THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES
(Matt. 13:10-11)

In Matthew 13, the ministry of Jesus took a stark turn. He now began to speak to them extensively in PARABLES.

Matthew 13:10 (NKJV)
10 And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?"

Clearly, how Jesus was addressing the crowd with parables at this point was different in the eyes of the disciples than what Jesus had previously been doing. This was different, and they knew it.

Previously, Jesus had used parabolic language on occasion to illustrate His message, as seen, for example, in the wise man building his house upon the rock and the foolish man building upon the sand as seen in Matthew 7:24-27; or in the language of new wine in old wineskins in Matthew 9:16-17, etc.

But this was different. Now parables formed the entire basis of His message to them, and they didn't get it. Up to this point in His ministry, Jesus had never taught the crowds strictly in the form of parables. Therefore, the disciples wanted to know WHY this change. They couldn't understand why Jesus just didn't tell them "***straight out***" what He was wanting to say.

Matthew 13:11 (NKJV)
11 He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.

The parables did two things – they ***revealed*** further kingdom truth to true disciples, and they ***concealed*** this same truth from those not accepting of the kingdom truth which they had already been given. This principle is consistent with what Jesus taught in Matthew 7:6.

> **Matthew 7:6 (NKJV)**
> **6** "**Do not give what is holy to the dogs**; **nor cast your pearls before swine**, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

There is a time when it is inappropriate to give more of God's sacred truth to those who are hardened to it and blasphemously opposed. The nation as a whole (as led by its leaders) had reached that point, and therefore further kingdom truth was hidden from them. Yes, Christ was still reaching out to individuals, but the nation as a whole was in sync with the religious leaders and therefore would not receive further kingdom truth. It would be hidden from them.

Note the word "***mysteries***". There has been so much confusion here and really needlessly so. If interpreters would just consistently apply proper rules of interpretation, the understanding would be clear.

The word MYSTERY in the New Testament consistently refers to something that previously was a **divine secret** but now is made known through further revelation. When we speak of a "mystery" - in our common understanding, it refers to something that is presently unknown. But as used in the NT, it refers to something that was previously unknown but is now revealed. It is a divine secret that can only be known by revelation, but now God is revealing it. So, a mystery in the NT refers to God's revealed secret, which is therefore no longer a secret.

> **Colossians 1:26 (NKJV)**
> **26** the **mystery** which has been **hidden** from ages and from generations, but **now has been revealed** to His saints.

Again "mystery" in the N.T. refers to that which was formerly hidden and therefore unknown, but is now revealed and therefore known.
Note Christ is talking specifically here about "***the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven".*** In other words, Christ is talking about kingdom truth previously unknown but which is now being revealed in these parables.

The language "***kingdom of heaven***" throughout Matthew refers to God's Messianic kingdom rule on earth. It is spoken of as the ***"kingdom of heaven***" because it is heaven (God) that brings it about. But clearly it is talking about the kingdom the Messiah will set up on earth that was prophesied about in the OT.

This very same language, "***kingdom of heaven,***" was that which was used by John the Baptist who prepared the way for the Lord (Mt. 3:2). It is the very same language Jesus used when He entered into His ministry (Mt. 4:17). And it is the very same language the disciples used as they went about in Jesus' name performing kingdom sign miracles (Mt. 10:7).

> **Matthew 3:2 (NKJV)**

2 and saying, “Repent, for the **kingdom of heaven** is at hand!”

Matthew 4:17 (NKJV)
17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the **kingdom of heaven** is at hand.”

Matthew 10:7 (NKJV)
7 And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The **kingdom of heaven** is at hand.’

Clearly, by this language the disciples understood Jesus to be talking about the very same Messianic kingdom prophesied in the OT Scriptures. And the Lord never corrected His disciples for holding to the idea of a literal earthly kingdom as foretold in the OT (cf. Matt. 19:28; 20:20-23). At the end of Christ’s earthly ministry, they still had the same idea of a coming earthly kingdom as they did all along (cf. Lk. 24:21). After His resurrection, Christ affirmed the idea of a coming literal earthly kingdom as the Jews hoped for, as seen in Acts 1:6-7.

So, with all this background in Matthew, with the exact same kingdom language, should we then look at Matthew 13:11 and claim it means something completely different? Consistency says we should not do that.

> “If the kingdom of the heavens was so defined [as a literal/earthly kingdom] in the preceding portions of Matthew, what is the basis for changing its meaning here?” ***– Stanley Toussaint***

The answer is: There is no basis for such a change! This is why I say in the matter of proper interpretation let Israel consistently stand for Israel; let the kingdom consistently represent the kingdom consistent with the OT prophets, and let the Church consistently represent the Church; and in doing so you will be on solid footing with regard to consistent sound doctrine. But if you begin to confuse the kingdom with the Church or the Church with Israel, you will be all over the map, and there will be much confusion.

Many, even in our basic dispensational camp, want to claim that Christ in the parables was now introducing what they like to call “***a mystery form of the kingdom,***” otherwise known as a “***spiritual form of the kingdom***”. But that is NOT what the text says. It does not introduce some new SPIRITUAL FORM of the kingdom, but rather reveals NEW truths about the SAME coming kingdom that were previously unrevealed. The same old kingdom hope is in view, but now new insights are being introduced to the true disciples while at the same time being hidden from those hardened to

kingdom truth. It's not a new form of the kingdom being introduced, but rather NEW KINGDOM INSIGHTS.

Some claim this new form of the kingdom now includes both saved and unsaved people, but again that is totally inconsistent. There is no new form of the kingdom, and lost people never have any part in the true kingdom at all, as consistently brought out by Jesus' teaching in Matthew (5:3, 10, 20; 6:33; 7:21; 11:11; 18:3).

> **Matthew 18:3 (NKJV)**
> **3** and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, **unless you are converted** and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom means the kingdom, and it consistently means the exact same literal/earthly kingdom the prophets prophesied about, and that which Jesus came offering to Israel on the condition of repentance.

But right there is the rub. Israel did not repent, and therefore the kingdom offer was withdrawn – therefore they could not go forward into the kingdom. Remember that both John the Baptist, followed by Jesus came on the scene saying, "***Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"*** (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). The kingdom was being offered, but on the condition of repentance. The nation had now, as a whole, hardened itself under the religious leaders and were not open to repentance.

Therefore, there was a change in the kingdom program at this point as presented by Christ in the form of the parables. These are kingdom parables in Matthew 13, giving further kingdom insight regarding God's kingdom program going forward.

As we will see in our study going forward a **KEY new insight** at this point, as brought out in the parables, is that because of the Jews' rejection of the kingdom truth, there would now be **a DELAY** before the kingdom would be set up. This is the MAJOR point. Whereas the Jews from the OT Scriptures expected the Messiah to come and immediately usher in the kingdom, there would now be a pause. That was new information. Yes, the OT hinted at it, and looking back, we can now clearly see it in places like Isaiah 53, but prior to this time it was not clear.

Note the earlier emphasis:

> **Matthew 3:2 (NKJV)**
> **2** and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven **is at hand!"**

> **Matthew 4:17 (NKJV)**
> **17** From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven **<u>is at hand."</u>**

After this time, Christ now began speaking to the crowds in parables, as seen in Matthew 13. After this, **<u>NEVER again</u>** do we see the kingdom being spoken of as being "***at hand***". ***<u>That offer has now been withdrawn and that is the point of the parables!</u>*** Further kingdom insight now shows there is going to be an interim period. And these kingdom parables in Matthew 13 not only show the reality of this delay, but also what will be the nature of this interim period.

The Jews knew full well of the promise of the coming Messiah and that He brings in the kingdom, but they did not know about the <u>two comings</u>. This reality of two comings is a BIG part of this new kingdom insight that Christ was bringing forth in the parables that was hidden from the nation at large.

You see, the Jews did not clearly see the truth of the cross until after the resurrection. They assumed one coming – not two. They assumed if Jesus was the Christ, He was here to set up the kingdom. And yes, that would have been true if Israel had repented. But they didn't, and hence a delay was put in place. This too is part of kingdom truth.

> "With hindsight, we now know that there will be two comings of Jesus and that kingdom blessings will be part of His second coming. But the two comings of Jesus was not revealed until Matthew 13."
>
> – ***Dr. Michael Vlach***

We are not in the kingdom right now in any form. Of course, God's sovereign reign is always in place – but we are talking about the Messianic kingdom. That is the whole context of Matthew. The Messianic kingdom has been put on hold, and <u>we live in a time of interim</u>. And as we know from further revelation, the entire Church Age takes place in this interim.

Of course, nothing takes God by surprise. He always knew how Israel would respond. He always knew Christ would go to the cross. He always knew the reality of the coming delay. He always knew the reality of the two comings. That does not change the reality of Christ's legitimate offer of the kingdom as being at hand on the condition of repentance. The offer was legitimate and was part of God's sovereign plan, as was everything else.

> Humanly speaking, the kingdom, instead of being brought in immediately, was postponed. From the divine viewpoint, the plan

> always included what actually happened. The human responsibility remains, however, and the rejection of the kingdom from this standpoint caused the postponement of the promised kingdom on earth. – ***John Walvoord***
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> ***Footnote:*** We are not presently in the kingdom but rather are praying for the kingdom to come as Christ taught us to pray (Mt. 6:10). Even though we are not directly "kingdom building," yet kingdom truth has application to us in this sense. We are seeking to win souls who will ultimately be in the kingdom. This is our great role in relation to the coming kingdom.

The whole of history is marching towards the kingdom. And in the end every person will either share in the kingdom or be thrust from it. The great ***"kingdom work"*** of the Church is sharing the gospel with people who, when they believe it, become kingdom citizens in the sense that they will share in Christ's coming kingdom (cf. Col. 1:13). Believers are spoken of as being "***the sons of the kingdom,***" as seen in Matthew 13:38. This ultimately defines all true believers!