

The Secrets of the Parables

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By

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Abbreviations for Scripture quotes in this book:

NIV – New International Version

FT – Free Translation based on the texts of the Interlinear NT by  
George R. Berry and the NIV

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## Introduction to the Parables

Master Jesus was the greatest Teacher to have ever walked this earth, yet so much of what He spoke about has often been misunderstood by many of His followers throughout the centuries, including many within the religious academic community. It is my belief that the primary reason for this lack of understanding by the Church at large is the failure to observe the context of Christ's teaching; that is, He was the Messiah promised through Israel's prophets ministering to the Jewish people in the land of Palestine in the 1st century AD. He was *not* sent to any other people of the world or any other land at that time (although the amazing news of Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection was to later go out to the nations of the world via the Apostle Paul); and He spoke in accordance with the writings of the Hebrew prophets contained in the Old Testament (OT; the Hebrew Scriptures).

The above explanation for this misapprehension of Christ's teaching might sound very obvious and a little simplistic, but it is astounding how many teachers and preachers within the Church have not truly understood these plain facts, and therefore much of what Jesus was really saying has been lost to the masses, and conveniently ignored or reinterpreted by others. This is especially the case when it comes to the parables that Christ taught. The Kingdom of Heaven (or kingdom of God) that Jesus so often spoke about was said to be near in the days of the apostles.

Jesus was the Master at teaching others through parables. The Greek word *parabolē* literally means 'a placing beside.' It essentially denotes something cast beside or parallel to something else, signifying a figure of likeness in action. That is to say, a parable is essentially a story or short narrative that uses familiar earthly themes and objects to portray spiritual truths in a figurative manner. Nature or agriculture were common themes used by Jesus in His parables whereby the everyday working person could relate to the story, say, for example, that of a sower sowing seed in his field and the subsequent growth process of the seed.

These same themes are also found throughout the writings of the Hebrew prophets, where the nation of Israel, as God's covenant people, were often figuratively portrayed as a vine, an olive tree and a fig tree, amongst other things. God used these common fruit trees and the various produce of the Promised Land to put across important truths to His people, and He even established seven Feasts or festivals at the various times of harvest from springtime through to autumn. Even these seven Feasts reveal the plan of God for Israel and the world when they are viewed typically.

Jesus, being the ultimate Hebrew Prophet, as well as being the promised Messiah and Son of God, continued with these nature themes in His teaching. The various laws and processes of nature that are all around us are full of spiritual meaning – and the reason for this is that, of course, God created it all, and sustains it all by His Spirit. But if we are to correctly understand the parables of Jesus, we need to keep the above in mind concerning the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Greek Scriptures (the New Testament) is essentially a continuation of, and a fulfilment of,

the Hebrew Scriptures. The key to understanding and correctly interpreting the Scriptures is to be aware of two things:

1. God uses a pattern of sound, spiritual words to match spiritual things with spiritual words (1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 1:13; Psalm 12:6).
2. There is a correct way of cutting or dividing the word of truth, being aware of that which is natural (or worldly) and that which is supernatural or spiritual (or heavenly), and being aware of the fact that there are various ages within God's plan and purpose for his people within history (2 Timothy 2:15; Ephesians 3:9-11).

If these principles are kept in mind and observed when studying Scripture, then, with the illumination of the Spirit, accurate deductions can be made in accordance with the truth that God is revealing through His Word.

### The Secrets of the Kingdom

Many of us are familiar with the classic parables that we learned in Sunday School or heard elsewhere, such as, The Good Samaritan, The Lost Sheep, The Wise and Foolish Builders, and many others. These parables were particularly concerned with teaching the people of Israel about the true nature of the Law of Moses, as well as showing them God's love and mercy, while at the same time revealing the moral righteousness and wisdom that is intimately linked with true faith in God.

These parables, and much of Jesus' metaphorical teaching, was to enlighten the people as to the true function of the Law and to instruct them to live in a righteous manner before God, while at the same time exposing the hypocrisy and wickedness of the religious leaders in what had become their dead religion of Rabbinic Judaism.

