock is in danger when some in it care for self and the rest care for the group. This was the inherent lesson in the two previous parables — and remains so here. (2) The short, but interesting, mention of sheep and goats does make us think of the qualities of the two animals. Sheep are docile and prefer to be in a flock. Goats are self-willed and prefer to wander off on their own.

In the 33rd verse we see favor and disfavor symbolized (as it is throughout Scripture) by right and left hands respectively.

The work represented in these two verses takes the bulk of the Millennial Age. The sentences pronounced in the remainder of the parable will probably take place at the end of the age — although some who are particularly incorrigible might experience their doom before the age ends. We have a prophetic hint of this in Isaiah 65:20.

25:34. The reward of the favored (the right hand) is described in this verse. It begins with "come." Compare this to 25:41 where the direction is "depart." It is favor versus abhorrence. It is acceptance versus rejection. It is life versus death.

The favored are described as "blessed of My Father." This is important. The objective of the age is to bring the willing into complete harmony and acceptability with the Father —

not just with the Mediator. In the end, the blessing of the Father equals LIFE.

These favored ones are HEIRS. The Kingdom of earth was designed to be given to them. This was the plan from the very founding of the world. (See Revelation 21:7; 22:5.)

25:35, 36. Remember now that this is a parable. The things done by the "sheep class" represent things OTHER THAN THE THINGS STATED. (Sheep don't do these things! But the sheep-like do.) We all can use our imaginations to come up with appropriate inferences. But we will here list some possible meanings for what the "sheep-class" do.

In verses 35 and 36, Jesus personalizes their good deeds as being done to him. He later (verse 40) acknowledges that the deeds were done to others, but accepted as done for the king. Thus, in the Kingdom, the "sheep-class" will see others as:

1. HUNGRY. There will be no literal hunger then. This may well be the hunger for information.
2. THIRSTY. There will be no thirst. But the Beatitudes suggest a thirst for righteousness. This is the application of information. The "sheep" apparently help others apply.
3. STRANGER. Well, there may, indeed, be "strangers" for a while as mankind learns to assimilate. Just as Israel under the Law was required to welcome

strangers and make them feel at home, the "sheep" will work to integrate all into the fellowship of the camaraderie of a new and restoring mankind.

4. NAKED. This might mean without justification. All returning from death will need to be led in the paths of righteous works in order to obtain life. Encouraging others in the "highway of holiness" may be meant here.
5. SICK. Sick here seems also to imply being isolated because of the sickness, since the "sheep" VISIT the sick ones. The thought seems to be that the weaknesses in another will not make the "sheep" standoffish.
6. IMPRISONED. It is not unlikely that return from death will be, at least in part, due to the request of someone who prays for the individual's return from the tomb. If this be the case, the "sheep" will be active in remembering people and REQUESTING their awakenings. Some people who have died may have nearly no one who wants them back! But the "sheep-like" will be anxious to give the chance for restoration to all.

25:37-39. These verses are revealing. It shows beyond doubt that it is internal character goodness that motivates the sheep. They don't need a list of instructions for salvation. They develop INSTINCTS which drive them to

serve. This is so much the case that they can hardly remember any special efforts to do things.

25:40. Jesus clearly wants that quality. It is that quality that makes these people "sheep." He considers it all done to him. This is not selfish of him! By doing it to him, he means that his unselfish and magnanimous plans for mankind NECESSITATE that kind of individual. "To him" means, then, in the service of the good to all — in service of the common wealth.

25:41. Now we look at the "goat-class" — those who do not exhibit that sharing of self for the benefit of others. Their doom is first pronounced. "Depart" is eternal exclusion. "Accursed" is a decision as to merit.

The remainder of the verse deserves some analysis. The "goats" will go into the "eternal fire" (Second Death). This "eternal fire" has been PREPARED FOR the devil and his angels. We can correctly conclude that the "eternal fire" condition was DESIGNED FOR (1) the devil, himself, but (2) also for "his angels." These last two words are subject to interpretation.

The Church constitutes Christ's angels. (See Matthew 24:31.) But Christ and his Church also have spirit angels in their service. (See Hebrews 1:14.) Thus we have the question: Are the "angels" of 25:44 the fallen angels? Or are they anyone (including these goats) who by their actions are Messengers ("angels") of Satan? We think the latter is the meaning. Thus, the "goat-class" is relegated to the condition which was in advance specifically

PREPARED FOR all who exhibit the qualities of the Adversary.

There seems, also, no time implied. The entry of the "goats" into the "eternal fire" is a destiny, but not a scheduled destiny. A careful comparison of texts on the subject reveals that the fallen angels likely are placed in this condition BEFORE THE MEDIATION. The personal devil arrives there at the close of the Little Season. These "goats" can apparently arrive there anytime during the Mediation (Isaiah 65:20), or at the close of the Mediation (as indicated by this parable). If (and this is difficult to confirm) the unfaithful of the "Little Season" are also considered "goats," then a third time for their entry into this condition becomes a possibility.

25:42-45. The same list of good works is given. It is important to note that the "goat-class" thinks it has done everything well! "When didn't we do that?" They obviously had concluded that they ought to follow a LIST of things to do to be saved. And they likely actually did these things. But they did them as an assignment — not as an absorption of the spirit of the things. Their characters didn't change — only their doings did. Jesus concludes: "You are not a part of me and my program. You are interested (like goats) in going your own way, and not in the welfare of the flock."

25:46. This ends the lesson. There will be only two possibilities resulting from Mediation: eternal death, or eternal life.

SECTION III

PARABLES EXCLUSIVE TO MARK

— THE FARMER —
(Mark 4:26-29)

We are speculating that this parable is a very abbreviated version of The Wheat and Tares Parable of Matthew 13. This speculation is founded on the observation that Mark 4 mentions the Parable of the Sower (4:3-9 and 14-20), the Parable of the Mustard Seed (4:30-32), and other material present in Matthew 13.

However, even if it is a shrunken version of the Wheat and Tares Parable, it never mentions tares, and can certainly be viewed as a little story of its own.

4:26. It may make no difference whatsoever, but it is worthy of note that in Matthew's account, the parables liken the stories to the "Kingdom of Heaven." Mark and Luke seem to report Jesus' words as "Kingdom of God."

The "man" of this verse we would initially be inclined to identify as Jesus — the sower of the Gospel message. But this creates problems in the next verse. So, it seems best to make this parable a lesson parable as opposed to a prophetic one. The "man" is just a farmer who plants, expecting growth. In other words, it is more of a generic than a specific parable.

4:27. Jesus doesn't "go to bed" and get up, but a farmer does. The seeming implication of the parable is that the Gospel Age is allowed to progress without any particular interventions — just as a farmer's field progresses through

rainy days, sunny days, days of varying winds and temperatures, etc. In other words, when the message was "planted" at the beginning of the age, the Lord allowed "natural forces" to prevail during the growing season. Jesus alludes to this in the Wheat and Tares Parable when he says, "allow both to grow together until the Harvest." We would not assume that this means that the Lord didn't have constant interventions on the Church's behalf. But he did let everything at least appear to be growing naturally.

4:28. The above interpretation fits the concepts of this verse. Crops "just grow" if soil conditions allow their kind of growth.

The growth of the ultimate (wheat) crop is slow and steady — but with an eventual goal in mind: the wheat. But first there are only grass-like blades. Then comes a blossoming "head." The blossoms become seeds — the desired fruitage of a wheat stalk.

4:29. When the desired fruitage has appeared, the farmer "immediately" (Revelation 14:15) puts in the sickle "BECAUSE" that was the intent from the beginning.

Other than an outline of the Gospel Age, this parable seems relatively uninteresting. Mark may well have failed to include what Matthew recorded — which makes Matthew's version vital to Christian history.

If nothing else, however, this Mark version shows God's age-long patience in developing the crop He wants — and that it will not be recognized until the age has ended.

— THE WATCHING SERVANTS —
(Mark 13:33-37)

The immediate context of this parable is material clearly from "Our Lord's Great Prophecy" of Matthew 24. Again, Mark reports fewer of many pertinent details.

Luke 12 is similarly connected to Matthew 24. Luke spreads Matthew 24 connections over several disconnected chapters. But in Luke 12:35-40 we find a parable that is most likely a much better report of the parable which Mark gives us. Please see the explanation of the Luke parable in comparison to Mark's simpler version.

13:33. In this verse, Jesus gives the reason for the following parable. It is simple and important: The saints will not know the Second Advent events and time scheduling beforehand. But they will know to be looking. The parable points out the importance of this "on-guard" attitude.

13:34. Jesus is a man who takes an age-long journey. While he is gone, he leaves his servants to manage his house. Varying servants have varying responsibilities or charges.

The "doorkeeper" is, of course, one of the servants. But his special charge is to open the door when the Master returns. (See Revelation 3:20.) It seems that Bro. Russell qualified as a "doorkeeper."

13:35. In this verse, we have, unlike in Luke, a less-than-clear reference as to when the Master might return. Mark here mentions FOUR possibilities. Luke only mentions TWO — the junction of which IS the time of return.

13:36. In this version of the parable, the Master warns against sleeping — a warning which found all virgins guilty in Matthew 25:5. But we might notice with glee that SOMEONE was awake in Matthew 25:6. That verse says it was MIDNIGHT when the announcement was made. Based upon that parable, the "midnight" of this parable (13:35) seems to be the right answer!

13:37. This little parable then concludes with Jesus' fundamental message: My return is for the alert WATCHERS.

SECTION IV

PARABLES EXCLUSIVE TO LUKE

— Introduction —

We need not say much here except that Brother Luke has supplied us with a repository of a good number of Jesus' parables which we would not otherwise have. While we must delight in Matthew's inspired placement of parables, we must also delight that Luke, as a careful historian, apparently sought out parables which others did not record.

Luke's contexts sometimes vary a bit from Matthew's. Nevertheless, there is a compelling contextual importance in Luke's listings. Luke, much more than Matthew, has a focus on parables dealing with the JEWISH HARVEST — that intriguing and important change (especially in the mind of the early Church) from the Jewish Law Age into the Christian Gospel Age. Our understanding of many of the details of this Jewish Harvest come, of course, from Jesus, but greatly due to Luke's efforts in recording parables specific to that event.

— THE TWO DEBTORS —

(Luke 7:41, 42)

This probably is not a parable. It is more like a "What if I told you that...?" Initially, our intent was to omit this episode since it seems clearly not to fit the definition of a parable as explained in our introduction to this book. In essence, there is no story here! Jesus just sets up a "What if?" situation in order to address the skepticism of a Pharisee. The "story" (the "What if?" situation) is this:

A man had a large and small debtor; he
forgave them both.

Clearly this is almost not a story. It is only a statement; but Jesus seems to use it to stimulate an important lesson about which debtor will likely have more gratitude.

We are entertaining this passage because it is good to see what kinds of things we are omitting. We also cannot help but note a peculiarity here —

The Pharisee says the greater debtor will have more gratitude. Jesus says, "You have judged correctly." Many of us might not reason this way. Many of us might reason that equal gratitude should come from those with much or those with little. It is clear, of course, that when we personally feel great relief from the lifting of a burden so large that we thought it might never go away, we have a deeper-felt gratitude. But under the Law, all breakers of the Law ("debtors" to the Law) were equal in the sense that

breaking a large or small commandment was breaking the entire Law, and was evidence that the breaker was not worthy of life.

Brother Russell reacted to this also. His response was that "the ratio [500 denarii versus 50 denarii] does not represent Jesus' view of the situation, but illustrates the sentiments of Mary [the woman] and Simon [the Pharisee]." This seems correct. Jesus was not saying that little infractions are less important than large ones. He was wanting the Pharisee to understand that, by the Pharisee's own judgment, the sinful woman had enormously more gratitude than did the Pharisee. Thus the Pharisee, hopefully, understood that Jesus' eating with sinners had a purpose: it was to turn them toward righteousness (because they felt much gratitude).

The context of this so-called "parable" is imperative to its success. It cannot stand alone. We should read at least verses 36-50. Perhaps this makes the point that an illustration DEMANDS its context; a parable ENHANCES its context.

— THE GOOD SAMARITAN —
(Luke 10:30-37)

The introductory passage to this parable is important and instructive (10:25-29).

We see in verse 25 that the lawyer had only a sinister motive in questioning Jesus. He asks what is certainly a wonderful question (if it weren't asked in order to entrap!): "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus answers with a question. While Jesus asks it in the kindest way, his hidden meaning seems to be: "You are an expert in the Law; why do you not know the answer to your own question? Are you possibly asking not for information, but to trap me?"

The lawyer did, indeed, know the answer. He quoted from the Law the very two basic concepts which summarized the entire Law. It is the answer which Jesus also gave in Matthew 22:37-40 when another lawyer asked him about the greatest commandment in the Law.

Thus, Jesus concurs with the lawyer's answer (verse 28).

Verse 29 demonstrates the insincerity of the lawyer's questioning. It says, "But wishing to justify himself..."

The lawyer had been unjust. Now we see that he wants to justify his having been unjust! In other words, he keeps on trying to ensnare Jesus! Even though he was caught in his own scheme, he continues it by baiting Jesus. He

challenges Jesus to tell him "WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?"
Perhaps he thought to himself, "Now I've got him!"

But Jesus now gives the parable. And the parable will very clearly trap the lawyer in the morass of his own reasonings. There will be no way out! And, additionally, the response which the lawyer will be forced to give will condemn the Pharisees and Levites! We can only speculate that the poor man left the scene wishing he had never opened his mouth.

The moral lesson of the parable is similar to the Apostle's injunction that we "do good unto all men as we have opportunity — but especially unto the household of faith." Thus all men become our family. The victim in this parable was, no doubt, a Jew — traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Therefore, he was FAMILY to the Pharisee and the Levite. The Samaritan was, in Jewish eyes, a STRANGER to the fellowship of Israel. As the parable progresses, the implications of all of this become obvious.

The traveling Jew is assaulted by thieves and left to die. A priest happens by the incident. A priest is not only a member of the Jew's "family," but, at least in theory, he is also a servant of the Jews! He doesn't help the poor victim. And to compound the sin, he makes a point of walking on the other side of the road!

The infraction is then repeated by a Levite (with all of the same duty abrogations found in the priest).

Jesus is making a point: You not only don't know who your neighbor is, you don't seem to know who your family is!

Then the STRANGER comes along — a stranger who tended to be HATED by the Jews! But "compassion" ruled this Samaritan. He gave the victim all of the comforts and aids at his disposal. Then he arranged for the poor man, at the Samaritan's expense, to be cared for by the local innkeeper.

It might be worthy of note here that the Samaritan did not stay with the victim. He merely PROVIDED for him according to his ability. Thus, we also, when we find unusual opportunity to "do good unto [one or some of the] all men," need not befriend them, nor interrupt the needed business we are about. We merely give the humanitarian assistance that all good people should expect of one another. With the "household of faith," however, we might suspend our usual business to ensure their welfare and peace.

The Samaritan (because he could) gave two-days-worth of wages to the innkeeper — with promise of additional funds if that were found necessary. This was GENEROSITY. Some of us could not do this much; but the amount is mentioned to demonstrate that the Samaritan's actions were not pecuniary, but generous within his means.

That is the parable. Even if no more were said, the story is complete and stands by itself.

But Jesus then asks the lawyer the question which very much UNJUSTIFIES the lawyer! And the question answers the lawyer's trick question for us all — the lawyer included.

"Which of the three men was neighbor to the victim?"
Jesus' question even answers the early Genesis question by Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Yes, indeed. And not only our brother's, but our neighbor's. And our neighbor is everyone in the human race. Thus the part of the Law requiring "your neighbor as yourself" is the FULFILLING of the Law — not just the Jewish Law, but the eternal Law of God, Himself. The Samaritan was the caring neighbor. How embarrassing for the Jew!

The lawyer walked off far richer (if he learned!). Jesus' admonition to him and us: "Go and do likewise."

— THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT —
(Luke 11:5-7)

This is a parable about persistence — not in the sense of nagging, but in the sense that it is important to convince regarding the sincerity and the true need in a request. (The convincing is for ourselves as well as for the one of whom we make request.)

The chapter opens with a reference to the "Lord's Prayer." It is a prayer of REQUESTS. Then follows the parable — a parable about persistence in request — not about repetitiveness, but about thought-out sincerity.

The story begins with a man who has unexpected guests. Our lives are full of unexpected situations and needs. This one is important in that the request for help is because the requestor wants to serve.

The PROVIDER of the needs is inconvenienced. This part of the parable teaches us in case we are ever privileged to be providers. We won't mind requests if we see their legitimacy.

In verse 7 we see the initial reticence of the provider-friend to respond to the request. We should not assume that this is a bad attitude. All of us have constant demands from others. We cannot possibly fulfill them all. And, frequently, the demands for our attention or our means are not really vital.

Verse 7 indicates what we have just stated. The response from the other side of the door is, "Do you REALLY need this right now?" We are justified in weighing how we respond to the requests of others. Elders, for instance, need not say "yes" to every invitation. Brethren, for instance, need not go to every available meeting in their area. All of these things, including requests for assistance on varying levels, can be properly and prayerfully weighed.

