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ISRAELOLOGY

Part 2 of 6

by Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum

ISRAEL PRESENT

In light of its consistent distinction between Israel and the Church, Dispensationalism ought to allow for a full-scale theological development of Israel Present. Instead, a bewildering lack of development causes great confusion among Dispensational theologians concerning the Jews (in general) and the role of Jewish believers today (in specific). Consequently, when dealing with current Jewish issues, many Dispensationalists sound like Covenant Theologians. The place of Israel in God's plan remains Dispensationalism's weakest area.

The Kingdom of God Program

God's kingdom program is all-pervasive and encompasses past, present, and future. Technically, a study of the kingdom program relates to any (and all) of these categories. However, this examination of Israelology will consider it under Israel Present, which is the connecting link with Israel Past and Israel Future.

The Universal Kingdom or the Eternal Kingdom

The first facet of the kingdom program is the Universal Kingdom or the Eternal Kingdom. This refers to God's rule in providence and sovereignty. Nothing ever happens outside of God's will. What happens might be due to God's directive or decretive will or due to His permissive will. God is always in control. The two names emphasize different aspects of this facet of the kingdom. The term *eternal* emphasizes the timeless aspect. The fact that God is always in control means that His control is eternal. The term *universal* emphasizes the sphere and the scope. No matter where things exist, everything is within the sovereign will and control of

God.¹ This is the kingdom that believers enter upon death (1 Corinthians 15:50; 2 Timothy 4:18). Dispensations are the outworking of this kingdom in human history.

The Spiritual Kingdom

As the second facet of God's kingdom program, the Spiritual Kingdom includes all (regardless of generation or time) who have experienced the new birth by the Holy Spirit. From Adam until our day and as long as men continue to be born on this earth, the Spiritual Kingdom will exist. This is the kingdom of God of which Jesus told Nicodemus that unless one is born again, he can neither see nor enter into the Kingdom of God. This is God's rule in the heart of the believer.² Although they are distinct because the spiritual kingdom was in existence before the Church began and will remain after the removal of the Church in the Rapture, during this present age (from Acts 2 until the rapture), the Spiritual Kingdom and the Church are synonymous.

The Theocratic Kingdom

As the third facet of God's kingdom program, the Theocratic Kingdom was God's rule over Israel. God established the Theocratic Kingdom through Moses and the giving of the law. Historically, the Theocratic Kingdom knew two forms. First came the *mediatorial* form, in which God ruled through mediators. These mediators were Moses, Joshua, and then the judges, of which Samuel was the last. The second was the *monarchial* form in which God ruled through monarchs from Saul, Israel's first king, until Zedekiah, the last king. Samuel marked the transition between the two forms. As the last judge, he also anointed the first two kings:

¹ Cp. 1 Chronicles 29:11–12; Psalm 10:16; 29:10; 74:12; 90:1–6; 93:1–5; 103:19–22; 145:1–21; 148:8; Proverbs 21:11; Jeremiah 10:10; Lamentations 5:19; Daniel 4:17, 25, 32; 6:27; Acts 17:24; *et al.*

² This facet is found in Matthew 6:33; 19:16 with 23–24; John 3:3–5; Acts 8:12; 20:25; 1 Corinthians 4:20; Colossians 1:13–14; 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:12, *et al.*

Saul and David. David, in turn, began a dynasty that continued to occupy the throne until Zedekiah. During the latter stages of the monarchical form of the Theocratic Kingdom, the kingdom went into a decline in quality. With the decline, the prophets began announcing a future form, a superior form of God's kingdom program, the prophesied Messianic Kingdom. The Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem abruptly ended the Theocratic Kingdom, initiating the Times of the Gentiles, which continues even today. Old Testament history from Exodus 19 to 2 Chronicles 36 is a history of the Theocratic Kingdom.

The Messianic Kingdom or the Millennial Kingdom

The fourth facet of God's kingdom program is also given two names: the Messianic Kingdom or the Millennial Kingdom. The name, Messianic Kingdom, emphasizes that the Messiah Himself will rule this kingdom directly. The name Millennial Kingdom emphasizes how long this kingdom will last: one thousand years. The form of the Messianic or Millennial Kingdom is that of a literal earthly kingdom that Jesus will rule from the Throne of David. Its roots lie in the Davidic Covenant, in which God promised that David would have an eternal house, an eternal kingdom, an eternal throne and an eternal descendent. This fourth facet of the kingdom program was a major focus of Old Testament prophecy. This was the kingdom proclaimed as being *at hand* by John the Baptist. This was the kingdom Jesus offered to the Jewish people. It is this kingdom that they rejected.

As a result of the rejection of the Messianic Kingdom, the offer was rescinded or taken away from that particular Jewish generation. From a human perspective the Messianic Kingdom was postponed and not to be set up at that time. From the divine perspective, this rejection was part of God's plan and the means by which the Messiah would die to provide the atonement and by which the gospel would extend to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:1–13). Thus, the Messianic Kingdom will be reoffered to the Jewish generation of the Tribulation, which will accept it. More will be said about this facet under Israel Future. For now, the fifth facet of God's kingdom program is currently in effect.

