

The details of the process of the kingdom of the heavens

The preceding section provides a sketch of the beginning and ending of the kingdom of the heavens and its process. The Gospel of Matthew, however, contains twelve parables that provide details concerning the process of the kingdom of the heavens.

1. The parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23).

This parable speaks of the time before the coming of the kingdom of the heavens by showing what happened when the Lord was sowing the seed in preparation. In this parable the Lord does not say, “The kingdom of the heavens has become like” (cf. v. 24) or “the kingdom of the heavens is like” (cf. v. 31), because at that time the kingdom of the heavens had not yet come. The seed that the Lord sowed, the word He planted, was the word of the kingdom of the heavens that was to gain and prepare people to be the sons of the kingdom of the heavens. There are four kinds of hearers of the word. The first kind of hearer is like the earth beside the way on the edge of the field (v. 4), which is close to the evil spirits. The field refers to the world, the air is close to the world, and since Satan and his evil spirits are in the air, this kind of person must be close to the evil spirits. When this kind of hearer hears the word of the kingdom of the heavens, he cannot

understand it, and Satan easily snatches it away (v. 19). The second kind of hearer is like the shallow earth on top of rocky places. This kind of hearer only shallowly accepts the word of the kingdom (v. 5). He is unwilling to allow the Holy Spirit to dig deeply to soften his hardened heart and to remove his hidden sins, personal desires, self-seeking, and self-pity (the rocks under the earth). Thus, the word cannot sink deep in his heart, and when affliction or persecution comes, he is stumbled (v. 21). The third kind of hearer is like the thorny ground. This kind of hearer receives the word of the kingdom of the heavens but is filled with the anxiety of the age, the deceitfulness of riches, and other kinds of private lusts and pleasures (thorns) that choke the word and make it unfruitful (vv. 7, 22). The fourth kind of hearer is like the good earth (v. 8). This kind of hearer receives the word of the kingdom of the heavens and allows the word to work in his heart to become deeply rooted and to bear much fruit (v. 23).

2. The parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43).

The parable of the tares speaks of the beginning, continuation, and end of the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens. Therefore, the Lord begins by saying, “The kingdom of the heavens has become like” (v. 24). This parable follows the first parable. The seed that the Lord sowed in the preceding parable becomes “the sons of the kingdom” (v. 38) in this

parable; they are the true believers (the wheat). Just after the church was established on the day of Pentecost, the Lord's servants were not watchful (the men slept), and the devil began to mix false believers (tares) in among the true believers. Once there were false believers, the outward appearance of the kingdom, which is Christianity, began. The Lord allows false believers to live together with true believers in the world (the field) — but not in the church — until He returns at the end of this age. Then the Lord will send angels to weed out the false believers from the world, that is, out of His kingdom, because the world will become His kingdom when He returns, and the false believers will be thrown into the lake of fire where they will be eternally punished (Rev. 11:15; Matt. 13:28-30). Once the false believers are separated from the true believers, the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens — Christendom — will end. At that time all true believers will be raptured to the air (the wheat being gathered into the barn). From that point forward, the overcoming believers (the righteous) will be in the manifestation of the kingdom of the heavens, that is, in the kingdom of their Father, and will shine with the light of glory just like Christ (the sun).

3. The parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32).

The parable of the mustard seed speaks of the outward appearance of

the kingdom of the heavens, Christendom, during its time of abnormal and improper development. The mustard seed in this parable is the seed sown in the first parable, which is God's word of life. The Lord sowed God's word in the world in order to obtain the church, which would be like an herb. But after a certain period of time, the church lost its herbal nature and became a great tree. This was an abnormal development because it broke God's natural law and principle that every living thing should be according to its kind (Gen. 1:11-12). According to history, this abnormal development began when the Roman emperor Constantine accepted Christianity. When the church began, worldly people, especially the early Roman emperors, persecuted and harmed the church. When Constantine, the king of the worldly people, accepted Christianity, he not only ceased his persecution of the church but even encouraged people to be baptized and accept this religion. In this way the church, which was originally like a small herb with shallow roots in the earth and was full of the nature of a pilgrim and sojourner, became like a great tree with large branches, flourishing leaves, and roots deep in the earth. The church outwardly sprang up, developed, obtained power and authority, and became Christianity. Thus, it became a place where Satan (the birds of heaven) could roost. This situation of abnormal development will continue until the Lord returns; the Lord, however, wants His people to leave such a situation and return to the original position of the church.

4. The parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33)

The parable of the leaven speaks of the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens reaching a point of inward corruption. According to history, this situation was fully present by the fifth century A.D. with the formal establishment of the Roman Catholic Church. The organization of Roman Catholicism is like a woman who usurps the headship and mixes all kinds of heresies and evil things (leaven) into the truths concerning Christ as food (the meal) for God's people. This caused the outward appearance of the kingdom of the heavens, which is Christendom, to become inwardly filled with all kinds of corruption.

These four parables are a group showing how the Lord sowed the kingdom of the heavens on the earth as the seed of life and produced sons of the kingdom so that He could obtain a heavenly kingdom where the heavens could rule. They show how Satan worked in many ways to damage the word of the kingdom of the heavens to prevent it from bearing fruit. But the word still produced sons of the kingdom who could become a kingdom where the heavens could rule — the church. Then Satan mixed in false believers, causing this heavenly kingdom to have an outward, earthly, false appearance; he later caused this outward appearance to be mingled with the

world, to have a worldly development, and to inwardly receive all kinds of heresies and evil things, filling this outward appearance with satanic corruption. Satan did all these things to damage God' s goal for the church and to frustrate the church from bringing in the kingdom of God. Thus, anyone who seeks God' s heart' s desire and pursues the kingdom must leave the situation in Christianity behind, including the presence of tares, the appearance of the great tree, and the leaven of its teachings.