Actually, the parable ends in verse 7. The remainder of the verses under consideration (8-13) are Jesus' comments on his own parable. If we compare Matthew 7:12, which follows a similar context, we find that Jesus summarizes the entire matter with what we call "The Golden Rule." "However you want people to treat you, so treat them." Then he adds, "...for this is the Law and the Prophets" — a phrase which connects us to the previous parable about our responsibilities toward family and neighbor.

The 8th verse of Chapter 11 gives us much to think about. Jesus points out that FRIENDSHIP (or we might even add "family") is not enough reason to expect rapid fulfillment of our requests. There is more that is needed. We must CONVINCe the one of whom we are making request of the VALIDITY of the request. This convincing is here called "persistence." It doesn't mean nagging repetition! It means a rational presentation of the true need. IF THAT is accomplished, then, Jesus says, "he will get up and give... as much as" is needed. It is a wonderful verse. It accomplishes two important concepts:

1. We should give because we are convinced that the need is real.
2. When we ask, we should be convinced that asking is appropriate.

In verses 9-13, Jesus expounds on the many implications which his parable contains.

Verse 9 is famous. We remember its sequence because A.S.K. becomes an acronym for Ask, Seek, and Knock. The NAS margin helps to augment the thought of reasoned persistence: "Keep asking...keep seeking...keep knocking."

It is also incumbent upon us to question the three words. To ask, of course, is simply to make reasonable request. To seek, however, adds the thought of our having made all due diligence in finding the answers for ourselves. This demonstrates sincerity. To knock implies that having asked and searched, we are requesting the opening of doors — the access to avenues of supply that haven't been opened to us via the previous two activities. There are some things (many things!) that cannot be accomplished without the help of others. If those things are important to the development of our new creatures and to the service of God and His saints, then the knocking is justified.

Verses 11-13 are there for one specific reason: if we ask, seek, and knock, our heavenly Father will be very ready to grant that which is appropriate.

Verses 11 and 12 need a little analysis. First of all, they seem to deal with COUNTERFEITS. There are fish and serpents which RESEMBLE one another. There is a white scorpion which rolls itself into an egg-shaped defensive posture. Jesus' point is this: No father will give his son a harmful substitute. Or, to put it more to the point: if our requests are harmful (unknown to us) for our spiritual welfare our Father will not give them to us. He wants only to give the real and beneficial item. Thus, our Father insists that we justify the importance of our requests — that we analyze our requests. If we ask for a fish — and He knows that granting the request will be tantamount to giving us a serpent, HE WILL NOT GRANT THE REQUEST. We do this with our own children. If we (yet being imperfect) know how to practice this concept with our children, how much more would we expect from our perfect heavenly Father! He would, as would we, always grant true needs for His children when they perceive the need.

Thus Jesus summarizes emphasizing what the REAL GIFT is: "the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." The Holy Spirit is the answer to all requests! Making us ask for it was the thrust of the parable. We will never appreciate it without having WEIGHED what it means to us — without having demonstrated that we have CONSIDERED its need and that we use it APPROPRIATELY!

— THE RICH FOOL —

(Luke 12:16-21)

In Luke 12:13 we find a misdirected soul in the multitudinous crowd yelling out, "Tell my brother to share the family inheritance with me!" This will stimulate Jesus into a little sermon on the value of character over possessions.

First (12:14), Jesus points out that his place was not like that of Moses and the tribal chiefs. No one appointed Jesus to intervene in family squabbles. No doubt he would, if he could use the opportunity to support the messages of his ministry. But Jesus was not there to undo human foibles.

Jesus swings the conversation (12:15) to warn against "every form of greed" BECAUSE, even with an abundance, life does not consist of possessions. Here is the thesis. Character is all that counts. The parable will illuminate this truth.

So, Jesus begins with a man whose lot in life has been success — apparently due to the quality of his land, not necessarily of his efforts!

The man's reasoning is faulty to the extreme. He thinks that he will expand HIS STORAGE so that he can retire, eat, drink, and be merry. Clearly, the sin is selfishness. The previous two parables had, to a large degree, stressed service to others. The lack of that spirit in this man is his

downfall. The two great commandments were far from his character orientation.

In the 18th verse, we even have a subtle intimation that appearance is important to this poor fellow. He could have just built extra barns, but he seemed to think it necessary to eliminate any memories that he was not always so rich. He decided to "tear down my barns (so that no one can see the old, inferior structures) and build larger ones." Then he pats himself on the back: "Soul, you have many goods!" (12:19)

There are, of course, nearly innumerable lessons here. But Jesus stresses two. (1) Just when you are nearing your goal (but haven't enjoyed it yet) the big heart attack comes, and you're dead! (2) You didn't SHARE your goods with anyone. Instead of the goodness of sharing, you now LOSE IT ALL! And who will enjoy it? Probably some undeserving nephew you despised anyway!

In verse 21, Jesus says that this is the lot of the selfish. Note that he doesn't specifically talk about charity. He talks about not being "rich toward God." This would include charity, but it is so much broader. Jesus' intent from the beginning was character over possessions (12:15). ALL RICHES are measured by character-likeness and service to God.

— THE WATCHING SERVANTS —
(Luke 12:36-38)

We all would likely consider this a parable; but we know it is because Peter (verse 41) says it is.

(Strangely, however, the Scriptures sometimes say that something is a parable when it is only a comparison. Thus we learn that the definition of "parable," at least by Scriptural standards, varies. See Luke 14:7 in these notes.)

The parable follows a sermon detailing spiritual thinking over fleshly thinking. In 12:31 and 32 the matter is stated clearly with the FOCUS being on the Kingdom. Then in verses 33 and 34, Jesus wants us to TREASURE the Kingdom as our sole objective. This leads into the parable because the Kingdom cannot come until the king comes. The parable IS about the Lord's return.

This parable itself is restricted to verses 36-38. This is important to know. Verse 39 has symbolisms totally inconsistent with the parable. And, while it RELATES to the parable, it is no part of it.

If our treasure is the Kingdom (which begins in an important sense when the king returns), then being ready for the event would naturally be a priority for all true disciples. Jesus thus prepares the parable with a double admonition for readiness:

1. "Be dressed in readiness." (NAS) This seems somewhat less forceful than the

literal "Let your loins be girded" (as the KJV reads). Girdles are designed to keep clothing close to the body so that, while working, we are not irritated with loose pieces of cloth getting in the way. Thus, Jesus' admonition is that we have no "loose ends" (temporal attachments) that will hinder our dedicated service to the Lord as we wait.

2. The second admonition is to "Keep your lamps alight." The "lamp" is the Bible. If we are not constantly searching its gleanings, we will have insufficient light to recognize the elements of the Master's return — about which the parable is given.

Before looking at the parable, we should note its inescapable connection to the message given to the Laodicean Church in Revelation 3:14-22. That passage mentions clothing, the Lord's return with his "knock," the responsive opening of the door, and the Lord's serving his servants. The parallels are unmistakable and important to the interpretation of the parable.

12:36. As the parable opens, the disciples (us) are admonished to be like adoring servants who anxiously await their master's return.

The first element which requires interpretive attention is that the master "returns from the wedding feast." At least on the surface, this could easily be misinterpreted. After all, when THE wedding feast occurs (Revelation 19:9), all

of the disciples — all of the spirit-begotten ones — will be glorified. But in this parable, the servants (the Church yet in the flesh) are waiting (manifestly in the flesh) for the master, AFTER "the wedding feast."

The answer is quite simple when a few facts are known, and when the contextual setting of the parable is known.

First, the Jewish marriage arrangement was frequently begun by an engagement contract — a betrothal. A great feast accompanied this auspicious event. The actual marriage was usually an event distant from the betrothal celebration. At the actual marriage, the groom took the Bride to himself.

Now, let us apply this to the parable. We know the parable is about Jesus' return (1874). The entire Laodicean Church is developed subsequent to that event. The parable's parallels to the Laodicean message of Revelation 3 are inescapable. Obviously, no wedding feast regarding the glorification of the Church has occurred!

This is the scenario. The Gospel Age is the age devoted to seeking a Bride for Christ. Clearly, this work extends through Laodicea. But that is not the point. Jesus returns, for among many reasons, TO TAKE HIS BRIDE TO HIMSELF. He raises a part of that Bride in 1878. Thus, the "Age of Betrothal" (the Gospel Age) has given way to the age of "Taking His Bride unto Himself" — the actual marriage. The age is over; the Harvest has begun. The master has returned from the betrothal period.

So, to paraphrase verse 36, these saints were waiting for the Lord's return from the age which had, as its only purpose, BETROTHAL. The actual marriage was soon to occur — as in the Wise and Foolish Virgin Parable: when the door was shut, the marriage was complete. We have not yet reached that shut door. But we do “behold the Bridegroom” — he has returned from the betrothal age.

As verse 36 continues, Jesus stresses his desire that his Laodicean saints be alert to "open the door to him." This parallels Revelation 3:20: "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him."

12:37. This verse begins with words which clearly echo Matthew 24:36, which is also about Jesus' return and our being fed. Jesus wants us "on the alert when he comes." If we are, he does something never expected from a master. He girds "himself to serve." He has us recline at the table; and he serves us! We saw this in Revelation 3; we saw the food preparation in Matthew 24:45. The Laodicean context of this parable just shouts at us!

12:38, 39. Verse 38 ends the parable. It is uniquely obscure and obvious at the same time!

This is a strange way to end a parable. If we consider its purpose — AND its context — we will find that Jesus SO VERY MUCH wanted to tell his disciples when he would return — the VERY DATE that opens the parable. But he could not do so. Verse 39 is Jesus' explanation of why verse 38 must remain cloudy.

Verse 39 is not a part of the parable except that it explains the obscure nature of the parable's last verse. To paraphrase verse 39:

"You can be certain that, if I gave you the specific date for my return, Satan would bolster the defenses of his 'house' so that undermining it would be much more difficult."

We will return to verse 38 in a moment. But there is another item in verse 39 which is instructive. The NAS says "not have allowed his house to be broken into." The translators did not choose the best wording. Fortunately, they give a marginal reference which leads us in the right direction. The margin reads, "Literally: 'dug through.'"

Most intruders enter through doors or windows. But Jesus' thief-like intrusion into Satan's house is not by such obvious means. Additionally, entering via doors and windows leaves the structure sound. But Jesus UNDERMINES — he "digs through" the foundation. He is like a colony of spiritual termites! Jesus isn't coming into this house to take a Rolex! He undermines the house in order to make it collapse!

The verse tells us thus, that for the two millennia of Jesus' absence, Satan is in total darkness regarding when the return comes. He cannot prepare for what he doesn't know. And Jesus can begin the undermining process secretly until Satan must suddenly shriek out "Help! My foundation is collapsing!"

We also thus can see why the raising of the sleeping saints does not occur at the return. An atmosphere full of tens of thousands of divine beings would alert Satan instantly. But by a three-and-a-half year delay in the first resurrection process, Jesus had time to do irreparable undermining (digging through) of the foundation of the old order.

Returning now to verse 38: While Jesus wanted so much to tell us when he would come, he could only give an obscure "hint" — a hint which ultimately becomes A CLEAR PROOF to the watching saints.

Jesus' 1,000-year parousia and Kingdom has its thousand-year length stated only three places in Scripture.

Revelation 20 is probably the most-cited instance. The chronology, however, also occurs in II Peter 3. And the Old Testament basis for the concept is in Psalm 90. It is Psalm 90 that gives "punch" to verse 38 of the parable.

We will not analyze this wonderful Psalm here. (We have done so in the New Albany-Louisville publication entitled "LAODICEAN CHRONOLOGICAL QUANDARIES.") But verse 4 of the Psalm is certainly the basis for Jesus' hint in this parable. The Psalm links night watches to periods of one-thousand years.

When saints have 1,000-year periods in mind, they inevitably relate them to the seven parts of the seventh creative day. The sixth part ended in 1874; the seventh part began there. In other places, both Old and New Testament prophecy calls the fifth through seventh 1,000-year periods

the final three days. Thus Jesus could say (in the fifth day) that he would raise his Body in three days. Thus, also, Hosea could tell Israel of its wound (casting off) being healed on the third day.

Psalm 90 equates these 1,000-year periods to night watches. Jesus takes advantage of this to give the date of his return at 1874 — a date which remains OBSCURE until the chronological clarifications from the Laodicean Trumpeter, but which SHOUTS WITH CLARITY after 1874! Verse 38 thus becomes dispensationally "mysterious" until it becomes dispensationally OBVIOUS.

Jesus didn't (couldn't) say, "I will return when the last two watches meet." So, he hedged his language and said, "Whether he [I] comes in the second watch [the second or sixth-thousand years] or even in the third [the third or seventh-thousand years], and finds them so [watching], blessed are these servants." He came as close as he could — without telling Satan — that he would return as the two watches meet — 1874.

12:40. Jesus concludes his comments on the parable by telling those PRIOR to his return that he could only give them that obscure hint. They must be clothed and studied (verse 35) so that the UNEXPECTED HOURS (even by Satan!) will be revealed to them after it comes.

12:41, ff. It is gratifying, once we understand the force of the parable, to see the context that follows it. Peter wants to know if the parable was to those of Peter's day, or to later saints as well. Jesus gives the answer to that in a way which Laodicean saints can best comprehend.

Jesus clearly has the "return" date of the parable yet in mind as he says, "Who THEN is the faithful and sensible steward..." Jesus prepared us to know how we would recognize the thief-like presence. Through verse 48, Jesus delineates detail for us who live "when he returns from the wedding feast."

— THE BARREN FIG TREE —
(Luke 13:6-9)

This short parable fits into a rather lengthy context. The parable and its context deal with the casting off of Israel at the first advent.

While it might seem arbitrary, Chapter 13 of Luke would much better have begun at 12:49. Chapter 12:35-48 deals with Second Advent matters; but the remainder of the chapter, and continuing through this parable, deals very much with First Advent matters.

We will present the subject as beginning in 12:49 and continue the interpretation through the parable. A number of these verses are at first difficult, but their challenges seem to melt away when we see how they fit into the context of the change of ages.

12:49, 50. Jesus points out that righteous destruction (fire) is part of his First Advent assignment. The "earth" is the Jewish society. He clearly wants very much to have the matter concluded so that the new age can begin. However, the new age cannot begin until his "baptism" is accomplished — his immersion into completing his primary First Advent assignment: his ministry and crucifixion.

12:51-53. Jesus poses a question. It is a very appropriate question considering that Israel — and even his disciples — thought that his advent was for the purpose of setting up

the Kingdom (Acts 1:6). So he asks, "Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth?" He quickly denies this objective for the First Advent. He says he came to DIVIDE!

John the Baptist had predicted (Luke 3:16, 17) that Jesus would DIVIDE Israel into wheat and chaff — that he would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire respectively.

Jesus is confirming John's predictions for his ministry.

This division would affect even families, as verses 52 and 53 state.

12:54-56. This little sermon castigates Israel for its lack of awareness of the times in which it was living. In essence, Jesus says, "You can look out the window and predict the weather; but why can't you see that you are living in special times?" This reflects Luke 19:41-44. Very much as Christianity is unaware of the Second Advent and its portents, Israel was unaware of the First Advent and its portents.

12:57-59. These verses are not immediately accessible; but Bro. Russell's comments on them secure them into this context.

Jesus begins again with a question. In essence, "Why don't you stop going with the flow and take some individual initiative to figure out what is happening?" This question is always in order. Those who rely on popular opinion, accepted norms, mass-accepted teachings, and satisfaction with the status quo will always be left in the dark. Jesus' question here is much like his advice to the Second Advent

disciples: "Watch and Pray." Or, as it is in Matthew 24:42 and 44, "Be on the alert" and "Be ready."

Verse 58 is explicitly to the First Advent Jewish situation. "While you are going with your opponent (the Law) to appear before the magistrate (the indictment), on your way there, make an effort (margin=) to be released from him (= the Law) in order that he may not drag you before the judge (God), and the judge turn you over to the constable (an entity which can enforce your sentence — in this case, likely the Roman Empire), and the constable throw you into prison (the period of the Jewish "Double" and Diaspora during which Israel was "in the pit" — Zechariah 9:11 and Luke 16:22-24).

Verse 58 thus is not a parable. It is an admonition in symbolic terms. It is addressed to Israel as a national warning. It admonishes faithful Jews to be willing to be released from the Law, and even from the whole Jewish identity.

The 59th verse then assures Israel that its imprisonment will continue until the time has come when payment shall have been made. Linking this imprisonment to the Jewish "Double" is an approximation for convenience. Clearly the imprisonment did begin with Israel's casting off at the First Advent (Matthew 23:39). Their actual release, however, from the Law's burdens won't occur until they renounce it by recognizing Messiah. (Romans 10:4) That occurs some time after the end of the "Double."

13:1. "On the same occasion" is an important phrase. It tells us that Chapter 13 is a continuation of the thoughts presented in the last 11 verses of Chapter 12.

13:1-5. These verses are interesting because Jesus uses them rather uniquely to make a point. The EVENTS themselves are not recorded in Scripture (except for here) and are of no significance except for Jesus' drawing a lesson from them.

The two events, the slaying of Galileans (verse 1) and the victims of a falling tower (verse 5) were, no doubt, local news items. It is certain from Jesus' comments that the populace was reading more into them than was warranted. In verses 2 through 5, Jesus says virtually, "These events are insignificant. They don't reflect punishments for these people's wrongdoings!" This leaves us with the obvious question, then: Why are these two local news items brought up by Jesus?

