

# Reading Matthew 13 as a prophetic discourse: The four parables presented in private

**Author:**Jacob J. Scholtz<sup>1</sup>**Affiliation:**<sup>1</sup>Department of Old and New Testament, Stellenbosch University, South Africa**Correspondence to:**

Jacob Scholtz

**Email:**

jacojanscholtz@gmail.com

**Postal address:**14 Botrivier Street,  
Protea Valley, Bellville 7530,  
South Africa**Dates:**

Received: 30 Sept. 2014

Accepted: 13 Feb. 2015

Published: 20 Apr. 2015

**How to cite this article:**Scholtz, J.J., 2015, 'Reading Matthew 13 as a prophetic discourse: The four parables presented in private', *In die Skriflig* 49(1), Art. #1887, 7 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i1.1887>**Note:**

This article is based on a study at the Stellenbosch University (Discipline Group Old and New Testament, Faculty of Theology).

**Copyright:**© 2015. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS  
OpenJournals. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.**Read online:**

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

The task of Jesus' disciples might be to juxtapose 'new and old' unconditional prophecies of the kingdom of heaven. After describing its setting, the four parables in Matthew 13, presented in private, are considered from a pre-millennial perspective. The parable of the hidden treasure may indicate how Jesus Christ first authenticates and then hides his authority and power to rule as King in terms of the Davidic Covenant over the literal Davidic kingdom – before he then goes to the cross. Having been to the cross, the parable of the pearl merchant may show how the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom commences when Christ Jesus starts his pearl ministry as High Priest in terms of the New Covenant. The parable of the dragnet has in view the transition from the spiritual phase of the kingdom into its future phase. An overview of the four privately given parables of Matthew 13 is then provided. After this a summary of the new and old prophecies contained in the eight parables of Matthew 13 is presented, followed by the conclusion.

**'n Ondersoek na Matteus 13 as 'n profetiese diskoers: Die vier gelykenisse wat privaat aangebied is.** Die taak van Jesus se dissipels sou kon wees om 'nuwe en ou' onvoorwaardelike profesieë van die koninkryk van die hemele met mekaar te vergelyk. Nadat die konteks beskryf is, word die vier gelykenisse in Matteus 13 wat privaat aangebied is vanuit 'n pre-millenniale perspektief oorweeg. Die gelykenis van die verborge skat sou kon aantoon hoe Jesus Christus sy gesag en mag om as Koning in terme van die Dawidiese Verbond oor die letterlike Dawidiese koninkryk te regeer, eers bevestig en dan verberg – waarna Hy kruis toe gaan. Nadat Hy gekruisig is, sou die gelykenis van die pêrelkoper kon aantoon hoe die eerste, geestelike fase van die koninkryk 'n aanvang neem as Christus Jesus sy pêrelbediening as Hoëpriester in terme van die Nuwe Verbond begin. Die gelykenis van die net toon die oorgang van die geestelike fase van die koninkryk van die hemele na die toekomstige letterlike fase. 'n Oorsig oor die vier gelykenisse van Matteus 13 wat privaat aangebied is, word dan verskaf. Daarna word 'n opsomming van die nuwe en ou profesieë wat die agt gelykenisse van Matteus 13 bevat gegee, gevolg deur die slot.

## Introduction

With 'this generation's' lack of response to Christ evident even in cities (Mt 11:20–24),<sup>1</sup> the Lord of heaven and earth hides (ἐκρυψας) 'these things' – the mighty works of Christ – from the wise and learned, but reveals them to little children (11:25; cf. 11:2–6). Shortly thereafter, in Matthew's presentation, this theme of concealing and revealing is continued when Jesus discloses – indirectly through parables – things kept secret (κεκρυμμένα) since the foundation of the world (13:35; cf. 13:1–53a). As this parabolic discourse in Matthew is concluded, Jesus requires his disciples to understand 'all these things' about the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven and to bring forth what is 'new and old' (13:11, 51–52). As proposed in the first article about the parables of Matthew 13 (Scholtz 2015), this discourse can be read as a collective presentation ('all these things') of unconditional 'new' prophecies of the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom juxtaposed with unconditional 'old' prophecies regarding the establishment of the future, literal phase of the Davidic kingdom.<sup>2</sup> After focusing on the contextual setting, a pre-millennial reading of the four privately given parables of Matthew 13 is presented. Then an overview of the four privately presented parables of Matthew 13 is provided. After this a summary of the new and old prophecies contained in the eight parables of Matthew 13 is given, followed by a conclusion.<sup>3</sup>

1. Further references to the Gospel of Matthew will be indicated only by chapters and verses.

2. This second article of a three-part series about Matthew 13 follows the same theological presuppositions and research focus as detailed in the first article (Scholtz 2015). Familiarity with the first article is assumed in the presentation of this second article.