This is why Jesus told the people

"Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

(Matthew 5:20 NIV)

Notice here that there is such a thing as 'righteousness that is of law,' but the difference between this kind of outward law-righteousness and true faith-righteousness is that only faith-righteousness of the heart is acceptable to God (see also Paul's words in Philippians 3:4-9). The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector is a classic example of Jesus' teaching on the subject, revealing the true righteousness of faith and humility that God accepts (represented in the attitude of the tax collector), while exposing and condemning the proud self-righteousness of faithless law-keeping (represented in the attitude of the Pharisee) (Luke 18:9-14).

Now there is much that can be, and has been, gleaned from these aspects of Christ's teaching that can be applied to anyone, anywhere in the world, at anytime. Christ taught truth, as He is The Truth, and therefore His words, as we have them recorded in the first four books of the New Testament (NT) known as 'the Gospels,' are loaded with spiritual and figurative meaning on many levels of truth.

But if we are to gain an accurate understanding of the Master's teaching, especially that which He called *the secrets of the kingdom* hidden in many of His parables, then we need to observe very closely the Hebraic background and context of these parables in the overall light of His ministry to Israel. This does not necessarily mean that we need to grasp the rabbinical ideas that were prevalent at the time, although this kind of information can sometimes help to illuminate certain texts, but it means that we need a good understanding of the writings of the Hebrew prophets, and of God's plan for Israel and the nations revealed within them.

This includes having some knowledge of the two roles of the Messiah/King, who would appear twice within one generation of Israel; as well as knowing something about the covenants that God had covenanted with Israel, particularly the New Covenant. (These subjects are treated in detail in the section *The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed*).

One of the major reasons why the Jewish people had such a hard time understanding Jesus' teaching, even the really simple stuff, was because they were quite ignorant of the truth contained within their own Scriptures. This ignorance was largely due to the teachings and traditions of the Rabbis, Scribes, and their various representative sects within Judaism (such as the Pharisees and the Sadducees) who were suffocating the truth with their own interpretations and philosophies. They also thought that their repetitive reading of the Scriptures, as their religious duty, along with all sorts of intricate rituals, would give them a ticket into the kingdom, but they were greatly mistaken.

These were the very Scriptures that prophesied the coming of the Messiah, and yet He was the very One Whom they were now fiercely rejecting (John 5:39-40). This is why Jesus often sought to expose the religious leaders and to warn the people of their deceptive teaching and hypocritical ways. This finally culminated in Jesus showing His anger at their detestable ways, calling down woes upon them, towards the end of his ministry (Luke 11:37-54; Matthew 16:5-12; 23:1-39).

### Balance and the Bigger Picture

In a similar way to the ignorance of Israel, the majority of the 'secret kingdom' parables have been, and are, largely unknown by the Church (apart from the Parable of the Sower and maybe a few others) – or at least, their true meaning is unknown to most because of the traditions and philosophies of the religious leaders of Christianity, who are often floundering in a quagmire of man-made thought and interpretation.

This is true even within the new 'evangelical, charismatic' religion of Christianity that has arisen in more recent decades. A large percentage of preaching is focused on immature, fleshly things of the soul, masquerading as that which is 'spiritual and biblical,' - which is often delivered by the preacher in a way that whips up the crowd almost to an emotional frenzy, and could be better described as religious motivational speaking – rather than on the mature, spiritual things of truth, accompanied by the real fruit of the Spirit, which includes meekness and self-control.

I'm not saying that all preaching and motivational speaking is wrong or misleading, but it needs to be done under the true inspiration and anointing of the Holy Spirit,

with the main goal being that of building up the people of God, remembering also that correction is often needed, as well as encouragement.

On the other hand, there are those who focus solely on the spiritual aspects of the parables to be applied to us as individuals, and they neglect the other aspects of Christ's teaching that relates to God's plan for Israel and the nations. **We need both aspects to truly appreciate and understand the bigger picture.** Truth will always be **balanced** and will take into account both sides of the coin. Where this is not the case, and certain things are minimised or ignored for one reason or another, there is an imbalance and this inevitably leads to error.