We want to notice the simple repetition of verses 3 and 5; "I tell you no; BUT, unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Analyzing these words is of great benefit. The first phrase we have explained. "I tell you no" means that the lesson is not punishment for their wrongdoings.

The word "BUT," however, is key to our understanding. It is telling us that, even though the news item is in itself worthless, a LESSON from it is valuable.

The first proviso is, "unless you repent." Here Jesus is explaining what will cause the "DIVISION" of 12:51-53. Some in Israel will be repentant. This was the objective of John the Baptist's ministry.

But what of those who do not repent? These constitute the BAPTISM BY FIRE group — the CHAFF group of Israel. What will happen to them?

Jesus uses the two local news items to show what would happen to those who are not converted from Moses to Christ:

1. Their blood would be (margin:) "shed along with their sacrifices." Jesus was showing that, even as the true sacrifices (the antitypes) of the Law were being shed in the great sin-offering, the national blood (life) of Israel would be poured out — ending the existence of the nation.
2. The "tower" falling and killing those who were probably trying to purify themselves in the pool of Siloam (a Jewish ritual) pictured that Jesus, the TOWER OF THE FLOCK, would fall on the old order (the Law) and destroy it, even though people were yet trying to use it for purification. It is akin to Matthew 21:44. Jesus is the rejected stone which will have some stumbling over him; but, more significantly, when it falls on the

old order, it will scatter it like dust — the
Diaspora.

In these two incidents, the meaning of "likewise" in verses 3 and 5 is made evident. The news items had significance ONLY because a similar result to that of the victims was awaiting the non-repentant of Israel.

This finally brings us to the parable. Having seen these preamble verses, the parable becomes crystal clear as a story representing what Jesus has just taught: a fruitless Israel will be judged and plucked up.

13:6. The "certain man" seems to represent God. He had a vineyard. The Scriptures strongly suggest that the vineyard might be a TWO-AGE arrangement. Matthew 21:41 shows the Jewish Age vineyard's being rented out to the "other vinegrowers" (the Gentiles of the Gospel Age).

Consequently, we have vineyard parables about the Jewish Age, but also about the Gospel Age (e.g., Matthew 20). The implication is that being part of the "true vine" is offered first to Israel and then to Gentiles.

Thus, a FIG TREE (the Jewish Nation) was planted in the vineyard. It represents the first inhabitants of the vineyard. It was unfruitful. In Matthew 21:18-22 we have an incident in Jesus' life that very much serves as a parable along this line. The "lone fig tree" had only leaves (professions). Jesus condemns it, and it withers. Jesus then points out that due to the persevering faith of the saints, Satan's unfruitful

mountain will also eventually meet the same fate as the fig tree. Hence we have the end of entities which meet their demise at the close of each age. Once the vine has yielded its fruitage (the Church is complete), then Satan's mountain will be cast into the sea even as Israel (the fig tree) ceased to function at the close of the Jewish Age.

13:7. Verse 6 has this fruitless fig tree in the vineyard. Verse 7 begins a discussion which gives a few interpretive headaches, but also suggests timing features of the First Advent.

The "vineyard-keeper" could well be Jesus (or possibly the Law, itself). The discussion occurs after "three years." This would put us six months prior to the crucifixion. After three years of seeking figs, God suggests cutting the tree down — it is only using up good agricultural ground.

We cannot ascribe impatience to God. And it was God who set the chronology for Israel's destruction in the Daniel 9 prophecy. So, this seemingly premature request to cut down the tree may simply be a parallel to Jesus' remarks in 12:50 — "How I am straitened until it is accomplished." In other words, God is also expressing His desire for the next age to begin. Not that He wants it to start early, but that He is EXPRESSING HIS DESIRE for the inevitable.

13:8. In this verse, Jesus answers — showing his understanding of events which must transpire, and his desire to get SOME fruitage before abandoning the old Jewish system. So, he says, "Let it take the planned-on course. During this next year (in which he would be

crucified), I will give it the oxygen of more miracles, and I will give it the fertilizing boost of my sacrifice (for those who will comprehend it) with my miraculous resurrection, and with the consequent gifts of the Holy Spirit."

13:9. This verse is an "IF." But the fact is, "Israelites indeed" (real fruit) did mature, even though the old tree did also die and was cut down.

The entire doctrinal and prophetic scenario shown from 12:49 through 13:9 is such a satisfactory and enlightening unit. The parable supports the teaching verses; the teaching verses prompt and explain the purpose for the parable.

— An Aside In Regard To Large Context —
(Luke 12:49-16:31)

We have noticed the focus on the subject of the shift from Jewish to Gospel Ages. It began with some force in Luke 12:49, and it was prelude to the UNFRUITFUL FIG TREE parable (Luke 13:6-8) which we already have considered.

There is AN INTERRUPTION to this subject in Chapter 13 as Jesus makes references to the Gospel Age. We have discussed that Matthew's account was INSPIRED —

including the flow of context. Luke's was not, and we really don't know how much of Luke's context is not actually sequential in the order in which Jesus presented things. Luke's contexts frequently differ from Matthew's.

Nevertheless, once we enter Chapter 14, it seems positive that the entire context through Chapter 16 is focused on one thing: the closing of the Jewish Age, and the opening of the Gospel Age. If we are secure in this concept, it will affect how we interpret some of the parables in the context.

Jesus wasn't like a modern-day showman who finishes one story and then starts another one just to keep us entertained. When Jesus gave parables, they were always to enhance the points he had been making.

Thus, for instance, we won't interpret THE LOST COIN parable (15:8-10) with an application totally out of sync with the LOST SHEEP which precedes it, and the PRODIGAL SON which follows it. These parables MUST (in some important way) ALL be making the same point and be referring to the same teaching lesson which Jesus is making. This series of parables is not random storytelling, flitting from one age to another. Parables are never isolated stories.

The parables of the
 INVITATIONS (14:16-24),
 LOST SHEEP (15:4-7),
 LOST COIN (15:8-10),
 PRODIGAL SON (15:11-32),
 UNRIGHTEOUS STEWARD (16:1-7),
 RICH MAN AND LAZARUS (16:19-32),

are all for the same purpose. These parables are all teaching lessons regarding the rejection of Fleshly Israel and the beginnings of Spiritual Israel.

— THE INVITATIONS —
(Luke 14:16-24)

We have already considered this parable. It is a shortened version of the parable in Matthew 22. As Bro. Russell observes (R. 3834), this parable is "evidently the marriage feast of another parable."

But the Matthew 22 version EXTENDS the parable to the end of the Gospel Age — something out-of-keeping with Jesus' objective here in Luke. The probability seems strong that Jesus uttered this parable twice — once for the extended lesson of Matthew 22, and once for the specific lesson of Luke 14. Therefore, we could simply refer back to the account in Matthew 22:1-10 and reap our explanation from our previous examination. But there are a few slight differences in the Luke account which might be valuable to us. So, we will examine Luke 14:16-24 as if we had not considered the subject before.

Its Context

The context of this parable is inextricable from it. The narrative has all kinds of connective words and ideas which make isolating the parable impossible. But this is one of the objectives of this book. Parables are not isolated, and true comprehension of them is impossible without their contextual connections.

In 13:35 Jesus casts Israel off from favor — with the PROMISE that favor will return in that day when they will recognize him.

It seems quite possible that 13:35 is connected to 14:1 which begins with "And..."

Chapter 14 is constructed in this manner:

- 14:1-24 — A Sabbath meal at the home of a Pharisee
- 14:1-6 — A healing miracle
- 14:7-11 — A lesson about where to sit
- 14:12-14 — An instruction to his host
- 14:15 — A remark from a guest
- 14:16-24 — The INVITATIONS parable
- 14:25-35 — A sermon after leaving the dinner — or even at a later date. (This last section will be considered before the LOST SHEEP parable of Chapter 15.)

14:1. "They were watching him closely." They thought Jesus was on trial! But it was they who were failing judgment as the previous verse just showed. Chapters 14 —16 all are placed here to show the reasons that the judgment of 13:35 had been issued. They also are placed here to show what follows the "desolate" state of Israel.

14:2-6. Jesus immediately finds an opportunity to demonstrate one of the reasons for Israel's rejection. Their

consciences had been seared so that the legal questions dominated over the human or compassionate issues.

An ill man was in the house. Instead of just healing him, Jesus put the lawyers into the uncomfortable position of having to respond to the legality of healing on the Sabbath. They refused to respond! This, in itself, was a powerful demonstration of their willfulness in evil. They must have known immediately that their answer was hardhearted and that, if it were compassionate, it would remove one of their excuses for accusing Jesus.

Jesus heals the man — the VISIBLE answer to his own question. Then he poses another question to which they "could make no reply!" Imagine that! They couldn't say that they would pull one of their sons or one of their oxen out of a well! We can hardly imagine the corruption of character that is described in these verses. It is no wonder that Israel was cast off.

14:7. This verse uses the word "parable" in an accommodated sense. It happens elsewhere also. Apparently "parable" can mean just a lesson. We, however, have honed its meaning to be "a short fictitious story to illustrate a point." This latter definition is used as the basis of selections made for this book. Verses 8-11 are not a parable in the way we normally use the word. These verses are an instructive lecture — ADVICE!

This verse opens the following discussion by showing us the real topic on Jesus' mind: CLASS DISTINCTIONS. The

Jews not only separated their elite from their despised, but they also had open contempt for the surrounding nations.

14:8-11. What is the contextual objective of these verses? Jesus, we recall, is EXPLAINING why Israel is being cast off. The invitation to "the wedding feast" is not a haphazard reference to make a point. Israel did, indeed, constitute those first-invited to the "wedding feast" of the Gospel Age. Thus, he is opening these verses by suggesting: "God is inviting Israelites to be a part of the Gospel Age advantages."

We will see, as this little sermon concludes in verse 11, that it is PRIDE which excludes Israel from being successfully entered into the Gospel Age benefits.

With this in mind, Jesus' words in 14:8-10 come alive with meaning. To paraphrase:

- v. 8 — When God invites you to the High Calling, don't say, "I deserve it! I should have the front seat." It might just be that God judges how "distinguished" a guest is in a manner you don't comprehend.
- v. 9 — If you mistakenly push yourself forward based on your misapprehensions, God may just say, "This poor publican is being asked first." You will then, in disgrace, find yourself rebuffed.
- v. 10 — But if you have the right attitude, HONOR OTHERS, and God will

say, "I appreciate that. Let me give you the honor that comes out of that kind of attitude."

In context, then, Jesus is explaining that Israel has BOLDLY SAID, "We deserve the honors that God is giving. We have first place in everything." In the end, God invited Gentiles (of all people!). And Israel was cast into an age of inferiority.

Thus verse 11 becomes a second reason for 13:35. "Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." Those "faithful remnant" ones of Israel who were humble and repentant were ushered into seats of honor.

14:12-14. Jesus goes up to his Pharisee host. This man is now to be representative of the DIVISION of Israel into wheat and chaff. These verses in one more way justify and explain 13:35.

Israel had a habit (especially among its elite) of a sort of "Quid pro quo" — "You scratch my back; I'll scratch yours."

14:12. The immediate lesson for this verse is that present advantage dominated Israel. SELFISHNESS is the lesson, and it is another justification for 13:35. "What will I get out of it?" Jesus was accusing Israel of this self-centered attitude.

14:13, 14. Jesus shows the right attitude. Bless those who cannot repay you. Then he gives a connection to the calling

to "the wedding feast" he had mentioned in 14:8. He is teaching that the remnant of Israel who have the right attitude, will, indeed, be given the opportunity to become sons of God. When he says, "You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous," he is suggesting that they will be given the opportunity to be exempt from the "general resurrection" ("of the unjust"), and to be part of the spiritual resurrection ("of the just" – the justified or "righteous"). (Acts 24:15, KJV)

Thus, once again, we see that this context is dealing with a change of age. For the first time, an opportunity is open to be part of "the resurrection of the just."

14:15. This verse stands alone. It is almost humorous as we place ourselves at the party. One of the guests, probably a bit inebriated, and probably lifting his wine glass as in a toast, blurts out: "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God!"

The poor, self-embarrassing fellow is trying to enter into the spirit of Jesus' words. He heard "resurrection," and he just wanted to comment on the Kingdom when, as he saw it, the rich and poor would all be having a banquet together and be blessed forevermore.

This brings us to the parable. All of the points that have been made have prepared the way for it. Everything has been about WHY Israel was to be desolate. But the parable will show HOW Israel is to be divided, and how the Gentiles will fill the void they have left.

The Parable

14:16. Luke writes, "But He said to him:" Jesus gives the parable in direct response to the guest's ill-spoken remarks. We can rightly assume that the probably-inebriated guest was quite confident that "the Kingdom of God" was going to be Israel — even if it would be both the elite and the poor. "But," the parable is to show this man that that is not to be the case. The current casting off of Israel (13:35), PLUS the soon-to-be progress in Israel's extinction, will lead to a "Kingdom of God" incorporating mostly Gentiles. This is Jesus' objective in directing his remarks to this banquet reveler.

The parable begins with God's opening up the Gospel Age feast invitations. They go to Israel.

14:17. The "dinner hour" is the opening of the age — A.D. 33 in the preliminary sense. The "slave" could be, in part, the work of John the Baptist. More likely it is that, PLUS the pre-Pentecost disciples. They all called out to Israel. "It's time."

14:18-20. Israel as a whole had its excuses for not listening. It is intriguing to try to interpret Jesus' symbols for their excuses. There are three:

"I bought land;"

"I bought oxen;"

"I've gotten married."

There is a similarity here with Matthew 24:37, 38.

Jesus is summarizing the Jewish Harvest. But in the Gospel Harvest, there also are three things going on which show that those involved don't know the age is changing. It says that in the days of Noah, (1) they knew not; (2) they were planting; and (3) they were marrying. These three items very much parallel Jesus' First Advent examples.

(1) When you buy land, you expect land values and deeds to have a long-term benefit. Jews reckoned that Israel was going to go on and on. Just like those in Noah's day, "They knew not" that the age was ending.

(2) The man who bought oxen in yokes was clearly planning on preparing fields (probably for himself and in hire for others) for the next season. Just as in Noah's day, they went on planting, thinking that there would be a next season.

(3) Finally, the third man was setting up a new household — he just got married and would start a family. Clearly he thought time and events would go on perpetually. As in Noah's day, they went on marrying.

Jesus has drawn an impeccable comparison regarding the endings of both Jewish and Gospel Ages.

14:21. This verse opens the 3-1/2 years from Jesus' crucifixion until Cornelius. God was rightfully angry with Israel's attitudes. He did, however, send a slave (the now-spirit-begotten disciples) out to seek yet exclusively in

Israel until the end of the predicted "seventy weeks" of Daniel 9. So, the disciples go throughout all the avenues of the "city" (Jerusalem — representative of Israel's existence). They were especially commissioned at this time to bring in the "most holy" — the faithful remnant of Israel. The elite had proven their unfaithfulness by crucifying Jesus. The publicans and sinners, however, were more in a repentant state of mind.

14:22. By the end of the "seventy weeks," Israel had been harvested. It is reported to the Master (God) that "still there is room." There will be room until near the end of the Gospel Age. It will be filled by Gentiles.

14:23. God (after A.D. 36) tells the saints to go out to the rest of the world. The NAS says to "compel" people to come. The Diaglott interlinear says "urge." The marginal translation says "constrain" — which means to force by reasoning. This has been happening since Cornelius.

14:24. God vows that the refusers of the invitation will not be a part of the High Calling — even though they were given the preeminence regarding the sequence of invitations.

The parable has ended. The poor fellow's blurted remarks in verse 15 have been countermanded. He thought Israel (rich and poor) would be the Kingdom. This verse says, "Absolutely not!"

— THE LOST SHEEP II —

(Luke 15:4-7)

This parable is nearly always considered as the same parable that we find in Matthew 18. Despite similarities, it is not the same parable. However, due to its usually being linked to the Matthew 18 parable, it was discussed in conjunction with the Matthew parable of the same name. Therefore, please go to the Matthew 18 discussion where the details of this parable are presented.

It is important, though, that we again stress context. It is context, among other things, that makes it obvious that this parable in Luke is about the transition from Jewish to Gospel Ages.

The Luke 14:25-35 Context

When we examined the INVITATIONS parable of Luke 14:16-24, we noted the items which lead into it. The items of 14:25-35 are a bit more difficult of interpretation. Nevertheless, Jesus' concentration on the age-change subject helps us to discover some of the meaning of these verses.

14:25. The following verses are addressed to the Jewish multitude. The message is a part of the Lord's efforts to find wheat amongst the Jewish nation. In 14:17 and 21 we

have seen the two-part witness to Israel to find "guests" for the invitation into Gospel Age blessings. In 14:26-35, that message of invitation is delineated in several ways by our Lord before he uses the LOST SHEEP parable to explain that he will find the faithful remnant in Israel. As he elsewhere states, he was sent to the "lost sheep" of the house of Israel.

14:26. Jesus is explaining how to "COME TO ME" — in other words, how to leave the Jewish Law and to be transferred into Christ. The terms are clear: You will have a new family in Christ. All of the old relationships will be LESS IMPORTANT. The NAS margin for "hate" states: "I.e., by comparison of his love for Me." Jesus leaves no doubt that Christian commitment will and must supercede all other relationships. This does not mean an inappropriate abandonment of responsibilities. Both the Law and the New Testament make clear that such abrogation of responsibilities makes one "worse than an unbeliever."

14:27. Jesus moves on to the next item of transfer from one age to the next. Jesus was crucified in part because Israel considered him a renegade against the Law. Jesus, in this verse, is saying that all Jews who leave the Law will experience the same kind of wrath — not literally, but certainly in the sense of being social outcasts.

14:28-30. Jesus here begins the first of two scenarios as examples of the kind of deliberate thinking and of counting the costs of taking such a monumental step in one's personal life as is inherent in leaving the Law. Jesus

DOESN'T THREATEN. He doesn't say, "You must become a Christian." He does say, "You will be successful only if your new commitment has been entered upon with free will and knowledge of what it will cost you."

The "TOWER," of course, is a new STRUCTURE. Christianity is a totally new structure — a totally new relationship with God. Jesus is the "TOWER OF THE FLOCK" — a different simile, but related in that the disciples are to be engaged in building the domain and influence of this new edifice in Christ.

Verses 29 and 30 sound somewhat like the parable of the SOWER in Matthew 13. Some will BEGIN, but not carry through. Some seed falls beside the road.

14:31, 32. Jesus' second illustration has to do with battle. Christians enter a battle with self and with outside influences. CHANGE OF CHARACTER is difficult to the extreme — one of the most difficult battles of history: "He who ruleth his own spirit is greater than he who captures a city." (Proverbs 16:32)

In verse 31, we, as incipient kings, are seen to do battle with a power greater than ourselves. As Paul counsels, we struggle with beings in high places. Thus we must "first sit down and take counsel" if we, with seemingly inferior numbers, can be strong enough to do battle with the superior numbers (not power!) of the one coming against us. In simpler terms: We must HAVE THE FAITH to be assured that "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

Verse 32 is tricky! However, if we view the contextual significance of age-change, it might just make sense. Remember, those here "counting the cost" are Jews — Jews who are contemplating the switch from Moses to Christ and who might decide not to do so. A Jew under the Law in the Gospel Age is not going to have much peace. But God did promise to watch over him during the Diaspora — most especially if his character so dictates. (Leviticus 26:44, 45) We must remember that, even in the destruction of their polity and in their Dispersion, some Jews suffered fates far worse than others. This may be accounted for by "terms of peace" — a willingness to be at peace with hard circumstances.

14:33. Jesus then gives the "THEREFORE." The "therefore" consists of total willingness to "give up all his own possessions." That, for the Jew, was THE LAW. It was pictured by the "rich young ruler" who TRIED TO KEEP THE LAW ("terms of peace") but refused to "give up all his own possessions." (Matthew 19:16-24)

14:34, 35. There is no way that the explanation of these two verses is easily comprehended the way they are inserted into the flow of thought. But their appropriate location is confirmed by Jesus when he says, "Therefore." In his mind, there is a clear connection of salt to what had just been discussed!

Note first that the Vatican and Sinaitic MSS insert "then" after salt: "Salt, then, is good." This word has the same function as "Therefore."

Salt is a PRESERVATIVE and something that ENHANCES flavor. Jesus uses it as a symbol of loyalty to God — something his disciples must also have. Loyalty, of course, is very much dependent on enthusiasm. Enthusiasm enhances and preserves our involvement.

But Jesus is saying, "Salt is good, BUT what if it loses its taste?" In other words, "You will find that it's nice that you want to preserve what you see as good in the Law. But preserving it is going to lose its appeal. It will become more and more difficult."

Jesus, thus, is issuing a subtle warning to the man who chooses to remain under the Law — to have "terms of peace" (verse 32). He cautions that living under the Law in the Gospel Age will require immense commitment and enthusiasm in attempting to preserve it and the way of life under it. In other words, "If you are counting the cost of discipleship with me, you had better also count the cost of continuing under the Law! The Law will not support you in the Gospel Age. It will become "tasteless" — and then what kind of a support mood will you be in?

In verse 35, Jesus shows how little true support or preservation the Law will have in the new age. It won't be good "for the soil" — for the land — because the land of Israel will be abandoned. It won't be good for fertilizer (to make things grow), because the works of the Law will justify no one. "It is thrown out." Indeed, for all practical functions, the Law has been abandoned by Jews. They hold

on to it like a mascot or a banner, but it has produced little practical value for Israel since the Diaspora began.

Thus Jesus, pleading for good "cost-counting" as the age changes, concludes with, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

The Parable

Chapter 15 begins with Jesus' addressing the wheat-producing and the chaff-producing parts of Israel — with the chaff GRUMBLING about Jesus' attention toward the common folk.

This instigates the parable — already discussed and clarified in our Matthew 18 presentation (which please see).

— THE LOST COIN —
(Luke 15:8-10)

Interpretation of this parable is dependent upon two factors. (1) The context is entirely about the Jewish Harvest. (2) The "woman" is MARRIED (i.e., not a virgin and, therefore, not representing the saints).

15:8. The word "Or," with which this verse begins, creates an inseparable link to the LOST SHEEP parable just before it. Both parables are about the same thing — the transfer of a faithful remnant of Jews from the Law into Christ.

Note the inescapable similarities between the LOST SHEEP and the LOST COIN:

- Both deal with something "lost;"
- Both verses 6 and 9 deal with going to friends and neighbors in order to share rejoicing;
- Both verses 7 and 10 have angels' rejoicing;
- Both verses 7 and 10 specify the REPENTANCE of a SINNER.

Thus, the little word "Or" is not little! This parable is a commentary or expansion on the previous parable.

Next we must deal with the "WOMAN." We want first to establish that she is MARRIED. Her being a virgin would immediately make us think of the Christian Age; but this parable is about the Jewish Harvest.

Bro. Russell (R. 3360 and R. 3835) points out that the ten silver pieces on a garland was a sign (almost like a wedding band) of being married — that it was a gift of a husband to his wife. At least two other commentators agree. Scofield says, "A valuable coin often worn in a ten-piece garland by married women." Barclay says, "The mark of a married woman was a headdress made of ten silver coins..., the headdress was almost the equivalent of her wedding ring."

The Greek word is not of much value. It is translated "woman" slightly more times than "wife." What is of interest is its contextual use. In 15:8 it is translated "woman;" but it is translated "wife" in all of these surrounding passages:

14:20

14:26

16:18

17:32

18:29

20:28

etc.

Due to its context and the historical usage of the ten-coin garland, we believe this "woman" best represents THE JEW who is married to the Law Covenant. The ten coins represent the ten commandments — the epitome of the Law. What the Jew had lost was the "great" commandment — the supreme love of God over all else. ONLY by "finding" this SPIRIT-OF-THE-LAW commandment could a Jew be transferred from Moses into Christ.

The "missing" item which kept a Jew from accepting Messiah is what Luke 16:26 calls the "great chasm." It is what Paul refers to when he says in Romans 11:25, "a partial blindness has happened to Israel." They still have nine coins but they are missing the key. Without that unreserved love for God, they could never recognize His son. As Jesus said, "If you have seen me, you have seen my Father." But Israel didn't recognize Him who led them. They were the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22) who refused to give up his riches (the Law) and to give his life for the restitution of the poor world of mankind.

How is the spirit of the great commandment found? It is a three-step process:

1. Light a lamp;
2. Sweep the house;
3. Search carefully until found.

These steps were all part of the experiences of those who would become the faithful remnant of Israel. (1) They would have to "search the Scriptures." Jesus always led the Jew to Scripture, pointing out that the light is there. (2) They would have to dedicate themselves to righteousness. The annual Passover sweeping-of-the-house was a ritual to be certain that no leaven (sin) was present. Those of the faithful remnant did this by committing to John's baptism — a baptism of repentance (which is stressed in 15:7 and 10). (3) Finally, searching is required until the answers are found. This is why the disciples were constantly questioning. This word (search — S. 2212) apparently is connected to a Hebraism meaning WORSHIP. It is a very interesting concept: worship through understanding,

through thought-pursuit, through questioning. We worship because we search and love what we find.

And the result? — "until she finds it." "We have found the Messiah!" is the jubilant shout recorded in John 1:41. And the disciples there went and told friends and neighbors (15:9).

So, to summarize verse 8:

Someone married to the Law realizes that something is missing — something important. That person looks to God's Word, commits to righteousness, and worships by honest seeking until what is found is MESSIAH!

15:9. We have already seen the ecstasy of the Jews who were discovering Messiah. And, we all know, they were nearly all of the "common man" status — not the Pharisees and those who "sat in Moses' seat."

These disciples immediately went to family, friends, and neighbors so that they also might find Messiah and thus rejoice together.

15:10. The parable ended in the previous verse. Now Jesus comments on it as he had done with the previous parable.

The import of this verse (and its parallel in the previous parable — 15:7) resides in two words: SINNER and REPENTS. As the angels, who well knew of the change-of-age events underway, witnessed the "publicans and

sinner" GRASP THE INVITATION offered to be a part of The Christ, they could only be ecstatic! They knew from Daniel 9 that Jesus would "anoint the most holy" ones of Israel. They knew that some of Israel would be "wheat" even though the majority would be chaff. They knew (Romans 9:27; 11:5) that a "remnant" of Jews would find the lost coin. They knew (Luke 15:5) that Jesus would lift up that remnant and put them "on his shoulders, rejoicing" — they would no longer be on the shoulders of Moses.

This remnant of Jews accepted John's baptism of repentance, and the angels rejoiced over these more than they ever had rejoiced over Israel, over whose covenant they had been administrators. (Hebrews 2:2)

This is a powerful parable in its context. It, in a sense, says that John the Baptist fulfilled his mission. He cried "in the wilderness." (Compare 15:4.) And his cry bore the desired fruitage. It led the wheat to Messiah, and they found him!

— THE PRODIGAL SON —
(Luke 15:11-32)

Jesus hardly takes a breath as he ends the LOST COIN parable. He launches into yet another parable to make the same point.

As a caution, we should note that while all of these parables in this three-chapter context are making the same point, each parable ADDS INSIGHTS. The Jewish Harvest was not nearly so complicated as the Gospel Harvest, but it wasn't simple. There were many questions in Israel that needed answers — both for the chaff class and for the remnant who would be transferred into Christ. All of these parables answer different questions while they maintain the same subject: the Jewish Harvest.

15:11. The "man" of this parable might well be Moses. The covenant-descendants of Moses fall into two groups — wheat and chaff as John the Baptist characterized them. Here, however, the two might be better characterized as (1) those who nominally remained faithful to the Law, and (2) those who just gave up on self and the Law and decided to live profligate lives.

15:12. The Jewish Law always promised some advantage — even to those under it who were decidedly careless. The "younger" son represents those who, while yet under the Law Covenant, were basically indifferent to it. They are "younger" in the sense that all of Israel was initially vocal about their commitment saying, "All these things we will

do." It was later that this indifferent group developed. Hence they were "younger." The Law discouraged and depressed them, and they simply decided to take from it what they could while they openly defied its rule over them. Thus we have the words, "Give me the share of the estate that falls to me."

This group may be called "younger" in a more subtle reference because in prophecy it says that the "older shall serve the younger." In this parable, it is the "younger" who becomes the remnant of Israel which is saved and transferred into Christ. Thus, in the end, the "older" (Fleshly Israel) will serve the "younger" (Spiritual Israel).

15:13. The phrase, "Not many days later," is a likely reference to the fact that it was not long after Israel accepted the Law that this "younger" group developed — virtually ADAPTING the Law to its own liking. The "distant country" represents living far from God's standards — distant from the restraints of the Law.

The squandering of "his estate" is the misuse of any advantage he had of being a Jew under the Law. This he did by "loose living." This "loose living" is what irritated the Pharisees. This "younger" son was, in every sense of the word, a sinner, guilty of a wasteful life, and serving as a horrid example in the nation.

15:14. The parable follows Israel's long history under the Law into the time of Jesus. This verse represents that "the publicans and sinners" — the prodigals of the nation — were, indeed, eventually deeply feeling their estrangement

from God. Living out from under what they knew to be good was taking its collective toll. The Pharisee class, of course, was of no help to them; the Pharisees gave them only one thing: scorn.

15:15. The prodigal class, in its desperations, "attached" itself to anyone who might give it some sort of relief. Those of this class, like Mary Magdalene, could find little else to do but to try to profit from the illicit. But attachment to the illicit gave no relief — it only sent the sinner into situations which accentuated his religious poverty.

Jesus elsewhere uses "swine" to represent those without appreciation. The "swine" here thus represent all who were totally indifferent to religious matters. The prodigal son was made all-the-more isolated and "hungry" by only tending to those without appreciation.

15:16. The prodigal tried to be "satisfied with" (margin) the life of the non-religious who surrounded him because no one else could give him what he needed.

15:17, 18. But he "came to his senses." John the Baptist helped this to happen. John preached repentance and its benefits — one of which was that Messiah was coming.

Jews did have slaves. The prodigal son realized that even slaves (if dealt with according to the Law) had better lives than his own.

At the time of Jesus when "all men were in expectation" of Messiah, John's message became very attractive to the

errant. They flocked to John in large numbers. And, hearing John, THEY REPENTED. (This, of course, is an echo of the previous two parables. See 15:7 and 10.)

They came back to their father's (Moses') house (covenant) in a repentant attitude, knowing that their sins were not only against the Law (their father's "sight"), but also against heaven itself.

15:19. The attitude of the prodigal class is so very humble. "I am no longer worthy to be your son; make me as one of your hired men." They were convinced in their own minds that the Law could not really justify them — they had strayed too far. But they just wanted to cooperate with anything that was God's — just to be hired servants. They were finding the lost coin!

15:20. The father's house (Moses' Law) at this time was about to end. But it was to be replaced by something higher: THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW. That is what the "father" saw coming as the prodigal son approached. He saw "in the distance" (looking to the new age) that this attitude is what would succeed. The remnant class (nearly all long-time reprobates against the Law) were WELCOMED by a force (the SPIRIT OF THE LAW) so much greater than they had ever anticipated. The SPIRIT OF THE LAW "embraced him" and "kissed him" — it welcomed the "lost sheep" into the blessings of the new age. Jesus "came to his own, and his own received him not; but as many as did receive him gave he the power to become the sons of God."

15:21. This verse repeats verse 18. Verse 18 had been what the son was planning. Verse 21 is the execution of that planning. This repetition is here because the son's proposition, once presented, is REJECTED in verse 22. Verse 22 begins with "BUT THE FATHER SAID..." The son's rejection of sonship was not allowed!

15:22. This is so powerful a verse. The repentant Jew, willing to do any menial task to serve God, is suddenly GLORIFIED with beauties and assured of his sonship. How better could John 1:11-13 find fulfillment than is here expressed?

The robe is possibly the justification that comes through Christ, rather than through the Law.

The ring possibly represents the circle of everlasting love which is promised to saints. It is on the hand because love will allow the Church to do the marvelous works of restoring. But it might also represent the signet of authority to rule. (See Genesis 41:42 where Joseph, a type of Christ, receives this symbol.)

The "sandals on his feet" seems easily a reference to Ephesians 6:15 where sandals represent the protection for our walk in His service. A good translation reads something like, "Put preparedness to preach the Gospel of Peace on as shoes." This concept seems to refer to Isaiah 52:7.

15:23. The "fatted calf" may well represent the disciples' age-long feasting on the benefits they have received from the ransom.

15:24. Jesus brought the ultimate joys to the Jewish remnant who were transferred from Moses into Christ. They were "dead" under the Law, but "found" in Christ.

This verse once more echoes the lessons of 15:6 and 9. It would be a nice end to this parable. The same sentiments did end the previous two parables. But this parable is extended in order for Jesus to teach an additional lesson about the Jewish Harvest.

15:25, 26. We know from the history of the period that the Jews who had nominally remained faithful under the Law despised the publicans and sinners. They constantly castigated Jesus for even eating with them.

The "older son" (the chaff element) was "in the field." In 15:4, the ninety-nine were left in the field (in the wilderness) in order for the shepherd to seek the lost sheep. This verse parallels the thought. While the bulk of Israel thought they were basking in the favors of the Law arrangement, they were actually in the wilderness of confusion and rejection — and soon would be in the wilderness of the Jewish "double" of rejection.

This verse pictures the confusion of the leaders in Jesus' day. They "heard music and dancing" coming from the wheat class who had found Messiah. But they

comprehended it not. Their coin was still lost — and they didn't seem to care much!

According to verse 26 they asked what was going on. We know, however, that all of their asking was tainted with pride, selfishness, superiority, and with the desire to deny, reject, and impugn any answers they received. They didn't want to learn. They wanted to entrap!

15:27, 28. They were given the opportunity to understand and to enter in to the discoveries about Messiah. But "they became angry." They were not willing "to go in." (Compare 14:18-20.) Even though the Law "entreated them" by having prophecy after prophecy fulfilled in their sight, they were a hopeless lot.

15:29, 30. The prejudices and misunderstandings of the "older brother" class are here delineated. "I've kept the Law forever!" (Compare Matthew 19:20.) But it is the next sentence which is so revealing. "You have never given me a kid that I might be merry with my friends." Clearly the "older brother" class had missed the point! If they had, indeed, been living faithfully under the Law, they would have had a perpetual merrymaking with their friends. The Law had promised that. The fact that these now say they hadn't had that experience is the very same as if they were to say, "We've never been faithful to the Law."