3. Understanding the prophecies contained in these parables may require the identification of specific, prophetic referents for the parables of Matthew 13. A person, process or event can be considered a specific, prophetic referent if it is *significant* to God's kingdom and redemption purposes.

## The setting

After the four parables spoken in public, the setting changes geographically as Jesus leaves the boat, sends the multitude away and goes into the house (13:1–33, 36). The audience now comprises only those who have already left all to follow him. The temporal setting, however, remains the same, as four more parables are given on the same day (13:1, 36, 53a).<sup>4</sup> Regarding the narrative setting, the ‘story of Jesus is one of conflict, so that its plot turns on conflict’ (Kingsbury 1992:347). Moreover, this key motif in Matthew is a conflict over *authority* (Turner 2008:44). Whereas Matthew 11 sketches the national rejection of Jesus implicitly (cf. 11:20–24), Matthew 12 pictures an explicit rejection and consequent plot to destroy Jesus (12:14). For the first time in Matthew’s story, the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities has intensified to the point where it has become ‘mortal’, a ‘struggle to the death’ and ‘beyond reconciliation’ (Kingsbury 1992:351–352). After the Sabbath controversies, followed by a miracle (12:1–23), the religious leaders of ‘this generation’ in Israel reject God’s authority when they attribute ‘what is in fact the work of God’s Spirit (v. 28) to his ultimate enemy, Satan’ (France 2007:482). According to Fruchtenbaum (1989:617), this unpardonable sin is the ‘national rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus by Israel whilst he was physically present on the basis that he was demon possessed. This sin is unpardonable, and judgment was set.’ The narrative setting of Jesus’ parabolic teaching, therefore, comes at a point of crisis: ‘The kingdom parables, then, were not intended to define the kingdom in its offer but to explain the effects of its rejection’ (Beacham 1996:232). Luz (2001) argues for the following interpretation of the interruption of the narrative by the parable discourse:

Our thesis is: *It condenses and anticipates the story of the entire Gospel of Matthew in a concentrated form.* What will happen in the story of Jesus as a whole is anticipated here and taught to disciples. In this sense – and not for formal reasons – the parables discourse is the center of the entire gospel. (p. 295)

Regarding the literary structure of Matthew 13, some commentators (Nolland 2005:522) propose a triadic structure of Matthew 13, but Hagner (2000:364) convincingly argues that no structural analysis can ignore the break at verse 36, despite the fact that ‘such a division separates the parable of the weeds from its interpretation. ... This change of audience is a major factor to which all other structural features must be subordinate.’ Many commentators (Wenham 1979:516–522; Blomberg 1990:113–114) agree that Matthew 13 seems to be structured chiastically. Combrink (1983:71) and Derickson (2006:426–428) even view the Gospel of Matthew as an eleven-part chiastic structure, the centre containing the parables of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>5</sup> If so, then Matthew 13:34–43 is not only the chiastic centre of the chapter, but of the whole Gospel and thus exegetically significant. Following the work

4. In agreement with Carson (1995:300; cf. Toussaint 1980:169–170; Nolland 2005:522–523), the parables of Matthew 13 were all given on the occasion of ‘that same day’, the day on which some of the controversies described in Matthew 12 occurred.

5. Matthew 13 is enveloped by two rejections: the first by Jesus’ blood relatives (12:46–50) and the second in Nazareth (13:53b–58; cf. Derickson 2006:432; Snodgrass 2008:174). Jesus calls his disciples his family, those doing the will of the Father (12:48–50).

of Constable (2014:206; cf. Stallard 2000:3–7), this literary structure of Matthew 13 may be proposed:

- A. Introduction (13:1–3a)
  - B. First parable to all: The parable of the sower (13:3b–9)
    - C. Q&A: Purpose (reveal & conceal) & explanation (13:10–23)
      - D. Three parables to all: tares, mustard & leaven (13:24–33)
        - E. Purpose (fulfilment) and Q&A: explanation (13:34–43)
      - D.’ Three parables to disciples: treasure, merchant & dragnet (13:44–48)
    - C.’ Explanation and Q&A: Purpose (understanding all) (13:49–51)
    - B.’ Last parable to the disciples: The parable of the householder (13:52)
  - A.’ Conclusion (13:53).