Yet even so, this ignorance manifested by Israel and the Church shouldn't be too surprising really as Jesus Himself stated that He spoke to the people in parables so as to **hide** the real meaning of His words from the masses so that only the *spiritual ones* among them could really understand what He was saying (cf. Matthew 13:10-17). He revealed the secrets of the kingdom only to His immediate disciples who were later to become His apostles and administrators of His Kingship, and who later taught the believing congregation in the land during Christ's absence. We have been given a glimpse of these secrets in the written accounts of the Gospels, and also in the teaching of the apostles contained within their letters.

All of this was to fulfil the scripture that says,

"I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden from of old."

(Matthew 13:34-35 and Psalm 78:2).

It also fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah concerning Israel's partial blindness and deafness to the truth of God (Isaiah 6:9-10; see also Romans 11:7-10, 25). They would see and hear, yet they wouldn't really *spiritually* see or hear or understand the words of wisdom and truth that came through Jesus' parabolic teaching. It would be hidden from the majority of the nation, while only the remnant of the true Israel of God would hear, and they would be the ones of their generation who would receive the long awaited kingdom promised through the ancient prophets.

The purpose of this book is to therefore help bring some illumination to the reader in regard to this neglected subject. We shall be focusing on the parables that concern the kingdom of God as promised to Israel in the Prophets, and the secrets that are revealed in them in relation to God's plan for the two ages known as 'the present age' (or 'this age'), and the glorious messianic 'age to come' (or 'impending age'). For a detailed treatment of the prophetic plan and the writings of the Hebrew prophets, see the section *The Great Prophetic Plan Revealed*.

Before we go back in time and begin our journey through Jesus' ministry to take a look at the kingdom parables that He taught, we firstly need to keep the following in mind to help us avoid a lot of misunderstanding.

#### The Foundation: Justified Before God

In every administration of God, real faith in God's Word is the *gracious* ticket into the coming kingdom of God. Yet it is also true to say that *acts of righteousness* are

the standard whereby the true people of God are accepted into the kingdom to receive eternal (or age-abiding) life (that is, the life of the coming age).

It is always true that faith and works complement one another, and are two sides of the same coin, because without works, faith is dead. In other words, *real faith in God's words will produce righteous acts*. The whole letter of James, sent to the twelve tribes of believing Israel in the dispersion, is proclaiming this truth, especially in Chapter 2, and Paul is proclaiming the same thing in Romans 4. Paul and James may appear to be contradicting one another on the surface of things, but in truth they are both declaring that faith is the foundation for righteous acts.

The foundational truth revealed throughout Scripture though is that we can only be justified, or made righteous, before God by simply believing that God alone can make us right with Himself! For those of Israel under the Law, this meant that they should humbly acknowledge their mistakes (or sins) and accept the way of sacrifice that God had given them in accordance with the Old Covenant (Luke 18:9-14). Yet the rituals of the Old Covenant were only sufficient enough to cleanse the flesh. Only the institution of a New Covenant with a greater Sacrifice could fully cleanse the conscience in spirit (cf. Hebrews 9).

Under the New Covenant, though, the sacrifice of the Messiah is the focal point of faith, and He is now the only Way to salvation or justification or becoming righteous before God, not only for Israel, but for all humanity (Acts 13:38-39; Galatians 3:1-14). But true faith in Christ Jesus will result in acts or works of righteousness, but the works themselves do not make us righteous. The ultimate truth is that it is *God Himself* who is operating within His children to cause them to produce good works for His delight and their blessing (Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 2:8-10).

Now Jesus taught that the righteous law of the King must be obeyed, and the nation of Israel is still to serve Him under a yoke, although compared to the Old Covenant and the laws of men, His yoke is *kindly* and His burden is *light* (Matthew 11:28-30) - nevertheless, there is still a yoke and a burden. So plain obedience to the Law of the Messiah is commanded, which can be summed up in the command to love one another, as love is the complement (or fulfilment) of the law (John 15:9-17; Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:8-10).

Nevertheless, there must be clear continuing evidence (or fruit) that one is a believer and a follower of the Messiah, otherwise entrance into the kingdom will be forbidden. Paul and the Twelve also taught this same truth (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; 2 Peter 1:10-11; 1 John 3:4-10).