The Mystery Kingdom

The name of the fifth facet of the kingdom program derives from Matthew 13 where, following the rejection of His Messiahship, Jesus introduced *the mysteries of the kingdom*, hence, the Mystery Kingdom. Paul defines what a divine mystery is in Ephesians 3:3–5, 9 and Colossians 1:26–27. A New Testament *mystery* is a divine truth that was not revealed in the Old Testament, but is revealed in the New. In Paul's words, in the Old Testament it was *not made known unto the sons of men* (Ephesians 3:5) because *it hath been hid in God* (Ephesians 3:9) and *hath been hid for ages and generations* (Colossians 1:26). In New Testament times, it *hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets* (Ephesians 3:5) in order to *make all men see what is . . . the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God* (Ephesians 3:9) and so it has now been *manifested to his saints* (Colossians 1:26).³ The Mystery Kingdom is the one facet of the kingdom program that was not revealed in the Old Testament.

Because of the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus, the fifth facet of the kingdom program, the Mystery Kingdom, was initiated, instead of the Messianic Kingdom. The parables of Matthew 13 describe the mystery facet of the kingdom program. The Mystery Kingdom covers the age between the two comings of the Messiah, between the first and second coming. More specifically, it begins with the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus in Matthew 12–13 and continues until the acceptance of the Messiahship of Jesus by Israel just before the Second Coming. Perhaps the best single word to define the Mystery Kingdom is the term “Christendom.” It describes conditions on this earth while the King is absent from the earth and is in heaven. These *mysteries of the kingdom* relate truths to the eternal purpose of God in relationship to His eternal kingdom program.

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from the *American Standard Version (ASV)*, 1901.

The nine parables of Matthew 13:1–53 (including the parallel accounts in Mark 4:1–34 and Luke 8:4–18), describe the outworking of the Mystery Kingdom in the present age. The *first* parable (Matthew 13:3–9, 19–23), the **Parable of the Sower**, teaches that the sowing of the gospel seed will characterize the Mystery Kingdom Age. While receiving opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil, the sowing of the seed will elicit different responses. Understanding the first parable is the key to understanding the subsequent parables (Mark 4:13): therefore, Jesus Himself details the interpretation.

The *second* parable (Mark 4:26–29), the **Parable of the Seed Growing of Itself**, teaches that the seed sown in the first parable will spring to life of its own accord; it will inexplicably regenerate and produce eternal life in the believer.

The *third* parable (Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43), the **Parable of the Tares**, teaches that a false counter-sowing will imitate the true sowing of the first parable. The wheat and tares will grow together, because of the two sowings. Only the judgment at the end of the Mystery Kingdom Age will separate the two, bringing the good into the Messianic Kingdom and excluding the bad. This is the same as the Judgment of the Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:31–46).

The *fourth* parable (Matthew 13:31–32), the **Parable of the Mustard Seed**, teaches that the Mystery Kingdom will assume huge outer proportions: It will have an abnormal external growth until it becomes a monstrosity which in turn becomes a resting place for birds. According to the first parable, the Parable of the Sower, the *birds* represent agents of Satan. Within the umbrella of Christendom this negative element includes all types of groups, such as cults that use Christ's name, but deny His deity.

The *fifth* parable (Matthew 13:33), the **Parable of the Leaven**, teaches that the Mystery Kingdom will be marked by inward doctrinal corruption. Frequently, a *woman* symbolizes a false religious system resulting in spiritual fornication (Revelation 2:20; 17:1–18). Whenever the word leaven is used symbolically, it always represents sin (1 Corinthians 5:6–8) and frequently the

specific sin of false doctrine (Matthew 16:6, 11–12). The three measures of meal, in which the leaven is hidden, point to the fact that Christendom develops into three main divisions: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. All three, to a greater or lesser degree, will have false doctrine.

The *sixth* parable (Matthew 12:44), the **Parable of the Treasure**, utilizes an Old Testament symbol, *treasure*,⁴ to represent Israel. This parable teaches that in spite of the two previous problems, the Lord will gain a remnant from Israel and some Jews will come to saving faith during this time.

The *seventh* parable (Matthew 13:45–46), the **Parable of the Pearl of Great Price**, by implication, represents the Gentiles for two reasons. First, because the Mystery Kingdom includes both Jews and Gentiles, this parable is the logical corollary contrasting with the prior parable about Israel. Second, the pearl's origin is the sea, a common symbol of the Gentile world (Daniel 7:2–3; Revelation 17:1, 15). This parable means that many Gentiles will also come to saving faith.

The *eighth* parable (Matthew 13:47–50), the **Parable of the Net**, teaches that the Mystery Kingdom Age will end with the judgment of the Gentiles, as symbolized by *the sea*, with the righteous brought into the Messianic Kingdom while excluding the unrighteous. This judgment is detailed later in Matthew 25:31–46.