But instead of realizing their wretched condition, they play the blame game: "When this (abominable) son of yours comes to you after enjoying his profligacy, you give him the greatest favors!" Clearly, forgiveness was not on the mind

of the older brother! The only thing on his mind was
jealously — and even revenge!

15:31. But there stood the Mosaic Law — a stone wall of
perfection. "My dear older son, you have for centuries been
under my protection. You claim me. You will have to be
satisfied with my demands. You want to retain the Law. Go
ahead. It will give you everything it has — which from now
on is NOTHING."

15:32. This verse is very much a rebuke. The Jews had
never learned mercy — the SPIRIT OF THE LAW. And that
spirit says, "What else can we do but rejoice that a lost one
is recovered? Are you insane, or are you merely blind, not
to see the righteousness in this reaction of joy?"

Thus 15:6, 9 and 32 all teach the prevailing lesson of the
Jewish Harvest. Rescue the faithful.

— THE PRODIGAL BUT SHREWD STEWARD —
(Luke 16:1-13)

A number of preliminary remarks need to be made about this parable. We might well begin with a quote from Bro. Russell (R. 5436). "There is room for dispute in respect to the teachings of this parable." Indeed! Those of us in the little group that studied the parables seem to be of one mind that this is the most difficult of all the parables.

Even the name of the parable creates inner turmoil! It is true that Jesus refers to the steward as "the unrighteous (unjust) steward" (16:8). But he also calls him "shrewd." For a very important reason, it might be called "The Prodigal Steward" — as opposed to the prodigal son of the preceding parable. We will see why shortly.

While certain aspects of interpretation could wait until the examination of each individual verse, there is a strength in presenting certain concepts before we examine the parable's details.

First, as a reminder, this parable, like the four before it, and the one immediately after it, deals with the Jewish Harvest. The context of the parable is imperative in arriving at a successful interpretation.

There exist a number of different kinds of parables. Some are historic; some are prophetic; some are just to teach concepts. This parable, however, is LINKED to the events of the Jewish Harvest, but it is neither historic nor

prophetic. It is instructional. Jesus gives this parable for a rather unique purpose. He is saying to that segment of Israel which is about to be rejected: "If only you could have done it this way, you could have had a successful transplant from the House of Servants into the House of Sons." Thus it teaches a lesson of correct behavior, while it never intimates that Israel observed such behavior. This instructional purpose will become evident as the details of the parable unfold.

One other item can be helpful. Where does the parable end? It seems to end in the middle of verse 8. It is with the phrase, "For the sons of this age," that Jesus' commentary on the parable begins. Seeing this construction is not difficult, but it is necessary.

As we begin to examine the parable in its detail, we must notice that it is addressed TO THE DISCIPLES (verse 1), but it is overheard BY THE PHARISEES (verse 14). Thus, if the Pharisees cared to learn from it, (they didn't!), they could. But the disciples could learn from it and must learn from it. Jesus is explaining the reason for failure in the Pharisee class, while he is presenting a concept for future behavior of the remnant class. The parable has two reasons for its existence.

— The Details —

16:1. This is primarily to the disciples. The disciples needed to learn why the Law Age was being rejected, and

also to learn how not to repeat the problem in the Christian Age. Unfortunately, NOMINAL Christianity did not learn this lesson. They followed the Pharisees rather than the "shrewd" (but fictitious) servant of this parable.

The "Rich Man" in this parable seems to be God, Himself. His "possessions" seem a symbol of the Law. The "steward" is, in one sense, those who were keepers of the Law (in the sense of watching over it to see it prosper). Hence, they would be the ruler-class of Israel. But we stress WOULD BE because this parable is strictly fictitious. What Jesus shows in the parable DIDN'T HAPPEN! It only SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED.

The charge against the steward (and this DID happen!) is that he squandered his Master's possessions. "Squandered" is an important word. It means WASTED. "Wasted" is the meaning of the word "prodigal." We see it in 15:13 (the previous parable) applied to that portion of Israel which lived in open defiance of the Law.

But here! Here we have a wonderful alternate application of the word. Here, wasteful ("prodigal") is applied TO THE RULERS! Thus, Jesus is saying that the ESTABLISHMENT class of Israel also were PRODIGAL — not just the publicans and sinners! We can see how Jesus is using one parable as a FOLLOWUP to a previous parable, but with the TWIST OF IRONY that no one was expecting. The "Older Brother" of the Prodigal Son Parable ALSO is being classified as prodigal! While the matter is sad, it is sadly humorous! It is to magnify this irony that we suggest that a

better name for this parable would be THE PRODIGAL STEWARD — or, even, THE PRODIGAL NATION.

16:2. God "called" to Israel through John the Baptist who, among other things, said to the Pharisees, "Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matthew 3:7) This little statement is predicting that the "Steward" was about to LOSE HIS POSITION. But it also shows that the Pharisees could have fled from the problem. When John issued the question, the Pharisees were coming to be baptized! John refused them because he knew their hearts weren't in it. But this little incident in Matthew 3 actually sets the stage for Jesus' parable. Jesus will show that the "steward" COULD HAVE taken a wise path; but history shows us that that didn't happen. In Matthew 21:43, Jesus predicts that they would fail to take the opportunity; he said, "The Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it." The Jewish Age was going to end — regardless of who in it did or did not do anything.

"Give an account" is a phrase which epitomizes the "Harvest" nature of the time. It was "accounting" time. "What has the season produced?"

"You can no longer be steward" is a sentence which simply says, "The Age Is Over." Verse one shows WHY it is ending: Israel has squandered its advantages. God's vineyard was ready to enter a new growing season that would, indeed, produce special fruitage.

16:3. Now we genuinely enter the fictitious. THIS verse never happened. It only SHOULD HAVE. It is not history or prophecy; it is INSTRUCTION IN WISDOM.

The rulers of Israel could have transitioned from Moses into Christ. SOME OF THEM DID. Perhaps Nicodemus was in the number of those who became part of the remnant. Perhaps Joseph of Arimathaea was also. Saul of Tarsus certainly was! But Jesus is, within hearing of the Pharisees (verse 14), showing that it can be done, even though both he and John the Baptist foretold the general failure of the opportunity.

So, our fictitious steward, (or maybe not-so-fictitious in the person of Paul and others like him), starts "coming to his senses." (Recall this same realization in 15:17 for another group.) When the Jewish Age was ending, the realization of that fact had to awaken questionings and concerns about what was coming next. Revelation 5:2-10 is a prophetic statement of how that was to happen. The trouble (the "Strong Angel") on Israel had Jews asking, "Who will open the book? — and they began to weep greatly."

The two statements by the steward at the end of this verse are intriguing, but not easy of interpretation. We can only speculate until someone finds what seems to be the "That's-it!" answer.

"I am not strong enough to dig." Perhaps this statement is much like the expression, "I'm in too deep to dig myself out!" Digging is WORKS. By this time in history, the Jews should have known well that they COULDN'T keep the

works of the Law. Jesus may be implying by these words of the steward that the Jews were, or at least should be, recognizing their lack of strength to continue in laboring under the burdens of the Law.

"I am ashamed to beg." We must put ourselves in a Law mindset to catch the implications of this. A person living as faithfully as he could under the Law was guaranteed to be increased in basket and in store. Thus, if someone were a beggar, it was a visible admission that he was not even trying to live up to the Law. THAT does bring shame!

With the elements of this verse, we thus have the "wake-up moment" – the REALIZATION that things are changing, but that the way to adapt to the changes is not yet clear.

16:4. The NAS margin says that the literal reading of the opening of this verse is, "I have come to the knowledge of" what I shall do. John the Baptist and Jesus both helped the remnant class of Israel "come to this knowledge." REPENTANCE was the main ingredient. Those who did repent and receive Messiah were received into the "new home" of the Sarah Covenant. ("Houses" in the New Testament seem to symbolize COVENANTS.)

So, verse 4 seems to be saying, "I have finally acknowledged to myself what is happening. Jesus is Messiah, and he is opening a new age. I'm going to change entirely my old ways of doing and thinking. Then, perhaps, I'll be received into the fellowship of this new and incoming age."

16:5-7. Before we examine the little things in these verses, we must see the big lessons here implied.

When Jesus instructed the Pharisees about their relationships with the people, he reduced the imperative instruction to one verse (Matthew 9:13): "Go and learn what this means: 'I desire compassion (mercy) and not sacrifice; for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" Thus Jesus epitomizes 16:5-7 as COMPASSION. This fictitious steward took the advice.

The "debtors" are in debt to the Master. They owe nothing to the steward. But the steward is helping them give SOMETHING to the Master.

In reality, God is wanting the SPIRIT of the Law. Is that more or is it less than the letter? For the purposes of this parable it is less, because the debtors CAN PAY it, whereas they COULD NOT pay the letter.

This steward will be commended as "shrewd" for taking this action. When the new age opens, it is this very concept of faithfulness to the spirit of the Law that will triumph. NO ONE will be expected to pay IN FULL, (in other words, with perfection of works). While the Jewish leaders could not comprehend this before Pentecost, if they practiced the concept of "I will have mercy," they were, indeed, helping the sinners against the Law AGAIN APPROACH a relationship with God. That was John the Baptist's work of baptism unto repentance.

In these three verses, the steward summons two debtors. He "lets them off the hook" for the part of the debt they could not pay. If the Jewish leaders had this attitude toward publicans and sinners, we could expect that John would have baptized them! But that wasn't happening, and Jesus is using this parable to emphasize that flaw — as well as to impress upon the disciples that this kind of action would be absolutely necessary in the new age.

The interpretation of the number 100, and of the varying percentages, and of the significance of the symbols of oil and wheat is, at very best, OBSCURE.

Perhaps 100 represents WORKS — the Law demanded 100% perfection. But the steward said, "I know you can give 50%, and you can give 80%, in the sense of entering into the SPIRIT of PAYMENT. This much you must do. So, QUICKLY, agree to it!"

"Oil," of course, symbolizes the Holy Spirit. We cannot assume we are to give only 50% of the spirit of the Law! But, perhaps, the oil as a symbol is SEPARATE from the percentage concept. Perhaps it is saying, GIVE YOUR OIL. Don't withhold any you have. It is the OIL (spirit) of the Law that must be paid.

"Wheat" is frequently the "first fruits" of the Harvest which are offered in sacrifice. Again, we would not want to sacrifice on an 80% basis! But, separating the percentage symbol from the wheat symbol, the meaning may be: OFFER EVERYTHING YOU HAVE.

These "solutions" constitute MERCY. They give the Master what He wants, even though not all that He deserves. Isn't that the new age in a nutshell?

16:8. God praises this fictitious steward because the steward was "shrewd" enough (alert and watching enough) to see what was happening and to adapt to it. Most of Israel's leaders were not.

That marks the end of the parable. The middle of the verse begins Jesus' comments on the lessons to be learned from it.

— Jesus' Comments —

16:8. "For the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light."

This sentence is HEAVY with meaning. First of all, who are the "sons of this age?" "THIS age" we suspect is the incoming (Gospel) age. The steward of the parable was "shrewd" — and thus must be a son "of this age" if we are to make sense of Jesus' explanation: "the sons of this age are...shrewd." The implication is that this fictitious Pharisee became a "son" of God in the new age. He did so because he was willing to repent — unlike the Pharisees who were listening and "were scoffing" (verse 14). The "scoffing" ones were "the sons of light." During the entire Jewish Age, Israel was the enlightened nation and reflected the light of the Law. But now, as the new age dawns, the Christians are more shrewd than the Jews who should have

been so. Jesus contrasts "this age" against "the sons of light" — implying that "sons of light" are from a different age — the old Jewish Age.

Jesus says that the "sons of this age (the new age) are more shrewd TO THEIR OWN KIND." This is the second lesson of this parable. The Jewish leaders DIVIDED "their own kind" into the powerful "righteous" class and the publicans-and-sinners class. This was not shrewd! But Christians (including the steward who was received into a new "house") are not respecters of person. They magnify, encourage, and practice THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW.

So, to paraphrase Jesus' explanatory remarks in the last half of this verse — we list remarks which show the TWO reasons for the parable to be:

1. Repentance will bring you to a new home, and
2. Christians, unlike Jews, will not be unkind to their "own kind."

This parable shows that those transferred into Messiah will be very much infatuated with their brethren (their "own kind") and not have respect of persons — very much unlike what the so-called "chosen people" have done.

16:9. Jesus now forcibly turns to the disciples so that they know their responsibilities from this parable (other than to cherish "their own kind.") To make his continuing lesson very personal and incoming-age-appropriate, Jesus says:

"AND I SAY TO YOU..."

"Mammon" is going to be a part of the lesson from here through verse 13. Its general definition is "riches" (a word which is notably spurious in verse 11). Riches (or mammon), in the sense only of money, probably is insufficient to explain the parable. POWER is probably included in the term. "Money is power" is an expression men like to use. And when we look at the parable, it seems MORE the abuse and the good use of power which defines the steward. Monetary value is included, but seems far from exclusive.

When Jesus says "make friends for yourselves by means of the mammon of unrighteousness," he is telling us that the formerly wasteful power of the steward was turned to make friends of those in debt. We have no indication that the owed oil and wheat were unrighteously obtained. Therefore, the mammon reference seems exclusive to the steward, not to the debtors.

What "failed" was the power of the steward. Jesus uses the comparison to tell us that it is an unrighteous world which has supplied whatever temporal power or riches we possess. And, as with the steward, TEMPORAL ADVANTAGE WILL FAIL! We, then, must use it while we possess it to bless and relieve others (of either their temporal or mental pressures and anguish.) The "others" we are to relieve must be, as the parable suggests, our "own kind" — our brethren.

The end of the verse clearly makes reference to 16:4. But here it has a modifier. It is not "their homes" — which apparently refers to the Sarah Covenant of the Gospel Age,

— but "the eternal dwellings" — an apparent reference to the heavenly resurrection. So, while his actions got the steward transferred from Moses to Christ, our actions will result in our heavenly resurrection.

16:10,11. While Jesus will not abandon the "mammon" theme, he now adds additional concepts we can draw from the parable.

"It is the little things that count" sums up the lesson of these verses. Jesus knew that the Jewish Age had built GRANDIOSE thinking into the Jews. THEY were "the chosen." THEY had God's Law. THEY were going to be the Kingdom. THEY were the sons of Abraham. It went on and on. But the parable started by saying THEY all were prodigal — wasteful. Their grandiose thinking made them lose sight of the "little" but really important things. They "strained at gnats, but swallowed camels"!

So Jesus, not wanting us to fall into the same trap, is pointing to our personal stewardships to tell us that we NEED NOT conquer armies; we NEED to build the "little" daily things in our characters which will guarantee that we are not wasteful stewards. He also stresses that if we let these "little" things slip, it will demonstrate that our stewardship has made us untrustworthy.

Verse 11 links the principle of verse 10 to the concept of the parable. The use of "mammon" (power and wealth of a temporal kind) is apparently considered the "little things" in our life that lead to the development of bigger things. The "big things" must be those of a spiritual nature. But

strongly implied is that our temporal-matter caretaking will influence whether or not we are worthy of true riches. It is a sobering verse.

16:12. Jesus brings it down to another level. The steward of the parable wasted ANOTHER MAN'S possessions. Jesus is reminding us that even our temporal things ARE NOT OURS. If our stewardship is wasteful, why should we have an inheritance that is actually ours?

16:13. This final verse is distressing in its lack of clarity of intent. Jesus seems to be repeating an idea. But WHY? WHAT is the practical difference (THE CONTRAST) between (1) "hate the one and love the other," and (2) "hold to one and despise the other"?

The same words occur in Matthew 6:24. In that context they follow advice about having singleness of vision, and they are followed by the admonition not to worry about food, clothing, etc. The Matthew account CONTRASTS the spiritual against the temporal.

In Luke, they are in the context of faithful stewardship. But in that context Jesus is contrasting temporal "little things" (which he calls "mammon") versus spiritual development (which he calls "much").

It is interesting that commentators and translators seem to avoid discussing the two contrasting elements in Luke 16:13. This means one of three things:

1. They fully understand it and assume we will also!
2. They don't understand it and, therefore, avoid it.

3. They think Jesus is merely being repetitive.

We can dismiss the third item. The Holy Word is not redundant! The first item seems unlikely. Therefore, it seems that, apparently, no one seems to understand the matter.

This leaves us with two possible approaches. (1) We can say that Luke has misplaced the verse (as opposed to Matthew 6:24), and we can ignore it here; or (2) Jesus used the verse twice, and we should try to explain it here. The verse needs explanation not only in a context, but because of the distressingly difficult-to-explain contrast of the two phrases.

Let's first consider the contextual import of the verse (ignoring the contrasting phrases). Within the parable, it is not at all clear what might be meant by "two masters." The steward had God as Master — but wanted to go into a "home" in the new age. Clearly, God is Master of both ages, so that is not our answer. BUT, perhaps the "two master" concept in the parable could be the LETTER of the Law versus the SPIRIT of the Law. This was, indeed, a constant contrast Jesus made when he witnessed to the Pharisees. Of course, Jesus would not want us to hate the letter of the Law. But he might want us to love it less than the spirit of the Law in that we CAN serve one, and not the other (and we can't have both in our human condition).

The steward had loved mammon. In the parable, the implication is that the Law (in its strict letter of interpretation) was used by those in power TO PROFIT

from it. He reformed and then used his formerly unrighteous mammon as a power to serve the spirit of the Law — righteousness in the sense of relieving the oppressed.

Jesus' lesson for us from the parable is that we serve (= the spirit of the Law). He then expands the lesson (beyond what the parable mentioned) to teach that we use temporal things in the service of spiritual things. Then, seemingly AS A CAUTION, he says that we cannot serve both the temporal and spiritual — EVEN THOUGH we are involved in both, or one will get in the way of the other. This may be the contextual import of 16:13.

That leaves us with the question of, "Why the seeming repetition?"

EITHER:

1. You will HATE the one and LOVE the other

OR:

2. You will "give loyalty to one and despise the other" (Phillips)

One possible difference in the two examples is that the first is INWARD, the other is OUTWARD. In other words, hate and love are internal evaluations. Loyalty and the showing of despising are external expositions of that which originates internally.

Bringing all of this back to the meaning of 16:13 for us, the lesson seems to be this (for Jew and Gentile alike):

We must choose one master — even if we are involved with two. In the sense of the parable, we must choose SPIRIT over WORKS. Only one (spirit) will be our master; but we will USE works to the best of our ability. They (works), however, will not be a master in our lives.

In the non-parable sense — the literal sense of our spiritual versus our temporal lives — we likewise cannot allow both as masters. ONLY our spiritual life is our master. BUT: we will use our temporal lives (our mammon) to serve our spiritual interests. Knowing that one is a master and the other is a tool removes all fidelity to the tool — but it does not remove care for it as a tool.

We will not acknowledge two masters. We will not acknowledge temporal affairs as CONTROLLING anything. They are only servants — not masters. (Romans 6:19; 8:12)

And here, then, is Jesus' warning. IF we allow both spiritual affairs and temporal affairs to control us (both to be masters), we will, indeed, learn to HATE the one that irritates us most, and to LOVE the one that makes us most comfortable. In other words, we will want to be rid of one of them! Thus, even if our priorities are straight, we will not be good stewards of temporal things; we will not let them serve us well, because we will HATE them!

That is the INTERNAL conflict. The second item in Jesus' comparison is EXTERNAL: We will "give loyalty to one and despise the other" — (show despite to the other). In practical terms, this means that our time and effort will be lopsided. We will plainly be loyal to one side, and plainly

demonstrate neglect to the other. Again, if our priorities are straight, we would show a great deal of spiritual activity, but would be slothful in temporal affairs — feeling an obligation to them (because they are one of two masters), but demonstrating which master we favor. But if the temporal is not a master, but only a servant, we will treat the servant well because he will better serve us.

16:14. We have, mostly, considered this verse by using it in reference to earlier considerations.

Nevertheless, a point about the Pharisees will help us to understand the early life of the steward in the parable.

Matthew 23:2-7 is most descriptive. Perhaps the one phrase in verse 4 sums it up well:

"They tie up heavy loads and lay them on men's shoulders; but they, themselves, are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger."

This represents the "older brother" in the Prodigal Son Parable. He would not forgive nor rejoice. He just wanted his own feast! The "shrewd" steward of the parable reversed this course.

— The Prelude to The Rich Man and Lazarus Parable —
(Luke 16:15-18)

These four verses set the stage for the final parable in this series designed to explain the Jewish Harvest.

We should first note that these verses are directly to the scoffing Pharisees — no longer primarily to the disciples. These intermediary verses are designed to let the Pharisees know why they are disfavored of God, what is changing, and the legal basis for God's leaving them. Then, the Rich Man and Lazarus Parable will illustrate that change of age.

16:15. Verse 15 points the finger: "You are those..." Jesus then tells the Pharisees the reality versus the perception. The perception is that the Pharisees spend their time and energy in a way that everyone SEES them as righteous. In other words, you are the "older brother" of 15:11-32. Jesus summarizes the contrast: (1) Men hold you in esteem; (2) God finds you detestable. (Interestingly, it will be just the opposite with the Church!)

16:16. Here Jesus dates the change of age. "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John." We have a date for the change of age. Once John had proclaimed "The Lamb of God" and "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2), THE AGE CHANGED. That was in A.D. 29.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees that THE EVENT HAS HAPPENED. And more and more of Israel's remnant were "forcing [their] way into it." A "shrewd" steward should be

taking note! It was time to be welcomed into a new "house."

16:17, 18. Here Jesus begins a two-verse explanation of the LEGAL ramifications for this change. First he points out that the Jewish heaven (rulership) and earth (society) ARE easily passing away. Then he adds "BUT." But "one stroke of a letter of the Law" will not fail.

This is so ingenious of Jesus! While the Law (its letter) will no longer hold anyone captive, the letter of the Law will always remain because it is perfect and typical. Jesus is saying that the AGE ENDS, but the perfection of the Law remains forever.

Because of this, Jesus uses the Law to legally justify the casting off of Israel. He refers to the Law on marriage. His legal point is that God is LAWFULLY and JUSTLY divorcing Israel. (Jeremiah 31:32; Isaiah 50:1; Hebrews 8:8, 9; Jeremiah 3:6-10) The stage now is set for the Rich Man Parable.

— THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS —
(Luke 16:19-31)

This parable, and the material upon which Jesus draws in constructing it, form the perfect final parable in the series designed to explain the Jewish Harvest and its results.

As mentioned, this parable is spoken to the Pharisees. This is particularly appropriate for this parable since one of its aims is to explain their fate, and the fate of Israel.

Nominal Christianity, as we know, has made a mockery of this parable — many even claiming that it is not a parable. But as a literal statement, it would be nothing short of absurd. As a parable it is nothing short of masterful.

16:19. The Rich Man is the nation of Israel — particularly that segment of Israel dwelling in the Holy Land at the time of Jesus. Verse 29 points out that this man is from a family which has "Moses and the Prophets." No one other than Israel fits that description.

The man's clothing helps to identify him. In Scripture, clothing is a symbol of justification — identity justification. To our own day, clothing represents the position of someone. If we see a blue uniform with a badge, we immediately assume the wearer is justified in arresting people. If we see in a hospital a man in green scrubs, we immediately assume he is justified in being in the surgical suites and/or in operating on people.

This man is clothed in purple and in white linen. (Compare Exodus 19:6 and II Chronicles 5:12.) He is royal (purple) and he is justified (white) by the Law Covenant. His clothing perfectly reflects his being the Royal Nation under the Jewish Law.

Israel always exulted in its "riches" under God — "every day."

16:20, 21. A second player is here introduced — a "poor man" ("beggar" in the KJV). If he were a Jew, he would automatically not be a faithful Jew because the Law promised riches in "basket and store" to those who faithfully served it. But this man, as we shall see, is not a Jew. He is a Gentile. He represents the spiritual poverty of those nations outside of Israel.

This man is named — and we shall see that this is for good reason. Lazarus means "Helped of God." The name is especially appropriate here because the Gentiles would never be a part of the Abrahamic seed unless God helped them do so.

The Hebrew equivalent of Lazarus is Eliezer. We might recall that Abraham sent Eliezer to seek a Bride for Isaac. In the type, Eliezer represented the Holy Spirit. Thus, this "beggar" is "Helped of God" — virtually given the Holy Spirit — to engraft him into the Olive Tree of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The poor man is "laid at his (the rich man's) gate." He is outside of the fellowship of Israel. He is "covered with

sores" — he is in great need of healing — most particularly in the sense of needing answers. And he had a longing to have some kind of taste of the "nutrition" that the Jews seemed to enjoy because of their relationship to God. (Compare Romans 8:19, 22.)

It is this "crumbs" reference which helps us to positively identify this man as representative of Gentiles. Read Matthew 15:27. In it we find Jesus' refusing to give help to a Canaanite woman — a Gentile. But she is extremely persistent. Jesus says that he serves only "the lost sheep (the remnant) of the house of Israel," and that "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." "Dogs" represent Gentiles, and the term was widely used by Jews to refer to Gentiles. But the woman's faith triumphs as she informs Jesus that "even the dogs feed on the crumbs from their master's table."

Jesus almost certainly had this woman in mind as he constructed this parable. And he used her faith to show how the Gentiles were "longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table."

The final descriptive element of the neglected Gentile nations is in the words, "Besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores." The only comforts Gentiles had during the entire 1,845 years of Jewish favor were the philosophies, religions, and "comforts" offered by their fellow Gentiles. Those "lickings" accomplished nothing. The "sores" remained.

16:22, 23. Now that the characters have been introduced, Jesus explains their fates.

To "die," in symbolism, is to leave behind what we were, because we have become "alive" to a new condition. Thus a Christian's humanity is said to be "dead;" but we are "alive" in or to Christ. The symbolism holds up throughout New Testament usage.

The "poor man died." He lost or "died to" his poverty. He became rich. How did this happen? He was accepted into the spiritual seed of the Abrahamic Covenant. We could well date the event. When Peter visited Cornelius in A.D. 36, the Gentiles were "carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom."

Even the words "carried away" indicate symbolic meaning. Have we ever been "carried away" by a wonderful message? It was the "angels" (messengers) who "carried away" the Gentiles into the spiritual seed of Abraham. Peter was the first messenger (angel) to bring Gentiles to Christ. Paul, then, was an irresistible force to a continent of Gentiles. Obviously, there were yet other "angels," but these two explain the symbol.

Contrary to corrupt theology, the poor man didn't go to heaven. Abraham wasn't in heaven! (John 3:13; Acts 2:34; Matthew 11:11) Heaven isn't even mentioned in the parable. "Abraham's bosom" means INTO ABRAHAM — into the condition of being a part of Abraham's promised seed (Isaac), as opposed to his genetic seed (Ishmael — representing Natural Israel).

"The rich man also died and was buried." Israel ceased to be a "rich man." It lost its riches as well as its polity and land. "Buried" is a superior word here. In the Old Testament, "sheol" is translated "grave" 33 times, "pit" 3 times, and "hell" 33 times. "Grave," of course is the best. This is why the rich man is BURIED. "Sheol" means oblivion — the state of non-existence IN THE GRAVE. The "rich man" was, indeed, "buried" as a nation.

It could be put another way. Jesus had warned that God was divorcing Israel (16:18). This obliterated or "buried" the old relationship.

It is ONLY NATURAL that "Hades" occurs in verse 23. It is the exact Greek equivalent of "sheol" in Hebrew. Notice the proximity of thoughts as verse 22 ends, and verse 23 begins:

"The rich man also died and was buried.
And in hades..."

"Hades" is obviously the equivalent of being buried — being in the grave.

Now, we know there is no knowledge in sheol or hades (Ecclesiastes 9:4; 9:10). Therefore, the reason this "rich man" can speak is because he is not an individual. He is the "dead" Jewish nation during its Diaspora. The nation "died," but has remained as a communicative people.

Israel (since about A.D. 70 when they were forced out of their land) has been in torment. For nearly 2,000 prior years they lived with God as their Protector and Provider.

Since the Diaspora began, they are mentally (and, quite unfortunately physically) subjected to torment. The greatest torment is the LACK OF EXPLANATION for what has happened to them. They SEE the Gentiles claiming to be a kind of Israel — a supplanter of Israel's hopes and promises. They KNOW their prophecies will have them to be a blessing nation. But, OH!, what have the last 2,000 years of the Gospel Age meant?

Poor Israel has had centuries of feeling "far off" from the promises to Abraham, and the Gentiles claiming to be Abraham's true seed.

16:24. So they address the very foundation of all of their hopes, claims, and aspirations: "FATHER ABRAHAM!" They add, "Have mercy on me." They plead for comprehension of their true relationship to that all-encompassing Abrahamic Covenant. It is even suggested here that, if Lazarus is anything like he claims, why can't he give me a little water of truth on the matter? Note: they want water (truth) for their tongues. They want explanation. The "fire" of the righteous judgment of the Jewish "double" is agonizing! John the Baptist had promised that they would be baptized with "fire."

This brings us to a revealing prophecy in Zechariah 9 which, almost certainly, Jesus had in mind as he crafted this parable.

In Zechariah 9:9 we have the prophecy of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem just prior to his crucifixion. It was, of course, the Jewish rejection of this presentation and their

insistence on his crucifixion which sealed their doom. (See Matthew 23:37-39.) Verse 10 then shows that the organizational structure ("chariot") will be terminated as a result. (Remember the name Ephraim in this Zechariah passage. It will come up again before we have concluded the parable.)

Note that doctrine ("horse") will no longer be coming from Jerusalem. They will also no longer have an army or defenses ("the bow of war").

It is at this very point in Zechariah's prophecy that we see the Gentiles (Lazarus) of the parable come into play: "He will speak peace to the Gentiles." And He will do so until it is time for the Kingdom — "Dominion is from sea to sea." This is Zechariah's version of Romans 11:25. Israel will have a "partial hardening...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" — i.e., when it is time for the Kingdom.

Zechariah 9:11 then brings in the "covenant." It is a reference to the New Covenant when Israel will be received back into favor. Romans 11:26 and 27 make this reference also.

When that time comes, Zechariah promises that the Jews will be set "free from the waterless pit." The 12th verse shows that this must await the time of the completion of the Jewish "double." The "waterless pit" condition is the reference in Luke 16:24 — a little "water" for explanation's sake, please!

16:25. But the Abrahamic Covenant, when studied carefully, has the answer: "Child (the genetic son, not the son of promise), remember: there was the first half of the "double" when YOU had the favor. The Gentiles during that time had no relationship with me. "But now" (the Gospel Age — the second half of the Jewish "double" which Zechariah 9 promised), the Gentiles are "being comforted...and you are in agony." Or, as Paul says in Romans 11:28-32, "God hath [at one time or another] shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all."

16:26. The study of the Abrahamic Promise also points out clearly that the ONE THING which will separate Fleshly Israel from Spiritual Israel is MESSIAH. He is the "great gulf (chasm) fixed" which prevents Israel from seeing the Gospel Age treasures. Romans 11 had shown that Israel only had a PARTIAL HARDENING (or blindness). They actually see most of the Divine Plan for man better than most of Christianity does. But the one blindness, the one hardening which prevents "water" to "cool off" the "tongue," is the identity of Messiah. As verse 26 concludes: No one can witness to a Jew because of it; no Jew can find the value in true Christianity because of it. The "great chasm" is FIXED; and it remains immovable.

In one sense the parable could end there. But the rest of it (16:27-31), when we dig deeply, draws another prophecy to our attention which greatly enhances appreciation of the Jewish rejection and reinstatement.

16:27, 28. The parable had centered much on the Israel of Jesus' day and locality. But we all know that, ever since

Solomon, Israel was DIVIDED into two tribes and ten tribes. The two-tribe segment, usually called Judah, was the Israel of Jesus' day and locality.

In this verse, the tormented rich man begins to think of the rest of Israel. The ratio here is one to five. But that is because the TWO-TRIBE group is represented in the one rich man. Thus the TEN-TRIBE group (proportionately) is represented as FIVE brothers. One plus Five translates to Two plus Ten in reality.

The two-tribe Kingdom of Judah begins to claim its FAMILIAL inheritance in Abraham — "Warn them" — warn the rest of Abraham's descendants. Maybe THEY can escape what has befallen Judah!

16:29. That the rich man AND his brothers constitute the whole of Israel is confirmed by this verse. "THEY HAVE MOSES AND THE PROPHETS." Only Israel fits this description.

The verse ends with the admonition that IF they study and believe Moses and the Prophets, they will figure it all out! But the ten-tribe part of Israel was notoriously ignorant of the Scriptures, Scripture study, and faith in Scripture. It is no wonder that the rich man protests in the next verse: "No, Father Abraham!" In other words, "That will never work! They'll never study and believe!"

But before considering verses 30 and 31, a look at Ezekiel 37:15-28 will be of great profit, because that prophecy confirms both the existence of the two-tribe split and its

ultimate repair. It is altogether likely that verses 27-29 of this parable came about because of Jesus' awareness of the Ezekiel text and its appropriateness as a conclusion to this parable.

— Ezekiel 37:15-28 —

As this Old Testament prophecy begins, God acknowledges the split in Israel. He likens each segment to a separate stick. He names the two sticks. Each has one name. The first stick is Judah — but clearly represents all in the two-tribe division. Thus it states "For Judah — AND for the sons of Israel his companions." God does likewise for the second stick: "Ephraim AND all the house of Israel, his companions."

(Here we might want to recall Zechariah 9:10 where Ephraim is mentioned as losing its military, and Jerusalem [the home of Judah] loses its position as a spreader of doctrine. It is so observant of these prophecies that the two-tribe Kingdom was more studious of the doctrine of the Law, and the ten-tribe Kingdom was more military. Prophecy doesn't miss the smallest detail. Hence, in the parable, the two-tribe "rich man" scoffs at the suggestion that his "five brothers" might search the Scriptures!)

In Ezekiel 37:19 the Lord looks forward to the Kingdom. He says, FUSE THE TWO STICKS INTO ONE. The Diaspora has helped Israel gain a unified identity. They are now Israel, not Judah and Ephraim! The Israel of today has no division into two and ten.

In Ezekiel 37:21-27 God promises the regathering of our day and its glorious results in a re-established Israel.

In 37:24-27, their new leadership is promised as well as their new faithfulness to the new Law Covenant. When verse 28 comes, we see that the GENTILES ("the nations") will also realize Israel's favored position.

