

IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING BIBLE WORD PICTURES

Track 3 – Putting Together the Word Pictures in Matthew 13¹

WHY is Matthew 13 Here and Not in A Different Chapter?

As we read through the *flow* of Matthew, Matthew very early introduces us to the Messiah's forerunner (John the Baptist) and the Messiah (Jesus). They both begin to announce "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" to the nation of Israel. The offer of the Kingdom by Messiah and His messenger was made and verified by both Jesus' words and by His power. By the time we reach chapter 10, His disciples are sent out to preach the same message, to Israel (and only to Israel), and we see that Jesus anticipates resistance. Their proclamation of the Kingdom was a call to see if Israel would repent in preparation for the reception of their Messiah. In chapters 11 and 12, we see the "turning point" in Matthew, where the message of the Kingdom and its Messiah have been essentially *rejected*. The people were NOT ready to receive their Messiah, bringing judgment upon Israel and the *postponement of the Kingdom*. Because of their rejection, Jesus begins to speak in parables, and we see Him teaching in parables throughout the rest of the Matthew's Gospel.

Just after Jesus pronounces judgment upon *that generation* of the nation, we find chapter 13... Verse 1 begins with "*On the same day.*" There is a reason! Having just pronounced judgment because of Israel's unwillingness to repent and believe the message, Jesus begins to share the "mysteries of the kingdom" in *seven* parables. We will discover that as we look through them, He is outlining a time *between* chapter 12 and "the end of the age". In other words, the seven parables we see in Matthew 13 are here to help us understand the nature of the time *between* Israel's rejection of the offered Kingdom and Jesus' victorious return to set up His Messianic Kingdom. Will things get better or worse? (Hint: What do YOU see in the world??)

Why do We Have SEVEN Parables in a Row?

These "mysteries of the kingdom" were shared with Jesus' disciples *because they were mysteries*. A "mystery" as used in the Bible is something that has not been revealed, but is now being openly disclosed (to whoever "has ears to hear"). A *postponement* of the Messianic Kingdom and an *interval* between Christ's 1st and 2nd coming *would not have been on the disciples' radar*. They were looking for their Messiah, in spite of conflict, to eventually be victorious and set up His earthly Kingdom.² While Jesus didn't want all those who heard Him to understand what that would look like, He wanted those who "had ears to hear" to be able to decode His message. These seven parables give several different perspectives of life here on earth *during the postponement, in His absence, and until He would return* to set up His Kingdom.

These parables were given *as a set*, in order to clarify. In order to *clarify*, the parables have to make sense when seen *together*. They have to be *coherent* (fit together). If they were inconsistent (if the same elements mean different things in different parables), they would simply *confuse* His disciples, and there would be no way to determine which element meant

¹ This material has been adapted from earlier work I've done on the Gospel of Matthew.

² The fact that the disciples still didn't fully understand what the *postponement* of the Kingdom meant (even after *seven* parables) can be seen by their 1st question when they see the resurrected Christ (in Acts 1:6): "Lord, will You at this time *restore the kingdom to Israel?*"

what. If Jesus wanted to use these parables to help His disciples understand the “mystery” of the Kingdom’s postponement, He would certainly want to clarify and not confuse!

Jesus, as a master communicator, gives us 7 parables together *because He knew that no one in His Jewish audience would be looking for what He was trying to explain*. If we are seeking to understand these parables correctly, they must be *considered together*, with all the parts lining up, understood as a whole.

Why are there Conflicting Interpretations of Several of These Parables?

There are several answers to that question. The first and easiest answer is that interpreters bring their “lens” to the text (they start with their theology) and interpret in a way that is consistent with their lens. That’s actually one of the *best* reasons **not** to try to understand *any* of these parables in isolation!

Another reason for differing interpretations is the assumption made by many pastors and teachers that the elements of a parable don’t really matter, only “the main point” that the author/speaker is trying to make. This is a faulty assumption on at least a couple of counts:

- If I give you an illustration that contains *several elements with various salient features*, what “point” would be “the” point I was trying to make, and how would you know? How would you determine which elements would help you know what I was trying to focus on?
- From the perspective of Matthew 13 and many other parables that Jesus told, it becomes VERY clear that Jesus mentioned elements BECAUSE they were important to the overall interpretation/meaning. In His 3 explanations in Matthew 13, He makes an effort to clarify *each particular part* of the parable, *each* of which had a particular meaning/interpretation!

Finally, there are differing viewpoints because interpreters *assume* that they are free to understand these parables in isolation *even when their interpretations of the parts/elements conflict*. While a few of these parables are written in other gospels, their purpose there was contingent upon the context, and the ones that are mentioned should be interpreted *in line with the 7 in Matthew* where they are seen *together*! Jesus *gave* both them and us seven parables so that we could arrive at our interpretation by seeing them *together*, and that means that there should be no conflict in the interpretation of the elements or parts. If you were to hear contradicting explanations of elements at the same time, what would happen inside your head then? It would create a conflict, no doubt, and it wouldn’t help you understand; but that is *exactly* what many “theologians” do with these parables...

With that in mind, take a look at the elements/parts and see if you can make sense of them:

The Seven *Kingdom of Heaven* Parables of Matthew 13

1. The Sower and the Soils

- a. Sower:
- b. Seed:
- c. Soils:
- d. Birds:
- e. Field (implicit):

2. The Wheat and the Tares

- a. Sower/Owner:
- b. Field:
- c. Good Seed/Wheat:
- d. Tares (Bad Seed):
- e. Servants of the Owner:
- f. Harvest:
- g. Difference between Wheat and Tares:

3. The Mustard Seed

- a. Man:
- b. Seed:
- c. Field:
- d. Tree:
- e. Birds:

4. The Leaven (Yeast)

- a. Woman:
- b. Yeast (that is “hidden”):
- c. Three measures of dough:
- d. “All leavened” (after mixing):

5. The Treasure Hidden in a Field

- a. Man:
- b. Treasure (Ex. 19:5, Deut. 7:6, Ps. 135:4):
- c. Why It’s Hidden *Again* (Rom. 11:25):
- d. Field:
- e. What is Sold and “Bought”:

6. The Pearl of Great Price

- a. Man:
- b. Marketplace (Implicit):
- c. Pearl:
- d. What is Sold and “Bought”:

7. The Dragnet

- a. Dragnet:
- b. All kinds of fish:
- c. Good fish/Bad fish: