

The Wheat and the Tares

***“Then shall the
righteous shine
forth as the sun in
the kingdom their
Father.”***

—Matthew 13:43

THE PARABLE OF THE

wheat and the tares is recorded in Matthew 13:24-30,36-54. In it, even as in the parable of the sower, which we considered in last month’s

issue of *The Dawn*, there is a sowing of seed. However, in the parable of the sower the seed is explained to be “the word of the kingdom,” whereas in the parable of the wheat and the tares the seed are said to be “the children of the kingdom.” (vss. 19,38) These “children of the kingdom” come into being through the power of the Word of God sown in their hearts, but in this parable they are themselves the seed. This is an important distinction to keep in mind as we examine the various details of our lesson.

In the wheat and tares parable there are two sowings. The wheat, or “good seed,” is first sown. Then, “while men slept,” an enemy sows tares, or imitation wheat, in the same field. The result of this is, as we would expect, that the tares threaten

to choke out the wheat. The servants of the householder who sowed the good seed suggest that the tares be uprooted and destroyed, but the householder does not permit this, explaining that this might also destroy the wheat. He orders that both the wheat and the tares be permitted to grow together until the harvest, and that then the tares should be gathered into bundles to be burned, while the wheat is to be gathered into his barn.—vss. 24-30

Jesus' explanation of this parable begins with verses 37 and 38, in which he explains that "the field is the world," and that the one who sows the good seed is "the Son of Man." Thus, the application of the parable is worldwide, and embraces the entire age, with a sowing by Jesus at the beginning of the age, and a harvest at the end of the age. It does not represent the work of the Lord's people as sowers of seed throughout the age, as does the parable of the sower.

The sowing of the good seed by the Son of man evidently depicts the work of Jesus in the selection of his apostles and other faithful disciples who constituted the nucleus of the Early Church. These were the first of the "children of the kingdom," as Jesus describes them in verse 38. How appropriate is this title, because these were attracted to Jesus by the "gospel of the kingdom" which he preached. (Matt. 4:23; 9:35) It was by the Spirit of this kingdom message that they were begotten, and devoted their lives to the service of the Master.

Their successors in each generation throughout the age were likewise those attracted by, and imbued with, the gospel—good news—of the kingdom.

They are more than merely morally righteous people, but are those who are dedicated to the promotion of the good news of the coming kingdom of the Messiah. This is why Jesus calls them “the children of the kingdom.”

THE ENEMY

Jesus further explained that “the tares are the children of the wicked one,” and that “the enemy that sowed them is the devil.” (Matt. 13:38,39) This is plain language, but a true prophecy of what has actually occurred. It is stated in the parable that it was while “men slept” that the enemy sowed tares. (vs. 25) The “men” here referred to would seem to be the apostles, who watched over the interests of the Early Church so faithfully, but then “slept” in death until the time of the “first resurrection.” (Rev. 20:6) Concerning this time, Paul alerted the elders at Ephesus: “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.” (Acts 20:29) Peter similarly forewarned: “There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.”—II Pet. 2:1,2

Not only did Jesus and the apostles warn the Early Church of the false teachers that would come among them, but history reveals that this is what actually occurred. Teachers of error are seldom limited to one falsehood, and this is true of those who began to instruct the church soon after the

apostles fell asleep in death. Through the introduction of such doctrines as the trinity and the immortality of the soul, they, in effect, denied “the Lord that bought them.” Additionally, the loving God of the Bible was soon transformed into a torture demon by the blasphemous hell-fire doctrine.

The parable of the wheat and the tares highlights still another false doctrine set forth by the “tares,” sown by the great Adversary. This is the claim that Christ’s kingdom on earth was established by them through the uniting of church and state. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, the devil offered to give him all the kingdoms of this world on the condition of being subservient to him. Jesus rejected this offer. (Matt. 4:9,10) Later, however, the “children of the wicked one,” who were guided by Satan’s various God-dishonoring doctrines, were quite willing to accept this proposition. The result of this was the development of a counterfeit kingdom of Christ in the hands of the “tares.”

History corroborates this change of viewpoint. Beginning in the second century the hope of a coming kingdom on earth, to be established by the returned Christ, began gradually to be thrust into the background. Philosophical and theological speculation started to spread through the church, and as larger numbers came under the influence of this type of thinking, the hope of a future Messianic kingdom on the earth lost its significance and appeal. Thus the way was prepared for the establishment of a counterfeit kingdom in its place.

