

PARABLES, FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Part I

The Use of, the Extent of, the Purpose for...

“In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, and told the sum of the matters.

Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea.

And four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another” (Dan. 7:1-3).

“The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside.

And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.

And he spake many things unto them in parables...” (Matt. 13:1-3a).

Parables and figurative language (metaphors and other types of figurative expressions) are often thought of somewhat together, for parables usually employ a number of figurative expressions. *But, whether appearing together or not, neither ever appears alone, apart from related Scripture.*

Individuals in the Western world do not normally think or express themselves in parabolic or figurative fashions nearly as much as individuals in the Eastern world. It is quite common for those in the East to speak somewhat in parabolic senses or use figurative language extensively, but less common for individuals in the West.

In this respect, it sometimes becomes more difficult for those in the West to grasp certain things in Scripture when it comes to parables and figurative language than it does for those in the East, who tend to automatically think along these lines.

(This is also why those in the West often have similar problems with types and antitypes in Scripture. They find it difficult to think along these related lines as well. But for those in the East, seeing types and antitypes [or seeing parables or figurative expressions] are seeing that which is second-nature to the way they think. And this would go hand-in-hand with the manner in which God structured and made known His Word to man, given in a part of the world where this type use of language was well known, a use which has been carried down into modern times in the East.

This is not to say that God simply gave His Word to a people after the manner in which they thought and used language. Rather, it is to say that God, over centuries of time, brought into existence a people in the Middle East whose thoughts and use of language followed a manner in which He desired to communicate His Word to man.

This would be similar to how God brought about the means which He desired to use to record His Word in what we know today as the New Testament. This part of His Word was originally recorded in *Koine Greek* [*koine*, a Greek word meaning “common” — *Kione Greek, a common language among the people*]. This was a language in use throughout the Roman world in the first century, possibly being *the most accurately expressive language human history has ever known*.

God began to bring the use of *Koine Greek* in the later Roman world to pass through Alexander the Great’s conquests in the Middle East in the fourth century B.C., allowing *Koine Greek* [the language used by these conquering armies] to progressively spread and eventually become a chief means of communication throughout that part of the world. And, when the New Testament was penned in the first century

A.D., this allowed God to have this particular means of communication at hand, ready for use by both those recording and those reading His Word.)

Thus, parables and the use of figurative expressions — as the use of types in Scripture — form different methods of the way God gave His revelation to man. Parables and figurative expressions form *necessary parts* of this revelation and are given *after particular, God-ordained fashions*, in order to form the complete canon of Scripture, *EXACTLY as God would have it exist*. They form integral parts of Scripture — parts of the whole — *apart from which other portions of Scripture CANNOT be properly understood*.

THEN, putting it all together, one can, so to speak, run *ALL* the checks and balances he wants to run through “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” — whether parables, figurative language, types, etc. — and *he will ALWAYS end up with the SAME uniformity and consistency throughout*.

He MUST, for he is dealing with a Divine revelation which, in actuality, has ONLY one Author; and this revelation emanated from an infinite, omniscient mind wherein nonuniformity and inconsistency CANNOT exist.

And that will speak volumes when it comes to the interpretation of parables, figurative language, and types. These simply form different methods which God used to communicate His Word to man; and the inexhaustible nature of that dealt with in the Word of God *is NO different* in parables, figurative language, or types as it is in any other part of the Word.

ANY part of the Word forms just as much a part of the Word as ANY other part. Parables, figurative language, and types *MUST* be looked upon after this fashion, *for the WHOLE of Scripture forms one complete, Divine revelation* — given “in divers manners [‘in many ways,’] in time past” — which *can ONLY be PERFECT, to the minutest detail, in EVERY respect*.

The Interpretation of Parables

Parables reflect on previous Scripture. They are given to explain, add further light to previously revealed truth. And the figurative expressions employed in parables or elsewhere in Scripture *are ALWAYS used after such a fashion* that either the text renders them self-explanatory or their use is made known in the context or in other portions of Scripture.

The English word “parable” is an Anglicized form of the Greek word *parabole*, which is a compound word comprised of *para* (meaning, “alongside”) and *bole* (meaning, “to place,” or “to cast”).