What is so important about Matthew 13:34–43? Firstly, the parable of the tares of the field may teach that the first, spiritual or new phase of the kingdom of heaven can *exist* in terms of the New Covenant without the literal, future phase of the kingdom of heaven having been *established* in terms of the Davidic Covenant (Scholtz 2015). Thus, the kingdom of heaven exists-but-is-not-yet-established. Until the Messianic kingdom is established, judgement of unbelieving ‘tares’ has been postponed and good and evil will co-exist until Jesus’ Second Advent. This observation is consistent with Toussaint’s (1980) understanding of the purpose of Matthew’s Gospel, namely to explain God’s kingdom programme as it relates to Jesus, to Israel and to the Church:

Matthew then presents the kingdom program in three aspects. First, the earthly literal kingdom was offered to Israel in the person of Jesus, the Messiah, at His first coming. Second, the kingdom was postponed because Israel rejected its Messiah. This postponed kingdom will be established at Christ’s second coming. Third, Christ Jesus is now engaged in building His church, composed of those who in this age are the heirs of the kingdom. (p. 20)

A second reason why Matthew 13:34–43 may be exegetically significant is because of the ‘larger development in Matthew’s narrative concerning the shift away from ministry specifically centered on Israel (e.g., Matt. 10:5–6) to a different focal point’ (Stallard 2000:7). A third reason is the *possibility* of using details referenced in the parable of the tares of the field consistently when considering other parables in Matthew 13.

## The parable of the hidden treasure

The disciples come to Jesus in the house and ask him to explain the parable of the tares of the field (13:36). Amongst other referents, Jesus identifies the field as the world, the sower as the Son of Man and the field is specifically ‘his field’ (τῷ ἀργῶ αὐτοῦ; 13:24, 37–38). Jesus has authority over the field since it is ‘his field’. In the parable of the mustard seed, which the disciples heard earlier that day, the field was also described as ‘his field’ (ἐν τῷ ἀργῶ αὐτοῦ; 13:31), that is, belonging to the

man who sowed the mustard seed. It was proposed that the same man (the Son of Man) and the same field (the world) are in view in the parable of the mustard seed (Scholtz 2015), a view which is contextually consistent (Luz 2001:262; Nolland 2005:552). Then Jesus tells this parable: 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field' (13:44; NKJV).

What the man buys is not the hidden treasure, but the field in which it is hidden. In agreement with Nolland (2005:564–565), contextually the reference 'in the field' provides 'a link back to vv. 24 and 31. In both those cases the field already belonged to the key figure in the parable, but by the end of the brief narrative the same will be true in the present parable'. Even if this contextual link can be demonstrated, can it be argued that the man buying the field in the parable of the hidden treasure *must* be the Son of Man?

The rule of God the Father over his universal kingdom is directly administered through the divine Son without a human intermediary (11:27; Beacham 1996:235).<sup>6</sup> However, God administers his rule over the mediatorial kingdom on earth indirectly through a *human* representative. God gave Adam the authority to rule over his mediatorial kingdom, but Adam disobeyed God. In Matthew, not only does Satan have his own kingdom, but he can offer 'the kingdoms of this world and their glory' to Jesus (4:8–9; 12:26). This 'shortcut to fullest messianic authority' (Carson 1995:114) is Satan's counter-kingdom-offer. From a kingdom perspective, Christ must eliminate any wrongful claims over the world that Satan may have had as a result of the first Adam's fall. From the perspective of redemption and salvation, Christ must atone for humankind's sin against God (cf. Gn 3:15). Focusing on authority, Constable (2014) states:

God restricted Jesus' authority before His resurrection because of His role as the Suffering Servant. Following His resurrection, God broadened the sphere in which Jesus exercised authority (cf. 4:8–10). He became the One through whom God now mediates "all authority" (cf. Dan. 7:14; Phil. 2:5–11). This was Jesus' great claim. (p. 434)

The ministry of Jesus *in his humanity* prior to the cross was restricted to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (15:24), but after the cross, the resurrected Lord receives all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18). Now God the Son not only has the right to rule over all things which were delivered to him by the Father (11:27), but Jesus, in his humanity, also has the right to rule over the mediatorial kingdom of God over all the earth. Since the way to receive all authority in heaven and on earth and to provide redemption is through the cross, the field had to have been purchased by Jesus in his humanity.

6. Beacham (1996:235) defines the universal kingdom as 'God's macrocosmic rule through his exclusive, sovereign dominion over all of creation, a rule without pause or end'. Included in the universal kingdom, and as a smaller subset of it, is God's rule administered indirectly through a human mediator *just over the earth*, and this 'earth-oriented, time-related, ethnic-centred kingdom is called, by some, the mediatorial kingdom of God' (Beacham 1996:235). The Theocratic and Messianic (or Davidic) kingdoms are phases of the mediatorial kingdom of God.