Although these changes came about gradually, by the end of the fourth century, the teaching of a future Messianic kingdom was banished from the

“official” theology of the church. Of particular significance during this period was the growing idea of the political and civil—not just the religious—importance of the church’s role. This led finally to the teaching that the church itself was the kingdom of Christ. Therefore, it was an accomplished fact, rather than something to be looked for, as Jesus and the apostles had taught, at the time of his Second Advent.—Matt. 25:31-34; John 18:36; II Tim. 4:1

How clearly these events of history outlined the developments foretold by Jesus in the parable. By the fourth century the “tares,” or imitation wheat, had indeed just about completely taken over in the “field.” From that time forward, the true “children of the kingdom” held to their hopes and proclaimed them with increasing difficulty. However, as the parable foretold, the wheat was not to be completely uprooted and destroyed. Rather, it was to remain and “grow together” with the tares until the end of the age, when there would be a harvest.

Once again, the pages of history bear this out. In an article from a noted encyclopedia, we find these words written: “It [the Messianic kingdom hope] still lived on, however, in the lower strata of Christian society; and in certain undercurrents of tradition it was transmitted from century to century. At various periods in the history of the middle ages we encounter sudden outbreaks of millenarianism, sometimes as the tenet of a small sect, sometimes as a far-reaching movement. And, since it had been suppressed . . . by the political church of the hierarchy, we find that wherever chiliasm [hope of a future kingdom] appears in the middle

ages it makes common cause with all enemies of the secularized Church. . . . These were legitimate inferences from the ancient traditions . . . of the Church.” These “ancient traditions” were none other than the teachings of our Lord and the apostles, later regarded as heresy by the great “tare” system.

The same article explains that while the Protestant reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave for a time some consideration to the teaching of a future Messianic kingdom, they soon “took up the same ground” which the state church had occupied since the time of the fourth century. Essentially, all these early reformers did, in fact, join hands with civil governments, and applied to their organizations the misnomer of “Christendom.”

THEY GREW TOGETHER

Returning to the parable, the householder instructed his servants to let the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest. (Matt. 13:30) What a true picture of this has been given to us by the pages of history. Those who held to the hope of Christ’s return and the establishment of his thousand-year kingdom were not crowded out of the “field” entirely, even though the “tares” held the dominating position. However, when the church was pronounced as Christ’s kingdom on earth, and later joined hands with the state, the wheat—“children of the kingdom”—became a highly persecuted minority, and were forced to carry on their activities largely “underground.” They were still there in the “field,” and kept the light of kingdom truth from becoming completely snuffed out. Thus, the wheat and tares continued to grow together until

the end of the age, when it was time for the “harvest” to begin.

The tares as a group continued their disinterest in, and oftentimes opposition to, the hope of the coming Messianic kingdom on earth. Although there was, at times, rebellion on the part of many against certain of the evils of the church-state system of government, the idea of a man-made kingdom continued. Even today, various theologians hold to the opinion that the only thing God will ever do for the human race will be accomplished, not by the establishment of a powerful government in the hands of Christ, but by the moralistic teachings of denominational churches, and by the extent that they can influence governments to enact and enforce righteous laws. However, amidst all the cross currents of confusion brought about by conflicting reform movements and by the infiltration of higher criticism, evolution, and various theological factions, some “wheat” has survived. In every generation there were some “children of the kingdom,” who held to the basic doctrines as originally taught by Jesus and the apostles.

THE “ANGELS” AND THE “HARVEST”

In the parable, the householder said, “In the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.” (vs. 30) Jesus’ explanation of this is, “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them

into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”—vss. 41,42

The Greek word in this passage which is translated “angels” more literally means “messengers.” The messengers of the Lord could be of numerous kinds. As devoted living servants of God, they could be the holy angels of heaven, or God’s consecrated people here on earth, or both. Certainly, when we note all the various things accomplished by these angels, or messengers, it would appear that a very wide variety of agencies must be used.

Looking back, we see that there was a harvest at the end of the Jewish Age, and Jesus at his First Advent sent forth disciples to be his messengers, or angels, in that work. He also asked them to pray to “the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.” (Matt. 9:38) These devoted followers of Jesus were to do their part in that harvest by preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, even as it was preached by Jesus.

In that harvest there was a burning of the “chaff.” John the Baptist foretold this, saying, “He [Jesus] will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matt. 3:11,12; Luke 3:16,17) We believe that this is a prophecy of the desolation pronounced upon the Jewish nation by Jesus just prior to his death, followed by the literal destruction which came upon them in A.D. 70-73. (Matt. 23:37-39; 24:1,2) The “messengers” largely responsible for this “fire” of destruction were the soldiers of Titus’ army.

This seems to be a revealing illustration of the two aspects of the “harvest” work at the close of

the Gospel Age. Here, also, there is a harvesting of the "wheat." In this latter harvest, we have "tares" which are gathered and burned, instead of "chaff." The messengers used by the Lord for this purpose are evidently not his consecrated saints, but whatever agencies and influences he may choose to use to rid the "field" of "all things that offend, and them which do iniquity."

The "wheat" are gathered into the Lord's barn. Jesus' explanation of this, as previously cited in our opening text, is: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." This explanation involves the exaltation of the "wheat" in the first resurrection to live and reign with Christ. These shine at the present time only as "candles." (Matt. 5:14-16) However, until the kingdom is established in "power and great glory," these "children of the kingdom" in the flesh constitute the only true light in this "present evil world." (Matt. 24:30; Gal. 1:4) When they are brought forth in the first resurrection to reign with Christ, they will "shine forth as the sun." Indeed, they will be a part of that "Sun of righteousness" foretold by Malachi.—Mal. 4:2

Clearly, to bring forth "the children of the kingdom" to the divine nature in the first resurrection requires the exercise of power through agencies beyond our ability to comprehend, and this work is included in the total accomplishments of messengers sent forth in this Gospel Age harvest. However, it is also true that an important part of this harvest work is accomplished by "the children of the kingdom" themselves through their proclamation, as messengers, of the gospel of

the kingdom, even as it was in the Jewish Age harvest.

THE HARVEST MESSAGE

In his discourse relating to the time of his Second Presence and the end of the age, Jesus said that he would “send his angels [messengers] with a great sound of a trumpet,” and that they would “gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matt. 24:31) Here the messengers are clearly “the children of the kingdom,” as also are the “elect” who are gathered. This gathering is accomplished by the “sound of a trumpet,” which is symbolic of the proclamation of a message.

This is the kingdom message of present truth—the harvest message. John the revelator records that it is the “everlasting gospel” which was to be proclaimed to those “that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” at this end of the age. Some of the details of the message are also given by John: “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” (Rev. 14:6,7) It is, in fact, the same “gospel of the kingdom” and “present truth” message spoken by Jesus and reiterated by the apostles.—Matt. 24:14; II Pet. 1:12

THE CHIEF REAPER

Jesus said that he would send forth his messengers to gather his elect. This implies that he would then be present in the “field” to assume the role of Chief Reaper. This is further pointed out in

Revelation 14:14,15. We read: "I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe."

Later in this chapter we are told of "another angel" or messenger, who had "power over fire." (vs. 18) This messenger is assigned the work of reaping the "clusters of the vine of the earth" and of casting it into the "great winepress of the wrath of God." (vs. 19) While the metaphor here changes from "fire" to the "winepress of the wrath of God," the symbolic reference to casting "clusters" of grapes into God's winepress is remarkably similar to the gathering of "bundles" of tares "to burn them." Thus we have a confirmation of the truths set forth in the parable of the wheat and the tares.

In Revelation 18:1, we read, "I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory." This seems clearly to be a reference to the return of our Lord, and the light of his glory which will eventually fill the earth. Concerning one of the first features of his work, we read: "He cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the

earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”—vss. 2-4

These Scriptures indicate that part of the message at the time of the return of our Lord and the period of his presence is the invitation to the “wheat,” who were to grow together with the “tares” until the harvest, now to separate themselves—“Come out of her, my people.” “Her” is a reference to Babylon, the great counterfeit “tare” system which held such great power over the nations for much of the Gospel Age. This, too, harmonizes with the testimony of Jesus in his parable, and in his great prophecy relative to the end of the age.

It should be noted that the revelator says Babylon is “fallen” at the time of our Lord’s Second Advent, and his call to come “out of her.” This does not imply Babylon’s immediate destruction, but rather a falling from her former position of church-state power held for so many centuries. The final destruction of Babylon is not spoken of until verse 21, where John records: “A mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.”

NOW IN THE HARVEST

Certain prophecies of the Bible—which we do not have space here to discuss—and the fulfillment, by way of documented events, of various “signs”

contained therein, provide ample evidence that the Gospel Age harvest was due to begin in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, or about one hundred forty years ago. Are there any evidences to indicate that these prophecies have been correctly understood? We believe so. Remembering that the “harvest” has to do with both the “wheat” and the “tares,” we think the evidence is clear that there has been, and continues to be, a harvesting of the “wheat,” and a bundling of the “tares,” in preparation for their eventual burning.

Let us first consider the symbolic harvesting of the “wheat” of the parable—“the children of the kingdom.” There is evidence to show that around the time of the early 1870s, a little group of earnest students of the Bible began to understand clearly the glorious promises of the Bible pertaining to the time and manner of our Lord’s return. They also came to understand the purpose of his return—that he was first of all to be Lord of the harvest, and then, through the establishment of his kingdom, accomplish the “restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20-23

One of that number, whom many earnest followers of Christ have come to believe was “a faithful and wise servant,” was blessed by the Lord with certain abilities and means, and most importantly had the sacrificing zeal to publicize these truths far and wide. They were sent in printed form to ministers and Sunday School teachers throughout the entire United States. “The children of the kingdom” were no longer restrained as in past centuries. God had given them the message,

and a way to proclaim it, and it began to sound forth.

This was not a work that was done in a corner, for in a few short years it became well-known throughout much of the Christian world. These relatively small groups of consecrated followers of Christ, a people separated from the traditional denominations of the past, worked “together” to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom with increasing volume and clarity.

These were, indeed, “the children of the kingdom,” for they not only believed in the promises of the Bible relative to Christ’s coming kingdom, but its glorious prospect filled them with a self-sacrificing zeal that allowed nothing to prevent them from proclaiming, on every suitable occasion, the glorious harvest and kingdom message. They broadcast to all with a hearing ear the good news pertaining to the thousand-year kingdom of Christ, and the blessings of peace, health, and everlasting life that will reach the people through the administration of its laws of righteousness. To this day, in 2015, the witness given by the “gospel of the kingdom” message has not ceased. Indeed, Satan has endeavored to discourage, separate, and disrupt “the children of the kingdom” through his wily ways. However, they have always been able to regroup and continue trumpeting forth the harvest and kingdom message through the many means made available by God’s grace.

THE TARES

The tares of the parable, Jesus explained, are “the children of the wicked one.” This does not

mean that they are immoral people and professed servants of the devil. It simply means that their viewpoints and lives are governed by teachings pertaining to the kingdom of God which have been corrupted through the deceit of Satan. Many of them are among the world's finest people, and hold sincerely to the concepts of the kingdom which are so prominent in the society of which they are a part.

The bundling and burning of the tares is explained by Jesus to mean their removal from the kingdom of which they profess to be a part. The "field" in which the wheat seed was originally sown was designed to be only a wheat field. The tare seeds were sown by an enemy, and did not belong with the wheat, so they are removed. The parable says they are "cast . . . into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."—Matt. 13:42

We understand that the destroying of the tares should not be considered as having to do with individuals, but only as a symbolic class. This is indicated by the statement that even when the tares are cast into the "furnace of fire" there is "wailing and gnashing of teeth." This is an expression used by Jesus to denote great disappointment and chagrin. How disconcerting and disappointing it will be to many when they learn that their long-taught conception of the kingdom of heaven is not in harmony with, nor part of, the Lord's sowing. As a class, therefore, the tares are removed from the field.

The parable states, "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them."

(vs. 30) It is not necessary to conclude from this that the bundling and burning of the tares is all completed before the harvesting of the wheat begins. In reality, we see that both the bundling of the tares as well as the gathering of the wheat have been taking place during the period of the harvest. Jesus simply refers to the gathering of the tares as “first” to separate that work from the other work going on—the gathering of the wheat.

It is reasonable to conclude that the “furnace of fire” in which the “tares” are burned will be the climax of the great “time of trouble” in which the “present evil world” is destroyed. (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21; Gal. 1:4) This will include all the various tare organizations, or “bundles.” When these things occur, the wheat will have all been gathered into the barn. In his explanation, Jesus says, “Then [at that time when the tares are destroyed] shall the righteous [gathered wheat] shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”—Matt. 13:43

Following quickly, the real kingdom of Christ will begin to function for the blessing of the people. The wheat class—“children of the kingdom”—brought forth in the first resurrection, will shine “as the sun” for the enlightenment and healing of all nations. The rulership of Christ’s kingdom will destroy all the enemies of God and of righteousness, even death itself. (I Cor. 15:26) Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” This work accomplished, the prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” will be fully answered.—Phil. 2:10,11; Matt. 6:10 ■