Thus, *parabole* simply means “to place [or ‘to cast’] alongside.” The word, when used relative to Biblical teaching, *refers to additional truths placed alongside of previously revealed truths in order to provide further light concerning the prior truths.*

In this respect, parables in Scripture and the previous truths to which they relate are somewhat like types and antitypes. *One will help explain the other, for they both relate to counterparts. And a rejection of one will negatively reflect on one’s understanding of the other.*

So, what can be said about the interpretation of parables? The same thing which can be said about the interpretation of types can also be said about the interpretation of parables. Parables and types *MUST* be interpreted after the same fashion as that to which they relate is to be interpreted.

And that to which they relate, generally, are not parables or types, though one parable or type could relate to another parable or type. But, with the existence of the latter, there *MUST* also exist a nonparabolic or a nontypical section of Scripture back behind or out ahead of that to which all of the parables or types on a particular subject would relate.

A parable is *NOT* simply “an earthly story with a heavenly meaning,” as some state; *NOR*, as stated by others, is

a parable given only to illustrate “one central truth,” from which “details” cannot be gleaned.

The first statement really says *nothing* when it comes to the true nature of parables, and the second statement *runs completely contrary* to any correct thought about parables when viewed strictly from a Scriptural standpoint.

The reason for parables, as previously stated, was given by Christ Himself when He first began to teach through the use of parables (Matt. 13:10-17). Christ used parables during the latter part of His earthly ministry in order to reveal *additional truths* to those who had received *His prior teachings*, for, having received the previously revealed truths, *they COULD then understand* the additional related truths taught by the parables.

However, through this method of teaching, these additional truths *were meaningless* to those who had rejected His prior teachings. *They had NO point of reference*, leaving the parables to stand alone; and, resultingly, *they COULDN'T understand* that which was being taught.

(And teachings with this type dependency on other Scripture *is NOT at all* peculiar to the parables. Note the central subject matter of the parables in Matthew chapter thirteen — *the Word of the Kingdom, and fruit-bearing in relation to the kingdom*.)

Unless a person has some type foundational understanding of this overall subject, he *CANNOT* begin at this point and expect to properly understand the subject at hand. *He has NO foundation as a point of reference*, upon which he can build. After all, these parables appear at a point part way through the Book of Matthew, and they are removed much farther yet from the foundational truths set forth by Moses in the beginning.

This will explain why certain Biblical truths appear relatively simple for one person but seem next to impossible

to grasp for another person. For one “instructed unto the kingdom of the heavens” [Matt. 13:19, 52], understanding things relating to *the Word of the Kingdom may appear relatively simple and easy*. But for one not so instructed, *the matter would NOT be that way at all*.

And this is WHY God placed all of these foundational truths at the beginning of His revelation to man. God expects man to begin where He began, at the beginning of His revelation.

And this is where man *MUST begin* if he is to properly understand the foundational truths as God set them forth, allowing a person to then correctly build thereon.)

Revealed Truth in Parables

The extent to which different parables deal with revealed truths could vary. A parable could reveal numerous detailed truths, providing numerous points of additional information to help explain the previously revealed truths (Scripture reveals *NOTHING* which would limit the use of parables in this respect). On the other hand though, the revealed, detailed truths covered in some parables could be considerably less than revealed, detailed truths covered in other parables.

They would be very much like types in this respect. A particular type deals with truth relating to only part of a complete picture (all the types together form the complete picture), but types *vary* as to the amount and what part of the complete picture each portrays.

The method of the interpretation of parables, as also previously stated, is simple. Though quite a bit of symbolism is usually involved (as is also present numerous other places in Scripture, types included), parables are to be interpreted and understood after the same fashion as the Scriptures to which they relate. As in the interpretation of types and antitypes, parables are to be interpreted in conjunction with their counterparts in other sections of Scripture.

The parable is *NOT* to be interpreted one way and that to which it relates another way, as the type is *NOT* to be interpreted one way and the antitype another way. In each instance, *BOTH are to be understood and interpreted in the light of one another, for they form inseparable units.*

The type and antitype, or the parable and the prior portion of Scripture to which it relates, in each case, deal with *the same thing* and are to be looked upon and understood *after the same fashion.*

Thus, to place parables in their correct perspective — beginning with the parables in Matthew chapter thirteen — note that to which the previously revealed truth pertained and that to which these parables pertained, *which, of necessity, MUST be the same.*

Part II

The Use of, the Extent of, the Purpose for...

A scattering of parables can be found in the Old Testament (e.g., Judges 9:7-15; II Sam. 12:1-4; Isa. 5:1-7), but parables are seen in their fuller use in the gospel accounts of the New Testament, during the latter part of Christ's earthly ministry. And parables appear at this point in Christ's ministry for a revealed reason and purpose.