The *ninth* parable (Matthew 13:51–52), the **Parable of the Householder**, teaches that some aspects of the Mystery Kingdom resemble other facets of God's Kingdom Program, while other aspects are new and never found before.

The Mystery Kingdom must be kept distinct from the other facets. First, it is not the same as the Eternal Kingdom because the Mystery Kingdom is limited in time between the first and second coming or, more specifically, from the Jewish rejection of the

⁴ Compare Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2; and Psalm 135:4.

Messiah until the Jewish acceptance of the Messiah. Second, it is not the same as the Theocratic Kingdom because it is not limited to one nation, the nation of Israel, but involves both Jews and Gentiles. Third, it is not the same as the Spiritual Kingdom because the Spiritual Kingdom comprises only believers, whereas the Mystery Kingdom includes both believers and unbelievers. Fourth, it is not the same as the Messianic Kingdom, because the Messianic Kingdom was not a mystery; it was the subject of much revelation in the pages of the Old Testament. Furthermore, the Messiah is not ruling this kingdom physically and visibly on earth. Fifth, the Mystery Kingdom is not the same as the Church. The Mystery Kingdom includes the Church within its scope, but it is much wider than the Church. Christendom is the best single term to describe the Mystery Kingdom. The Mystery Kingdom spans the time from the rejection of the King until the acceptance of the King in the closing days of the Great Tribulation. This Mystery Kingdom starts in Matthew 13. It does not end at Acts 2, or even at the Rapture, but at the end of the Tribulation.

The Rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus and its Results and Consequences

Messiah's first coming is closely connected with God's kingdom program. Both John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1–2) and Jesus (Matthew 4:17) came proclaiming that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. That neither John, nor Jesus, nor the particular gospel writers recording these events, attempted to define the nature of this kingdom, indicates that they expected the audience to understand the meaning of that term. Well they might, since Jewish audiences had common knowledge of the Old Testament and understood the nature of the Messianic Kingdom. The common Jewish understanding of the kingdom in first century Israel was that of Messiah ruling a literal earthly kingdom centered in Jerusalem. The obvious origin of such a view was the literal understanding of the Old Testament prophets. If either John or Jesus meant something totally different, then why not explain such a distinction from the beginning? The very fact that they did not shows that the common Jewish understanding of the coming kingdom was a correct one.

Matthew 12:22–45

In the layout of the Gospel of Matthew, Christ began His ministry in chapter four. From chapter four until chapter twelve, Jesus traveled throughout Israel proclaiming His Messiahship and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. During this period, the miracles He performed were to serve as signs to Israel authenticating His person (that He is the Messiah) and His message (the gospel of the kingdom). If they accepted Him, He would establish the prophesied Messianic Kingdom. These miracles were to serve as signs to the nation of Israel to lead them to a decision about Him. However, following the rejection of His Messiahship in Matthew 12:22–37, the purpose of His miracles and His whole ministry underwent a radical change.

Among the many miracles of Jesus, He cast out demons. In Matthew 12:22, Christ cast out a dumb demon, causing the people to ask, *Can Jesus really be the Messiah?* (v. 23). One of the key purposes of this miracle was for them to see that He indeed was the Son of David. However, the people were not willing to come to a conclusion by themselves, but were looking to their religious leaders, the Pharisees, to reach a verdict for them. The Pharisees only had two options: to accept His Messiahship or to reject Him. If they were to conclude that He was not the Messiah, the Pharisees would also need to explain how Jesus was able to perform His many unique miracles. In verse 24, the Pharisees made their choice. They refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah, because He did not fit the Pharisaic mold of what Messiah was supposed to say and do (Luke 7:30–35).

The Pharisees claimed that Jesus was able to perform His miracles because He was possessed, not by a common demon, but by the prince of demons, *Beelzebub*. This name combines two Hebrew words that mean “the lord of the flies.” This then became the basis of the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus: He was not the Messiah on the grounds of being demon possessed. In verses 25–29, Christ responded that this could not be true because it would mean a division in Satan's kingdom (vv. 25–26): First, they themselves long recognized that the Spirit gives the gift of exorcism, so this accusation is inconsistent with their own theology

(v. 27); second, this miracle actually authenticates the claims and message of Jesus (v. 28); and, finally, it shows that Jesus is stronger than Satan, not subservient to him (v. 29).

In verses 30–37, Jesus pronounces a judgment on the Jewish generation of that day. The judgment of A.D. 70 came because that generation had committed the unpardonable sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. The unpardonable sin was not an individual sin, but a national sin. That particular generation of Israel committed it in Jesus' day, so it cannot be applied to subsequent Jewish generations. The unpardonable sin's content and definition is that, while He was physically present, the nation of Israel rejected the Messiahship of Jesus, based on their charge that He was demon possessed. Judgment came in A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the worldwide dispersion of the Jewish people. It was a national sin committed by the generation of Jesus' day: For that generation the sin was unpardonable. From that day forth, the gospels place a special emphasis on *this generation*, for it was guilty of a very unique sin. At this point, Jesus rescinded His offer of the Messianic Kingdom. It would not be established in their day because of the unpardonable nature of that sin.

