

# The Mysteries of the Kingdom

📖 Matthew 13; Various

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We are continuing our study of major prophetic passages. We've been through the OT, and in particular the major players are Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah, so that when we come to the NT we already see a prophetic picture of things to come from the standpoint of the OT. From Daniel, they were expecting four Gentile kingdoms to run their course before the coming of the kingdom of God. In the Gospels, they were already in that fourth kingdom, the kingdom of Rome, and so there was a Messianic expectation in the air. Further, from Daniel, the 490-year calendar was coming toward a close and so from that perspective the kingdom was at hand. From Ezekiel, the nation was to undergo a return in unbelief, one that arguably could have happened under Cyrus, and so perhaps, in their mind, the only thing that remained was a return in belief. Given that Malachi predicted the return of Elijah who would lead the nation to belief it would be natural for many Jews to think that John was Elijah, and indeed our Lord said to the nation Israel, "And if you are willing to accept, John himself is Elijah who is going to come." But John was not Elijah because the nation rejected, and Elijah is still to come.

This reveals the three-fold paradigm for understanding the Gospels. First, the offer of the kingdom to the nation Israel. John preached this message in Matt 3:2, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus preached this message in Matt 4:17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And the Twelve were commissioned to preach this message in Matt 10:5-6 when Jesus sent them out saying, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Note three things about this message. First, that the kingdom was "at hand", meaning near, not here; near in the sense of its arrival being right on the cusp of entering into history. That's what Daniel foresaw in the four kingdoms and in the 490-year calendar. Second, that it is the kingdom of heaven that was near. The kingdom of heaven is a synonym for the kingdom of God and means that it is a kingdom sourced in heaven or coming from heaven. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is a kingdom on earth that is sourced in the God of heaven. That kingdom was on the cusp of entering history. Third, this kingdom was being offered and preached to Israel only. Go not in the way of the Gentiles, do not enter any city of the Samaritans, but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And we have to maintain that this was a genuine offer of the kingdom being made to Israel. That is to say, if they had accepted it, the kingdom

would have come. Just as if they had accepted it, John would have been Elijah. We call this contingency. That's the fancy theological word for it. And contingency is presented throughout the Bible as the model for understanding God's sovereignty and human responsibility. God has a plan. He's sovereign. But He has built contingency and human responsibility into the plan. And some things in the plan He conditions on human decision. So, in that way we come to see that the offer of the kingdom was genuine and the coming of the kingdom was contingent on Israel's acceptance of the King.

The second aspect of the paradigm for understanding the Gospels is the rejection of the kingdom by the nation Israel. Jesus said in Matt 11:16ff, "But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other *children*,<sup>17</sup> and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' What's the big idea? That generation had the wrong response. If you hear the flute, it's the sound of joy and the proper response is to dance. If you hear a dirge, it's the sound of death and the proper response is to mourn. But when John came the nation did not have the proper response.<sup>18</sup> For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' And when the one John pointed to came, they did not have the proper response either. "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." They rejected the forerunner of the King and they rejected the King Himself. Jesus states it clearly in Matt 12:39, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; but no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet... The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." That generation of Israel committed the unpardonable sin, which is the blasphemy of the Spirit, and that sin was the sin of claiming that the miracles Jesus did were done by Satan rather than the Spirit. And because that sin was unpardonable it meant that generation was going to judgment. That judgment fell in AD70 when Jerusalem and the Temple were left desolate. Jesus said it in Luke 19:41 "when He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes."<sup>43</sup> For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side,<sup>44</sup> and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." That generation was absolutely unique. They saw the Messiah with their own eyes. They saw the Messiah's work with their own eyes. They heard the Messiah's words with their own ears. And they closed their eyes and shut their ears. They rejected Him. That is the second aspect of the paradigm in understanding the Gospels. So first, the offer of the kingdom, the kingdom was offered to that generation of Israel and they could have seen it come; but second, the rejection of the kingdom, the King was rejected and so that generation of Israel was going to judgment.