In light of this, many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14); and small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only few find it, like searching for a secret passageway or small door that is not that obvious (Matthew 7:13-14) – but the chosen ones are cleansed and regenerated as the true children of God, and they are promised an entrance into the kingdom of the heavens at Messiah's appearing (John 10:27-29; 15:3, 15-16; 1 Peter 1:3-9, 22-23; 2 Peter 1:3-11; The whole letter of 1 John should be read in light of the above). This is the faithful remnant of the spiritual Israel of God.

## Paul's Ministry

The apostle Paul was chosen by God to proclaim a number of new truths or secrets through his gospel to the nations, the primary one being the revelation of the present secret administration of Grace concerning the spiritual Body of Christ, where believing Jew and Gentile are at one in Christ (Ephesians 1-3). In this era of reconciliation, there is abundant grace as God holds out His hand of friendship to all nations, and not just to Israel. There is much emphasis on salvation by the unadulterated grace of God, granted to us solely through faith alone and not from works of law. There are no specific rituals to be observed now in order for us to be saved. This message is especially for the nations, called the Uncircumcision, who no longer need to go through Israel to draw near to God (only in the sense that Jesus was the true Israel in his fleshly humanity).

*These new truths do not negate the teaching of Christ or the other apostles, and they are not a direct contrast either, as some suggest.* Paul's calling and 'good news' message (i.e. gospel) were unique, and his teachings contain things that not even Peter and the other apostles were given to proclaim, but this does not mean (as some 'ultra-dispensationalists' teach) that Peter, John and the others of the Circumcision didn't understand Paul's teaching, or that none of it applied to them as well, only that it wasn't for them to proclaim it. They were set apart for the Circumcision believers (i.e. the Jews), while Paul was set apart for the nations (i.e. the uncircumcised Gentiles; cf. Galatians 2:8-10). It was about distinction of calling.

Peter says that Paul had written to the dispersed Jewish believers in Asia Minor (the letter to the Galatians was probably the one) and Peter admits that Paul's letters contain some things that are hard to understand, *which the unlearned and unstable are twisting*, as they do the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:15-16). The Circumcision apostles were not among these unlearned ones, so they therefore understood most of what Paul was talking about, if not all of it.

Nevertheless, Paul reveals things that are only found in his letters, and these revelations were given to him through personal appearances of Christ. These secrets and his additional details of prophecy, along with specific instructions for believers of the nations, *were an extension of what Jesus and the Twelve had previously revealed, and was not something separate from them.* Instead, they complement one another.

The primary secret that Paul revealed was the administration of God's grace (Ephesians 3:2), which would occur during Israel's national rejection and partial blindness, in which God is calling out a people from all nations to complement the remnant of Israel chosen by grace, to co-rule with Christ in the coming ages (Romans 11). This 'Bride/Body of Christ' was initially a *firstfruit* company from the 1<sup>st</sup> century generation spanning 30-70 AD, the assembly (Gk. *ekklesia*) of the *firstborn ones*, the heavenly sons of God, the true Israel (cf. James 1:18; Romans 8:23; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 14:4). They were to be the first of a greater harvest of God's new covenant people called out from all humanity in the coming generations.

So the teaching of Christ and the other apostles needs to be viewed in the light of this further revelation, including the parables of Jesus. We shall find that the secrets of the kingdom that Christ spoke of dovetail perfectly into the secrets that were

given to Paul. Paul's evangel gives us the bigger picture and fills up what was previously lacking.

This is why Jesus said the following to His disciples.

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

(John 16:12-13 NIV)

So we need to allow an expansion in our thinking in relation to any previous teaching by Christ and the Twelve to accord with the further revelation given through Paul. They all complement one another and together they give us the full picture; the whole counsel of God revealed in the NT.