The unpardonable sin had four ramifications. First, this is a national sin and not an individual one. Even for individual members of that generation, it was possible to escape the judgment for the unpardonable sin by repenting.⁵ No individual could commit this sin today for two reasons: (a) it was never an individual sin; and (b) all sins are forgivable to that individual who comes to God through Jesus the Messiah. But for the nation as a nation, it was unpardonable.

Second, it was a sin limited to the generation to whom Messiah came. From that day forth, the gospels placed special emphasis on the guilt of *this generation*.

⁵ *Editor's note:* Acts 2:38 connects individual deliverance with repentance. Peter urged believers [those already persuaded regarding Christ (2:37)] to repent. Whereas, verse 37 resolved their eternal destiny; verse 38 solved their individual relation to the national judgment, which was certain.

Third, this is not a sin that any nation can commit today, because the Messiah is not now physically and visibly present with any nation, offering Himself as that nation's Messiah. This was unique to His relationship to Israel and to no other.

Fourth, that generation's commitment of the unpardonable sin meant two things for that generation: (a) The offer of the kingdom was rescinded, meaning that they lost the opportunity to see the kingdom established in their day. Instead, it will be reoffered to a later Jewish generation that will accept it, the Jewish generation of the Great Tribulation detailed in Matthew 24–25. (b) It meant that the generation which saw Jesus was under a special divine judgment, the physical destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (fulfilled in A.D. 70).

Although the Pharisees tried to retake the offensive by demanding yet another sign (v. 38), Jesus announced His new policy regarding miracles (39–40). From now on there would be no more signs for the nation except one. While Jesus continued to perform miracles after this event, the purpose of His miracles changed. No longer were they for the purpose of authenticating His person and His message to the nation to cause the nation to come to a decision. That decision had now been irrevocably made. Rather, His miracles would be for the purpose of training the twelve disciples for the new type of ministry they will need to conduct as a result of the rejection of His Messiahship. The apostles performed this ministry in the Book of Acts. For the nation there would be no sign but one: the sign of Jonah, which is the sign of resurrection. It is a sign that would come to Israel on three occasions: (1) at the resurrection of Lazarus; (2) at Jesus' own resurrection; and (3) at the resurrection of the Two Witnesses in the Tribulation. The first two were rejected, but the third will be accepted.

In Matthew 12:41–45 Jesus concluded with more words of judgment for that generation. Note the repeated phrase, ***this generation***:

*The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with **this generation**, and shall condemn it: . . . The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with **this generation** . . .*

Even so shall it be also unto this evil generation [Emphasis added].

In verse 41, He compared them with Nineveh and explained why Nineveh will stand in judgment of that generation. The same is true with the Queen of Sheba (v. 42). The people in both of these verses were Gentiles. With much less revelation than Israel had, they responded, even without miracles, but that generation did not. In verses 43–45 the words of judgment conclude with a story about a demon to illustrate what the final outcome of that generation would be.

Jesus related the account of a demon who left on his own volition a man whom he had possessed. When he was unable to find a new body to indwell and control, he returned to his original abode. Although he found it swept and garnished, he also found it still empty. The individual never took the opportunity to fill his life with the Holy Spirit; nor had another demon entered him. The demon re-entered the man he originally possessed and then invited seven other demons to join him. The outcome was that the last state of that man had become worse than the first. Originally, only one demon possessed him. After the demon left, he had the opportunity to fill his life with the Spirit of God, but failed to do so. The last state of that man was worse, because now eight demons possessed him.

The point of this story is often missed. Christ closed the story with the point that what was true of the man was also true of that particular evil generation. When that generation began, it began with the preaching of John the Baptist. John's ministry was essentially a clean-up ministry, for he was to prepare the people for the reception of the Messiah. By means of the preaching of John, that generation was swept and garnished. When the Messiah had come, they rejected Him as possessed by Beelzebub. That swept and garnished generation, now remained empty. Truly, the last state of that generation was worse than the first.

When that generation began, it was under Roman domination and needed to pay annual tribute to Rome. Nevertheless, it was a national entity, possessing a form of government in the Sanhedrin.

Jerusalem stood in all its Herodian glory, as the religious worship system in the Temple remained intact. Later, as a result of their rejection and the A.D. 70 judgment, the national entity of Israel ceased to exist. In place of bondage, the Roman armies dispersed them. The Temple, the center of Judaism, was completely destroyed, so that not one stone stood upon another. Eventually the Jews were dispersed all over the world. Indeed, the last state of that generation became worse than the first. They went from bondage to worldwide dispersion.

Even after the events of Matthew 12, the Pharisees approached Christ demanding a sign to authenticate His person and His message (Matthew 16:1–4). But again Christ refused to give them any more signs and promised them only *the sign of Jonah*, which is the sign of resurrection.

