

6. The Net of Fish

“Once again, **the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish.** When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. **This is how it will be at the end of the age.** The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

(Matthew 13:47-50 NIV)

This parable is very similar to the earlier one of the Wheat and the Darnel, so I will not be repeating much here. I would encourage the reader to refer back to chapter 2 on the Wheat and the Darnel, particularly noting the portion on ‘the conclusion of the age’ and ‘the fiery furnace’, as both themes are repeated in this parable of the Net of Fish. Nevertheless, there are a few subtle differences between these two parables, though the Wheat and the Darnel gives much more detail than this one does.

Two Forms, One Meaning

Why, then, you may be asking, are there two parables basically declaring the same truth? It is for this reason: when God has something extremely important to say, He reveals it at least twice in two different ways to highlight different aspects of the same truth, and to show that it has been established by God and it will come to pass. This can be seen in the instance of Joseph’s two dreams and Pharaoh’s two dreams (Genesis 37:5-11; 41:1-7).

“The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.”

(Genesis 41:32 NIV)

A similar thing occurred with the prophet Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream of a Large Statue, which Daniel interpreted, followed by Daniel having a vision of Four Beasts dealing with the same subject matter; and he also had another dream that filled in further details of the previous dreams and visions, that of a Ram and a Goat (Daniel chapters 2, 7 & 8). All of these visions, particularly the first two, were revealing the same basic truths. This follows the divine principle that every matter is to be established out of the mouth of two or three witnesses (Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1).

So here we have another parable that reveals and confirms the truth that was revealed in the parable of the Wheat and the Darnel; and the subject matter is very serious indeed, that of final judgment. This time we are given the picture of a large fishing net or ‘dagnet’ that hauls in a large amount of all kinds (or species) of fish. Then there is the process of separating the good fish from the bad (or rotten) fish, with the good fish being placed in baskets while the bad are then thrown away. Of course, a number of Jesus’ disciples would’ve been very familiar with these things, seeing as they were fishermen.

Then Jesus simply tells them that this is how it would be at the conclusion of the age. In the Day of the Lord, He would send out His messengers or angels to separate the righteous from the wicked, and the wicked would be thrown into the furnace of fire to be destroyed, while the righteous would be kept safe. There would be weeping and gnashing of teeth (that is, sorrow and anger) in relation to this separating process.

The Day of Judgment & Fire

Jesus referred to this judgment of separation at His Appearing (or Parousia) in the following passage.

“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, **fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.** It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed...”

“I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding corn together; one will be taken and the other left.” “Where, Lord?” they asked. He replied, “Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.” ”

(Luke 17:28-30, 34-37 NIV)

Jesus was warning His disciples about the then-imminent Day of the Lord. He made it abundantly clear that it would be just like the judgments that took place at the time of Noah and of Lot. Only true disciples of Christ, those who obey His word, would be saved from this judgment of wrath, while the rest would be destroyed in the judgment, leaving their dead bodies for the birds of prey. Jesus clarified this when the disciples asked Him, “*Where, Lord, where will they be taken?*” and He replied, “*Where there is a dead body, there the vultures will gather.*”

As unpleasant as this may sound, Jesus was confirming the many prophecies of the Old Testament that the Day of Yahweh would involve many of those who claimed to be his people being destroyed in judgment before the kingdom would be fully manifested in a New Creation. Here is one example.

“See, the LORD is coming with fire...he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For with fire and with his sword the LORD will execute judgment upon all men, and many will be those slain by the LORD.”

(Isaiah 66:15-16 NIV)

The Apostle Paul also confirmed this in the following text.

This will happen **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.** He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.

(2 Thessalonians 1:7b-9 NIV)

[For a more detailed consideration of this subject, please refer to my four-part series *The Day of the Lord, the Royal Appearing.*]

Returning to our two similar-themed parables, it is possible that there are slight differences in emphasis between the two parables, with the Wheat and the Darnel being focused more on the Jewish/Israelite believers within Christ's kingdom, while the Net is focused more on the Gentiles. This would be similar to the nuances of the previous two parables, that of the Hidden Treasure & the Precious Pearl.

Either way, these parables had particular application and relevance to that first century audience. As noted previously, the focus was on 'the conclusion of the age' and the soon-coming Day of the Lord, with a special focus on Israel and the city of Jerusalem. At the establishing of Christ's kingdom, at the coming of the Son of Man, Israel (along with the world) would be judged by the Messiah, resulting in a separation between the righteous and the unrighteous, the good and the bad. It was also becoming evident through Jesus' teaching that these events would not only have relevance to this world, but they would ultimately be fulfilled in relation to the *spiritual world or dimension*, through the Divine power of resurrection.

We shall be considering this subject further later in the book.

Fishing, a River, a Tree & Paradise

In closing this parable, let us return to the subject of the fish in the sea. The prophet Ezekiel saw a preview of the blessings of the New Covenant gospel in the vision of the Temple. In Ezekiel 47:1-12, we have the vision of the River of Life winding its way down the Mountain of the Lord, having its source in the Temple at the summit. The River flows down the Jordan Valley and into the Dead Sea. It then causes the Dead Sea to become fresh, so that it becomes full of living creatures and *many species of fish*. There is also the mention of fishermen, and the spreading of nets, as well as fruit trees providing food, with their leaves giving healing.

So what we have here is essentially a description of the Kingdom of God as a Mountain, with the River of Life providing fruit and healing to a dead wasteland. These are images and motifs intimately related to the Eden Paradise story in Genesis, and its restoration in a New Creation in the vision of Revelation (cf. Genesis 2:8-17; Revelation 22:1-5).

Now if you've been carefully paying attention so far in this book, or if you are familiar with the teaching of the New Testament, you will notice that Jesus spoke of these things in His parables and teaching, and so did the apostles in their writings. These details in Ezekiel are also very similar to that which is recorded in Revelation 22:1-2. *These things were symbols and spiritual pictures of the blessings of the Gospel of the kingdom, which would be inaugurated by Jesus as the Messiah.*

The River is the Holy Spirit of God, which brings Life to the Dead. Only in Christ can we have access to the Tree of Life and the Fruit of the Spirit, with its healing properties. The fish are the peoples of the earth, and the fishermen are Christ's 'fishers of men,' His gospel messengers, who are to catch the Elect Remnant of God in their nets, etc, etc.

In relation to this, John 21:1-14 gives us the account of the miraculous catch of fish that occurred after Jesus' resurrection. There is great significance in the fact that it gives the exact number of fish that were in the net *once they arrived at the shore* - 153. Some scholars and commentators believe that this is symbolic of the full number of the chosen ones of God, who have believed the Gospel heralded by the Apostles, the fishers of men. (It is also interesting to note that there were 7 disciples present at this time, which speaks of apostolic Spiritual Fullness; and that the Gematria for the Hebrew term '*sons of God*', where the letters are also numbers, is 153! See the book *Number in Scripture* by E. W. Bullinger).

I would add here that I think that the symbolic numbers for the elect remnant of the Israel of God, which in Revelation chapters 7 and 14 is recorded as 144,000, specifically represented the firstfruit/bride assembly of the early church *before* the Day of the Lord in 70 AD. Since that time, innumerable amounts of good fish are being caught in the net of the kingdom of God from amongst all nations. And when all is said and done, there will always be a judgment of separation between the good fish and the bad fish.

Oh, the wonder of the Word and Works of God! I pray that you, the reader, may be dragged into Christ's Net as a good fish – if you haven't been already!