Events in Matthew Chapter Twelve

Christ began to use parables extensively during His earthly ministry *ONLY AFTER Israel had rejected the offer of the kingdom of the heavens.* Parables, in this respect, were first used after the events recorded in Matthew chapter twelve, having to do with the blasphemous act of the Scribes and Pharisees against the Holy Spirit.

In this chapter, the fundamental religious leaders in Israel, the Scribes and Pharisees (vv. 14, 24, 38) — the largest of the religious sects in Israel, who, because of their very numbers, controlled the religious life of the people — attributed the source of Christ's power, through which He performed miraculous works, to Satan.

These miraculous works were *supernatural signs performed for the Jewish people, having to do with the proffered kingdom*. They were being performed, not through Christ's Own power, but through the power of the Spirit; and, accordingly, Christ looked upon this blasphemous act by these religious leaders as something directed against the Spirit of God more so than against Himself.

And, through committing an act of this nature, these religious leaders had gone too far. They, in their rejection of the King and the kingdom, had acted after a fashion which necessitated Christ announcing *that THIS sin would NOT be forgiven them* (which would also include the nation at large, for that being offered and rejected had to do with national Israel), "neither in this world ['this age'], neither in the world to come ['the one (the age) to come']" (vv. 31, 32).

(Note that Christ was performing miraculous works through the power of the Spirit, though He Himself was in full possession of His Deity [cf. Matt. 16:21; Luke 22:61; John 1:48; 2:18-21; 18:5-8; Acts 20:28], *being very God of very God and omnipotent*.)

Why was Christ performing these miraculous works through the power of the Spirit when He Himself possessed the power to perform them?

The answer can be seen in Gen. 1:2b ff, through the Father having previously performed works in relation to the Spirit after the same fashion, at the beginning, showing the manner in which actions of the triune Godhead are brought to pass. This forms a first-mention principle within the types;

and the Son, at a later time, would NOT — He could NOT — act after a different fashion than the Father in this respect.

Thus, though Christ was fully capable of performing miraculous works within His Own power, He *COULDN'T* act after this fashion and remain within the confines of the manner in which Scripture is structured. *His actions had to be in complete keeping with that set forth and established at the beginning, in Genesis.* The unchangeable pattern had been set 4,000 years prior to that time, and the Son *could ONLY act in complete accord with this established pattern.*)

Christ's statement relative to Israel not being forgiven throughout two ages for the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit would encompass time covered by both the present age and the Messianic Era. This would include time covered in the antitype of the whole of the seven days in the opening two chapters of Genesis — Man's 6,000-year Day (one age, covered by the six days), and the 1,000-year Lord's Day (a subsequent age, covered by the seventh day).

And, for all practical purposes, *THIS* was the point in Scripture where the proffered kingdom was taken from Israel, though the announcement was not made *UNTIL* near the end of Christ's earthly ministry (Matt. 21:43).

According to Matt. 12:31, 32; 21:33-45, Israel, throughout time covered by any part of the six and seven days, the six and seven thousand years, would be estranged from having any part in realizing that seen in the proffered kingdom of the heavens. This portion of the kingdom would be taken from Israel and would be "given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof," a nation which would, during the seventh day, the seventh one-thousand-year period, realize heavenly promises and blessings.

(Note that the kingdom taken from Israel was that part of the kingdom [having *both heavenly and earthly spheres*] which

had been offered to Israel — “the kingdom of the heavens” [*the heavenly sphere*], *NOT* the kingdom covenanted to David [the earthly sphere, *which can NEVER be taken from Israel*].

This, of course, *has NOTHING to do with* the widespread, erroneous teaching within Christendom today that the Church has replaced Israel. Rather, it has to do with one facet of the kingdom [*the heavenly*] which was offered to, rejected by, and taken from Israel.

And it has to do *with an entirely new entity subsequently called into existence to be the recipient of this heavenly sphere of the kingdom*.

All of God’s promises to Israel, aside from the nation one day realizing regal positions in the heavenly sphere of the kingdom, *remain intact and can NEVER change*. In fact, apart from Israel continuing in existence in this respect, the new entity, *NOW* in possession of heavenly promises and blessings, *could NOT ONLY have NEVER been called into existence BUT those forming this new entity could NEVER realize these promises and blessings*.

And the reason for that is very simple. God has decreed that *ALL* spiritual blessings *MUST* flow through Israel, which is why *the new entity MUST be “Abraham’s seed” in order to realize these promises and blessings* [Gal. 3:26-29].)