Luke 19:41–44

Luke 19:41–44 sheds further light on the nature of the unpardonable sin in rejecting the Messiahship of Jesus. This passage is in the context of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Thousands of Jews cried, *Hosanna, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord*, which had clear messianic overtones, based upon the messianic context of Psalm 118:26. The Jewish masses proclaimed His Messiahship as He approached Jerusalem. However, the Jewish leaders had already committed the unpardonable sin. Judgment had already been set upon that generation. Since the sin was unforgivable, there was no way of alleviating that judgment. In spite of the masses proclaiming Him to be the Messiah, Jesus pronounced words of judgment upon the city of Jerusalem. Forty years later, the prophecy was literally fulfilled.

Matthew 23:1–36

Another passage of Scripture dealing with the judgment of that generation is Matthew 23:1–36. In this chapter, Jesus closed His public ministry. The entire chapter is devoted to a denunciation and condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees, the leadership of Israel in that day. Jesus pronounced a total of seven woes against them for various sins. These woes form a circle, since the first and seventh

woes deal with the same sin. In the first woe the Pharisees are held accountable not only for their rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus, but also for leading the nation to the same rejection as well (verse 13). This is an important factor to note for the later understanding of what the basis of the Second Coming will be.

The seventh woe is in verses 29–36. These verses emphasize the severity of the judgment on that generation. The judgment is primarily upon the leaders, but also upon the nation whom the leaders led in the rejection of His Messiahship. When Jesus said *from the blood of Abel . . . to the blood of Zechariah . . .*, He stated that they were not only to be held accountable for the rejection of His Messiahship, but also to be held accountable for the blood of all the prophets of the Old Testament. This is something unique for that generation, as declared in verse 36: *Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation.* It is the judgment for the unpardonable sin.

The point is this: The Jewish leadership rejected the Messiahship of Jesus and they also led the nation to the rejection of that Messiahship. These facts will have ramifications for Israel Future in relation to Christ's Second Coming.

Consequences of the Rejection

When the nation rejected Jesus, the offer of the Messianic Kingdom was rescinded and the Mystery Kingdom replaced it. Due to the nature of the unpardonable sin, the ministry of Jesus changed radically in four areas, after Matthew 12's rejection. The first change involved the purpose of His miracles. Following the rejection, they no longer served as signs of His Messiahship to Israel, but were for the purpose of training the apostles for their ministry in the Book of Acts (Matthew 16:1–4).

The second change concerned the people for whom He performed these miracles. Prior to Matthew 12, Jesus performed miracles for the benefit of the masses without requiring them to have faith first. Afterwards, he performed miracles only in response to the needs of individuals and began requiring them to have faith first. Furthermore, before Matthew 12, those He healed were free to proclaim what He had done for them, but after Matthew 12, Jesus

initiated a policy of silence and forbade those He healed to tell anyone about it (Mark 7:36; Luke 8:56; *et al.*).

The third change involved the message that Jesus and the apostles would now proclaim. Until Matthew 12 both He and they went throughout the land of Israel proclaiming Jesus to be the Messiah. In Matthew 10 the apostles were sent out two-by-two to do just that. After Matthew 12, He also instituted the new policy of silence, forbidding the apostles to tell anyone that Jesus was the Messiah. In Matthew 16, after Peter made his famous confession, *Thou art the Christ (Messiah) the Son of the living God*, Jesus ordered him to tell no one that He was the Messiah (Matthew 16:20). The policy of silence (Matthew 17:9) continued until the Great Commission rescinded it (Matthew 28:18–20).

The fourth change concerned His teaching method. Until Matthew 12, whenever Jesus taught the masses, He used terms that they could and did understand. For example, at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), the people not only understood Jesus, but also knew where He differed from the Scribes and the Pharisees. In Matthew 13, Jesus began a new teaching method, the parabolic method, in order to hide the truth from the masses. The very act of teaching in parables was a sign of judgment against them.

The first series of parables Jesus taught was on the Mystery Kingdom (the facet of God's kingdom program whose inauguration resulted from the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus and Jesus rescinding His offer of the Messianic Kingdom). To clearly comprehend what is happening in Matthew 13, one must understand the relationship between Matthew 12 and 13. Matthew 12 records the national rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus. The leadership of Israel officially rejected Jesus. By so doing, the nation became guilty of the unpardonable sin. From that day forth that particular generation came under the judgment of A.D. 70, when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed. On that same day, as a result of their rejection of Him as Messiah, Jesus taught a series of parables. Matthew 13:10–18 states the purpose of these parables. Verse 10 records: *And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?*

This question clearly indicates that His parabolic method of teaching began here. In verses 11–14 Jesus gave three reasons for this new method of teaching. First, for his disciples, the parabolic method of teaching would illustrate the truth. The second purpose, however, was to hide the truth from the masses. By rejecting His Messiahship, the nation had rejected the light they had. Thus, no more light would be given. Instead of teaching them clearly and distinctly in terms they could and did understand, from this point He taught them only in terms of parables so they could not and would not understand. Third, parabolic teaching fulfilled the prophecy which Jesus quoted from Isaiah 6:9–10, that the Messiah would speak to the Jewish people in such a way that they would not be able to understand.

Later, Matthew 13:34–35 states:

All these things spake Jesus in parables unto the multitudes; and without a parable spake he nothing unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world.

These verses re-emphasize that Jesus spoke to the multitudes only in parables and that without a parable He said nothing to them. This was not true before the rejection of Matthew 12, but it is very true after the rejection. Matthew 13:34–35 restates the second purpose of His parabolic method of teaching, to hide the truth from the masses. In verse 35 He pointed out again that parables fulfilled prophecy by quoting Psalm 78:2, reiterating the third purpose of the parabolic method of teaching, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Once again, His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy proved the very Messiahship they had rejected.

The Unconditional Covenants

Before discussing the present outworking of the unconditional covenants, a point of observation is in order: Although a covenant may be made at a specific point of time, it does not mean that all of its provisions go immediately into effect. Some do, but some may not for centuries. The Abrahamic Covenant is a good illustration.

Some of God's promises did go into effect immediately, such as providing for Abraham's physical needs in the land and his change of name. Others were fulfilled only later. For example, Abraham was promised a son through Sarah, but had to wait twenty-five years before that promise was fulfilled. Other provisions were fulfilled only later in Jewish history, such as the deliverance from Egypt that was also part of the covenant. Other provisions are still future never having been fulfilled, such as Abraham's ownership of the land and Israel's settlement in all of the Promised Land. It should come as no surprise that not all of the provisions of the unconditional Jewish covenants are presently being fulfilled to, in, or by Israel today. Current fulfillment is neither necessary for the covenants to still be in force, nor a valid reason to teach that the Church has taken over these covenants, or that they are now being fulfilled to, in, or by the Church. Finally, a strong correlation exists between God's Kingdom Program and the unconditional covenants, "for God's kingdom program was the outworking of His eternal and unconditional covenants."⁶

The Abrahamic Covenant

Among its provisions the Abrahamic Covenant promised a seed, land, and blessings. The seed was to develop into a nation, and so it did at the foot of Mount Sinai. Today, Israel is a scattered nation but still a nation. Just as Israel remained distinct in Egypt, the Jewish people have remained distinct throughout the Church Age. No other nation that lost its national homeland and suffered dispersion for centuries has survived as a distinct entity. On the contrary, when Gentile nations were scattered, they intermarried and disappeared into a melting pot. Not so the Jews, whose distinctive history is easily traceable throughout the years of Jewish history. The fact that Jews have continued to survive as a people in spite of so many attempts to destroy them demonstrates that this covenant has continued to operate.

⁶ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 9. The book offers an in-depth treatment of this correlation.

As for the land, there has been no real independent government in the land (within the confines of the Church Age) since A.D. 70. The land has been overrun many times and ruled by many people, but always ruled from somewhere else. Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Turks, and Britons have controlled it. Even under Arab control, no independent Arab government was ever set up; it was ruled from somewhere else: Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Amman, etc. Since A.D. 70, the first time an independent government was set up in the land was in 1948 with the State of Israel. Thus, the history of the land also shows that the Abrahamic Covenant continues to be fulfilled with the people of Israel.

As for the blessings, history demonstrates that Gentiles who blessed the Jews were blessed, just as those who cursed them were cursed. Furthermore, the spiritual blessings have now been extended to the Gentiles, as will be shown later in this section.

The seal of the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision and this is still mandatory upon all Jewish males, both believers and unbelievers. However, does not the Book of Galatians argue against the practice of circumcision? Yes and no! Requiring circumcision for Gentiles, circumcision on the basis of the Mosaic Law, and circumcision for justification or sanctification are all wrong. Galatians condemns circumcision as a means for justification. Jewish believers who circumcise on the basis of the Law of Moses are also wrong, since the law ended with Christ. On the other hand, this same book clearly states that the Abrahamic Covenant is still very much in effect with all its features, which includes circumcision (Galatians 3:15–18).

Circumcision on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant is right and proper; it is still very much in effect for Jewish believers. Paul, who taught the Gentiles not to circumcise, did not do so with Jews; this is clear from Acts 21:17–26 and from Acts 16:1–3, when he had Timothy circumcised. It was not circumcision per se that was ruled out, but rather circumcision on the basis of the Mosaic Law. Since Jewish believers still fall under the physical and spiritual provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant, they also fall under the rule of circumcision as a sign and seal of this same covenant. Some Dispensationalists have denied circumcision's continuity, despite

correctly insisting on the Abrahamic Covenant's continuity. The failure to distinguish circumcision under the Abrahamic Covenant and circumcision under the Law of Moses has produced needless confusion. A careful distinction between the two will make Dispensationalists more consistent regarding the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Land Covenant

The Land Covenant promised a final worldwide regathering following a worldwide dispersion. While the final regathering is still future, the worldwide scattering is a present fact since A.D. 70. Furthermore, this covenant promised that the Jews would suffer persecution in the dispersion and that the land would become desolate over the centuries. The fact that all these promises have and are being fulfilled shows that this covenant is still in effect.

A key point of the Land Covenant was to teach that while Israel's enjoyment of the land was based on obedience, her ownership or title deed to the land was not. The failure of all other occupiers of the land to set up an independent government demonstrates that this covenant continues to operate.

Using passages like Joshua 11:23 as evidence, many Covenant Theologians insist that God's promises to Israel concerning the land have already been fulfilled. However, this verse, like all verses of Scripture, must be kept in context and viewed within the Book of Joshua as a whole. Keeping in mind that originally the Book of Joshua did not have chapter divisions, the verse simply states a fact which is then followed by exceptions to the fact. Joshua 11:23 is followed immediately by chapter 12, which lists the Canaanite kings killed by Israel. Joshua 13:1–6 indicates that a large extent of territory did not fall into the hands of the Israelites, constituting a sizable exception to Joshua 11:23. Little of this territory fell into Jewish hands in the immediate future following Joshua. The Jebusites retained Jerusalem (Joshua 15:63) until David (2 Samuel 5:6–9) and the Canaanites held the city of Gezer (Joshua 16:10) until Solomon (1 Kings 9:16).

The Tribe of Dan needed to move, because they could not take their territory from the Philistines. Although David and Solomon extended Jewish control close to the borders of the Promised Land, Phoenicia (Lebanon) retained its independence. Even if they had taken Phoenicia, it would not have fulfilled the covenant promises, because during the rule of David and Solomon most non-Jewish territory merely paid tribute while under military control (1 Kings 4:21).⁷ Fulfillment of the land covenant guarantees actual possession and settlement in the land, not mere military control and tribute. This did not happen under Joshua as the context of verse 11:23 clearly shows. Recording events occurring after Joshua's death (Judges 1:1), various tribes failed to take the land allotted to them (Judges 1).⁸ Neither in Old Testament history, nor in post-biblical Jewish history has Israel possessed, inhabited, and settled the entire Promised Land. However, the Land Covenant guarantees that some day it will.

The Davidic Covenant

This covenant promised four eternal things: house, throne, kingdom, and descendant. The fact that the Messiah, the eternal descendant, now sits at the right hand of God the Father, as David himself prophesied in Psalm 110:1, proves that this covenant is still functioning. In fulfillment of the Eternal Seed facet of the Davidic Covenant, Jesus is called the *Son of David* (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:32) and the *Root of David* (Revelation 5:5). Many Covenant Theologians insist that the entire covenant has now been fulfilled, moreover that the promise of the throne was filled when Jesus sat on His Father's throne, citing Revelation 3:21 as evidence:

He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne.

⁷ This applied to the territories of Syria, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, etc.

⁸ Cp. Judges 1:19, 21, 27, 29–36.

Although, unquestionably, Jesus is now sitting on the Throne of God the Father, the promise made in Luke 1:32 is:

He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.

What foolishness to equate the Throne of David and the Throne of God, unless Covenant Theologians wish to contend also that David once sat on the Throne of God the Father!

The New Covenant

Signed and sealed by the shedding of Messiah's blood, the New Covenant guarantees Israel's national salvation down to every individual Jew. While this did (and does) result in the salvation of Jewish individuals, no national salvation of Israel has taken place thus far. This covenant does not extend Israel's national salvation to the Church as spiritual Israel. The Church certainly has a relationship to this covenant, but not as the entity to or through which the covenant is fulfilled. Like the other covenants, this is a Jewish covenant, so its provisions can only be fulfilled in a future national salvation of Israel. Again, not all of a covenant's provisions go into effect immediately, nevertheless some do. Individual salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are present outworkings of the New Covenant. An additional provision of the New Covenant only revealed by the New Testament is the Law of Christ. Just as the Mosaic Covenant contained the Law of Moses, the New Covenant contains the Law of Christ (Romans 8:2; Galatians 6:2). Like the Law of Moses, the Law of the Messiah has many individual commandments given either by Jesus directly or by the Apostles. This will be discussed in more detail in the next article.

The Church's Relationship to the Unconditional Covenants

A number of Scriptures connect the New Covenant with the Church,⁹ but some confusion has arisen regarding the Church's relationship to the New Covenant, because the covenant is made not with the Church but with Israel (Jeremiah 31).

Covenant Theologians try to resolve the difficulty by a theology of replacement or transference. Dispensationalism's literal hermeneutics precludes such a solution. Thus, some have tried to resolve it by inventing two new covenants. The problem with this view is that there is no indication in Scripture that there are two covenants with the same name. Any mention of a new covenant would cause Jews to think only of the one in Jeremiah. Amazingly, adherents of the two covenants view even cite the Jeremiah passage as supporting the New Covenant for the Church, although it speaks of the New Covenant for Israel. A better solution, and quite consistent with Dispensationalism, is to remember that these covenants contained two types of promises: physical and spiritual. The physical promises were, and still are, limited to Israel and will be fulfilled only to, in, or by Israel. However, as early as Genesis 12:3, the Abrahamic Covenant already promised that the spiritual blessings would extend to the Gentiles. Actually, the solution is not difficult, since Ephesians 2:11–16 and 3:5–6 explain it clearly.