Now the third aspect of the paradigm in understanding the Gospels, the postponement of the kingdom. Jesus says in Matt 19:28, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration (which is the

kingdom) when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." So, the kingdom was not coming at that time, it was being postponed, from the human point of view, in the plan of God. Of course, God knew they would reject the offer of the kingdom, but that did not negate the genuineness of the offer or alter the plan of God. But what this did to prophecy was open things up in a way not clearly seen by the OT prophets. They struggled to understand. Peter says, "the prophets...made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." They could never figure it out. They could not understand how the King could both suffer and reign, because by definition suffering under another's power is contrary to reigning over others with power. But the rejection by the nation Israel is what clarified how you can have suffering and reigning. He would come first to suffer and then a second time to reign. It would be the nation Israel's rejection that brought about the King's suffering and dying and it will be the nation Israel's reception that brings the King's return to reign in great power and glory. So there are to be two comings of the King. And in between these two comings is a period unforecasted by the OT prophets, an intercalation in Daniel's 490-year calendar, a break in the fourth kingdom of Rome so that now we see two phases of Rome. It's this period between the nation Israel's rejection and the nation Israel's acceptance that we call the postponement. And what is so important to grasp is that the truths about the period of postponement were not revealed in the OT. This was something new.

That is what brings us to the parables of Matthew 13. Turn there. This teaching in parables was strange because Jesus had never used parables to communicate before. Something had happened that caused a change in His teaching methodology. What happened? The rejection in Matt 12. The same day He was rejected is the very day He began speaking in parables. That is why scholars call this the Long Day. Everything in Matt 12 and 13 occurred on the same day. It is a critical day in the history of the world. So after the rejection, in 13:10 you see the disciples saying to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" Why this change in teaching methodology? You never spoke in parables before. So He explains saying, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted." In other words, there is a split in the nation. To you it is granted...to them it is not granted. The you are Jesus' followers...the them is the rest of the nation. What is being granted to Jesus' followers that is not being granted to the rest of the nation by the parables? Knowledge, understanding. "To you it has been granted to know. Know about what? The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And all the parables that follow relate to mysteries of the kingdom. Well, what's a mystery? The Greek word *μυστηριον* refers to something that has been concealed or hidden, but is now being revealed. And the location these truths have been hidden is in God. Verse 35 is giving us a definition of this word so let's look in verse 34, "All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. <sup>35</sup>This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world." That last phrase, "I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world" is the definition of a mystery. A mystery was something hidden, obviously in the mind

of God, since the foundation of the world. They were always there in the mind of God as a part of His plan. But He never revealed them before. And so, in the parables of Matt 13 He is revealing them for the very first time. And the vehicle that He is revealing them through is parables. But the only ones who are going to understand the message are those who followed after Him. The rest of the nation Israel are going to hear the parables but they are not going to understand the message. That's what He's saying in 13:13, "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." They didn't understand the significance of the King and the kingdom offer and therefore they are being cut off from further truth. They are going to hear but they are not going to understand, they are going to see but not perceive. That's why orthodox Judaism is still fumbling around today with the OT. That's why they are still waiting on the first coming of the Messiah. They are blind. The parables are hiding truth about the kingdom from that portion of the nation that rejected but at the same time they are revealing new truths about the kingdom to those who followed Him. That's the whole purpose of the parables. Both to hide and to reveal. And the new truths about the kingdom that are being revealed all relate to this postponement I have been talking about. It was never revealed in the OT that there would be a postponement of the kingdom. From the OT perspective, it just looked like you go through the four kingdoms of Daniel and then the kingdom of God breaks into history. But here they were in the fourth kingdom and the kingdom of God did not come and the final truths about the fourth kingdom never took place. So, there is a break in the fourth kingdom. Same thing for the 490-year calendar. It looked like you just go straight through the 490 years and then the kingdom of God breaks into history. But now you have a break between the 483<sup>rd</sup> year and the 484<sup>th</sup> year. This was never seen by anyone. The prophets longed to look into these things. But they were shut up to OT revelation and so this could not be seen. And what happens in these parables here, is Jesus begins sketching characteristics of the period of the postponement. In 13:24ff we have the sowing of tares among the wheat and they grow up alongside one another until the end of the age when they are separated out by judgment. This is very evidently the growth of sons of the kingdom in this present age alongside the growth of the sons of the evil one and the judgment at the end to separate the sons of the kingdom from the sons of the evil one for kingdom entrance. That's nothing new to you because we saw last week in the Olivet Discourse that there are judgments when He comes in His kingdom. In 13:31-32 we have the mustard seed and it starts small and grows large and the point is simple; the number of the sons of the kingdom will start small, with just the Eleven, but by the end of the postponement their numbers will have grown large. In 13:33 we have the leaven and the leaven is hidden in flour until it was all corrupted and the meaning is simple; the sons of evil will end up corrupting this whole world. Then the kingdom will come. These are just some of the characteristics of the period of postponement in parables. But interestingly, nowhere in these parables is the Church spoken of, not once.

