

The Parable of the Tares
A series on the Mysterious Nature of God's Kingdom (part 5)

1. Review the Parable of the Sower (Matt 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8) and summarize what it was about.

Beginning with the Parable of the Sower, in His series of parables about the kingdom, Jesus teaches the disciples that the Good News will be heard by all kinds of people, but that only a small number will take it to heart and have an abundant spiritual life. The preaching of the Good News by Jesus Christ heralds the dawning of the kingdom of God.

2. In telling the Parable of the Tares (Matt 13:24-30; 36-43), Jesus is making a comparison to the kingdom of heaven to a man sowing seed on his land. Who is Jesus speaking to?

From Matthew 13:34, 36, Jesus tells the Parable of the Tares to the public crowd, and they hear the parable's emphasis on the conversation between the master and the servants. However, Jesus' interpretation of the parable is for the ears of the disciples and places an emphasis on the **beginning** and **end** of the parable.

3. What is happening in the beginning with the sowing of the seed (Matt 13:24-25; 36-39)? Consult a Bible study aid to gain a sense of first century agricultural practices.

To the crowds, Jesus tells the situation of a man sowing good seed, and his enemy comes at night to contaminate his work and sows with bad seed.

Usually fields are weeded in the spring; however, if discovered too late, weeding risks the uprooting of the young wheat shoots. A weed that grows exclusively in the Middle East is the bearded darnel (*lolium temulentum*), which is difficult to distinguish from wheat as a young shoot.

To his disciples, Jesus interprets the parable by drawing several parallels and identifies the imagery:

As the Son of Man, Jesus identifies Himself as the One sowing the good seed and His enemy as Satan.

The field is identified as the world.

The good seed is identified as the sons of the kingdom which are Believers.

The bad seed is identified as the sons of the evil one which are non-Believers.

4. What is happening at the end of the parable with the harvest (Matt 13:29-30; 39-43)?

As Jesus continues with His parable to the crowds, the slaves are surprised to discover that there are tares growing with the wheat, and they want to separate them. But the landowner instructs them to let the wheat and tares grow together until the harvest when he will supervise the reapers.

In the first century, reaping was usually done with a sickle. Harvesters cut the wheat just below the head and leave the remaining wheat stalks and the shorter tares to be cut separately. Gathered and dried, the darnel is used for fuel where wood is scarce.

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To the disciples, Jesus interprets the most important part of His analogy – the harvest. Several parallels are made, and He discusses them with imagery from the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, the term “harvest” is a metaphor for final judgment (Jer 51:33; Hos 6:11; Joel 3:13); it is the harvesting of souls. This imagery is consistent with Jesus’ statement of the harvest occurring at the end of the age.

Jesus’ use of the image of a “fiery furnace” symbolizes divine punishment, which would not be lost to the Jews as the use of a furnace for punishment occurred in the Old Testament (Dan 3:6; 11, 15, 20; Mal 4:1-2).

This association of the furnace with divine punishment is further reinforced as the place of “weeping” and the “gnashing of teeth.” Used in the same context as Matthew 8:12, the “gnashing of teeth” could be an expression of futility by the wicked or a refusal to acknowledge the justness of God’s judgment.

The reapers are identified as His unfallen angels. In contrast to a typical harvest in which the good seed is reaped, the angels will be removing the wicked out of Jesus’ kingdom which was identified earlier as the world (Matt 13:38).

The wicked are identified as “all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness.” The translation seen here is understood by many scholars as a periphrastic rendering of a Hebrew expression found in Zephaniah 1:3 translated as “everything that causes sin and all who do evil.” As a metaphor in this context of the tares, the phrase refers to people who cause others to sin or have false faith and essentially are in rebellion against God.

The righteous “will shine forth as the sun” refers to a radiance of the life to which they have come (Dan 12:3). The term “righteous” is in the context of the Believer’s acceptability not in their meritorious achievement. And their destiny is to the kingdom of their Father.

The kingdom that belongs to Jesus, Son of Man, also belongs to God the Father (Matt 20:21; 25:31; Rev 11:15). Jesus’ future deliverance of the kingdom to God the Father is doing the will and work of God and that the kingdom of heaven is His by virtue of His relationship to His Father and His role as the Son of Man (1 Cor 15:24). Jesus is indeed Jesus Messiah King (Matt 20:31; 25:34).

5. With the Parable of the Tares, what is Jesus saying about the kingdom through His analogy?

The conflict between Jesus and Satan is personal and about satanic opposition to His world.

In this present phase of the kingdom of sowing and growth, Believers and non-Believers will coexist; Believers are not responsible of separating the righteous from the wicked.

Jesus ascribes to Himself the role of Judge, and He will direct His angels to remove the wicked leaving behind those who will enter the next phase of the kingdom, the kingdom of the Father.

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What Jesus reveals about the kingdom through the Parable of the Tares has several implications to the church:

1. Despite Satan's efforts of planting non-Believers amidst Believers, God's kingdom will still prevail.
2. Making the distinction between Believer and non-Believer is the prerogative of Jesus Christ, which will occur in the coming Judgment.
3. As the fate of church members is in God's hands, the church need only focus on "sowing" and "growing." Set free from the desire of bringing about a "pure" community (as the Landowner's slaves sought to purify the field), the church can focus on the gathering of people into the kingdom of God.

References:

1. Gaebelien F, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, & Luke*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1992).
2. Walvoord JF and Zuck RB, eds., *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Wheaton: Victor Books, (1985).
3. Baily ML. The Parable of the Tares in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 155, (July-September 1998), p. 266-79.

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