Events in Matthew Chapter Thirteen and Beyond

Once the kingdom had been taken from Israel, there was then a need for the extensive use of parables in Christ’s earthly ministry, something which would have been out of place prior to that time.

And an introduction and use of parables immediately following Israel’s climactic rejection of the King and the kingdom, followed by Christ’s removal of the kingdom from Israel, *is EXACTLY what occurred*. Immediately after the events of Matthew chapter twelve, Christ departed from the house, went down by the seaside, and began to speak to the multitudes in parables.

Note Matt. 13:1 in this respect:

“The same day [referring to the time of the events back in ch. 12] went Jesus *out of the house*, and sat *by the seaside*.”

The symbolism, the figurative expressions — in keeping with that which had occurred in chapter twelve and that which is stated in Matt. 21:43 — is essentially *prophetic* in nature and has to do with Christ departing from Israel (departing from “the house,” having to do with *Israel*) and going to “a nation” *which was NOT Jewish, but mainly of Gentile origin* (going down by “the seaside,” foreshadowing His going to *the Gentiles* [cf. Acts 15:14; Rom. 11:25]).

And that which had been offered to Israel — the kingdom of the heavens — after having been taken from Israel was to be offered to this other nation (cf. Matt. 21:43; I Peter 2:9).

The parables given by the seaside following Christ’s departure from the house are to be understood in this light, as are the subsequent parables in His ministry. They all have to do, essentially, with some facet of the message surrounding the kingdom of the heavens; and the different facets of this message within the parables center mainly around the Church (future) rather than around Israel (past or present).

Note the preceding in the very first of the parables, the parable of the Sower in Matt. 13:3-9.

This parable has to do with four types of saved individuals sown out in the world, *with a view to THEIR bringing forth fruit for the kingdom — THAT previously sought from Israel*.

And in the interpretation (vv. 18-23), this whole overall message is specifically called “the word of the kingdom” (v. 19) — having to do with “the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens” (v. 11) — which would be associated with “the gospel of the glory of Christ” in II Cor. 4:4 (ASV; cf. Acts 20:25, 32), *NOT* with “the gospel of the grace of God” in Eph. 2:8, 9 (cf. Acts 20:24, 28).

(In the parable of the Sower, for a correct understanding of that which is in view, translate the words “received seed,” or “received the seed,” in vv. 19, 20, 22, 23 [KJV] as “was sown.” That is, “This is he which was sown...”

In each case, the Lord sows [places] a saved individual at some point in the world, with a view to that individual bringing forth fruit in relation to the proffered kingdom [cf. vv. 3, 37, 38; ref. ASV].)

And, at this point in Christ’s earthly ministry, *Israel could NO longer* bring forth fruit relative to the kingdom of the heavens (cf. Isa. 5:1-7; Matt. 21:18-43).

ONLY the Church, which was ABOUT to be called into existence, could do this (a completely new entity which would be mainly of Gentile origin.

With Christ’s departure from the house and His going down by the seaside — *symbolizing His departure from Israel (the house) and His going to the Gentiles (the seaside)* — the backdrop is set for this beginning parable. This parable *can ONLY have to do with the Church in relation to the kingdom of the heavens and fruit-bearing, NOT with Israel in relation to either one.*

Then, the reason for parables, in response to the disciples’ question, is given immediately following the parable of the Sower, prior to the interpretation of the parable (vv. 10-17). Parables were given to further explain previously revealed truths; but whether or not the hearer understood the additional truths brought out by the parables was contingent upon whether or not that person had accepted the previously revealed truths.

The latter was completely dependent on the former, which is why two classes of individuals were singled out in the Lord’s stated reason concerning why He spoke in parables at this time (those who understood, and those who didn’t understand).

(Note that the last three parables in Matthew chapter thirteen were given back inside the house, showing that Israel, regardless of circumstances, *could NOT be removed from the overall picture* [13:36, 44-50; cf. Rom. 11:11-26].

BUT, in relation to the kingdom of the heavens, Israel could ONLY be as the fruitless fig tree in Matt. 21:18, 19. Israel could NOT NOW bring forth fruit in relation to this facet of the kingdom.)

Part III

The Use of, the Extent of, the Purpose for...

Recognizing the value of parables is simple, and it can be stated in terms equally as simple. As previously stated (Part I), *parables provide further light, they help explain previously revealed truth. That's really their sole purpose, and that's why the Lord used them.*

Parables constitute part of the different ways in which Scripture has been structured. They simply form additional revelation given to man, after a particular fashion, in order to help man see and understand the larger picture covered by the whole of Scripture.