Jesus — and *only* Jesus — could make that purchase. Jesus 'sells all that he has and buys that field' at the cross (13:44; cf. Gibbs 1987:36). It is therefore proposed that the *man* who finds the treasure, re-hides it, sells all that he has and then buys the field, is Jesus Christ; the *field* is again viewed as the *world*, and after the cross it becomes 'his field' (cf. 13:37–38).<sup>7</sup>

Matthew refers to treasure in 6:19–21; 12:35; 13:44, 52 and in 19:21. According to Vine (1997:1164), 'treasure' may refer to a place of safekeeping, such as a casket or storehouse or, metaphorically speaking, a heart (cf. 12:35; 13:52), or it may refer to the valuable thing itself (cf. 6:19–21; 13:44; 19:21). In Matthew, obedience to the will of God is sometimes rewarded with more authority. As already argued, this is true of Jesus in his humanity (15:24; 28:18–20), but it is also true of the 12 apostles (19:28) and other faithful servants (10:40–42; 19:29; 25:21, 23). It is proposed that the treasure in Matthew 13:44 refers to the authority to rule in the kingdom of heaven. If so, when and how does Jesus find this treasure-authority, and why does he hide it again before selling all he has to buy the field?

At the baptism of Jesus, God the Father reveals that Jesus is the beloved and anointed Son and the Spirit of God descends on Christ (3:16–17). As also announced by 'more than a prophet', the Son of David is given the right to rule as King in Israel, not only over the house of David, but also over all the house of Jacob (1:1; Lk 1:32–33). Immediately thereafter, Jesus is tempted as Satan offers Christ the kingdoms of the world and their glory (4:8, 10). When Jesus' public ministry starts, he authenticates to Israel his Messianic claims through his words and numerous miracle-deeds and he presents the kingdom of heaven to Israel as being at hand (4:17–12:28). Although his authoritative teaching and deeds astonishes (cf. 7:28–29; 8:27), the Messiahship of Jesus is rejected and his mighty works are also rejected by *this generation* in Israel (11:2–12:45). When national repentance and salvation of *this generation* in Israel become impossible because of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and when it is clear *this generation* will not accept God's anointed king over them (cf. Dt 17:14–15; Mt 11:2–12:45), the establishment of the kingdom of heaven in Israel is postponed.<sup>8</sup>

The treasure, proposed to be the power and authority granted to the King of the Jews to establish and rule the Messianic kingdom in Israel, is now hidden. Fruchtenbaum (1989:625–626) notes that, from this point in Matthew's presentation, the purpose of Jesus' miracles is no longer to authenticate his Messianic claims to this generation in Israel. Previously, various authenticating signs were given, but now the *only sign* given to an evil and adulterous generation will be the sign of Jonah (12:39–40). Previously parables were

7. If the field is the world, Jesus warns that it is possible to gain the world, but at the expense of losing one's soul, presumably by yielding to Satan (16:26; cf. 4:8–9). Therefore, as long as Satan is still permitted to sow tares in the field (13:25, 39), the committed disciple must deny him- or herself, take up his or her cross and follow Jesus: thus die to the world, not try to buy it (6:19–20; 16:24). Suffering comes before glory (cf. Mt 20:21–23; 1 Pt 1:11).

8. This is also discussed in the first article in this three-part series about the parables of Matthew 13 (Scholtz 2015) and in more detail elsewhere (Scholtz 2014:3–6).



used to illustrate truth, but from that time on Jesus teaches the multitudes *only* in parables (13:34; cf. 13:11). Previously the Davidic kingdom was at hand, but after Matthew 13 it is neither near, nor is the gospel of the kingdom preached until it is again used with reference to the Second Advent (Bailey 1998:176; cf. Scholtz 2014:5).<sup>9</sup> The treasure was hidden on the day the unpardonable sin was committed – on the same day these mysteries of the kingdom were given.<sup>10</sup>

Commenting on Matthew 11:26, Carson (1995:275) notes that Jesus delights in ‘his Father’s revealing and concealing’. For Christ, it is a joy to glorify the Father in heaven, who will reward openly what is done for him in secret (6:4). For the joy set before him, Jesus obeys the Father by going to the cross, not only providing atonement for sin, but also purchasing the field by bruising Satan’s head (cf. Gn 3:15; Mt 12:39–40). It is submitted that, even though the Lord received all authority in heaven and on earth after the cross (28:18), the treasure is still hidden, for Christ Jesus does not already exercise this authority as King on earth in a mediatorial sense in terms of the Davidic Covenant: ‘Even though the Son of David received the right to rule the kingdom of heaven in Israel (cf. Mt 3:16–17; Lk 1:32–33), his exercise of this rule was contingent upon Israel accepting him as the messianic King’ (Scholtz 2014:3; cf. Fruchtenbaum 1989:615; Toussaint 1980:61, 138). The Son of God may be ruling in the universal kingdom of God (11:25–27; 28:18–20), but still not yet exercise his authority to rule as Son of David in terms of the Davidic Covenant over the mediatorial kingdom of God on earth. At his Second Advent, however, when Israel has accepted Christ (23:39; cf. Hs 5:15–6:3; Zch 12:10), the Lord Jesus Christ will unveil the authority, power and glory of his Father’s kingdom for all to see (13:43; 24:29–30; 25:31–34; 26:64; cf. Dn 7:13–14, 22).<sup>11</sup>

## The parable of the pearl merchant

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant (ἔμπορος) seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price (πολύτιμος μαργαρίτης), went and sold all that he had and bought it’ (13:45–46; NKJV). This pearl merchant is not a shopkeeper, but a wholesale trader on a journey (Bailey 1999a:186) looking for pearls and who ‘on a given day finds one particular pearl of great value’ (Kistemaker 1980:59).<sup>12</sup> The parables of the hidden treasure and of the pearl merchant share the same climactic and closing

9. Some hold that treasure refers to the nation of Israel, which is not currently recognised as a treasure, but remains a hidden entity in the world only to emerge at the end of the age as a major factor in the prophetic fulfilment leading up to Christ’s Second Advent (Walvoord 1974:104). Israel is undoubtedly a *peculiar* treasure (Ex 19:5; Dt 7:6; Ps 135:4), but it seems more probable to argue that the treasure in this parable refers to the power and authority granted to the Son of David to rule the Davidic kingdom, a rule which is currently still hidden.

10. Even though this parable is interpreted to refer primarily to Jesus Christ and his authority to rule the Davidic kingdom, the Lord also indicates that he will share his authority (treasure) to rule with some of his faithful disciples when the Davidic kingdom is established (19:28–29; 25:21, 23, 34). Disciples are commanded to lay up treasures, not on earth, but in heaven (6:19–21).

11. Although the verbs describing them are different, the *actions* of God the Father who hides (κρύπτω; 11:25) the mighty works of Christ, of the woman (taken to refer to the Holy Spirit (see Scholtz 2015) that hides (ἐγκρύπτω; 13:33) the leaven, of Jesus who utters things kept secret (κεκρυμμένα; 13:35) and of the man (the Son of Man) that hides (κρύπτω; 13:44) the treasure, are interpreted as connected with the Godhead, the three Persons that have the divine nature.

12. A pearl is a unique gem, because it is formed in a living organism as a result of an irritation (or injury) in the tender side of an oyster (Walvoord 1974:105). A pearl grows gradually and remains hidden in the shell of the oyster under the water.

phrase (Gibbs 1987:21). However, whereas the parable of the hidden treasure uses the historic-present tense (ὕπαγει [goes], πωλεῖ [buys] and ἀγοράζει [sells]), the parable of the pearl merchant uses verbs in the past tense, such as ‘sold’ (πέπρακεν perfect) and ‘bought’ (ἠγόρασεν aorist). Whereas ‘the man with the treasure could sell part of it and still be wealthy, the man with the pearl must retain it; his delight was in possessing it, not in the profit he could make from it’ (Bailey 1999a:188).

Except for 13:45, the only other reference to a pearl in Matthew appears as part of a chiasm saying: ‘Do not throw your pearls before swine lest they trample them under their feet’ (7:6).<sup>13</sup> If, in Matthew, deeds are as important as words, what Jesus does may be as revealing as what he says (7:21; 23:2–3). When Jesus casts demons out of two men, he permits these demons (definitely *not* pearls) to go into a herd of swine (8:31). It seems that Christ does not mind throwing what are *not* his pearls amongst unclean swine that cannot trample anything whilst drowning in the sea (8:28–34). Christ did *not* come to save the devil and his fallen angels (25:41; cf. Heb 2:16); instead, as a *human* kinsman-redeemer, Jesus sacrificed himself to provide the sign of the prophet Jonah and thus to save the lost (12:39–40; 18:11). Although this argument is not conclusive (knowing what something is *not* does not conclusively define what it *is*), one can propose that in the parable of the pearl merchant, the pearl may refer to Christ’s ministry as High Priest in terms of the New Covenant (cf. Ps 110; Mt 20:28, 22:44; 26:28). Having been to the cross (‘went and sold and bought’), having ratified the New Covenant by his blood, and having journeyed back to heaven, Christ Jesus starts to function in his pearl ministry office as High Priest during the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom of heaven (cf. Johnson 1992:435). Christ gives what is holy not to dogs, but to those who want to follow him. He will not cast his pearls before those who cannot be saved (i.e. the devil and his angels) or those humans who refuse the grace shown through the blood of the Lamb.

From Pentecost onwards the first fruit of Christ’s pearl ministry in terms of the New Covenant is the Church, espoused to the Bridegroom (cf. 9:15; 19:6; 2 Cor 11:2). Some hold that the pearl refers to the Church *only* (Walvoord 1974:105–106; Toussaint 1980:184), but if the pearl refers to Christ’s High Priestly ministry, this allows the parable to be applicable during both phases of the kingdom of heaven.<sup>14</sup> The view held by most commentators is that the merchant is the committed disciple and the pearl refers to the value of the kingdom and/or the sacrifice for it (Blomberg 1990:279–281; Snodgrass 2008:243–245). By way of *application*, committed disciples can take up Christ’s yoke upon them (cf. 11:28–30) and participate in the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek, but it is nevertheless submitted that in this

13. A: ‘Do not give what is holy to dogs’; B: ‘and do not throw your pearls before swine’; B’: ‘lest they trample them under their feet’; A’: ‘and turn and tear you to pieces’.

14. From a pre-millennial perspective, Christ will save more people after the Church age.

parable the pearl ministry primarily belongs to the merchant, that is, to Jesus Christ as High Priest.

The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl merchant describe a great switch: instead of ruling as King (the treasure) in terms of the Davidic Covenant in the Davidic kingdom, Christ is ruling as High Priest (the pearl) in terms of the New Covenant during the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom of heaven. This situation is temporary, for Christ will still simultaneously exercise his authority to rule in terms of both the New and the Davidic Covenants when the future phase of the kingdom commences. This will start to happen when the chaff, the tares and the bad fish are removed from the kingdom of heaven.

## The parable of the dragnet

In contrast with the previous two parables, the parable of the dragnet 'is concerned with securing many items (fish) rather than just one item of value' (Bailey 1999b:282). Using a dragnet results in an indiscriminate and mixed catch of *all* kinds (ἐκ παντός γένους) and sizes, edible and inedible, saleable and useless (Kistemaker 1980:62). The catching of 'every kind' (γένος) is more commonly used for a 'race' or 'tribe' of people: 'An allegorical meaning for these details is thereby confirmed; the different kinds of fish stand for different nationalities of human beings' (Blomberg 1990:202). By God's might the nations will be gathered before him (cf. Hab 1:14–16; Snodgrass 2008:488).

Snodgrass (2008:482) views this parable as 'heavily oriented to future eschatology'. The parable of the dragnet may focus on 'God's ingathering of all people at the end of the age' (Blomberg 1990:201). Moreover, one may identify 'the drawing activity of the net with the culminating events of this age' (Bailey 1999b:288). Indeed, the verb *it was full* (ἐπληρώθη) in the parable of the dragnet (13:48) can be interpreted as the 'end of the age', and the transitional statement in 13:49a (οὕτως ἔσται ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος) confirms this (cf. Kingsbury 1977:121; Hagner 2000:399).

Who will authorise the mission described in the parable of the dragnet? Given that the transitional statement in Matthew 13:49a is identical to Matthew 13:40b, both of which refer to the end of this age, it seems reasonable and consistent to ascribe the authoritative sending of the angels in 13:41 and that of 13:49–50 to the Son of Man. The Son of Man is therefore again identified as a specific, prophetic referent.

The parable of the tares of the field and the parable of the dragnet both envisage a global mission and both depict the same judgement at the end of this age. Whereas the second parable of Matthew 13 requires a period of time before the harvest at the end of the age (13:30, 39), the situation in the parable of the dragnet seems to be the casting of the dragnet, which is shortly thereafter followed by the sorting of the catch on the shore and the judgement of the wicked (13:47–50). In agreement with Carson (1995:330; cf. Bailey 1999b:285), the parable of the dragnet 'cannot easily be made to refer to the

missionary activity of the church; for it describes a separation *when the net is full*, not a continuous separation'. If the parable of the dragnet does not refer to the missionary activities of the Church, yet another global mission to the sea of all nations of the world (cf. Kingsbury 1977:120) at the end of the age is in view, what, then, will be the content of the gospel of that mission, and who will be the missionaries?