Try as you may to find it, and many a commentator says they found it in the pearl or the treasure or some other odd symbol, and yet the Church is not clearly mentioned anywhere. These are not truths about the Church, they are truths about the Kingdom and its postponement and general characteristics of the age during which the

Church will form, that much is true enough. The Church develops and runs its course during the postponement, but it does not exhaust the postponement. The Church is not the entire period of the postponement. This chart reflects the difference. The postponement began with Israel's rejection in Matt 12 and it will end with Israel's acceptance. Isn't that what Jesus said to the nation Israel, "you will not see Me until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." Of course, that is what He said. So the postponement is the larger period from the rejection to the acceptance, and general characteristics of this period are sketched by the parables. But there is no mention of the Church in these parables, although it does end up developing within this mystery period, and there are mystery truths related to the Church, as we will point out next week, and in particular the Rapture. The Church is the smaller period beginning on Pentecost and ending at the Rapture. So that ultimately the postponement begins at the rejection by the nation Israel, then the Church begins on Pentecost within the postponement and then ends at the Rapture before the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel runs its course and then the kingdom will come. And we'll be talking about why the Rapture happens before the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel here in the next few weeks. But we're setting the stage now.

And to conclude today, we need to establish proof positive that the Church began on Pentecost. The beginning of the Church continues to be an issue in theological circles. There are groups who think the Church began with Adam or with Abraham and so they think that Israel is the Church in the OT and the Church in the NT is the new or spiritual Israel. This is the idea that Scripture presents only one people of God and that the OT was just forms and shadows of the spiritual realities of the NT which is the substance they pointed to. In this view all the distinctiveness of Israel and their covenant program in the kingdom are wiped out. So we need to be able to at least establish when the Church began. The argument for Pentecost has four parts. First, the Church was still future in Matt 16:18. Let's look at it. Verse 16 is Peter's great confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." In verse 17 Jesus pronounces blessing on Peter because the Father had revealed this to Peter. "Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." Then He says something additional in verse 18. "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church." What Jesus added in verse 18 is the first prediction of the Church. What exactly did He mean? It's real simple. Peter's name is *Πετρος*, it means "a small stone." Jesus is saying, "You are a small stone" Peter. "And upon this rock," the word "rock" is *πετρα* and means "a large bedrock." Jesus is pointing at Himself when He said this. He's saying, "And upon Me I will build My church." Putting it all together, what is Jesus saying? Peter, you are a stone in the building and I am the foundation of the building, and in particular My work as the Christ, the Son of the living God, is the foundation of the building, because Paul said later, in 1 Cor 3:11, "No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Christ is the foundation of a building, which is the Church. Peter is a living stone placed into the building. Israel was never compared to a building that Messiah would construct with Himself as the foundation. This is something entirely new. And if words mean anything then this entity was not in existence already but would be in the future. So, the first big point is that the Church was still future in Matt 16:18 and that it would be built on the crucified, resurrected Messiah. If He's to be the

foundation, how can it come into existence before His death and resurrection? It can't. It had to be future as of Matt 16:18.

Second, entrance into the body is by means of Spirit baptism. Turn to 1 Cor 12:13. This is Paul to the Church at Corinth, a bunch of carnal believers who he refers to as saints. And he is explaining the use of spiritual gifts within the body. So now we have another metaphor, a body. A body has different parts but they are all necessary to work together as an effective unit. He's explaining this in verse 13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." In other words, all believers are unified because they were baptized into what? One body. One unit. And who baptized them into this one body? One Spirit. So Spirit baptism is what puts a believer into the body so that we have unity. Hold that thought because the argument has multiple components. Truth one is the Church was yet future in Matt 16:18. Truth two is that Spirit baptism is necessary to enter the body.

Truth three is that this body is the Church. Turn to Eph 1:22-23. Paul again, this time to the Church at Ephesus, and He is explaining the exaltation of Christ. He says in verse 22, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,<sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." So what is His body? How is it defined? As the church. "the church, which is His body." This is how we get the concept of the church as the body of Christ. So we join truth two with truth three. Truth two is that you enter the body by Spirit baptism. Truth three is that the body is the Church. Therefore, by logical syllogism, the only way to enter the Church is by Spirit baptism. That brings us to truth four.