### The Nearness of the Kingdom

One thing worth pointing out before we begin considering the parables is that of the issue of the time indicators in the NT concerning the arrival of God's kingdom. One of the major difficulties when studying NT prophecy is this issue of how to understand the terms 'the last days' and 'the last hour', etc. There are many instances where these, and similar terms, are used by the NT writers to indicate the nearness of the 'coming of Christ' as the Son of Man. Most of these texts (when interpreted in their original context, along with noting the original word usage) appear to clearly teach that a coming of Christ was expected to occur in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

In fact, Jesus made it plain to his disciples that the 'royal presence' or *parousia* of the Son of Man would occur in their lifetime (cf. Matthew 10:23; 16:28; 24:34; 26:64). It is also evident that this 'coming' was intimately connected to 'the great and dreadful day of the Lord' and the impending judgment upon Jerusalem and the temple (Luke 19:41-44; 21:5-33).<sup>1</sup>

There have been many biblical scholars who have correctly argued the point that throughout the NT 'the last days' and the 'parousia' or coming of Christ and his kingdom were said to be near, at hand, very soon, right at the door, etc, indicating that Jesus' disciples believed that He would return within their lifetime (this view is generally termed preterist).

So, how are we to understand these time indicators in the NT? What are 'the last days' of the NT writers? Let us take a brief look.

I used to be among those who are of the position that these 'time' words and phrases are to be understood from God's point of view and not man's, i.e. God views time differently.

The argument usually goes like this: God is outside of Time, for He created it, and therefore, as the scriptures say, '*a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day or a watch in the night*' (cf. 2 Peter 3:8-9; Psalm 90:4). So God is not slow in keeping His promises as some understand slowness, hence 'the last days'



and 'the last hour;' or that which is 'near' or 'soon', can be understood as meaning a 1000 years or more from God's viewpoint!

I have to say, I find it hard to believe that I actually accepted and taught that view for many years! It's obvious that God views time differently to us, but when he reveals his word to humans, he speaks in ways we can understand. So what did Peter mean when he quoted Psalm 90:4?

Here's what the text says.

First of all, you must understand that **in the last days** scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ...

...But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, **as some understand slowness**. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance...

...Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation.

(2 Peter 3:3-4, 8-9, 15a NIV)

The Apostle Peter was writing primarily to Jewish Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, probably in the early to mid-60's AD. The 'coming of the Son of Man,' which Jesus had prophesied would occur in that generation had not yet arrived, and the holy city of Jerusalem and the temple were still standing. Peter then warns the Jewish believers about the scoffers who would come 'in the last days' who would mock the prophecies of Jesus and scorn his words.

Then he reminds them of Psalm 90 verse 4 to emphasise that God's way of doing things is not the same as man's way, because time itself is of no consequence to God. A thousand years *are like* a day to God, but for mere mortals who aren't around for very long, time can seem to drag by! Peter tells them that the Lord is *not* slow in keeping his promise at all – as some understood it, slowly counting off the decades. God's timing is perfect. And also bear in mind that all these things had particular relevance to the 1<sup>st</sup> century audience, to the generation that had heard the words of Jesus and the apostles firsthand.

Peter also emphasises that the reason behind the seeming delay of the 'coming of Christ' and the Day of the Lord is that of God's patience, to allow as much time as possible for repentance among the Jewish nation because he wants everyone to come to repentance to avoid the impending judgment. Ultimately, the Lord's patience means salvation and deliverance from the coming wrath.

This passage alone doesn't prove that 'the last days' had already begun at that time, but there are others that do make it very clear. These were the last days of the old covenant system represented in the temple religion of the Jewish nation – and the end of that age, and the subsequent establishing of the New Covenant 'kingdom of heaven' was 'near' or 'at hand' (meaning *close enough to reach out and touch it*).

The coming of the Son of Man and his 'royal presence' would achieve this (in accordance with Daniel 7:13-14, 26-27).

### What are the Last Days?

Here are some of the NT texts that talk about the last days.

This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

#### **In the last days**

the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established  
as chief among the mountains;  
it will be raised above the hills,  
and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say,  
"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob.  
He will teach us his ways,  
so that we may walk in his paths."  
The law will go out from Zion,  
the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

(Isaiah 2:1-3 NIV; see also Micah 4:1-2)

Even in the Hebrew Scriptures, the term 'the last days' usually referred to the Messianic era and the arrival of God's kingdom. This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus the Messiah taught in the Temple at Jerusalem and then subsequently established his spiritual kingdom (figured as the mountain), which spread forth from Jerusalem to the whole world.