Thus, the Luke 16:27-30 verses are shown to be of great significance.

16:30, 31. After complaining that Scripture will not satisfy the "water on the tongue" problem, the rich man requests a SIGN. (Compare Matthew 12:39 and I Corinthians 1:22 to see Jesus' and Paul's treatment of this request!) The rich man says that if someone returns "to them from the dead," they will repent. Well! Jesus said he would grant them that sign — the "only sign" he would give them: the sign of Jonah. Did it work?

Verse 31 predicts the outcome. If the Jews can't believe the Scriptures, a rising from the dead won't persuade them either. After all, wasn't it the awakening of Lazarus that caused the Jewish hierarchy to have Jesus crucified?! This may be one good reason why this parable names Lazarus. The parable begins with a name they hated; it ends with a pinprick of conscience that "YOUR REQUEST WAS ALREADY GRANTED before you were officially cast off"!!

We have come to the conclusion of Jesus' marvelous collection of tales covering Chapters 14 through 16 and his answering just about every detail regarding the Jewish Harvest. The sum of these parables is greater than the separate parts. While each parable is a little gem, there is no way the great impact of Jesus' teachings on the subject can be experienced without seeing the contextual unity of all of them combined.

— THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW —
(Luke 18:1-8)

At the outset, we would suggest that the chapter division here would better be placed between 18:8 and 9. Again, because of contextual connections, certain ideas belong with certain other ideas; placing chapter divisions between them distorts our ability to interpret well.

Luke 17:20 and following are clearly about Second Advent topics. We will also note that this parable makes reference (in 18:8) to the Second Advent. Connecting it to Chapter 17 seems helpful. However, 18:9, as we shall see, begins a parable and other subsequent material again dealing with the transfer from the Jewish Age into the Gospel Age.

The parable of the Importunate Widow is divided into four parts. (1) Verse 1 gives the reason for giving the parable. (2) Verses 2-5 tell a little story — not as history or prophecy, but strictly to make a point for subsequent application. (3) Verse 6 is Jesus' stating that we should learn from what one character said. (4) Verses 7-8 tell us what we should learn from the parable.

18:1. The point of the parable is persistence in prayer without losing heart-reliance that it will be answered.

It should be noticed in advance that this parable may not be about generalized prayer requests, but rather about

relief from injustices. Notice that the widow wants "legal protection" (18:3); we (verses 7, 8) want "justice." It would be erroneous to think, or even to desire, that we will not suffer injustices. According to Peter, we were CALLED to experience injustices (I Peter 2:19-21). So, the thought seems to be that relief from them (or overrulings for them) can be obtained in whatever form the Lord might deem best.

This parable is addressed solely to the disciples. (The next one will be to the Pharisees.)

18:2. The little story appears to be entirely fictitious. It is strongly likely that we are not to identify the characters with anyone. We are merely to get a "life lesson" from the episode.

Thus, all the identities of the city, the judge, and the widow are immaterial.

The judge is described for us as having two characteristics. We are given these two characteristics not because we need to understand this judge, but rather because we do need to know that the story relies on outside influences' not being factors. The action the judge takes will not be because of other people's welfare or because of power over him. It is to provide a lesson for us. Consequently, he is said not to care what God thinks, nor to worry about the effects of his decisions on those in his jurisdiction. In one sense, we might think him "impartial." But we would never consider him sympathetic to people or subject to superiors. He

represents for us "the cold, hard facts" of what life has to offer.

With that much established, the second player in the drama is introduced.

18:3. "In that city" — in other words, in his jurisdiction — was a widow. This second character is a widow because a widow is traditionally one of the most powerless people around. We know this judge cannot be influenced by power above him or by sympathy for what is below him. The widow has neither thing on her side! But she does have, as we shall soon see, something on her side. (And it is that something which we need for the development of our new creatures.)

This verse shows us her fortitude. "She kept coming to him."

Her request will be important to our lives as saints:

"Give me legal protection from my opponent."

18:4, 5. The judge doesn't care a whit about the opponent or the widow. But there is one thing that the judge does care about. It seems to be his peace of mind! But we will see that it goes deeper than that. He confirms to us that his action to come has nothing to do with influence: "Even though I do not fear God nor respect man..."

THEN we see the lesson continue. "This widow bothers me!" To accomplish his own peace and something deeper, he grants her the legal protection she requested. But this

surface explanation of his motivation missed a hidden point in the parable.

The NAS modifies the expression he uses. It says, "... lest by continually coming she wear me out." But the margin says that the literal version is, "... she hit me under the eye!" This suggests that he was not only concerned about peace and quiet, but more importantly, that her omnipresence might give him the proverbial "black eye." He might gain a reputation for not caring. Not caring is one thing; having a reputation for it is another!

That is the end of the parable as such. Its details don't represent us; its lesson in persistence does pertain to us.

There is something about this story that we need to hear. The lesson is not obvious because WE are empowered; the widow was not. The judge was uncaring; our judge is not. Jesus wants us not to hear the story so much as he wants us to hear its peculiar lesson.

18:6. This verse seems so very innocent! We marked it as part 3 of this parable. Yet, on the surface, its import seems negligible. But it is a rather unique verse among all of the parables. It is of great significance.

It seems to be a connection between the parable and the application of the parable in verses 7 and 8. But, upon careful scrutiny, it isn't a smooth connection. Look carefully:

"Hear what the unrighteous judge said." Jesus is referring back to something in verses 4 and 5. Before Jesus gives us the lesson which verse 1 stipulated, he is giving some other (rather obscure) lesson. What did the unrighteous judge say? Jesus implies that it is very important.

We have commented on the literal translation of verse 5 as found in the margin. THAT seems to be the words to which Jesus refers. How strange! The "unrighteous judge" said that if he didn't help the widow, HE WOULD HAVE A PROVERBIAL BLACK EYE.

If we think back to the days of Moses, we may well find the necessary clue to the meaning of these words. When God wanted to obliterate Israel and begin a new nation from Moses, Moses argued that the surrounding nations would give God a bad name because he gave up on His people.

With this in mind, we can explain Luke 18:6 and see how it connects the parable with the application verses. If God would treat His saints like the "unrighteous judge" treated the widow, God would have "a black eye."

Well! In the eyes of the world during the Gospel Age, THAT IS WHAT HAPPENED! The world has looked at true Christians and has concluded that God has not given them "protection from [their] opponents." God has a "black eye" in the sight of the world. But it is Jesus' intent in verses 7 and 8 to tell us that that is not true — and to explain what has happened and why.

A short reflection is here profitable. The parable had not openly accused the judge of being "unrighteous." But Jesus says he is (verse 6). This teaches us clearly that an uncaring attitude IS unrighteous. It need not be influenced by power; it need not be cajoled by threats of seeming sympathy. It is the NOT CARING that is here defined as unrighteousness.

18:7, 8. These verses draw on the parable to teach us about PERSISTENCE IN PRAYER and PERSEVERANCE IN COURAGE. Those two things we recall from verse 1 as being the purpose of this lesson.

These verses are a CONTRAST to the parable. It is Jesus' contention that if the UNCARING judge gave the desired relief, can we dare think that God (Who has made us His elect) will delay to send relief when He sees our honest persistence ("day and night")?

In harmony with Romans 8:28, God will work all things for our good — not because we irritate Him, and not because He doesn't want a "black eye;" — but because we are His cherished work in progress.

We might quickly ask, if He is so concerned, why must we (as the parable suggests) have to persevere and not lose courage? There can be only one reason! It is to our benefit

that we maintain constant and continued communication with our Father for the sustenance and strength of our embryo new creatures. It is to our benefit that we continue to trust when we cannot trace. No other explanation seems possible. That is the point of the parable.

— The Big Overriding Lesson —

As verse 8 concludes, we see an age-long perspective to this lesson. We might only apply the parable to our personal experiences. But Jesus tells us more. In paraphrase:

These concepts of "pray without ceasing," of "watching" and of "never doubting" will so impress those who use them that they will rejoice in them — not worry that the requests must be repeated nor that the answers may seem delayed.

BUT:

By the time the Second Advent arrives, those who do accept and practice this advice will be so much in a minority that one will wonder if this faith yet exists on earth.

Suddenly, the parable has become prophetic! It began by admonishing persistent prayer and faith in the outcome. It ends by saying that this practice will nearly disappear! What a lesson for us in the "Harvest."

This might well suggest to us that we who live in a day when justices are demanded by everyone, will find this particular trial of not getting justice for ourselves even stronger than during the age. But the solution will be what it always has been: Ask your Father; don't give up; "He will bring about justice" for us — and that, SPEEDILY!

A short summary of this complex passage is in order. First, even in the uncaring world, persistence can shame the world into providing some needed relief. Second, God will perhaps LOOK uncaring to those who don't understand. Third, God does care for us INTENSELY, but He cannot openly reveal that care without compromising faith as the test of the age. Fourth, despite God's hidden relief for us, He insists that our persistence in request and our perseverance in trust is good for our success in the spirit. Fifth, this INVISIBLE aid He provides will mean that VERY FEW by the end of the age will even believe that it exists.

— THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN —

(Luke 18:9-14)

As suggested, the chapter division should occur as this parable begins. The parable is exclusively "to certain ones who trusted in themselves." The Pharisees are the target of the lesson, and the parable was spoken to them. This parable is not (as was the previous one) about the Gospel Age. It is about the transition from the Jewish Age into the Gospel Age.

As verse 9 points out, the Pharisees trusted in their own righteousness (justification) under the Law. They viewed the common man Israelite "with contempt." As John the Baptist had prophesied, this would result in the justification (the righteousness) — or the being baptized by the Holy Spirit — of those held in contempt; and it would result in the baptism "with fire" for the old self-righteous institutions of Israel.

18:10. Jesus gives a story that has very little fiction in it! The lessons and the intended inferences would be exceedingly clear — even to the dull-of-hearing Pharisees.

The scene is in "the temple." This is clearly a Jewish Age setting. It is about a relationship with God as expressed by the activity of prayer. There are only two players in this scene: a Pharisee (who represents Pharisees!), and a tax-gatherer (who represents tax-gatherers and the other second-class groups of Israel.)

18:11,12. Jesus' description is priceless in its innuendo! He could have said that the Pharisee was praying. But, instead, he said that the Pharisee "was praying thus to himself"! These last two words summarize the state of Israel's relationship with God. The prayers were going nowhere! They were formalistic and meaningless — except that the Pharisee actually thought that he was doing what God wanted.

What a prayer! Not only is it tragically self-righteous, but, since it was likely spoken out loud, he took the opportunity to BELITTLE before God and any hearers the tax-gatherers. The Pharisees, remember, were supposed to be elevating the population toward God. These words show, to the contrary, that the Pharisees were ridiculing, demoralizing, and crushing those they were supposed to help. There can be no argument that the old order should come to a catastrophic conclusion.

Compare verse 12 to verse 21 in this chapter. The Rich Young Ruler incident of verses 18-25 is not casually placed. The ruler, while he certainly existed, becomes an ALLEGORY for the whole blinded Jewish establishment. They were convinced that they were keeping the Law and being justified by it. They refused to give it up for a Gospel that would save the poor and give "treasure in heaven" to Jesus' followers. (18:22-23)

18:13. Now we see the tax-gatherer (the Publican). He is even loathe to approach the Temple. He is, indeed, the prodigal son of 15:21. He is so repentant and ashamed of his shortcomings that he is "unwilling to lift his eyes to

heaven." We can read into this the common expression: "I could never aspire to set my sights on" a concept like the heavenly calling. Yet it is this very man and his attitude that received Jesus and to whom Jesus gave "the power to become the sons of God." This man represents the faithful remnant of the Jewish Age.

18:14. Jesus gives us the powerful summary: "This man went down to his house justified." In other words, he would enter the new "house" or covenant we call the "Grace Covenant," or the "Sarah Covenant," or the "Covenant by Sacrifice."

But the Pharisee would have to be satisfied with self-praise — which results in the most humbling experience of having the whole Jewish polity collapse!

The parable is ended. But the material following it is all related.

In verses 15-17 we see material similar to that which began Matthew 18. The point is similar here. Unless attitudes beget teachableness (as with little children) — the kind of attitudes the Pharisees seemed incapable of learning — there is no way that entry into the Gospel Age favors (the embryo Kingdom) can be obtained.

In verses 18-25, the allegory of the Rich Young Ruler prophesies that Israel will not give up its treasured Law Covenant to serve the poor groaning creation. But, in

verses 26-30, Jesus assures his disciples (who were very unlike the Pharisees, and who had given up the old ways to follow Jesus) that they were now rich in blessings — not to mention their blessed futures "in the age to come."

Even verses 31-43 reflect the change of age, showing the sacrifice that will seal it, and the faith that will allow spiritual "sight" for those who follow him.

— THE POUNDS —
(Luke 19:12-27)

The parable of The Pounds (the "Minas" in the NAS) has many similarities to the parable of The Talents in Matthew 25:14-30. Please review that passage and the comments on it to pick up some of the details which do not differ in this parable and which, therefore, will not be repeated.

It is again imperative to note the context of this parable. Luke 19:1-10 tells us of Zacchaeus. This little episode connects Chapter 18:9-43 with the Pounds Parable in an important way.

If we recall that the tax-gatherers (18:13, 14) of the parable became JUSTIFIED, we begin to see the connection. Zacchaeus was a tax-gatherer. He did become a disciple. He had the attitude which the rich ruler (18:18-26) did not have in that Zacchaeus was abundantly willing to give his wealth for the poor and the wronged. Zacchaeus, like the tax-gatherers of the parable, GAINED JUSTIFICATION. Justification IS THE POUND given to the servants in the parable. The contextual integrity of all of these little parables and incidents is no less than remarkable and instructive!

In 19:9, Zacchaeus became a "son of Abraham" — not in the genetic sense as was Israel, but in the "promised seed" sense. Jesus accentuates this in 19:10 when he proclaims

that Zacchaeus was one of the "lost" but now "saved" sheep of the House of Israel.

In 19:11, the rationale for the parable is given. The disciples supposed the establishment of the earthly Kingdom was ready to happen. But Jesus, with this parable, was going to instruct them of his coming absence and of their charge while he would be gone. This is the final parable to be recorded exclusively by Luke. (In 20:9ff and later, Luke records other parables. But these were recorded also in Matthew where they have already been considered.) It is in one sense a good final parable for us in that it charges us with responsibility in the use of the justification we have received.

19:12. Jesus is the nobleman. His departure to the "distant country" of heaven itself represents his physical absence from earth during the Gospel Age (minus its "Harvest").

Jesus, if the disciples could receive it, explains rather clearly that at the first advent he didn't have the Kingdom they were expecting. He had to go away to get it. THEN he would return with it.

19:13. The nobleman has ten servants. Since multiples of ten often represent things related to Jesus, (his specific number being 100), we can comfortably assume that ten represents all that would enter prospectively the embryo Body of Christ.

To these servants, the nobleman gives one pound apiece. (We will refer to them by their famous name of "pounds")

since nearly no one calls this the Parable of the Minas!) His instructions are clear: "Do business with this until I come." What he means, of course, is that we are charged to use what he has granted to us for the purpose for which it was given.

The pound is our INDIVIDUAL JUSTIFICATION. The talents of Matthew 25 were INDIVIDUAL ABILITIES. Thus, in this parable, everyone receives the same thing. In the Talents Parable, the gifts were not equal. But in both cases, the charge is equal: You have the responsibility to use what you have been given.

How do we use justification? It is not the same as using abilities. In one sense, it is so much easier to use abilities than it is to use the condition of justification. Among other things, justification is much more precious than ability. This is a part of the clues about how we might use justification. The very first element in its proper use is understanding what it is and cherishing its unspeakable value.

But this is where Zacchaeus enters the discussion. The Pharisees simply considered themselves right with God. To them, justification was just a "given" under the Law. It was something to them that was considered an entitlement. But to the tax-gatherers of the parable, and to the literal tax-gatherer, Zacchaeus, justification was an opportunity to serve as well as an opportunity to have some kind of personal fellowship with God.

When Jesus gives us the "pound," he says, "You are now a son of the Most High. How are you going to handle that?" Unfortunately, some will handle it like the Pharisees and simply say, "Good. I'm saved." And that will conclude their "responsibility" in their own minds. How tragic. How selfish. How much like 18:11 and 12. We don't want our "pound" to be reduced to a prideful attitude: "I have the truth; I'm His; I'll spend my life polishing it and admiring it."

Verse 13 summarizes those who receive the pound — those who receive spirit-begetting in the Gospel Age.

19:14. But, during that same Gospel Age, there will be others than the spirit-begotten who claim to be "citizens" of this new arrangement. We know them as "tares." In this verse Jesus points out that, while they might be "nice people" ("citizens" in good standing to most observers), they hate him in the sense of having a true disdain for doing things his way.

The verse (marginal translation) says that they "sent an embassy after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.'" An embassy is literally an intrusion of one's own sovereignty into another's country. This fits so accurately the condition of tares. They were planted in a field that belongs to someone else. They don't belong there! And during the age their primary complaint to the Lord is, "We don't want to abide by your rules."

19:15. Beginning in this verse, we have the judgment results for the age of Jesus' absence. In other words, we

have arrived at the "Harvest" time when the "sleeping saints" receive their due, the living saints conclude the earthly activities of the "Body," and, finally, the Great Multitude find themselves on the wrong side of a shut door.