Given During a Transitional Period

The parables in the New Testament *are quite unique*. They fit centrally within that period between the removal of the kingdom of the heavens from Israel (removed following the events in Matthew chapter twelve, though not announced until Matt. 21:43) and the calling into existence of the Church to be the recipient of that facet of the kingdom removed from Israel (Acts 2:1ff).

And the parables, *NOT ONLY* fitting centrally within this period *BUT ALSO* having to do with the kingdom of the heav-

ens, *reflect upon that which had happened to Israel (in relation to this facet of the kingdom) and anticipate the Church being called into existence (also in relation to this facet of the kingdom).*

Thus, the parables within the gospel accounts become a primary means which God uses to reveal truths surrounding the kingdom of the heavens during *a transitional period*, as these truths pertain to both Israel and the Church.

And the parables, coming into full use in Christ's ministry and given *ALMOST exclusively* during that period between the removal of the kingdom from Israel and the calling into existence of the Church to be the recipient of that which was taken from Israel, could be viewed in a fourfold respect:

- 1) They look back *to Israel*.
- 2) They have to do *with the kingdom of the heavens*.
- 3) They are essentially *prophetic in nature*.
- 4) They concern themselves mainly *with the Church yet future*.

(As previously seen, *parables are truths placed alongside of previous truths to provide additional light. BUT*, in the sense that they fit within a transitional period and have to do mainly with the kingdom of the heavens in relation to the Church yet future, they actually relate previous truths to present and future truths. They take previous truths surrounding Israel and the kingdom of the heavens and relate these truths to the Church, about to be called into existence.

That is, *the parables take truths having to do with Israel and the kingdom in past time and present truths having to do with the Church and the kingdom in future time* [future from the time that the parables were given, *i.e.*, referring to time throughout the present dispensation and beyond]. *They help explain previously revealed truths surrounding the kingdom of the heavens as these truths now relate to the Church.*

And these truths center around “the word of the kingdom” [Matt. 13:8, 22, 23], which has to do *with fruit-bearing* [Matt. 13:19], *with the Messianic Era in view* [Matt. 13:19-23; 24:47-51; 25:19-30].)

The Beginning of Parables

Note again the timing of and reason for the introduction of parables in Matthew’s gospel, chapter thirteen. These parables have to do with *fruit-bearing in relation to the kingdom of the heavens* (cf. vv. 11, 19, 22, 23).

This would be a reflection on the previous message concerning *fruit-bearing* as it pertained to Israel and the kingdom, and the parables would relate *this past fruit-bearing to a future fruit-bearing* as it would pertain to the Church and the kingdom (cf. Matt. 3:8; 21:19, 34, 41, 43).

That would be to say, *because* of the immediately preceding events (in ch. 12), events set forth in the parables *could NO longer* have to do with Israel bringing forth fruit, for Israel *could NO longer* bring forth fruit relative to the kingdom of the heavens.

Thus, events in the parables, of necessity, would have to do with the new “nation” — *the Church* — about to be called into existence and mentioned shortly thereafter (Matt. 16:18; cf. I Peter 2:9-11).

And the parables themselves, consisting of one truth placed alongside of a previous truth, would simply relate things past to things future — things having to do with Israel and the kingdom (past) to things having to do with the Church and the kingdom (future).

Or, take the parable of the marriage festival in Matt. 22:1-14 to illustrate a somewhat different facet of the matter, though still remaining within the thought of one truth being placed alongside of a previous truth.

In this parable, mention is made of the offer of the king-

dom to and the rejection of the kingdom by Israel first (vv. 2-7 [note also that v. 7 anticipates events of 70 A.D., about thirty-seven years later, which were future destructive events resulting from Israel's past rejection]).

Then the remainder of the parable pertains to the Church (vv. 8-14). And one previous truth to which the parable relates can be found in Matt. 8:11, 12, the only prior mention of "outer darkness."

In Matt. 8:11, 12, "outer darkness," a negative aspect of the message having to do with the kingdom of the heavens, had to do with those in Israel; but in Matt. 22:8-14, "outer darkness" is used pertaining to those in the Church (though not yet called into existence), those to whom the kingdom was to be offered following Israel's rejection.

This is how parables form additional truths placed alongside of previously revealed truths in order to cast additional light on the previous truths, light which invariably has to do with some aspect of how the offer of the kingdom now relates to the Church.