Christ is now the true Temple of God, as well as the true King of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly Mount Zion. And likewise, his new covenant people, the Body of Christ assembly, the Christian Church, which is composed of Jew and Gentile, is also represented as the kingdom and the figurative temple of God. The gospel has gone forth to the whole world. Therefore, even in the OT, 'the last days' referred to the days of the Messiah. This is confirmed in the NT as being fulfilled in Jesus.

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, **but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

(Hebrew 1:1-2 NIV)

He was chosen before the creation of the world, **but was revealed in these last times for your sake**.

(1 Peter 1:20 NIV)

On the day of Pentecost in about 33 AD, when Peter gave his speech to those in the temple courts, he quoted from Joel to confirm that these prophecies were being fulfilled through Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

"No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

" **In the last days**, God says,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy."

(Acts 2:16-18 NIV)

This again confirms that these events in the 1st century AD were 'the last days.' This is why Paul could say that, even in the 1st century, the end of the ages had already arrived upon the people of God. This was particularly relevant to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish audience in light of the fact that the Jewish Old Covenant age was about to come to an end.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, **on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.**

(1 Corinthians 10:11 NIV; see also Hebrews 8:13; 9:26b)

Paul also spoke to Timothy about the last days.

But mark this: **There will be terrible times in the last days.** People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.

(2 Timothy 3:1-5 NIV; see also 1 Timothy 4:1)

In this text, Paul is initially describing the moral condition of the last days of that Jewish era, which is very much in line with what Jesus had predicted in his Olivet Discourse. He is expecting Timothy to have to deal with such people, for he warns him strongly, '*have nothing to do with them.*'

Of course, texts like these do not have to be limited solely to the last days of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. They can also apply *in principle* to the Christian era beyond 70 AD. That is, this text is not out of place if applied to the Christian apostasy that was to largely arrive in the form of the religion of Christendom and the rise of Papal Rome, as well as through some of the Christian Gnostic sects. Nevertheless, its primary context is the last days of the Jewish age in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

Dear children, **this is the last hour**; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. **This is how we know it is the last hour.**

(1 John 2:18 NIV)

Take note here that John said '*this is the last hour*' and '*we know it is the last hour.*' Now there's no way that the term 'the last hour' can be stretched to mean hundreds of years, let alone thousands of years! This has to be understood in the light of 1<sup>st</sup> century events; that is, during the era of transition, between the fading away of the Old Covenant religion and the official inauguration of the New Covenant kingdom of Christ. All of these things have to be understood in light of the prophecies of the Olivet discourse. The era when all the Hebrew Scriptures would be fulfilled concerning Israel and Jerusalem was *at hand* or *near*.<sup>2</sup>

Here are a few more texts that are declaring the same thing.

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. **You have hoarded wealth in the last days.**

(James 5:1-3 NIV)

James was writing primarily to Jewish Christians in the dispersion, and here, in this chapter, he was warning those within the Jewish community that judgment was coming soon upon the land. He particularly addresses those who had acquired their wealth unjustly and who were selfishly hoarding it all '*in the last days.*' Instead of following their Lord's wise advice to sell their possessions and give to the poor, because the land was about to be destroyed, they had hoarded their wealth instead. And James makes it clear that this had occurred in the last days!

Peter also states that Christ was revealed or manifested '*in these last times*' for the sake of that generation of Israel.

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed **in these last times** for your sake.

(1 Peter 1:20 NIV)

Peter also confirmed in this same letter that '*the end of all things is near*' meaning that the end of the Old Covenant age, which event Christ figuratively referred to as 'the passing away of the heavens and the earth,' was near (cf. Matthew 24:29, 34-35; also 1 Corinthians 7:31).

**The end of all things is near.** Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

(1 Peter 4:7-8 NIV)

This expression of Christ's coming and kingdom being *near* or *at hand* is stated clearly in a number of places in the NT. One of these passages is James 5:7-9.

Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, **because the**

**Lord's coming is near.** Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

(James 5:7-9 NIV)

The Greek words *engus* (adverb) and *engizo* (verb) are usually translated *near* or *at hand*. This was the common way of describing something that was close by, something that could almost be touched, hence the expression *at hand*. James was reminding his Jewish Christian brethren that the Lord's coming (parousia) or royal presence was near; so near, in fact, that he could say that the Judge was standing at the door – ready to bring judgment upon Israel.

