

Lesson Nine — The Kingdom of the Heavens

Day One — God's People, a Kingdom of Priests

Day Two — Two Realms of One Kingdom

*Day Three — Beginning with the Earthly,
Moving Toward the Heavenly*

Day Four — The Gospels

Day Five — The Sower and the Seed

We are at a turning point! Thus far, we have glimpsed various large portions of the Biblical puzzle, fitting many of the detailed small pieces together into various, separate sections. The sections are as follows:

- The purpose of man's creation — man was created to rule.
- The present system of rulership — fallen angelic forces ruling from the heavens over the earth, headed by Satan.
- The call of and promises to Abraham and his descendants — that they would 1) be innumerable (as the sand and the stars), 2) possess a land, and 3) receive an inheritance in that land.

We have also seen Abraham's descendants, through Isaac and Jacob, grow in numbers, become enslaved in a land not their own, and be redeemed from slavery for the purpose of being taken into another land. We have seen this first generation fall away, losing their inheritance due to their disobedience.

We have also seen the establishment of the theocratic kingdom within the land, the interruption of that kingdom, and the displacement of Israel from the land (due to continual disobedience). Then we have glimpsed some of the prophecies concerning Israel's future reestablishment.

Last week we viewed the first coming of Christ, and the message He pronounced — *the kingdom of the heavens*. We witnessed the rejection of the offer of the kingdom and the crucifixion of the One making the offer — the very King Himself. The question that we will consider this week is this — What does the phrase *the kingdom of the heavens* mean? Exactly what did Christ's offer entail for Abraham's descendants?

Understanding the answers to these questions is essential in order to fit together these large and various sections of Scripture. As we get more into the New Testament, the overall picture of Scripture will really begin to take shape and dimension, as these sections fall into place. Please continue to pray for yourself and the others in your group as you work through this week's lesson. Let's begin.

Day One — God’s People, a Kingdom of Priests

Let’s remember for a moment how God’s Word is structured. God purposely begins at one point and purposely ends at another point. (Remember your timeline?) The foundation of the entire Scriptures is laid down in Genesis 1:1-2:3. It is this: In the beginning, there was a perfect creation (Gen. 1:1); there was a ruin of that creation (Gen. 1:2); and there was a restoration of the ruined creation in which God took six days to complete (Gen. 1:3-30). Then God rested on the seventh day and He sanctified it (Gen. 2:1-3).

That’s it. Plain and simple!

And it is upon this foundation that God builds the structure of the remainder of Scripture. In the beginning, He explains the created purpose of man — to rule; and in the end He brings that purpose to fruition — Christ, the *Son of Man*, ruling from an established throne with redeemed mankind ruling with Him for an entire period of time (one thousand years [Rev. 20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7]). This thousand-year period is called the Messianic Era or the Millennial Reign of Christ. It is also referred to as the Sabbath Rest (Heb 4:9-11; cf. Gen. 2:1-3). And everything between the beginning point and the end point is a part of the puzzle that fits together with precision, accuracy, and purpose. (We will continue to build on this foundation in upcoming weeks.)

In order to comprehend *the big picture of Scripture*, we must see and understand how God deals with Abraham’s descendants *in both* the Old Testament and the New Testament, understanding exactly who Abraham’s descendants are, along with the implications thereof.

First, the specific promises made to Abraham have to do with *redeemed people*, not the world-at-large (although the world-at-large will ultimately be blessed through these promises being fulfilled in the coming age [Gen. 12:3]). The promises are given only to those who are saved! So it is necessary to understand how salvation is accomplished in the Old Testament, and what are the implications thereof. As we have seen, *the means* and *the end* of salvation in the Old Testament is the same as *the means* and *the end* of salvation in the New Testament. The *means* of salvation involves faith in the provision God gives, which has always been *death and shed blood*. (Initially, God shed the blood of an animal [Gen. 3:21], which remained *the means* of salvation throughout the entire Old Testament. As we have previously seen, more details were added to the revelation of the means of salvation [Gen. 4; 22; Ex. 12], all of which ultimately pointed to the shedding of blood and death of Jesus Christ.) Anyone putting faith in the provision God made — the blood of an animal in the Old Testament (pointing to, or foreshadowing, Christ’s redemptive work), or the blood of Jesus Christ in the New Testament — was saved!