(The whole of the matter surrounding Israel's rejection [as set forth in Matt. 22:2-7] can be seen in the previous chapter of Matthew's gospel in the parable leading into the announcement concerning the kingdom being taken from Israel, in the parable of the Householder and His vineyard [21:33-41; cf. vv. 42-45].

And this parable reflects back on a large segment of Israel's history, which reached an apex [as it pertained to unfaithfulness] *through the events of Matthew chapter twelve, which led to and anticipated that seen throughout succeeding chapters, leading into the crucifixion* [cf. Matt. 23:37-39].)

The Olivet Discourse Parables

Then in the Olivet Discourse parables (Matt. 24:32-25:30)

everything is projected out into the future. These parables begin with a reference to Israel (referenced metaphorically by a “fig tree” [24:32-36]), seen in the latter days (during the Tribulation) with “leaves” *BUT NO fruit*. In relation to the kingdom of the heavens, *Israel will NOT be allowed to bear fruit; BUT*, in relation to the earthly segment of the kingdom, *Israel will one day be very fruitful*. And this parable reflects back on — providing additional light for — that seen in the preceding part of the Olivet Discourse (vv. 3-31).

The parables then continue with a reference to the days of Noah (24:37-39). The judgment of the Flood, as seen in Genesis chapters six through eight, appears as the central subject from which foundational truths pertaining to “the coming of the Son of man” are drawn. The “Flood,” in the typical structure of Genesis chapters five through nine, foreshadows *the coming Tribulation* (with “Israel,” typified by *Noah*, passing safely through the Tribulation). Thus, that seen in the parable referencing the days of Noah provides additional information relating to the preceding parable and that to which it relates — information particularly surrounding Israel during the Tribulation.

Then, the remaining four parables (Matt. 24:40-25:30), having to do with the kingdom of the heavens (25:1), have to do with those to whom the kingdom was offered following that time when it was taken from Israel. These parables *can ONLY have to do with Christians* (though *the one new man* “in Christ” had yet to be called into existence), for, since the kingdom of the heavens is in view, these parables *CANNOT possibly relate to Israel*.

These parables have to do with Christian activity during the present dispensation, in relation to judgment and the outcome of this judgment at a future time (referring to events surrounding the judgment seat of Christ and beyond). And the entirety of that dealt with in these parables has to

do with the kingdom which follows (the kingdom of the heavens, which is *NOT ONLY* the central subject throughout Matthew's gospel [and the other gospel accounts] *BUT* is clearly stated to be the central subject during the course of these parables).

And, beyond the preceding, each of these parables has to do with different facets of truth dealing with the same subject.

Note, for example, how the last of these four parables, the parable of the talents, begins in Matt. 25:14.

Literally, from the Greek text, the verse would read:

"For it [the parable of the ten virgins immediately preceding] is just as a man..."

That which follows in the parable of the talents is simply another facet of that which has preceded in the parable of the ten virgins. *It is an explanation of the preceding parable*, using another parable. That is to say, *the parable of the talents has been placed alongside the parable of the ten virgins to provide additional light, to help explain the parable of the ten virgins.*

And that is the manner in which all four of the parables in Matt. 24:40-25:30 are structured. The first would be placed alongside of preceding revelation to help explain that revelation. Then each of the following three parables would be placed alongside of a preceding parable to help explain that parable.

A succinct Overall Picture

Thus, the parables in the gospel accounts have to do with *both Israel and Christians in relation to the kingdom of the heavens*. In this respect, they are inseparably connected with the removal of the kingdom from Israel and the offer of the kingdom to "a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"; and they provide innumerable truths surrounding the offer

of the kingdom to this new nation, drawing from the previous offer to Israel.

To overlook, ignore, misunderstand, or limit the use of parables is to fail, in varying extents, *to provide oneself with a series of explanatory helps which the Lord has provided. And doing such will always be to one's own detriment in Biblical study.*

Part IV

The Use of, the Extent of, the Purpose for...

Figurative language is used extensively throughout Scripture — in types, parables, and elsewhere. But one is *NEVER* left to his own imagination insofar as interpretation is concerned. Scripture itself *ALWAYS* provides the interpretation, as in the interpretation of types, parables, or any other portion of Scripture.

Scripture is *ALWAYS completely consistent* when it uses language in a figurative manner. There is *ALWAYS uniformity throughout*. “Leaven,” for example, is *ALWAYS* used the same way. A “mountain,” the “sea,” “Egypt,” “Canaan,” etc. *ALWAYS represent the same things*.