The same thought is being proclaimed at the beginning and at the end of the vision of Revelation, and this cannot be ignored when it comes to interpreting this book.

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants **what must soon take place**. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, **because the time is near**...

...Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this scroll, **because the time is near**."

(Revelation 1:1-3; 22:10 NIV)

The apostle John was indicating very clearly that the prophecies contained within the vision of Revelation were about to be fulfilled, shortly after it was given to him. A sound interpretation of Revelation has to fit these criteria.<sup>3</sup> This is not unlike what occurred with OT prophets like Ezekiel who prophesied things just a few years before they transpired (e.g. Ezekiel 12:21-28, given within 5 years of its fulfillment in Jerusalem's destruction).

Sadly, many within the Church are ignorant of these things, or have been taught something different. It is important to bear in mind that much of what Jesus said he said to his chosen apostles and disciples of Israel in accordance with God's original plan for that nation. Later on, Christ chose Paul and gave him a unique message for all the nations in accordance with a new era of grace. Nevertheless, the ultimate focus of all the Apostles is the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the New Covenant in Christ Jesus.

So with this in mind, let us now begin our journey through the kingdom parables of Jesus, which were spoken in accordance with the gospel of the kingdom as it was originally proclaimed to Israel, the Circumcision. Nevertheless, we shall also interpret these parables in light of Paul's teaching as well, and the whole of the New Testament, in accordance with its 1<sup>st</sup> century context.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed study of this topic, see my article *The Olivet Discourse and The Second Advent* and the new series entitled *The Day Of The Lord: The Royal Appearing*.

<sup>2</sup> In Luke 21:22, in relation to the then-future events of the Jewish war, and the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (which occurred in 70 AD), Jesus stated clearly that those days were to be the "...days of vengeance, **to fulfil all that is written.**"

"Now whenever you may be perceiving Jerusalem surrounded by encampments, then know that her desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee into the mountains, and let those in her midst be coming out into the country, and let not those in the country be entering into her, **for days of vengeance are these, to fulfil all that is written.** Yet woe to those who are pregnant, and to those suckling in those days; for there will be great necessity in the land **and indignation on this people.**"

And they shall be falling by the edge of the sword and shall be led into captivity into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden by the nations, until the eras of the nations (*or times of the nations*) may be fulfilled."

(Luke 21:20-24 Concordant Literal NT)

It is very evident from the context that Jesus was talking about the events of 'the great affliction or tribulation' of the Jewish/Roman War in the land of Judea and the whole of Palestine, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, heralding the official end of the Old Covenant system. It also terminated the era of 'the Times of the Nations' after which time the final exile and captivity of the Jews would continue till the consummation of human history.

Jesus was confirming that Daniel's prophecies were to be fulfilled by 70 AD. He said that those events in the 1st century, within that generation, would fulfil ALL that is written concerning Israel and the coming Messianic kingdom, including the days of vengeance and judgment upon the people and the land and the city and the temple.

In fact, Jesus was alluding to Daniel 12:7.

"It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, **all these things will be completed.**"

The time period of 'time, times and half a time' is understood as three and a half years, which can also be found in Daniel 7 in relation to the Little Horn. It is a well-established historical fact that the Jewish War lasted three and a half years! And by the end of this period, "**all these things will be completed!**" This time period can also be found in Revelation - where it is evidently referring to the same event, although its symbolic significance can be interpreted on a number of levels.

Anyhow, let us repeat this point. Jesus was saying that ALL the prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures concerning Israel, Jerusalem, the temple, the land, the covenants, as well as that that prophesied the coming of the Messiah and the establishing of His spiritual kingdom were all fulfilled by 70 AD! The New Testament writings are the inspired record of these fulfilments, much of which was witnessed by thousands in Judea and Palestine - and throughout the Roman world.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr, in his excellent book *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating The Book of Revelation*, shows convincingly that the weight of evidence for the writing of Revelation, both externally and internally, actually leans heavily toward the early date of c. 65 AD, during the reign of Emperor Nero, as opposed to the later date of c. 95 AD during the reign of Domitian. The evidence also indicates that the whole New Testament canon (i.e. the original writings of the apostles) was completed before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

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