According to these passages, God made four unconditional covenants with Israel: the Abrahamic, the Land, the Davidic, and the New covenants. All of God's blessings, both physical and spiritual, are mediated by means of these four covenants. However, there was also a fifth covenant, the conditional Mosaic Covenant. This was the middle wall of partition. Essentially, it kept the Gentiles from enjoying the spiritual blessings of the four unconditional covenants. For a Gentile to receive the blessings of the unconditional covenants, he needed to submit to the Mosaic Law, take upon himself the obligations of the law and, for all

⁹ Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:14–20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 7:22; 8:6–13; 9:15; 10:16, 29; 12:24; 13:20.

practical purposes, live as a son of Abraham. Only Gentiles as proselytes to Mosaic Judaism could enjoy the spiritual blessings. Gentiles as Gentiles were not able to enjoy the spiritual blessings of the Jewish covenants and hence were strangers from the Commonwealth of Israel. However, when Christ died, the Mosaic Law, the middle wall of partition, was broken down. Now Gentiles as Gentiles can by faith enjoy the spiritual blessings of the four unconditional covenants. That is why Gentiles today are partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings; they are not taker-overs.¹⁰

The relationship of the Church to the New Covenant is the same as its relationship to the Abrahamic, the Land, and the Davidic covenants. God promised the physical aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant (as amplified by the Land and Davidic covenants) exclusively to Israel. However, the blessing aspect (amplified by the New Covenant) was to include the Gentiles. The Church enjoys the spiritual blessings of these covenants, not the material and physical benefits. The physical promises still belong to Israel and will be fulfilled exclusively with Israel, especially those involving the land.

The Gentile Obligation

According to Romans 15:25–27, the fact that Gentile believers have become partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings places an obligation on Gentile believers. While Paul had had a long-term desire to go to Rome (he expressed this in chapter one), his desire was subject to his duty, which was to collect an offering and to take it to the Jewish believers in Jerusalem.¹¹ In verse 26, Paul named the contributors and the recipients of the offering. The Gentiles of Macedonia and Achaia had given the money, which was

¹⁰ Covenant Theology assumes a theology of replacement, in which the Church replaces Israel. The New Testament speaks of Gentiles partaking in Jewish spiritual blessings, but not of taking over those blessings from Israel. The theology of replacement errs seriously.

¹¹ Paul refers to this special offering in 1 Corinthians 16:1–4 and 2 Corinthians 8–9.

specifically for the poor Jewish believers of the City of Jerusalem in the Land of Israel.

In verse 27, he clearly stated that Gentiles are debtors to the Jews, because they have become partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings. Earlier, in Romans 11, Paul taught that the Gentiles have become partakers of spiritual blessings. The very fact that Gentiles have been made partakers of Jewish spiritual blessings has put them into debt to the Jews. The way they pay their indebtedness to the Jews, according to this verse, is to minister to Jewish believers in material things.

The Purpose of Gentile Salvation

God has two purposes for Gentile salvation that relate directly to Israelology. As stated in Acts 15:13–18, the first reason was to gather from among the Gentiles a people for His name. As God had a select group among the Jews known as the faithful remnant, the Remnant of Israel, He is now also developing a people for His name among the Gentiles. While the calling of the Gentiles began with the Book of Acts in the New Testament, it was not unforeseen in the Old Testament. One such Old Testament prophecy was quoted by James and is found in Amos 9:11–12. The very fact of a great Gentile response is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and His messianic mission. Other passages include Isaiah 42:1 and 49:5–6. The calling of the Gentiles, which had begun in earnest (Romans 9:24–33), is temporary until the time that the full number of Gentiles is completed. For then God will turn again to Israel as a nation and begin dealing with her (Romans 11:25–27).

According to Romans 11:11–14, the second purpose for Gentile salvation is to provoke the Jews to jealousy in such a way that many of them will come to Christ. The Greek word translated to provoke to jealousy is *parazelaō*. It combines two Greek words: *para*, meaning “to come alongside of,” and *zelos*, meaning “to cause to burn, to seethe, to make red hot, to flame, to envy.” The Gentile Christian is to come alongside a Jew (*para*) in daily contact and to live such a life and be such a witness that the Jew will begin to burn with red hot envy (*zelos*) so that he will want the very thing the Gentile Christian has: the Jewish Messiah. God still has a

remnant among the Jews today (Romans 11:1–10), and the remnant will come to saving faith by being provoked to jealousy by Gentile believers.

The first purpose of Gentile salvation in the Church Age, therefore leads to Israel's national salvation in the future. The second purpose leads to the salvation of individual Jews (the remnant) during the current Church Dispensation.

—**To be continued**—

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