And the figurative expressions *NEVER detract* from the literality of the subject matter under discussion, no more so than types or parables detract from the literality of that to which they relate. Things *very real* are depicted through the use of figurative expressions, *things just as literal as that seen in the Scriptures to which the expressions relate*.

Note that in the extensive use of figurative language — in accounts such as Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the “great image” in Dan. 2:31-35, Daniel's vision of the “four great beasts” in Dan. 7:2-7, or the use of a “dragon,” “woman,” and “man child” in Rev. 12:1-5 to depict different things — the interpretation is *ALWAYS* revealed other places in Scripture (cf. Dan. 2:36-45; 7:16ff; Rev. 12:6ff).

The whole of a matter can often be depicted and developed to a fuller extent, in concise form, through the use of pictorial, descriptive language. *God can use numbers and metaphors to state volumes in a very succinct manner, which is EXACTLY what He does.*

Matthew 17:1-5 would present a good example of this because of the multi-faceted nature of the passage. In this section from Matthew's gospel, figurative expressions appear in a type, with the whole event both reflecting back on the original type in the opening two chapters of Genesis and pointing to something very real out ahead.

It was after six days, on the seventh day, that Jesus took Peter, James, and John up into "an high mountain apart" and was "transfigured before them."

The "high mountain" is used in the type in a figurative sense, a metaphorical sense, *representing a kingdom, the coming kingdom of Christ* (cf. Isa. 2:2-4; Dan. 2:31-45).

And the kingdom will appear, as in the type, after six days (after 6,000 years) on the seventh day (on the seventh 1,000-year period), which reflects back on and draws from the original type in Gen. 1:1-2:3.

The Olivet Discourse

Matthew 24:45-51 would present a good example of figurative language used in a parable, with the same figurative language used in another section in this discourse (nonparabolic) after the same fashion.

Note the use of "meat" in Matt. 24:45 and also in Heb. 5:12, 14. Both refer to the same thing, as does the use of "meat" after this fashion in any other portion of Scripture. "Meat," used after this fashion, is *ALWAYS* a reference to Biblical teachings, referring particularly to things surrounding Christ's return and the establishment of His kingdom (cf. Matt. 24:46, 47; Heb. 5:10-14).

Then, note that the same thing is seen in Matt. 25:31-46:

A judgment of the unsaved, with eternal verities in view, *could NOT* possibly be the subject at hand in this passage of Scripture (cf. vv. 41, 46). Both the text and the context have to do with realizing or not realizing an inheritance in the kingdom, *which would limit this judgment to the saved ALONE, having NOTHING to do with eternal verities.*

Note Rom. 8:17: "And if children, then heirs..."

"Sheep" and "goats" (vv. 32, 33), *can ONLY* be understood contextually as a metaphorical way of describing two classes of saved individuals, similar to *the parable of the wheat and the tares* in Matt. 13:24-30 (cf. Ex. 12:3-6; Lev. 16:5-10).

The unsaved and eternal verities simply *CANNOT* be in view in either passage. Rather, in both passages, *ONLY the saved, with a view to an inheritance or non-inheritance in the kingdom, can be in view.*

Compare that which the King states to those on His right hand (vv. 34-40) as opposed to that which He states to those on His left hand (vv. 41-46).

(The words "everlasting" and "eternal" in vv. 41, 46 are translations of the Greek word *aionios* and would, in the light of v. 34, have to be understood as "age-lasting," not "eternal" as it has been translated in most versions of Scripture.

Neither the Hebrew text of the Old Testament nor the Greek text of the New Testament contains a word for "eternal." *Olam* is the word normally translated "eternal," "everlasting," or "forever" in English translations of the Old Testament, and *aion* [a noun] or *aionios* [the adjective form of *aion*] are the words translated "eternal," "everlasting," or "forever" in the New Testament [also there is *aidios*, an older form of *aionios*, used two times and meaning exactly the same as *aionios* (Rom. 1:20 and Jude 6)].

Olam, *aion*, and *aionios* all have to do with "a long period of time," which, if the context permits, can refer to "eternity" [e.g., the *aionios* God in Rom. 16:26]. But the words standing alone, apart from a context, *cannot* be understood as "eternal." *Context*

is the all-important factor to ascertain the length of time in view when these words are used.

Aion and *aionios* are usually thought of and used numerous times in the New Testament in the sense of "an age." And a usage of this nature is even brought over into English. For example, the English word "aeon [or 'eon']" is derived from the Greek word *aion*.

