

Matthew, chapter 12-13

The Kingdom of Heaven: Conflict and Conquest ... Adversaries and Advancement

Jesus teaches His disciples that the Kingdom of Heaven—which He is commissioning them to proclaim—will be opposed by conflicts and adversaries; but in the end, it will advance and conquer the kingdom of the world and the Evil One.

CONTEXT & MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

1 / I have titled this lesson as I have because these two themes are clearly presented in the two chapters of this lesson text. **Chapter 12** will continue to develop and illustrate the increasingly mounting opposition that Jesus faced as His influence grew among His hearers. In contrast, **chapter 13** contains the third major discourse or teaching block that Jesus delivers to His disciples as He continues to train them in discipleship and how they must ‘**go and make disciples of all the nations**’ as He will commission them at the conclusion of Matthew’s narrative. As we have stated before in previous lessons, Matthew uses these five major discourses as the skeletal framework of His Gospel. We have called it ‘the training of the twelve’ to go, in turn, to train the nations of the world to be disciples of Jesus Christ.

2 / So, again, with this formidable chunk of Scripture to cover in this brief lesson, I can but outline the various sections and give you some salient summaries of the content of each section—and how they connect and develop the overall theme and purpose of Matthew [even as I ‘grieve’ over everything I have to leave out...].

Chapter 12 | Conflict and Adversaries

I | ch 12.1-14 | Two occasions of conflict over the Sabbath

1 / **ch 12.1-8 | Jesus and His disciples pass through some wheat fields on the Sabbath. They pluck and eat some of the grains of wheat, stirring up the vehement ire of the Pharisees.** There had been testy complaints before [9.1-8, 32-34], but now it will break out into an all-out frontal assault—and will result in the Pharisees’ **conspiring from that time how to destroy Him [v 14]**. This is what Matthew wants to record. Matthew writes these two encounters together, not because they necessarily happened back to back, but because both of them have a common theme: the mounting vocal opposition to Jesus from the Pharisees—the chief religious influencers and leaders among the people. The only “**not lawful**” act that Jesus and His disciples did was to **not conform to their man-made laws [see Deuteronomy 23.25]**. By citing David’s eating of the tabernacle bread of the Presence [shewbread] [1 Samuel 21.1-6], and the continual work that the priests performed in the Temple every Sabbath, Jesus establishes the true spirit of Sabbath laws—that “**I desire mercy, and not sacrifice**” [Hosea 6.6]—God permits acts and works of mercy like eating when you’re hungry to be performed even when other unnecessary work may be forbidden. Besides, Jesus Himself is “**something greater than the Temple**” and He was the One sanctioning the disciples’ Sabbath snack; and “**For the Son of Man [Daniel 7.13-14] is lord of the Sabbath.**”

2 / **ch 12.9-14 | Jesus enters one of ‘their synagogues’ to worship and encounter a man with a withered hand. He is accosted and challenged by the Pharisees whether it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. He does.** This, too, was a ‘set up,’ to see if they could establish some public evidence and testimony to accuse Him of breaking the Law and justify their venomous enmity against Jesus.

II | ch 12.15-21 | Matthew cites Isaiah 42.1-3 as a fulfillment of Jesus’ Messianic identity and mission.

This is another one of Matthew’s numerous ‘OT fulfillment formulas’ that are written in throughout the Gospel. The import of this Isaiah quotation and why it is written here is to show that, even though the Pharisees virulently opposed Jesus as His most public and vocal adversaries, Yahweh approved Him. Quoting from **Isaiah 42.1-3**, Jesus was Yahweh’s Servant: **chosen, Beloved, Spirit-filled, just, and gentle [full of mercy and grace]**. AND, Matthew adds another prophetic statement to the redemptive plan of the

New Covenant and Kingdom of Heaven to include the Gentiles—nations: **“...and in His Name the Gentiles will hope.”**

III | ch 12.22-37 | A third healing encounter incites more antagonism and opposition from Jesus’ adversaries—this time leading them to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit who was the Spirit and power of Jesus’ mission. Jesus responds to their blasphemous accusations by exposing the evil of their hearts and warning them of the judgment to come if they do not repent.

1 / Yet a third healing act performed by Jesus inspired the people to ask **“Can this be the Son of David?”** and also to invoke yet again the wrath of the Pharisees...and their accusations against Jesus that He was an agent of Satan and demon possessed: **“It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons.”** Jesus not only logically refutes their self-defeating charge, but he turns it back on them...and He warns them of committing the ‘unpardonable sin’ that **“will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come”**—the **blasphemy against the Holy Spirit**. They had witnessed the undeniable work of the Holy Spirit [see v 18] by whom Jesus worked, and yet intentionally, insistently rejected Yahweh’s witness to Jesus’ Kingdom Authority.

2 / The next section, vv 33-37, identifies these adversaries as bad trees bearing bad fruit [**“for the tree is known by its fruit”**] and warns them [and us] that we will give account to God, in the Person of Jesus Himself, for every careless word that we speak. This should serve as a sobering warning to all of us!

IV | ch 12.38-45 | Some of the scribes and Pharisees openly and brazenly challenge Jesus:

“Teacher, we wish to see a sign [authenticating miracle] from you”—as if they needed more evidence of His Messianic Kingdom Authority! Jesus promises them no sign...other than the ‘sign’ of Jonah which would be fulfilled in His resurrection from death. And He calls on them to repent like the Ninevites did.

1 / The hateful and bitter attacks only escalate by their demands for Jesus to certify and authenticate Himself and His Kingdom Authority *to them—to their satisfaction*: **“Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.”** And this, in the face of the works that Jesus has done, not only in this immediate context, but all the other works He has done from the beginning of His ministry. Jesus will not cow to their petty, self-assumed superiority over Him to judge Him. He promises them only one miraculous ‘sign’ or miracle: **“the sign of the prophet Jonah”**—His impending resurrection. Further, Jesus cites two *Gentile* responses to the Messianic prophecies/types of Him in both Jonah and Solomon, contrasting them with the rejection of **“this generation”** under the influence and leadership of the Pharisees and scribes. AND, again Jesus establishes His Kingdom Authority by elevating Himself: **“...and behold, something greater than Jonah is here...and behold, something greater than Solomon is here”** [link these statements with v 6].

2 / vv 43-45 | Jesus refers back to the charges of His accused liaison and alliance with Satan and demons in vv 22-32. Previously Jesus described His mission and that of the **Kingdom of God** as being an invasion of Satan’s ‘house’ and plundering Satan’s goods, which are the souls of those He came to save. Now, in these statements, Jesus gives this parable to tell **“this evil generation”** that it is THEY who are the ones who are under the influence of demons. Jesus warns us against half-way reform or heartless, insincere religion. In vv 22-32, He had come to **“enter the strong man’s house, bind him, and plunder his goods,”** that is, the souls Satan had been holding in captivity. Here, in vv 43-45, He warns **this evil generation** that if they do not repent and believe in Him, they will be inexorably and inescapably captivated by Satan.

V | ch 12.46-50 | Jesus encounters opposition to the Kingdom of Heaven—not only from the religious rulers of ‘this generation,’ but also from His own family.

This is a sad commentary on yet another front of adversarial opposition to Jesus’ ministry—this time from His own family. They had come to ‘intervene’ and ‘rescue’ Him from Himself, fearing and accusing Him of ‘going off the deep end.’ Compare this account with the parallel **Mark 3.21, 31-35**. This is Jesus’ own experience and testimony to the fore-warning He had given His disciples in **Matthew 10.21-22, 34-39**.

Chapter 13 | Conquest and Advancement | The parables of ‘the mystery [revealed secrets]’ of the Kingdom of Heaven—how it will be received and grow in the world during this age.

1 / Now we move into the third major discourse or teaching block that Jesus delivers as He is making disciples and teaches them how to **“Go and make disciples of all the nations.”** This also is what Jesus teaches them that they must, in turn, **“teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.”**

2 / IF they must expect adversarial conflict and opposition to their proclaiming **The Kingdom of Heaven**, they must also know that **The Kingdom of Heaven** will advance and grow until **“...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Glory of The LORD as the waters cover the sea” [Habakkuk 2.14; Isaiah 11.9].**

VI | ch 13.1-9 | The parable of the sower and the seeds

This parable will serve as the foundation, basis, and interpretive key to all the other parables. Indeed, Jesus says in Mark’s account: **“Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” [Mark 4.13].** Jesus will explain this parable in vv **18-23**, giving the significance of the different types of ‘soils’ or hearers of the Gospel of the Kingdom. But He uses figures and illustrations that were familiar to them to describe how different persons would receive the **Gospel of the Kingdom** He is sending them to proclaim. As the sower sows the seeds of the Gospel, some of the seeds will fall on [1] the beaten, hard-packed pathways between the fields—only to be picked up and devoured by the birds, [2] onto rocky ground with shallow soil—only to be withered by the sun because it had no depth of soil, [3] among thorns and weeds—only to be choked out and robbed by the invasive roots of the weeds, [4] but other seeds will fall on good soil and spring up in healthy, productive growth. And so it is...

VII | ch 13.10-17 | Jesus explains why He speaks in parables ... and supports His use of parables as the fulfillment of Isaiah 6.9-10.

1 / All of these parables are revealing **“the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven.”** The word that Jesus uses is *mysteria*, or ‘mysteries.’ The definition of a Bible ‘mystery’ is not an unsolvable riddle, but rather something that was previously hidden or unknown, but is now being clearly revealed. God is the One who first shrouds it in cloudy secrecy and mystery—and God is the only One who can sovereignly and clearly reveal it in His time. The reason Jesus spoke in parables is both to elucidate and obfuscate. He will elucidate **The Kingdom of Heaven** to those who ask to understand and receive it; and He will further obfuscate it to those who refuse to believe in Him and receive His Kingdom Authority [see ch 11.25-27].
2 / This fulfills the commission and prophecy that Yahweh gave Isaiah in his own time and generation in **Isaiah 6.9-10**. This is a resounding testimony to both God’s absolute sovereignty in the hearing and receiving of the Gospel and also of the undeniable responsibility of every human hearer of the Gospel.

