
Chapter 1

Wheat and Tares

In the very center of the Gospel message is the parable of the wheat and the tares. We find this parable recorded in Matthew 13:24-30, where God says:

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and 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.

The Bible gives us the spiritual meaning of this parable in Matthew 13:37-43, where we read:

He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. 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. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

We will learn that the parable in these verses teaches that at the end of the world there will be a separation of the saved individuals, who are called “wheat,” from the individuals who thought they were saved, but in actuality, had never become saved. They are called “tares.”

Immediately, we can know the following.

1. The field is the world. Since local congregations have been placed all around the world, we can understand that the wheat and tares are found in these churches.

2. The good seed are the children of the kingdom, that is, they have become saved. Throughout the New Testament era until the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the local churches had been given the commission and the mandate to evangelize the world. Moreover, those who became believers were to become members of a local church, if possible. By the end of the church age, local congregations could be found throughout the world, and that is in harmony with the language of this parable, which states that the field wherein the seed was sown is the world.

3. The tares are weeds that look virtually identical to the wheat. They represent those who are still in Satan’s kingdom, that is, they are not saved. However, during the church age, they were found in the same churches in which the true believers were found. They were altogether mixed in with the true believers and looked so much like the true believers that it was impossible to accurately separate them from the true believers. Matthew 13, verses 29 and 30, teaches that the tares were to remain with the wheat. That is, if an attempt is made to separate the tares from the wheat it might happen that the wheat is also removed.

To understand this more fully, we shall begin our study of this very informative parable by looking carefully at the character of the local churches as they have existed throughout the New Testament era.

Church Members

The first question that must be asked is: Who are to be members of the local congregations? This question must be asked because in this parable, the wheat and the tares typify church members. The Biblical answer must be that hopefully, the members are those who truly have become saved. With this truth in mind, many churches readily proclaim that their congregation is a saved membership. Their membership is spoken of as “members in full communion.” In other words, they believe that each and every one of their members is a true child of God. They believe the proof of this is that each and every member has been baptized in water, made a personal confession

of faith, agrees that their church doctrines are Biblical, attends worship services fairly regularly, and lives a decent, moral life. In fact, if a member becomes divisive or begins to live immorally, he is excommunicated. Thus, the spiritual overseers of the congregation believe the church membership is being maintained as a saved membership.

Having said all this, the big question must be asked. Who makes the decision that permits any individual who professes Christ to become a member of the congregation? The answer is, the pastor and the elders and deacons make that decision. They carefully examine the person's conduct and his profession of faith in Christ, and they make the decision that he has become saved, and therefore, should be a member in full communion. Insofar as they can determine, this person is truly seed that will grow up as wheat.

But therein lies a huge problem. Can these pastors or elders or deacons look into the soul of this person and know with absolute certainty that this individual has been given a new resurrected soul? The answer is obvious. Of course, they can't. Only God can do that.

Isn't it true that many people can give an appearance of salvation when they are not truly saved?

Then how can they know that this person has truly become saved? Isn't it true that many people can give an appearance of salvation when they are not truly saved? God deals with this problem in Hebrews 6:4-6. This passage teaches:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame.

As we examine these verses, we might think they are speaking about a congregation of saved members. Such phrases as, "**tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God,**" surely must refer to those who have become saved. However, in this citation God speaks of a congregation that has been brought very close to the kingdom of God but consists mainly of unsaved members. We know we understand these verses correctly because the same passage speaks of falling away, and that is impossible if a person

has become truly saved. A truly saved person has been given eternal life and nothing can separate him from the love of God. Moreover, in the same context of Hebrews 6, God says in verse 9:

But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

In other words, in this passage God is not speaking of those who had become saved. Rather, He is speaking of those who could easily be identified with those who had become saved, but in actuality, they had not become saved. Thus, we are made to understand how impossible it is to know with certainty which church members are saved and which church members are still not saved.

Ye Shall Know Them by Their Fruits

True, the Bible declares in Matthew 7:20:

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Doesn't this verse tell us we can know the true believers by looking carefully at the spiritual fruit they have produced? The principle is true but what human being is qualified to truly know the fruit produced by another person's life? A pastor, an elder, or any member of a congregation may outwardly appear to be a godly person, devoted to serving the Lord. But unknown to anyone, he may have an intense desire for wealth, or he may have seriously wrong sexual desires, or he may have great pride that is not readily discernible. In the public eye he may appear to be very godly but in his private life he may demonstrate that he could hardly be a true believer. Or he may be living as godly as possible because deep in his heart, he is trusting his own good works as a basis for salvation.

Ultimately, the fruit that should be seen in the life of the true believer is obedience to God.

Without question, the statement “**by their fruits ye shall know them,**” can help any individual analyze his personal relationship with God. He knows his own thoughts and motives and desires. He can know whether the fruit of his life measures up to the standards God has established in the Bible. It is also true that God knows everything about this person, and He knows precisely if the fruit of this person's life indicates that he is a true

believer. But at best his fellow man can only hope that he is truly saved. Ultimately, the fruit that should be seen in the life of the true believer is obedience to God. Therefore, the command of our day to forsake the local church is one test whereby a person can know if he is, indeed, a true believer.

Moreover, later in this study, we will be reminded of God's Words in II Corinthians 11 where God speaks of Satan, who comes as an angel of light, and his ministers. In that context, God speaks of Satan's ministers as "**ministers of righteousness.**" This helps us to see the extreme difficulty of knowing if someone is truly saved. Thus, we are brought back to the teaching of the wheat and tares parable that the separation must occur at the end of the world.

Surely, we must realize that it is impossible for any pastor, elder, or deacon to positively ascertain that any individual in the congregation is truly saved. It is no wonder, then, that as God speaks of the local congregation in Sardis, He declares in Revelation 3, verses 1 and 4:

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. . . . Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

Obviously, we can readily see that in the church in Sardis a few members were wheat but most members were tares. God saw the hearts of the members of the church in Sardis, and He can accurately declare that only a few were true believers.

Wheat and Tares Members Cannot be Separated

We can now begin to see the beginning reality of the wheat and tares parable. All through the world, churches are to be found. The membership of these churches appears to be saved, that is, they all appear to be wheat. But in any church, as in the church in Sardis, there are those who identify with the language of Hebrews 6:4-6. Outwardly, the whole membership is considered to be wheat. But in reality, part of the congregation are tares as was the situation in the church at Sardis.

There is no good way to separate the wheat from the tares. Throughout the church age, the wheat and the tares have grown together. Outwardly, the conclusion is that all the members of any church that is reasonably faithful to the Bible must be saved. They all give the appearance of being wheat. But no one can know for certain that they are saved. No one can know for certain that they are not tares.

There is no good way to separate the wheat from the tares.

The parable continues. At the end of the world, the wheat is separated from the tares, and the tares are bound together in preparation for them to be cast into the fire. How is this accomplished?

God answers this in verses 39-41 of Matthew 13:

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. 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;

Again, questions must be asked. What time in history identifies with the phrase “the end of the world?” Who are the angels? In reality, how will the tares be gathered? How will this separation be accomplished? Doesn’t Christ come on the last day of salvation? On that final day of salvation, will not all the believers’ bodies be resurrected as glorious spiritual bodies and immediately be caught up to be with Christ in the air? (See I Thessalonians 4:17.)

Simultaneously, will not those believers who are living at that time be instantly changed into their glorious spiritual bodies and also instantly be caught up to be with Christ in the air? (See I Thessalonians 4:17, I Corinthians 15:51-52.) On that last day of salvation, will not the bodies of the unsaved who died previously be cast out of the graves? (Jeremiah 8:12.) On that last day of salvation, will not the unsaved who are living at that time enter into that 5 months period of final judgment? (See Revelation 9:5.)

The above questions are all true. Therefore, how can the language of Matthew 13:40-43 concerning the separation of wheat and tares at the end of the world be in agreement with these truths?

To understand this we should examine several additional key words in this parable. The first word is the word “harvest.” God uses this word in connection with His plan to bring the Gospel to the world so that the fruit of the harvest -- those who become saved -- can be brought into the kingdom of God. We read in Matthew 9:36-38:

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the

labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

. . . harvest is concerned with people becoming saved.

We can readily learn from these verses that harvest is concerned with people becoming saved.

But who are the laborers that God uses to bring in this harvest of saved people? In Matthew 13:39, God speaks of the reapers in this end-of-the-world harvest as angels who send the Gospel into the world so that people might become saved. Does the Bible teach that God uses angels? Obviously, we must examine the word **“angels.”**

Angels or Messengers

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *malak*, which is frequently translated **“angels,”** at times is also translated **“messenger.”** This is also true in the New Testament. The New Testament Greek word *aggelos* is frequently translated **“angel.”** But at times these words are also correctly translated **“messenger.”** As we examine verses that contain the word *malak* or *aggelos*, we find that the messenger that is in view can be God Himself, or it can be angels, or it can be humans who have a message to bring. The context in which the verse is found must determine the proper translation.

For example, we read in Malachi 3:1:

Behold, I will send my messenger [*malak*], and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger [*malak*] of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.

The word **“messenger”** is used twice in this verse. The first **“messenger”** must be John the Baptist who was sent by God to announce Jesus as **“the lamb of God.”** The second **“messenger”** is clearly Christ who is the Lord, the messenger of the covenant.

In fact, in the Old Testament the word *malak* is translated more than 100 times as **“angel”** and almost 100 times as **“messenger.”** Usually, when it is translated **“messenger,”** it is speaking of men who are bringing some kind of message to others. However, as we have seen in Malachi, the messenger can be God Himself.

In the New Testament, the word *aggelos* is translated as “**angel**” about 180 times and as “**messenger**” seven times. For example, in Matthew 11:10-11, the Bible speaks of John the Baptist as a messenger of God. There we read:

For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger [*aggelos*] before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

We can clearly see, therefore, that the Hebrew *malak* in the Old Testament and the Greek *aggelos* in the New Testament must be carefully examined in the context in which they are found to determine whether they are speaking of God Himself, of angels, or of humans.

That brings us back to Matthew 13:39, where God speaks of a harvest in which the reapers are angels. Can we be sure the word *aggelos* in this verse, which was translated “**angel**” by the King James Bible translators, is speaking of angels and not those who are saved, who as messengers of God, bring the message of the Gospel to the world?

In answer to this question, we will look at God’s statement in John 4:35-38:

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.

The reapers gathering in the harvest are those who have become saved.

These verses clearly show that the reapers gathering in the harvest are those who have become saved. They obviously are those who as messengers of God have been commanded to bring the Gospel to the world. They faithfully send forth the Word of God so that God can apply the Word to the hearts of those elected to salvation. Thus, those who become saved are the harvest of believers who enter into the kingdom of God.

Therefore, returning to Matthew 13:37-43, the Greek word *aggelos*, found in verses 39 and 41, would be more accurately translated **“messenger.”** The angels do not bring in the harvest. It is brought in by the believers who bring the Gospel to the world so that the harvest -- those who become saved -- can be reaped and brought into the kingdom of God. Thus, in the first part of the parable of the wheat and the tares, the believers are called seed that produce wheat. But as the parable continues, the true believers are called messengers who are to bring in the harvest of the wheat.

The End of the World

But what about the phrase the **“the end of the world,”** which is found in Matthew 13, verses 39 and 40:

The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world.

How are we to understand this phrase? To answer this question we should examine how God uses the phrase **“the end of the world”** elsewhere in the Bible.

In Hebrews 9:26, we read:

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

On the one hand, in this context the phrase **“end of the world”** points to A.D. 33 when Christ went to the cross to pay for the sins of the elect. Thus, the phrase **“end of the world”** can include the whole New Testament era. This final period of time that lasts approximately 2,000 years is the end of the world that finally will have lasted about 13,000 years. The phrase is used in a similar way to the way God uses the phrase **“last days”** in Acts 2:17. It can be shown that in the context of Acts 2, the term **“last days”** includes the entire New Testament era.

However, returning to Hebrews 9:26, in this context, the phrase **“end of the world”** may focus on the judgment that Jesus experienced on behalf of those He came to save. Thus, Hebrews 9:26 is not decisive in informing us how to understand the phrase **“end of the world.”**

However, in Matthew 24:3 we find the same phrase. In this context, it is more helpful in showing us how to understand the phrase **“end of the world.”** We read:

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

This verse serves as an introduction to the information set forth in Matthew 24 that teaches the timing and character of the Great Tribulation. This chapter also teaches that the Great Tribulation is immediately followed by the return of Christ and by the end of the world. Thus, we can be assured that the term “**end of the world**” can clearly identify with the time of the Great Tribulation and the end of this world¹.

Significantly, it is during the time of the last part of the Great Tribulation that the final harvest of believers will be brought in.

Significantly, it is during the time of the last part of the Great Tribulation that the final harvest of believers will be brought in. As we learned in the book “The End of the Church Age and After,” at the time of the “**latter rain,**” a “**great multitude which no man can number**” will become believers (Revelation 7:9-14). As individual believers send the true Gospel into all of the world, this final harvest of souls is brought into the kingdom of God.

It is also the time when those who are saved are commanded to come out of the local church. This is so because in the church institution, which consists of all the local congregations, the Holy Spirit is no longer applying the Word of God to the hearts of anyone.

Thus, we can be assured that the phrase “**the end of the world**” clearly can be identified with events that occur during the Great Tribulation, and the end of the world.

We have learned that the parable of the wheat and the tares is focused on the time of the Great Tribulation. We should now begin to understand God’s declaration of how the tares came to exist within the local congregation.

In the next chapter, we will learn the identity of the enemy that sowed the tares.

¹ Get the book “We Are Almost There” from Family Radio for more information about the time after the Great Tribulation.

Chapter 2

The Enemy that Sowed Them is the Devil

In Matthew 13:39, Jesus makes a very important declaration. There He declares, **“The enemy that sowed them is the devil.”** Thus far, we have learned in our study that the wheat (the church members who are true believers) and the tares (church members who have not become saved), co-existed throughout the church age in the local congregations. In this statement of Matthew 13:39, God reveals that Satan is definitely involved in the local congregations. It brings our attention to this most solemn and important piece of information.

Therefore, it is very essential that we look at the Bible’s declarations as to how Satan has been involved in the churches throughout the church age. In order to understand this, we should back up and look at the Bible’s declarations concerning this all-important matter.

Sometimes we have the idea that because of the victory of Christ on the cross, and because of what we read in Revelation 20, that Satan, to a very high degree, has been taken out of the spiritual war, the war that goes on between Christ and Satan. Thus, we can readily adopt the idea that throughout the church age, the local congregations existed in a very secure way, and they did not have to worry that much about Satanic involvement. However, when we carefully examine the Biblical statements concerning the activities and the prerogatives and opportunities of Satan throughout the New Testament era, we find that it is quite a different story.

Satan Is Bound

First, we want to find out what Revelation 20:2-3 is teaching about the binding of Satan. There we read:

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

We have read this quotation many, many times but probably have not understood what it means. What does it mean that Satan was bound and then later on loosed? Based on what we read in Hebrews 2:14, we know that when Christ went to the cross, Satan was destroyed in some sense. There we read:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself [*Christ*] likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

And from Revelation 13, we know that Satan was given a deathblow. We read in Revelation 13:3, wherein God is speaking about Satan:

And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.

And because of Christ's victory on the cross, we can be sure that Satan was cast out of heaven. We read in Revelation 12:9:

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

And anticipating Christ's victory on the cross, He said in Luke 10:18:

And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

As we examine these verses, we conclude very correctly that at the time of the cross, Satan was given a deathblow. That is, the fact that Christ endured the wrath of God for the sins of His people also guaranteed that at the end of the world, Satan will be destroyed. We have understood this quite correctly. That is why we read in Revelation 20:10:

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

He Should Deceive the Nations No More

However, we also read something very interesting in Revelation 20 that should be factored into our thinking. We read in Revelation 20:3:

And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more,

till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

We learned in the book “The End of the Church Age and After” that the end of the thousand years is the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Therefore, the language, “**that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled,**” appears to imply that now that we are in the time of the Great Tribulation, he again is able to deceive the nations. This is so because the thousand years, during which he was bound, ended with the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

Let’s begin to develop the truth, “**that he should deceive the nations no more.**” Prior to the time of the cross, we know that Christ was the perfect preacher, and yet, virtually nobody became saved. Christ preached for three and a half years, and at the end of that time, only a few appeared to be saved or actually had become saved during His ministry. There is plenty of evidence that except for a few, virtually nobody became saved.

We have learned that as Christ preached, and He was the perfect preacher, Satan was there to snatch away that Word so that it would not find root in the heart of those who heard it.

We must remember that two things are required in order for the Word of God to bring salvation to anyone. First of all, the Word that is preached or declared must be the Word of God. We know that from Romans 10, verse 17, where God says:

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Secondly, the Word preached must be applied by the Holy Spirit to the hearts and lives of those God is planning to save. We learned from the parable of the sower in Luke 8 that Satan can prevent the preached Word from bearing spiritual fruit. Jesus explains this in Luke 8:12:

Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

So, we see very clearly that before the time of the cross, this is the way Satan was quite successful in inhibiting salvation. Each time the Word of God was declared, Satan was there to snatch it away so that it would not take root in the hearts of those who heard it. He was able, therefore, to deceive the nations, because in the entire world wherever the Gospel was preached, that would have been the situation. We are amazed, and yet it is

a truth that God gave us, that when Jesus was preaching, that is exactly what was happening. It was happening in the temple, in the synagogues, and by the seashore. That is why we see very few results even though Jesus was the perfect preacher.

*Each time the Word of God was declared,
Satan was there to snatch it away . . .*

Satan Bound and the Holy Spirit Ruling

That particular aspect of Satan's activity was stopped at the time that Christ went to the cross. As the New Testament church was being developed, Satan was bound in the sense that he could not frustrate the Word of God by snatching it away from the hearts of those that Christ intended to save. When Christ defeated Satan by going to the cross, that possibility came to an end. In this sense, throughout the church age, Satan was bound.

More than that, the Holy Spirit had been poured out. Thus, beginning at Pentecost in A.D. 33 and throughout the New Testament church age, God the Holy Spirit has been in the midst of every congregation that recognized the Bible as the Word of God. In these churches, God applied His Word to the hearts and lives of the elect.

We witness this truth very dramatically when we look at Pentecost in A.D. 33. Peter preached one sermon and about 3,000 people were saved. Obviously, Peter was not nearly the perfect preacher that Christ was, yet the fact is that about 3,000 truly became saved that Pentecost day. This is a dramatic evidence of the statement that Satan was bound so that he could not deceive the nations and also that the Holy Spirit was actively saving souls. These are facts that we know to be true and trustworthy.

How then are we to understand the parable of the wheat and the tares which teaches that throughout the Church age, Satan has been busy sowing tares or weeds? Does the Bible have more to say about this? Indeed, the Bible has much to say about it. This truth is sprinkled all through the New Testament.

Satan is at War with Christ

First of all, in Revelation 12:17 where Satan is called a serpent, we read about the body of believers which is called a woman who is in the wilderness. We can be assured that the woman in the wilderness represents the believers throughout the New Testament time. In this citation, we read a very significant truth. Revelation 12:17 says:

And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

From this declaration we learn that the warfare goes on throughout the New Testament era. This is a solemn truth. Satan was bound in the sense that he cannot frustrate God's plan to save every one of the elect as they come under the hearing of the Gospel. Simultaneously, God the Holy Spirit is busy applying the Word of God to the hearts of those individuals that He plans to save. But Satan is still at war.

This brings to mind the words of Ephesians 6. Most of us are quite familiar with this serious citation, but we have not really understood its tremendous importance. We read in verses 11 and 12 of Ephesians 6:

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Here again is the declaration that there is warfare going on. In this particular context, God indicates the protection God's true people can have so that Satan does not overcome them. He says in Ephesians 6, verses 13-17:

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

He speaks about "having your loins girt about with truth," and the truth is Christ Himself. He speaks about, "having on the breastplate of righteousness," and "your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace," and "taking the shield of faith" and "the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." The essence of all of these statements is Jesus Christ Himself. He is the protective armor that shields the true believers from the assault of Satan who continues to make war in the local congregation. Satan is there trying to snare away those who are present in the local church.

Satan continues to have a total and terrible vendetta against the Lord Jesus Christ.

Satan continues to have a total and terrible vendetta against the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Christ is in heaven, he cannot assault Him personally. But in the local congregations, the body of Christ lives or lived. Therefore, that is where Satan can assault Christ.

There are many other passages that warn us that this warfare is happening. We read for example in James 4:7:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

We read in Ephesians 4:27:

Neither give place to the devil.

This indicates that the Devil is very active within the churches. We read in II Corinthians 11:3-4:

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty [*craftiness*], so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or *if* ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with *him*.

In these verses, God is warning that if someone comes with a false doctrine or with a false gospel, trying to entice those within the congregation to believe these wrong doctrines, that is the means by which Satan will come to snare them.

I Timothy 3 speaks about the qualifications of an elder in the local congregation, and God says in verse 6:

Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

That is a very, very serious matter. It means that this new elder could be someone who is not saved, and if he is not saved, it means that he is still identified with Satan. Furthermore, God teaches in I John 3:8:

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

In this context, God is teaching that those who commit sin includes everyone who is unsaved. They are still of the Devil. This is emphasized, for example, in I Timothy 5:15, where again God warns the New Testament believers:

For some are already turned aside after Satan.

Again, as we continue to study this, we discover that those who follow after Satan or who are identified with Satan are all the unsaved.

In Acts 26:16-18, God emphasized that Satan has authority over the unsaved. In this context, as God sends Paul forth to declare the Gospel to the world, God instructs him:

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and *from* the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power [authority] of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

In this very important passage, the phrase “**the power of Satan,**” indicates the authority of Satan. We learn from this verse that those who are unsaved, who are still identified with Satan’s dominion, are under the authority of Satan. We will find that this is very important information as we continue in our study.

In II Corinthians 11, God further tells us how Satan works. Wouldn’t it be nice if Satan showed himself as a devil with a red suit and a forked tail so we could know quickly that it was Satan. But God indicates that Satan is the father of lies, and therefore, we dare say that he is the master deceiver. He is very much a deceiver, and he operates in a very deceptive way. We read in II Corinthians 11:14:

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

This, too, is an exceedingly important statement because it shows us how Satan operates. He does not come appearing as a wicked person, as he

does, for example, in the non-church world of the drug culture, the red light district of a city, and in the wicked hearts of heathen people who know nothing about the Gospel. Oh, yes, Satan works there, too. But in this verse, we read that Satan works within the local congregation. He comes as an angel of light, that is, as a messenger of the Gospel. Christ is the light of the world, and Christ is the messenger of light. But Satan is the master counterfeiter, and he comes as an angel of light so that unbelievers cannot discern that he is Satan. He looks very much like Christ.

*Satan can neutralize them by coming into them as an
angel of light.*

Then this passage describes how he operates in the local congregations. Please, bear in mind, this is what has been going on throughout the church age because it is part of the warfare, or it is the way in which Satan fights against Christ as he seeks to overcome Christ. Satan cannot frustrate the Gospel from saving God's elect, but he can try to completely neutralize the local congregations, which are the external representation of Christ's kingdom. Satan can neutralize them by coming into them as an angel of light.

How Does Satan Fight

The question is: How does he do this? He is a spirit being. But God shows us how he does this. The Bible declares in verse 13 of II Corinthians 11:

**For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers,
transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.**

In this verse, Christ is speaking about preachers and elders and deacons who look very holy, very decent, very moral, very much like they really love the Lord Jesus. In their own minds, they are completely convinced that they are faithfully serving the Lord Jesus. But they are false. Furthermore, God says in II Corinthians 11, verse 15:

Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers [*Satan's ministers*] also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

Isn't that something? Those ministers, who serve Satan within the local congregations, appear to be ministers of righteousness. How frightening!

Now we can understand why we read in Ephesians Chapter 6 that true Christians are to put on the whole armor of God so that they can withstand the wiles of the devil. God's true people must have the protection of the Gospel and the protection of Christ. Any time they stray away from the authority of the Bible and they begin to trust men, they are putting themselves in the position to be snared by Satan.

Speaking about those who have been snared, we read in II Timothy 2:26:

And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

This verse is teaching that there are those who have been snared according to the will of Satan. He wants people to be under his authority. But this verse also carries the hope that there is the possibility of being made free from the fact that an individual has been snared. The only way anyone can become free is to become truly saved.

This kind of activity is anticipated in I Timothy 4:1, also, where we read:

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

God is warning us in the Scriptures, and we don't normally take enough notice of these warnings, that Satan is very active in the local congregations, trying to frustrate God's plan. He can't keep the elect of God from becoming saved, God will not allow him to frustrate that plan. But insofar as the local congregation, as a divine institution utilized by God to be the caretaker of the Gospel and to faithfully declare the Gospel to the world, Satan has been warring within it. Satan has been constantly attempting to neutralize local churches by filling them with his own ministers of righteousness. How terrible this is!

Satan has been constantly attempting to neutralize local churches by filling them with his own ministers of righteousness.

Given the fact that these ministers of righteousness, and all those in the congregation who have been snared by Satan, look virtually identical to the true believers, we can see how it is impossible to separate the wheat from the tares. Therefore, we understand that Satan can be very successful. In fact, that's why we read that the church at Sardis, which was only a few decades old, already was a dead church. Revelation 3:1 says:

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

This passage emphasizes that already, Satan had caused most of the people of that congregation to be under his authority.

Remember earlier we learned that those who are not saved are under the authority of Satan. Concerning this church at Sardis, we read in Revelation 3, verse 4:

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

This indicates that a few true believers were still there. Now we can begin to see how Satan sows the seed of the tares. He does so by bringing in leadership that looks like messengers of righteousness and preachers of righteousness, and then he snares those in the congregation by enticing them to trust the doctrines of men rather than the Bible alone. They are brought under Satan's authority rather than Christ's authority.

Small wonder then that we read in Revelation 2:9 that the church in Smyrna, which was only a few decades into the church age, already had within it those who were in the synagogue (assembly) of Satan. We read there:

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan.

In like manner, the church in Pergamos had within it those who held the doctrines of Balaam (a wicked prophet of the Old Testament) and the teachings of the Nicolaitans, which God hated. Therefore, God declared in Revelation 2:13:

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not

denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

This congregation dwelt where the seat of Satan was. That is, to some degree, Satan was already ruling in that young church. We will examine this concept more carefully later in this study. In Revelation 2:24, God says:

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

This verse implies that some in that congregation also already had identified with Satan.

As we study these references given to us in Revelation 2, we are learning that just a few decades after the church age had begun, already Satan was sowing tares in the local churches.

The Transition to Satan's Sole Rule

Therefore, we can see why the Bible says in II Thessalonians 2 that the man of sin, who can be shown to be Satan, took his seat in the temple at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. This is teaching that he rules in the local congregations. It isn't as if at the end of the church age there had to be a great change. There was very little to indicate any change had taken place because the local congregations were already so infiltrated with Satan's ministers (who appeared as ministers of righteousness) that any difference in true spiritual character was indiscernible. True, in one sense there was a great change. At the beginning of the Great Tribulation, Christ abandoned the local congregations. We read about this change in several places in the Bible. One citation is II Thessalonians 2:7, where God says:

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [*restraineth*] will let [*restrain*], until he be taken out of the way.

In this verse, the one who restrains Satan is the Holy Spirit, and actually, the phrase, "**be taken out of the way,**" would be better translated, according to the Greek language, as, "**taken out of the midst.**"

We have learned that throughout the church age, it was God's plan that the Holy Spirit be active in the churches to restrain Satan so that he could not prevent the Gospel from saving the elect who heard the Words of the

Bible. Satan cannot frustrate that activity. But, at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the Holy Spirit was taken out of the midst, thus, there is no one to restrain Satan. Moreover, God commands the true believers, if they have not already been driven out of the churches, to come out of the churches (Matthew 24:15-16, Luke 21:20-21, Revelation 18:4). Therefore, Satan has a totally free hand to do his will within the congregations.

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We should remember that long before the end of the church age, perhaps a great majority of the people in a congregation were not saved. They were already under the snare of Satan because Satan has been sowing his tares during the entire church era, and so, they were already under his authority. But at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the true believers had been driven out and they have been commanded to come out. Moreover, God the Holy Spirit is no longer in the midst because He has abandoned the local church. So, that leaves the whole local congregation under Satan's authority.

Satan Becomes the King of the Local Churches

Now we can understand the language that the man of sin will take his seat in the temple. Satan has complete control of the local congregation. Some congregations gave complete control to him many, many years ago. They have become false gospels. They have developed an authority other than the Bible alone and in its entirety. However, even in those congregations in times past, as long as the Bible was still utilized within that congregation, there was the possibility of someone becoming saved. This was true even though perhaps the total membership was already under the authority of Satan. But once the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the congregations, that meant that every congregation throughout the whole world is now under the authority of Satan. Satan is in authority even though the pastor may believe that he is preaching faithful messages of the Bible.

Of course, we have to ask the next logical question. Isn't it true that if a believer truly loves the Lord, if he truly is a child of God, then he will have an intense desire to do the will of God? But what if a pastor, an elder, a deacon, or a fine member of a congregation thinks he is a child of God and believes he is a child of God, and yet, he will not obey God's command to come out of the congregation? If he is not trembling before the Word of God, can he really be a child of God? We will address these very serious questions later in this study.

We now can begin to understand that throughout the church age, Satan has been very active in the local congregations as an adversary of God.

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We surely would think and even dare to assume that as a result of God's action in separating the wheat from the tares in the congregation throughout this end-time period, by the time the Day of Judgment comes, only tares will be left in the congregation.

As we continue our study of this very significant parable, we should address some other important phrases that are a part of this parable.

Chapter 3

While Men Slept

There is another statement made in the parable of the wheat and the tares that we should look at very carefully. We read in Matthew 13:25:

But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.

What does “**while men slept**” mean? Obviously, in this context, God is talking about the development of the New Testament church during which Satan somehow was able to sow tares amongst the wheat. So, how can we understand the phrase, “**while men slept**”?

It is true that in many places in the Bible, the idea of “sleeping” is associated with death. However, in this reference, death is not in view. Rather, God has a time in view when He has not opened spiritual eyes. We read, for example, in Isaiah 29:10-12:

For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which *men* deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it *is* sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned.

In this passage, God is teaching that if God does not open our “eyes” to the revelation that has been placed in the Bible, then it is like the “book” is “sealed” or it is like we are still sleeping.

We get the same idea when we look at Daniel 8:18-19:

Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright. And he said, Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end *shall be*.

Here again, before knowledge is given to Daniel, God uses the figure of him being in a deep sleep.