Jesus returns and pertinently asks, "How have you used the honor of being God's sons?"

19:16-19. In these verses we find those who have been successful. (It is quite likely that the Great Multitude is ignored in this entire narrative. We might note that only three of the ten are mentioned. Perhaps the Great Multitude are represented in the seven who are not mentioned.)

— An Aside —

It could be argued that the Great Multitude is in this parable. Perhaps the three servants mentioned are intended to represent the three classes resulting from those who initially receive justification: Church, Great Multitude, and Second Death. The third servant loses his justification. That can only result in Second Death. But there is an interesting ratio mentioned regarding the two remaining servants. One ends up with ten; the other with five. The ratio, then, is DOUBLE. Since the "firstborn" has a double inheritance, perhaps the one servant represents the Church of the Firstborn; the other servant, not losing his justification, but only having one half the inheritance,

may represent those receiving less than a "full reward" (II John 8).

The problem with the above (as reasonable as it might seem) is that both are made rulers over a number of "cities." It is difficult to find a Scriptural support for the Great Multitude's being made ruler over anything.

It is, of course, obvious that we cannot multiply justification! So, making ten from one seems to be an accommodation for the sake of storytelling. But the point is, the first servant used his justification to multiply the Lord's wealth. (We could muse that he was the instrument in finding ten more Body members. That would, indeed, multiply justification!)

The reward seems to be rulership over "cities." The symbolism escapes us.

The second servant likewise utilized his justification, but to a lesser degree. His reward was, consequently, smaller but similar.

19:20-23. The third servant is tragic. If the "pound" is justification, he has lost his — a condition which can only mean death.

We have earlier reviewed the value and purposes of justification. This servant didn't serve with his. He merely preserved it — or so he thought.

The element of "fear" is behind the problem — as it was also in the Talent parable (which please see). It is worthy of note in verse 22 that the Master judges the servant "by [his] own words." The only words recorded are about fear. Fear is based in selfishness — concern over one's own welfare. Thus, if justification means to us, "I'm saved," then we are in great danger.

Justification, as beautiful and precious as it is, is not an artwork to be admired, but rather a spectacularly fine fishing rod — designed to catch fish, not to worry about getting water-spotted! This poor servant caught no fish. The rod was a useless possession.

19:24. As previously mentioned, justification can't really be multiplied. Nor can it be passed on to someone already possessing it. So, the symbol is an accommodation for storytelling. This verse simply represents that what would have gone to one, is committed to another.

19:25, 26. The objection here is quickly answered if we suppose the one who made most of his "pound" were Jesus. Who would question giving him even more rulership? With his justification, he saved the world! Verse 26 confirms this application.

19:27. Having dealt with the spirit-begotten, the nobleman deals with the "citizens" of verse 14. They are "slain" just as the "tares" were "burned." The existence of FAKES as fakes will never again be a factor. This does not "kill" people; it slays their profession as "citizens." They never had a

"pound." They never were in the picture except to get in the way.

AFTERWORD

AFTERWORD

The parables seen as a collection, instead of as one-here-one-there stories, become much grander than their individual parts.

With few exceptions, the parables focus on one of three things: (1) The Jewish Harvest; (2) The Gospel Age; (3) The Gospel Harvest. It probably has become evident to us that Matthew's collection of parables centers more on Gospel Age matters. Luke's collection centers more on Jewish Harvest matters. Whether or not this was by design, seeing the distinction is helpful.

In all cases, CONTEXT has been the secret to understanding. The parables were illustrations of surrounding material. They never were meant to stand alone.

Jesus stressed that he spoke in parables so that "they" would not comprehend. This ignites our imaginations in many ways.

The "they" were the Jews primarily. During the Gospel Age, "they" becomes the nominal believers of the Christian world. But, when the parables were spoken, it was usually multitudes versus disciples.

Both Matthew and Luke are careful to let us know when Jesus spoke to "them" versus when he spoke to "us." Sometimes it was both at the same time. But the "us" class

is supposed to understand; the "they" class is not supposed to understand.

This, of course, brings up the question: "If we are always to understand, why speak in parables to us?"

There seem to be two answers to this question. (1) Parables can make us see more clearly sometimes than can a straight explanation. (2) But, perhaps more importantly, some things were designed so that "we" would understand ONLY WHEN UNDERSTANDING IS DUE. Consequently, many parables now are clear to believers which were not clear to believers of earlier periods of the Church. In other words, some parables are purely dispensational. "We" becomes those living at a certain time.

We, who live in the "hour of temptation" need understandings, perspectives, and clarifications not needed for earlier Christians. Thus now, in the Gospel Age Harvest, we can comprehend all the parables. The "they" class still cannot.

It is our prayer and hope that this review of Jesus' parables has been spiritually stimulating for the saints of our day who have read it. We surely have missed many of the details present in these great stories. But this review of them will likely stimulate many of us into seeing and sharing the additional insights which Jesus has packed into these "short stories."

V. Appendices

1. The Chart of the Ages
2. Index of Scripture Citations
3. Glossary of Abbreviations, Terms, References, and Dates

Appendix A

The Chart of the Ages

Excerpted from Volume 1 of
Studies in the Scriptures

CHART OF THE AGES

Write Down the Vision and Make it Plain Upon Tables, That Everyone May Read it Fluently.

— HABAKKUK 2:2

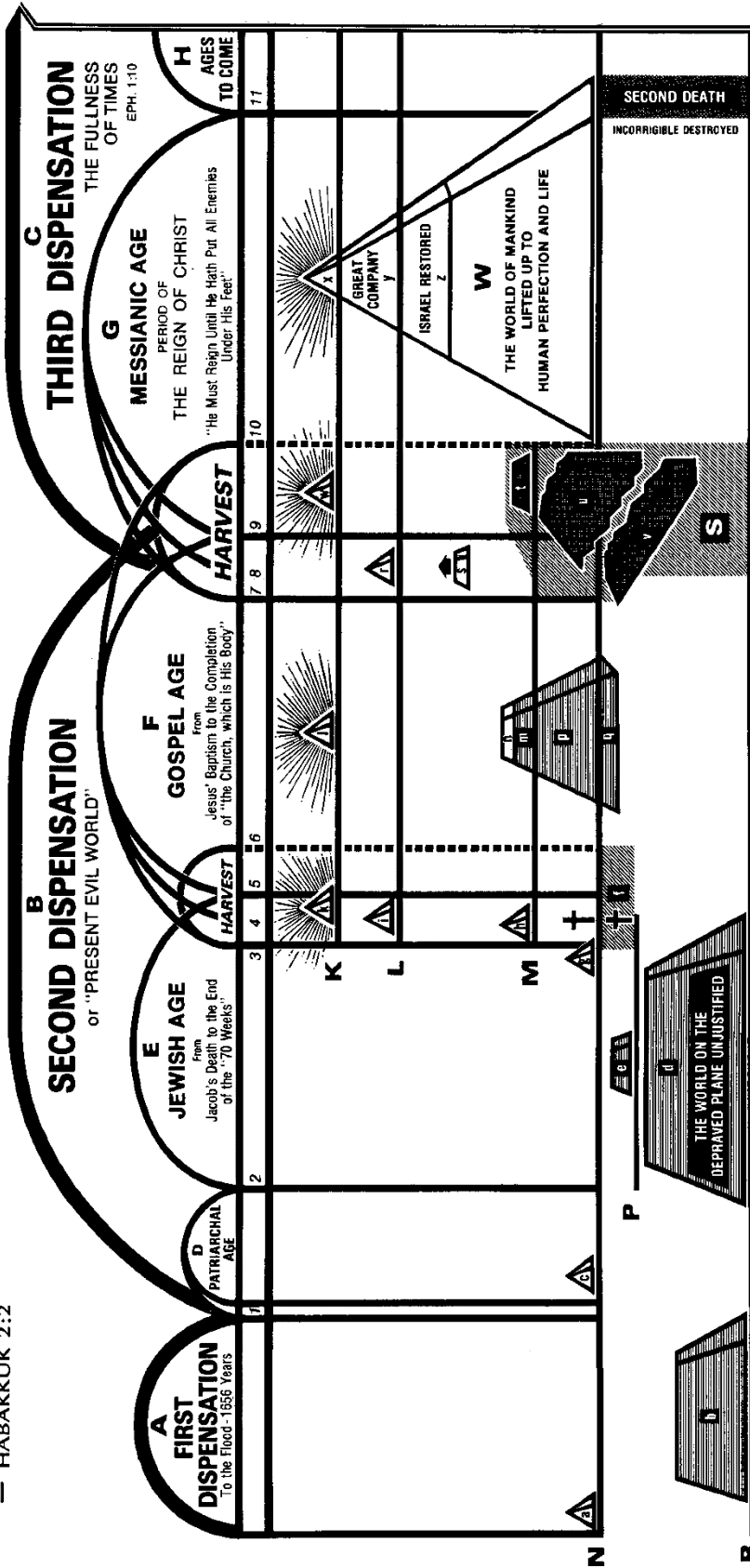


CHART OF THE AGES

ILLUSTRATING THE PLAN OF GOD FOR BRINGING MANY SONS TO GLORY, AND HIS PURPOSE—

"... In Regard to an Administration of the Appointed Times, to Re-unite All Things Under One Head, Even Under the Anointed One; the Things in Heaven and the Things on Earth — Under Him." EPH. 1:10 (dagney)

Appendix B

Glossary

of

Abbreviations, Terms, References, and Dates

Glossary
of
Abbreviations, Terms, References, and Dates

A

Ancient Worthies — The faithful servants of God in Old Testament times. See Hebrews 11.

B

Barclay — Translator of a fine-reading 20th Century New Testament and writer of extensive commentaries.

Bro. Russell — See Russell.

C

Chart of the Ages — For a complete explanation of this chart, see THE DIVINE PLAN OF THE AGES — Volume 1 of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES by C. T. Russell. This chart virtually pictures the Bible and man's history and future on one page. (See Appendix A.)

D

Dates:

1799 — The date at which the 1,260 prophetic “days” of Daniel and of Revelation end. It is “The Time of the End” in Daniel’s prophecy. It is marked by, among other things, the profuse distribution by Bible Societies.

1874 — The date of the 1,335 “days” of Daniel 12. It is the date of the finishing of the “mystery” in Revelation 10, the date of Daniel’s being fully opened, and the

date of Jesus' "thief-like" second advent. It also marks the beginning of the 7th one-thousand years after Adam's fall.

1878 — The date of the resurrection of saints who had been faithful during the Gospel Age. The date of the casting-off of "Babylon." The date of the end of the Jewish "Double."

1881 — The date which marks the drawing-in of the net in the Matthew 13 parable. It is calculated by its parallelism with the end of the 70th "week" in the prophecy of Daniel 9.

Diaglott — A 19th Century translation by Benjamin Wilson which contains both an interlinear Greek-English translation and a more-easily-readable English realization. It is an extremely fine New Testament although it couldn't, at that date, have the advantage of more recent Greek manuscript discoveries.

Double — The Scriptures refer to a period during which Israel is favored by God. Prophecy then refers to a same-length period during which Israel experiences God's disfavor and His seeming abandonment of them. This second period is referred to in prophecy as their "double." It does not mean "twice as much." It means the same amount repeated — in other words, a mirrored amount, a double. Each circumstance is 1,845 years in length. The first is from Jacob's death to the cross. The "double" of disfavor is from the cross to the 1878 date of the re-

establishment of Israel in its homeland with the founding of “Petah Tikvah” — the first kibbutz.

E

Ephesus — The name given to the first epoch of Church history dating from A.D. 33 to A.D. 70. (Revelation 2:1-7) The name means either “Desirable” or “First.” Its “angel” (or messenger) is the Apostle Paul.

G

Gospel Age — The period from Jesus’ baptism until the completion of the Church, his body. (See Appendix A.) It is the only period during which a heavenly resurrection is offered.

Great Company or Great Multitude — That group of spirit-begotten Christians (most clearly named in Revelation 7) who will receive a reward in heaven but who will not be a part of the “Body of Christ.” They receive a “partial reward” — see II John 8. They do not deny the Lord, but they do not develop that ripeness of character necessary to be a part of the “Bride of Christ.”

H

Harvest — The periods at the conclusions of the Jewish and Gospel Ages when the work of those ages is completed in order to switch to the work of the incoming age. The term finds its usage in such places as Matthew 13:39. (See Appendix A.)

J

Jewish Age — The period from the death of Jacob until the baptism of Jesus. (See Appendix A.)

K

KJV — The King James translation of the Bible into English (1611). Also sometimes called the “Common Version” or the “Authorized Version” because the English Church is thought to have authorized only it as the acceptable English Bible for many centuries.

L

Laodicea — The name given to the seventh epoch of Church history dating from A.D. 1874 to ? (Revelation 3:14-22). The name means something like “Justice of (or by) the People” or, possibly, “Judgment of (or by) the People.” It exists during the time of the beginning of the thousand-year Judgment Day defined in II Peter 3:7-13. Its “angel” (or messenger) is Charles Russell.

M

Mediation — That period during the 1,000-years of Christ’s reign in which individuals (as opposed to institutions) will be under judgment for the purpose of restoring them to perfection.

Millennial Age — The period from Jesus’ return until the completion of the “Restitution of All Things” — Acts 3:19-21; I Corinthians 15:22-28. It is named for its thousand-year length as found in Psalm 90; II Peter 3; Revelation 20. (See Appendix A.)

Miller — William Miller, the 19th Century prime instigator of the Second-Advent Movement — a prediction that Jesus would return (visibly) in 1843. The movement was extensive, spreading into Europe. It promoted fervent

study of prophecy which did result in much enhanced understanding and appreciation of the Bible — despite Miller’s prophetic failures.

N

NAS — The New American Standard Bible. This translation is, since its inception, under constant revision. Thus newer printings may differ (sometimes importantly) from older printings. It has been used as the primary reference for this book on Jesus’ Parables.

New Albany — Louisville Bible Students Ecclesia — An independent congregation founded in or before 1883 and operating continuously since that time.

P

Parousia — The Greek word which is often translated “coming,” but which strictly means PRESENCE. It refers to the thousand years (the Millennial Age) during which Christ first secretly undermines the old order of things, and then is revealed in power (though invisibly) for the period during which he mediates between God and man to bring man to perfection. Parousia is generally used in reference only to the period between Jesus’ return and the Mediation (the Peaceable Kingdom).

Pastor Russell — See “Russell.”

Pergamos — The name given to the third epoch of Church history dating from A.D. 313 to A.D. 1160. (Revelation 2:12-17) The name means “Earthly Elevation”

in reference to the Church's being accepted as the state religion of Rome. Its "angel" (or messenger) is Arius.

Philadelphia — The name given to the sixth epoch of Church history dating from A.D. 1521 to A.D. 1874. (Revelation 3:7-13) The name means "Brotherly Love" in reference to the fact that Christians, now realizing their INDIVIDUAL JUSTIFICATION and standing before God, began to value their brethren more than church authority. Its "angel" (or messenger) is Martin Luther.

R

R. followed by a number (e.g., R.4678) — These are references to reprints of articles from "Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence." (See under "Russell.")

Ransom — The doctrine that Jesus' death was the price to justice for the release of Adam (and the race that came from him) from the death sentence. See I Timothy 2:5, 6; I Corinthians 15:22; Romans 5:12, 15-19.

Russell — Charles Taze Russell, the world-renowned expounder of Bible study from the 1870's until 1916. His "Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence" — a twice-monthly publication — and his Studies in the Scriptures — six volumes of intense topical scriptural investigation — form a part of a body of written work which yet blesses and enlightens Bible students around the world. Subsequent to his death, his corporation, The Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, was usurped, corrupted, and changed almost beyond recognition resulting in the 1931 founding of the sect known as the "Jehovah's Witnesses."

Their claims to the contrary, Charles Russell was neither their founder nor the presenter of nearly anything they believe.

S

Sardis — The name given to the fifth epoch of Church history dating from A.D. 1371 to A.D. 1521.

(Revelation 3:1-6) The etymology of the name is uncertain. Some claim that it means “Strengthen the Things which Remain.” The Sard stone may enter into the etymology. Its “angel” (or messenger) is John Wycliffe.

Seven Church Periods — Revelation 2 and 3 symbolically divide the history of the Christian Era into seven periods of the Church, each represented by a city in Asia Minor. The seven stages of the Church are defined separately (under their names) in this glossary.

Smyrna — The name given to the second epoch of Church history dating from A.D. 79 - A.D. 313. (Revelation 2:8-11) The name means “Bitter” in reference to the extreme persecutions of Christianity by Rome during the period. Its “angel” (or messenger) is the Apostle John.

T

Thyatira — The name given to the fourth epoch of Church history dating from A.D. 1160 to A.D. 1371.

(Revelation 2:15-29) The name means “Sweet Perfume of Sacrifice” due to the fact that successful service to God during the period was very costly, because of the vicious persecution of saints at the hand of an all-powerful Roman

Church. This was the depths of the Dark Ages. Its “angel” (or messenger) is Peter Waldo.

Time of the End — The period beginning at 1799 defined, among other definitions, as the time when the understanding of Daniel would begin (Daniel 12:4), and during which Christ would secretly return (Daniel 12:1).

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Index of Scripture Citations

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