VIII | ch 13.18-23 | Jesus explains the meaning of the sower and the seeds parable—four types of hearers of the Gospel of the Kingdom

Now Jesus returns to the key parable of the sower and the seeds [see vv 1-9]. He describes each type of hearer of the Gospel. NOTE also how in all of the activity and proclamation of **The Kingdom of Heaven**, there is another kingdom that is at work opposing the Gospel—seeking to subvert, thwart, undermine, and defeat the Gospel...keep it from being heard and received in faith. As Jesus explains in v 18, **“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 another commentary and illustration of the spiritual warfare that we are constantly and continuously engaged in. See again Jesus’ repeated exposes’ of the **Satanic and demonic activities that confront us in chs 12.22-32, 43-45.**

IX | ch 13.24-30 | Jesus ‘puts before them’ the companion ‘parable of the weeds’ ... how the ‘enemy’—‘the god of this age’—will seek to counterfeit and subvert the Gospel and the Kingdom of Heaven during this age.

Once again, Jesus highlights the constant and continuous spiritual warfare that will attack and oppose the

ministry of the Kingdom of Heaven. Both kingdoms will grow together. As His disciples go forth into all the world to preach the Gospel—sowing the good seeds of the Gospel—the enemy will be busy with his own sowing. Except the enemy will make every attempt to counterfeit his false religion and make it look like the true one. When the good wheat and this worthless darnel-weed are sprouting and coming up, the darnel-weed looks remarkably like the wheat. It doesn't really manifest itself until it grows more to maturity and doesn't bear good grain. The temptation is to try to pull them up. But, inevitably, if you do that, you will pull up some good stalks with the bad...or else their roots will be so intertwined, that you will end up uprooting some good wheat at the same time. Often, it is difficult to tell the difference between a true believer and a false one merely by observing external appearances and actions [see ch 7.21-23]. But Jesus, the Judge of all, who knows our hearts, will separate the worthless, faithless chaff from the genuine wheat when He comes at the end of this age to harvest, separate His believing saints from the false professors, burn the ungodly in Hell, and gather His elect into the 'grainary / barn' of the Kingdom of Heaven. **See the more specific application of the symbols in vv 36-43...**

X | ch 13.31-33 | Jesus delivers two more parables: mustard seed and leaven.

Both a mustard seed and spores of leaven are among the smallest of elements; yet when they are planted or kneaded into even large measures of dough, they grow exponentially larger than their original size. So it is with the **Kingdom of Heaven**. **"The Kingdom of Heaven is like..."** Jesus gave these two parables to encourage His disciples—both then and now. The **Kingdom of Heaven** started very small—considered to be insignificant both by its first contemporaries and continuing on down through the generations to us. It is opposed, rejected, despised, and fought against from all sides and in every way. Yet, God has made it grow, and it will, in the end, **"fill the whole earth with the knowledge of the Glory of the LORD."** Christ's Kingdom of Heaven IS the right side of history!

XI | ch 13.34-35 | Jesus reiterates—explains again—that His parables fulfill the prophecies of His Messianic mission, this time from Psalm 78.2 ... and also the purpose His parables served.

Matthew cites yet another OT prophecy that said Messiah would teach in parables, this one from **Psalm 78.2**. NOTE: here is another citation of what a Bible 'mystery' is: **"I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."** See also Ephesians 8-10; Colossians 1.26.

XII | ch 13.36-43 | Jesus returns to the parable of the weeds to forewarn and explain to His disciples how 'the sons of the Kingdom' will be opposed by 'the sons of the evil one.'

This is an explanatory commentary on vv 24-30...

XIII | ch 13.44-51 | Jesus tells yet three more parables to illustrate what the 'the Kingdom of Heaven is like': hidden treasure, pearl of great value, and fish caught in a net – then follows with a rich promise to those who are 'trained for the Kingdom of Heaven' by receiving, understanding, and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of Heaven.

These parables of the treasure, pearl, and fish share a common theme: the inestimable worth of **The Kingdom of Heaven**. The parable of the **"scribe who has been trained for the Kingdom of Heaven"** goes back over everything Jesus has taught in this discourse; and He blesses His disciples for their interest, their inquisitive questions—and especially for the gracious blessing of God to give them understanding and their high estimation of the value of **The Kingdom of Heaven**. The things that are **'new...and old'** are those hidden mysteries of Christ and His Kingdom that are contained in the OT—and then how they are now revealed and fulfilled and granted to us in Christ!

XIV | ch 13.53-58 | Jesus' lessons on the conflict and adversaries of the Kingdom of Heaven are reinforced yet again by His rejection by His hometown folks in Nazareth.

Once again, Matthew bears witness to the conflict and adversaries **The Kingdom of Heaven** will encounter in this rejection experience Jesus encountered in His hometown of Nazareth. **See Luke 4.16-30.**