According to Scholtz (2014:5), the gospel of *the kingdom* is preached during two time periods: the first preaching of this gospel to Israel only occurred during Christ's First Advent (10:5b–15) and the second such preaching will take place during the Tribulation Period immediately prior to Christ's Second Advent – and then the end will come (10:16–42; 24:14).<sup>15</sup> In between these two periods, during the Church age, the content of the gospel emphasises the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (cf. 12:39–40; 16:21). The specific, prophetic-eschatological timeframe that the parable of the dragnet covers appears to be the Tribulation Period immediately prior to Christ's Second Advent.

Who will preach the gospel of the kingdom during the Tribulation Period? 'Because it is required that a Jewish generation call on the Son of David to return and establish the Messianic kingdom (Mt 23:39), it is submitted that during the Tribulation the gospel of the kingdom must be preached by *Jewish* messengers authorised by the King of the Jews' (Scholtz 2014:5). Since the kingdom of heaven to be established at Christ's Second Advent will be in fulfilment of the unconditional covenant made with the Jewish house of David (2 Sm 7:11b–16; 1 Chr 17:10b–14), Jews will present the gospel of the kingdom to Jews during the Tribulation Period – as well as witnessing to all the nations. These Jewish missionaries during the Tribulation Period are identified as specific, prophetic referents.

The parable of the dragnet has in view the transition from the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom of heaven into its future phase, when the 'old' prophecies regarding the Davidic kingdom will start to be fulfilled. Even before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the LORD, the prophet Elijah will be sent to Israel to restore all things (Ml 4:5–6; Mt 17:11; Scholtz 2014:3–4). Focusing on both the dragnet and sorting activities depicted in it, the parable of the dragnet teaches that during the Tribulation Period, the Son of Man will send Jewish missionaries to preach the gospel of the kingdom in the entire world as a witness to the sea of all nations – then the end of this age will come (24:14). At the end of the Tribulation Period, the last of the Gentile empires will be destroyed by the stone cut out of the mountain, but not by human hands (Dn 2:44–45). Also at the end of the Tribulation Period, the Holy Spirit will be poured out over all of Israel, and it is this restored and saved nation that will in faith call on the Lord to return (Hs 5:14–6:3; Zch 12:10; Mt 23:39). With the dragnet drawn in, the nations will be judged, the enemies

15. The Tribulation Period is viewed as a period of seven years immediately preceding the return of the Son of Man, comprising two consecutive periods of three and a half years each – the latter called 'the Great Tribulation' by Jesus (24:21; cf. Toussaint 1980:141).

of Christ will have been made his footstool and the wicked will be *excluded* when the Messianic kingdom is established on earth (Jl 3:2, 11–12; Zph 3:8; Zch 14:2–3; Bailey 1999b:288).

## Overview of the four parables of Matthew 13 presented in private

The four privately presented parables of Matthew 13 emphasise Christ's authority to rule in the kingdom of heaven. The actual exercise of Christ's authority to rule the Davidic kingdom is conditional on Israel accepting its Messiah-King. Once it becomes evident in the Gospel of Matthew that God's anointed ruler will not be accepted by 'this Jewish generation', the Son of David hides this treasure-authority to rule in terms of the Davidic Covenant. On the same day Jesus promises what was unconditionally part of his First Advent, namely to provide the sign of the prophet Jonah. At the cross Christ not only sells all he has to buy the field, but he sold all he had and bought the pearl, gaining authority to spiritually rule in the kingdom of heaven as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek over his disciples in terms of the New Covenant. The parable of the dragnet depicts the transition during the Tribulation Period from the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom of heaven to its future, Davidic phase. During that time the enemies of Christ will be made his footstool. At the end of the Tribulation Period, the whole Jewish generation then living will in faith accept the Son of David and call on him with the words of 23:39, thus satisfying the condition noted above. At his return, Christ will exercise his authority to rule as King and as High Priest in terms of both the Davidic and New Covenants. The pearl will have been removed from its oyster and made visible and the treasure will be revealed for all to see. Disciples are instructed to bring forth the new and old, for the Son of Man has privately revealed these mysteries to those who fear him through four uniquely Matthean parables regarding ruling authority in the kingdom.

## Matthew 13 read as a prophetic discourse

This author submits that Matthew 13 can be understood as a prophetic discourse that contains new and old prophecies of the kingdom of heaven that have been, or will yet be, literally fulfilled. To understand these prophecies, specific, prophetic referents were identified for the eight parables of Matthew 13. These referents did not contradict each other a single time. In accordance with Jesus' instruction in the parable of the householder (13:52), a brief summary of this prophetic discourse and its 'new and old' is now presented.