And *the end* of salvation remains unchanged also. *The end* is eternal life, which has been, is now, and always will be *a free gift*. This free gift is received apart from any work of an individual himself. It is only God Who can accomplish this work. The only thing necessary on the part of an individual in order to be saved is to *believe* in the provision made — the death of the lamb(OT)/Lamb(NT).

But more is implicated in this salvation than solely the free gift of eternal life. Once this salvation/redemption has taken place, a door of opportunity opens up. When Abraham’s descendants were redeemed on the night of Passover, they were placed in a position to participate in a *theocracy* (a system of government wherein God would be King and His people would be the administrators of that kingdom). Redeemed Israel was placed in a position where they might become a *kingdom of priests*, a holy nation (Ex. 19:4-6). Two things were necessary on the part of an individual in order to partake in this kingdom: 1) he was to have been redeemed through faith (realizing salvation, passing “from death to life”), and 2) he was then to exercise faithful obedience toward God’s commands. The first is a singular event (salvation/redemption) which takes place at a particular *point in time*. This *event* is referred to in Scripture as *salvation* or *redemption*. Both terms are interchangeable in this regard. The second is a process which is

to take place over a *period of time*. This *process* is referred to in Scripture as *salvation* or *inheritance*. Both terms are interchangeable in this regard.

The term *salvation* in Scripture can either be referring to *the initial event*, or it can be referring to *the succeeding process*. (More on that in Lesson Twelve.) The former takes place the moment a person puts faith in the provision God gives, and the latter takes place along the way of life as a person exercises faithful obedience. Context would determine which is in view in any given passage.

Again, there is something essential to understand at this point. To become redeemed only involves one thing on man's part — *faith!* But to take part in the theocracy as a priest in God's kingdom involves something beyond simple faith, it required *faithful obedience*. And participating in the kingdom has to do with *receiving an inheritance* as a firstborn son. (As we shall see in upcoming weeks, this distinction clears up much misunderstanding concerning the issues having to do with salvation!)

Another way to state the previous paragraph is to say that only family members (those who are redeemed through faith into the family of God) have the right to become priests in God's kingdom and receive the inheritance as a firstborn son of God. The free gift, received through faith, puts an individual into the family. Ongoing faithful obedience allows that redeemed individual to receive the inheritance as a firstborn son. And the inheritance has to do with the theocracy, the kingdom of God. We have seen some of this play out in the Old Testament. This week we will begin to see how this plays out in the New Testament.

As we close for the day, would you summarize in your own words the contents of the last six paragraphs, adding any questions you have about this at the end of your summary. (The purpose of this exercise is to solidify your understanding of these things.)

Day Two — Two Realms of One Kingdom

As we begin today, please read the summary you wrote at the end of yesterday's lesson. (Hang on to the questions you may have. Most likely they will be answered for you in upcoming lessons.) Be sure to pray as you begin.

Let's think through a few things. You know that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Write down what two realms are mentioned in this very first verse in the whole Bible?

You also know that Satan and his fallen angels rule over the earth. But from where do they rule? Are they ruling the earth *from the earth* or *from the heavens* above the earth? (Look at the end of Eph. 6:12 and the end of Dan. 4:26, if you need help in answering this question. Or go back and skim Lesson Four.)

So, what two realms are obviously involved in Satan's domain?

Even now Satan and his angels are ruling from the heavenly realm over the earthly realm. (Of course there are heavens beyond that which Satan and his angels have control. The heavens from which they exercise control are the heavens that have to do with the earth, not the heavens extending throughout the universe.)

We have also seen that in Satan's fall, as the Scriptures state, his sanctuaries (plural) became profaned, or desecrated, which would refer to both the earth and the heavens that surround the earth (Eze. 28:18).

Both realms are mentioned in the very first verse of the Bible — *God created* the heavens and the earth. And subsequent to this first verse in all of Scripture, we get information of His creating things *to fill* both of these realms. In the passages printed below, Paul states some of the details (not that this is the first place this information can be seen in Scripture, but Paul words it so succinctly).