The only way in which the Greek text can express "eternal" apart from textual considerations is through a use of *aion* in the plural [e.g., Luke 1:33; Heb. 13:8, referring to "the ages," i.e., ages without end, which would comprise eternity] or a double use of *aion*, in the plural and articular both times [e.g., Rev. 1:6; 4:9, 10, referring to "the ages of the ages," again, ages without end].

And the use of *aionios* in Matt. 25:41, 46 [the adjective form of the noun, *aion*, meaning *EXACTLY* the same], referring to an inverse of that seen in verse thirty-four [failing to realize an inheritance in the kingdom] *can ONLY* be understood as "age-lasting." It *can ONLY* be understood in connection with *the outcome of a judgment of unfaithful saved Gentiles coming out of the Tribulation.*)

The extensive use of "metaphors" in sections of Scripture such as Matthew chapters thirteen, twenty-four, and twenty-five *MUST* be recognized.

Note, for example, "meat" in both Matt. 24:45 (previously discussed) and Matt. 25:35, 42, all part of the same discourse.

The use of "meat" is clearly metaphorical in chapter twenty four [referring to that which is spiritual, the Word of God], when dealing with the judgment of a servant; and the servant rendering an account at the time of his Lord's return is with a view to *regality* (realizing or not realizing a position with Christ in the kingdom [cf. Luke 12:42-48]).

Why should the matter be viewed after any different fashion in chapter twenty-five when also dealing with a judgment of individuals at the time of the Lord's return, with a view to inheritance in the kingdom (*EXACTLY* the same as

the regality previously seen in chapter twenty-four, though stated in a different manner)?

Understanding the preceding after this fashion (which, in reality, *is the ONLY contextually correct way* to view this section of Scripture) will, again, show that *ONLY saved individuals* can possibly be in view throughout Matt. 25:31-46. *BOTH* those depicted by the “sheep” and the “goats” are seen as being in a position to dispense “meat,” “drink.” Unserved man *CANNOT* occupy a position of this nature.

There *is NO such thing in Scripture* as a judgment of unsaved Gentiles at the end of Man’s Day, prior to the Millennium. Rather, the Millennium itself will form their judgment in this respect, for the Millennium will simply be 1,000 years of a righteous judgment, when Christ and His co-heirs will rule the nations with a rod of iron.

The Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation, throughout, uses numbers and metaphors perhaps more extensively than any other section of Scripture of comparable length. And much of the misinterpretation and mishandling of this book is due, in no small part, to man mishandling the numerical and metaphorical aspect of the book.

The Book of Revelation *is about God bringing His Word to a close through opening up and completely removing any remaining veil surrounding His Son.* And note how this is done in this book. It is done through *an extensive use of particularly numbers and metaphors.*

(Note the word “signified” in the opening verse [the verb form of the word for “sign”], referring to the structure of the book as a whole [ref. the eight “signs” in John’s gospel].)

There are “seven Churches,” with an “angel” over each Church; and this (the number *seven*) shows *a completion*

concerning God's angelic ministry in the Churches during the dispensation, with the seven Churches showing the complete Church, all Christians (chs. 1-3). There are "seven seals," "seven trumpets," and "seven vials" of wrath, showing *Divine perfection* (the number *three*) within *God's complete judgment* (the number *seven*) upon Israel and the Gentile nations (chs. 6-11, 15, 16).

There are four horsemen, which cover *the complete panorama of the matter* (*four*, the number of the earth [ch. 6]). There are *mountains, islands, a Beast, a harlot woman, Babylon, the sun, the moon, the stars* — just to name a few — all used in metaphorical senses (chs. 1, 6, 12, 13, 16-18). And God's use of language in this respect *must NOT ONLY be recognized at this point in Scripture BUT elsewhere as well* (note particularly the Book of Daniel in this same respect).

God's Use of Language

If a person does recognize God's use of language in this respect, he can interpret aright, following the manner in which God has structured and given His Word to man; if a person does not do so, he will invariably find himself lost in a sea of misinterpretation.

Whether types, parables, figurative language, or any other method which God has used in His revelation to man, *a person is NEVER left in the dark or to his own imagination in interpreting and understanding the passages*. God has provided other Scripture to cast light upon, help explain, that which He has revealed through different methods at different times, through different individuals.

The whole of Biblical study is, in one respect, really that simply. Simply pay attention to how God has structured and given His Word, along with that which the Word states. And, with a proper foundation, building upon that foundation, you WON'T go wrong.