Truth four is that Spirit baptism began on the Day of Pentecost, in Acts 2. How do we know that? It never says in Acts 2 that anyone was baptized by the Spirit. Well, turn to Acts 1:4. Here is Jesus and the Eleven. And we read, Jesus, "Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," *He said*, "you heard of from Me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Alright, had they been baptized by the Holy Spirit yet? No, Jesus says it was not many days from now. But were they believers? Of course. They were already believers, they were OT believers, they had never been baptized by the Holy Spirit because this is something new. But it was scheduled to begin not many days from now. Anyone know why? Because the Son had to be exalted to the right hand of the Father so that both the Father and the Son could send the Spirit. There is an order in the Trinity. This is orthodox doctrine and it's how we get the order of procession in the Trinity. It's why we say the Father is the 1<sup>st</sup> person, the Son is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person and the Spirit is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person. It's because of the texts that speak of the order of procession, or who sends who. The Father sends the Son, the Father and the Son send the Spirit, and that sets the order. It doesn't mean one is greater than the other or anything like that. It means that they have distinct roles and functions even though they are all involved. But before the Spirit could be sent to do His baptizing ministry the Son had to be exalted. And so had anyone ever been baptized by the Holy Spirit? No. They had been filled, people were filled by the Spirit during the OT. The Holy Spirit had restrained sin, He had done other

ministries before, but this particular ministry He had never done, and yet it is necessary we have seen, from truth two and three, to enter into the body of Christ, which is the Church, for Him to baptize people into the body of Christ. So has the Church begun by Acts 1:5? No. But it will not many days from now. And then in verse 6 the question of the disciples is interesting, "So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Question. Are they interested in the Church? No. Do they even have an idea of the Church? No. That is all coming. Very little had been revealed so far. They are still thinking about what? The kingdom. And the timing of that is not given, but something else is going to begin not many days from now and it will begin with the baptizing work of the Spirit. Now if you read Acts 2 you don't read anything about the baptizing work of the Spirit. You read in verse 4 about the filling of the Spirit, but that was an OT truth. People were filled with the Spirit in the OT. In this sense, it means sovereignly taken control of. The Spirit took control of these men and was giving them utterance. You also read in verse 18 a quote from Joel that predicted a pouring forth of God's Spirit as an explanation of the tongues. Remember, the people said they're drunk, but Peter said, no, it's 9 in the morning, the tongues are a result of a pouring forth of the Spirit that took control of their tongues and produced new languages. But there is nothing here about a baptizing work of the Spirit. So how can I say it happened here? Turn to Acts 11:15. Here's our final passage and proof that the church did begin in Acts 2 because Peter tells us Spirit baptism occurred in Acts 2. Here is Peter giving an explanation to a group of Jews who heard what he did at Cornelius' house, that he crossed the threshold of that Gentiles' house, which was a no, no in Judaism. So here he is coming back to Jerusalem and he has to give a defense. And he says, in verse 15, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup>"And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' <sup>17</sup>"Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" Who are the them and the us? Them are the Gentiles. Us are the Jews. The Spirit fell upon them Gentiles as He fell upon us Jews. When did He fall on us Jews? At the beginning. Well, where else are you going to put that in Acts if not Acts 2? So Peter interpreted the falling of the Spirit upon the Gentiles at Cornelius' house as being baptized by the Holy Spirit and links what happened to them with what happened to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. Therefore, putting all these truths together. Truth one, the Church was still future in Matt 16:18. Truth two, entrance into the body is by Spirit baptism. Truth three, the body is the Church. Truth four, Spirit baptism began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. That sets the stage for mystery truths to be revealed relative to the Church, prophetic truths that somehow have to fit into the postponement due to Israel's rejection of the King, and then there will be a return to conclude Israel's prophetic plan revealed in the OT. That's how things are shaping up.

And so the full picture we have seen today is this; in the Gospels there is a three-fold program; first, the kingdom was offered to Israel, second, the kingdom offer was rejected by Israel, third, the Lord pronounced a postponement of the kingdom, that postponement began with national Israel's rejection of the King and will end with national Israel's acceptance of the King, then, during the postponement the church was predicted to

form, the church began on the day of Pentecost as shown by four evidences; first, the church was future in Matt 16:18, second, the Spirit baptizes believers into one body, third, the body is the Church, and fourth, Spirit baptism began on Pentecost. Next time we will look at some of the mystery truths related to the Church, one of which is the Rapture, which means it cannot be confused with anything already revealed, such as the Messiah coming in His kingdom. It has to be something unique, something different, something never before revealed in the OT.