Colossians 1

16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created by Him and for Him...

Paul tells us that God created things *in* these two realms. With respect to *creation*, which realm is mentioned first? (This answer is seen in this passage, as well as in Gen. 1:1.)

Then what does Paul say God created within the two realms?

Did you notice that there are both *visible* and *invisible* thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities? Write out the obvious — which set goes with which realm?

Continuing —

...20 and through Him [Jesus] to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

According to v. 20 (as it follows v. 16), what needed to be reconciled through the blood of Christ?

In putting all of this together, what do you think is the reason for *things* in *both* realms needing reconciliation?

According to v. 16, heaven is mentioned first with respect to creation. But with respect to *reconciliation* (v. 20), which realm is mentioned first?

(It is no coincidence that the *heavens* are mentioned *first with respect to the creation*, and *earth* is mentioned *first with respect to reconciliation*. In fact, this order of reconciliation is born out in the Scriptures which follow the ruin of the creation in Genesis 1:2. In Genesis 1:3, God begins dealing with the earth. The earthly realm is the subject predominately dealt with in the first part of Scripture — the Old Testament. And the heavenly realm is the subject predominately dealt with in the second part of Scripture — the New Testament. These divisions and distinctions are by Divine design.)

According to Colossians 1:16, 20, specifically what things on earth needed reconciliation?

According to Colossians 1:16, 20, specifically what things in the heavens needed reconciliation?

Both sets of created things — *visible* and *invisible* thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities — needed to be reconciled to God, showing that in time past, both realms of authority had been in perfect accord with God, then became out of accord, resulting in a need for a reconciliation. And according to the passage, both realms *are reconciled* through the blood of Christ.

We will glimpse another passage written by Paul which has to do with the same idea.

Ephesians 1

8 ... In all wisdom and insight 9 He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth.

How is this passage similar to the one we studied in Colossians?

What added facts can you draw from the Ephesians passage?

According to this passage, in the fullness of time, what will be summed up in Christ?

Recount in your own words what you just learned from these two passages in today's lesson.

Day Three — Beginning with the Earthly, Moving Toward the Heavenly

As has been stated, the Old Testament deals primarily with the earthly realm, along with an earthly inheritance for Abraham's physical descendants (through Isaac and Jacob) — the land. Now we are beginning to see that the New Testament deals primarily with the heavenly realm, along with a heavenly inheritance for Abraham's spiritual descendants (through the blood of Christ) — the heavenly land. The offer of the heavenly realm of the kingdom is that which the Jews, as a nation, forfeited when they rejected the One making the offer. We will look more closely into these things in upcoming weeks, but today we want to see if Old Testament saints knew anything about this heavenly realm and the inheritance therein.

Abraham was called by God and was told of a land that God would give to him and to his descendants after him. Throughout the progressive revelation God gave to Abraham, he learned that he would have many descendants, that these descendants would have a land of their own, and that they would have an inheritance in that land — possessing the gates of their enemies (i.e., exercising power over them). Throughout eleven chapters in Genesis (chs. 12-22), God begins to unveil and make known the details of His promises to Abraham. And we can learn much about the promises given to Israel, through studying these eleven chapters. But there is more to learn about the promises of the inheritance for Abraham's descendants throughout the New Testament. Again, for the most part the Old Testament deals with the land, *the earthly portion of the kingdom*; and the New Testament deals with the heavens, *the heavenly portion of the kingdom*.

But there are a couple of questions which must be asked — Since there is an inheritance connected with the earthly kingdom, would there also be an inheritance connected with the heavenly kingdom? Did Abraham and his descendants know anything of *the heavenly realm* and the inheritance therein? One of the places in Scriptures where the answers to these questions are evident is in the Book of Hebrews. Read through these passages in Hebrews a few times, and make study notes in the margins. Then answer the questions which follow.

Hebrews 11

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised; 12 therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE. 13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. 15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better

country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

What did Abraham do when he was called (vv. 8, 9)?

What was Abraham looking for (v. 10, 16)?

What two Old Testament descriptive phrases did the author of the Book of Hebrews quote to describe the numbers of Abraham's descendants (v. 12)? (Remember, capital letters in the NASB indicates that the passage is quoting the Old Testament.)

What did those who "died in faith" confess (v. 13)?

For what were these Old Testament saints seeking (v. 14)?

What type of country were these Old Testament saints looking for (v. 16)?

Compare v. 16 with v. 10. From these two verses, describe the city they were looking for.

Continuing in Hebrews chapter eleven, the author cites the works done through faith by these Old Testament saints. After citing several specific examples (vv. 4-31), the author goes on to give some general examples of faithfulness. Before you answer the questions which follow the passage, be sure to spend some time studying through this passage, making notes of what you learn in the margins. (We are going to be studying the specific examples of faithful saints in Lesson Fifteen. But today we are only looking to see if Old Testament saints could have understood some things concerning the heavenly inheritance.)

Hebrews 11

32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted,

they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

At the end of v. 35, what does the author state is the reason for the actions of these faithful saints?

Write out the statement made of these saints at the beginning of v. 38.

Write vv. 39 and 40 in your own words.

The question we are considering is this — Did Abraham and his descendants know anything of the heavenly portion of the kingdom? After studying through these sections of Hebrews chapter eleven, what do you think — Could Old Testament saints have known and understood about the heavenly portion of the kingdom? From the text, what makes you think so?

And here is another question — With these things from Hebrews chapter eleven in mind (along with the information from last week's study as to the first coming of Christ, His offer and the nation's rejection), *should* the Jews of Christ's day have understood His message, the offer of the kingdom of the heavens? Why, or why not?

We'll end here for the day. Please keep entrusting yourself to God the Holy Spirit as He guides you into understanding. Keep asking Him to open up your mind to understand more and more from His Word.

We'll look at more of this tomorrow.

Day Four — The Gospels

With the message which John the Baptist brought, and the fact that Christ's message was exactly the same as John's — *Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand* — we must look at the gospels in this light (Mt. 3:1,2; 4:17,23). The gospels literally lay out in detail the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to God's people. Last week we studied some of these details. Today and tomorrow we want to glimpse more details of the offer made to Abraham's descendants in the Gospel of Matthew.

Matthew is the only gospel writer who uses the phrase *the kingdom of heaven* (Gk. "*the kingdom of the heavens*"). The other gospel writers use the phrase *the kingdom of God*. In the New Testament there is no difference in the meaning of the two phrases, it is just a different way of saying the same thing. (The phrase *the kingdom of God* can cover a larger scope — actually the entire universe — but the context of a given passage in which the phrase is used will determine its meaning. And this must be understood for proper interpretation.) Simply stated, the kingdom of the heavens (or the kingdom of God in most of the places it is used) refers to the *rulership from the heavens over the earth* (cf. Dan. 4:26b).

To get started today, we'll review a couple of passages we looked at last week.

Matthew 4

17 From that time [the time when John had been taken into custody] **Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

...23 And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people.

It is easy to see from these two verses what Jesus' message was. Luke records a similar phrase in his gospel, clearly explaining the purpose for which Christ had been sent, quoting Christ Himself.

Luke 4

43 But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose."

What was Christ's own stated purpose for coming to the earth?

Jesus came to offer the kingdom of the heavens to the only people on earth who could receive this offer — the Jews. But just as receiving the earthly kingdom at Kadesh Barnea was individually conditional upon faithful obedience, so is receiving the heavenly kingdom individually conditional upon faithful obedience. And the spiritual condition of Israel at the time of Christ's first coming was so deplorable, that a message of repentance needed to preface the message of the offer of the kingdom. Hence, the message John brought and the message Jesus brought — Repent!

Jesus' first sermon — commonly known as *the Sermon on the Mount* — was spoken in the hearing of a great multitude, but directed specifically to His disciples. It is important to study Jesus' message in this light. This sermon was spoken to individuals who were the first followers of Christ. The intent of Jesus' words to them was *not* how to receive the free gift of eternal life, but rather *how to live in such a way so as*

to *inherit* the kingdom of the heavens. The assumption that the disciples had already been saved through faith in the provision God had made in the Old Testament is obvious.

Let's take a little time and sort through this beginning portion of this message. When you come to the words or phrases having to do with the kingdom of the heavens, inheritance, or reward, underline it. Remember, He is speaking to His disciples. (A reward is something earned through some type of faithful action on the part of a saved individual.)

Matthew 5

1 And when He saw the multitudes, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 And opening His mouth He began to teach them, saying,

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

**6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.**

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

**10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**11 “Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you,
and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me.**

**12 Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great,
for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Fill in the details from the passage in the chart below. I've done the first one for you.

Blessed are —

1) the poor in spirit

For theirs/they shall —

1) is the kingdom of the heavens

Based upon this first section of His sermon (this entire sermon runs from Mt. 5-7), what do you think Jesus wants His disciples' focus to be?

From succeeding portions of this sermon, it is easy to see that treasures can be stored in either of two realms — earthly or heavenly. What is the difference between the two? At this point in your understanding, how do you think you would store up for yourself treasures on earth? In the heavens?

Jesus desires His disciples to take their focus off of the present world and place their focus on His heavenly kingdom. After speaking to them about the differences between the reward here and now given by men, and the reward in the future kingdom given by the Father (6:1-21), read what He says to them about storing up treasures.

Matthew 6

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Rephrase what Jesus said about treasures.

Jesus reiterates His desired focus as He tells His disciples about seeking the things of this world versus seeking the things of heaven by finishing this section of His message with the following words. Underline what He tells them to seek first.

Matthew 6

31 “Do not be anxious then, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘With what shall we clothe ourselves?’ 32 For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.

What did He say was necessary to seek?

And what would happen as a result?

A study of the entire sermon reveals the type of life style necessary for one *to receive their inheritance in the kingdom of the heavens*, rather than revealing how one receives the free gift of eternal life. Understanding this distinction clears up major misunderstanding in these passages (as well as many others). As we end today's study, you may want to read the sermon in its entirety, but if your time does not

allow it, at least read the end of the sermon as it is printed below. Think through these things. Keep it in mind the context of the whole message that Jesus was giving to His disciples (chs. 5-7). We will spend time in the lecture on this section, so I want you to be familiar with the text.

Matthew 7

13 “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. 14 For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.

15 “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ 23 “And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’ 24 Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. 25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. 27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.” 28 The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Answer these couple questions as you consider this passage.

In the way of review, to whom is He speaking (Mt. 5:1)?

What seems the subject of this entire sermon?

A couple of things need to be remembered while studying through this passage. This passage is at the end of His sermon, wherein Jesus sums up what He has taught them. In doing so, He talks about *entrance into* or *exclusion from* the kingdom of the heavens. It is not a free gift/eternal life issue. (His comments are directed to people who are saved [5:1, 2]). And He is talking about fruit bearing in the spiritual realm. Only people who are alive spiritually can bear fruit in the spiritual realm, either good or bad. Those who are dead spiritually would never be expected to bear spiritual fruit, as it would be impossible for someone to bear spiritual fruit if they are spiritually dead. Think on these things as you end your study today.

See you tomorrow.

Day Five — The Sower and the Seed

As we come to the conclusion of this week's lesson we will endeavor to understand a little more clearly the message of the kingdom of the heavens as it is laid out in the first parable given in Matthew chapter thirteen.

If you were to read through the first twelve chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, you would see Jesus being baptized by John, His public ministry beginning, His calling twelve men to Himself, His offering the kingdom of the heavens to the descendants of Abraham — the nation of Israel, and His performing many miraculous signs during the course of the offer. He did not take His message to the Gentiles as He could not do so. Because the promises were made to Abraham and his descendants, the offer *could only be made to Israel*. Even when He sent out His disciples with the message of the kingdom, He instructed them to only go to the house of Israel (Mt. 10:5-7; cf. Mt. 15:24; Ro. 15:8).

But already, the Pharisees and the leadership of the Jews were trying to disparage Jesus and His ministry, saying that He performed miraculous signs by the power of Satan (*e.g.* 9:32-34). As Matthew's gospel unfolds, it becomes evident that the leadership of the Jewish people were not happy either with Jesus nor with His message. In truth, they *hated* Him, and *despised* the message He brought. So much did they hate Him, that they sought for a way to destroy Him (12:14).

As His public ministry was gaining momentum and as Jesus continued to teach and perform miraculous signs, more and more Jews were following Jesus believing that He was, in fact, the son the David, the Son of God. Many others were beginning to wonder. He had made it very clear Who He was, through His words and miraculous signs! In fact, at one point, Jesus cast a demon out of a man, causing the people to wonder *aloud* if it were true — Is this the Son of David (12:23)? If the nation accepted the fact that Jesus was the Expected One (the son of David, the Son of God), it would mean that He would have ushered in the final kingdom. Though some of the people asked the question — Could this be the Son of David? — the way the question is worded in the Greek reveals that the people, in fact, *doubted* that He was! The way they worded their question revealed a “middle-of-the-road” attitude, so to speak, leaning very strongly to the possible answer being a negative one.

When the Pharisees heard that the people were wondering this, they publicly made a statement that Jesus casts out demons by the power of Satan (Mt. 12:24). In a sense, this was a line crossed over! They had committed a sin which would not be forgiven in *this age* (the present age) nor *in the age to come* (the Messianic age). They had blasphemed the Holy Spirit. Through the use of miraculous signs (signs done through the power of the Holy Spirit), God had been validating the words and the works of Jesus, in order that the people might recognize that He was Who He said He was — the Christ! But instead of recognizing and agreeing with the power and work of the Spirit, the Pharisees credited His power to Beelzebul (Satan). This action blasphemed the Holy Spirit, which was a sin that could not be forgiven in this age (the present age), nor in the age to come (the kingdom age).

This sin on the part of the leadership caused Jesus to change His course of actions. He went out of the house and sat by the seaside (Mt. 13:1). And there, by the seaside, Jesus began teaching through the use of parables. Below is the first one He gave. Let's see what we can learn from this first parable.

Matthew 13

1 On that day Jesus went out of the house, and was sitting by the sea. 2 And great multitudes gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach. 3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 And others fell upon the rocky places, where

they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 And others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil, and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear.”

Before we go any further with this parable, list the information about each seed in the first two columns. We’ll fill in the third column as we come to it.

**Conditions of
of the soil:**

**What happened
to the seed:**

Interpretation:

Continuing —

10 And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” 11 And He answered and said to them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE; 15 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN <1994>, AND I SHOULD HEAL <2390> THEM.’

16 “But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. 17 For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

What question did the disciples ask in v. 10?

What was the very next statement (v. 11, 12) Jesus made to the disciples before directly answering their question (v. 13)? Write it in your own words.

In the space below, make careful notes as to the reason that Jesus had begun speaking to them in parables (vv.14, 15).

Be sure to look up the definitions for the words *return* and *heal*.

return <1994>

heal <2390> (Also look up the root word <4762>)

Write out what Jesus would do for these people if they would open their eyes and ears to see and hear.

After explaining these things, Jesus Himself gives the commentary as to the meaning of this parable, leaving absolutely no doubt as to its meaning.

18 “Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit, and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.”

Write out *specifically* what *the seed* refers to in v. 19. Then compare v. 19 with v.11.

With this in mind, refer back to the list you made on the four different soils (p. 150) and complete the chart, specifically noting what happened to each, *why* it happened, and the outcome of each.

Logically and contextually, what is the ultimate goal of the seed when it is planted?

Can you see why this parable is not dealing with the free gift of eternal life? It is dealing solely with people who are capable of bearing spiritual fruit! And bearing fruit has to do with things *beyond* the free gift of salvation. Bearing fruit has to do with a Christian's work here and now with a view to an inheritance in the future. We will see this more clearly as we continue to study.

In your own words, write out briefly what the meaning of this parable is.

The four soils in this parable represent the willingness a person has to produce fruit with respect to the kingdom. In the way of a personal question — Which of the four soils represents your heart? Is there anything in your life that needs to change in order to produce fruit?