Matthew's parable of the sower identifies various 'soil' responses and fruit-bearing (or lack thereof) to Jesus Christ and the sowing of the word of the kingdom, be it during Christ's First Advent (through the gospel of the kingdom), during the great commission (through the gospel of Christ) or during the Tribulation Period (through the gospel of the kingdom).

After his baptism and the temptations, Jesus reveals the treasure to Israel, but when *this generation* in Israel commit the unpardonable sin, the treasure was hidden. At the cross, the Son of Man purchased the field, but the treasure remains hidden in the world until his Second Advent. The only exception to this general statement was a brief preview of the Son of Man coming in his kingdom on the Mount of Transfiguration (17:1–9a). Meanwhile, having been to the cross, Christ has commenced his pearl ministry during the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom. The High Priest, according to the order of Melchizedek, mediates spiritual blessings of the New Covenant to the first fruits of his inheritance, namely the Church – a ministry that will continue after the Church age. From Pentecost until the bride is taken to her Bridegroom, Christ baptises believers with the Holy Spirit, who also indwells these believers. After the Church Age, the Holy Spirit will still indwell all believers in terms of the same New Covenant.

Much of the new prophecies in the parables of the tares of the field, mustard seed, leaven and householder were fulfilled once the kingdom of heaven 'has become like' (13:24; cf. vv. 31, 33, 52; Scholtz 2015). The Son of Man sent good seed into 'his field' (the world), that is, the eventual 12 apostles were commanded to make disciples out of all the nations (Israel included) in terms of the great commission, a mission that is still continuing. The first phase of the kingdom of heaven can *exist* as the Church is baptised with the Holy Spirit, but this is not the same as the future outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all Israel immediately before the *establishment* of the kingdom of heaven on earth. The prophesied judgement immediately preceding the establishment of the Davidic kingdom has also been delayed. Satan's sowing of tares will continue until Christ's Second Advent.

The Son of Man sowed a specific mustard seed into the field and, as authorised, Peter used the keys of the kingdom of heaven to open the spiritual door of the kingdom to Jews, Samaritans and, then, also to Gentiles (16:19; cf. 10:5–6; Ac 2, 8, 10–11). From Pentecost onwards, during the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom, Jewish, Samaritan and Gentile believers find shelter in this 'kingdom-tree'. Likewise, during the future phase of the kingdom when a tender cedar twig is planted, the literal Davidic kingdom will be restored and reach global proportions, providing shelter to all the nations (cf. Ezk 17:22–23).

How does the kingdom of heaven grow? Whether the focus is on something 'new or old', the existence, growth and establishment of the kingdom is all due to the power of God. The parable of the leaven describes the unique ministry of baptism of the Holy Spirit during the Church age – a ministry that will continue until 'all is leavened'. During the future phase, the Holy Spirit will be poured out over Israel immediately before the Messianic kingdom is established – and he will also still indwell all believers in terms of the New Covenant.

The parable of the dragnet teaches that during the Tribulation Period, the Son of Man will send Jewish missionaries to



preach the gospel of the kingdom in the whole world as a witness to the sea of all nations. Then the end of this age will come and, with the dragnet drawn in, the judgement of the nations will follow.

On the same day that Jesus teaches all these mysteries of the kingdom, Christ pre-authenticates a teaching ministry for his disciples. From Pentecost onwards, these disciples should discharge the responsibility by teaching all the new and old things. When the Son of Man has come in glory, what is covered will be revealed and what is hidden will be known, so perhaps then disciples will bring forth the 'old and new', for then the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom will be over and the Davidic kingdom will have been established.

## Conclusion

Matthew 13 touches a rich theological vein. The transition from a focus on the *nation* of Israel to a focus on *disciples* of all nations is not only evident in the Gospel of Matthew, but also in Matthew 13. Thus, regarding Israelology, Matthew's parabolic discourse depicts the partial and temporary hardening of Israel (12:31–32; 13:13–15, 44). Only as long as this temporary and partial hardening continues, Ecclesiology as a sub-set of the kingdom of heaven is likewise in view, especially in the triad of parables presented in public (13:24–33). Regarding Eschatology, the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl merchant may be foundational to this two-stage view of the kingdom of heaven: it exists-but-is-not-yet-established. The same Matthew 13 also touches on Bibliology (hermeneutics; the Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic, Land and New Covenants; mysteries; the doctrine of the kingdom), on Pneumatology (13:33), Satanology (13:19, 25, 38–39) and on Angelology (13:39, 41, 49–50). However, Matthew 13 may also be noted as a most remarkable Christological passage, for the central authority figure is the Lord Jesus Christ whose mighty works in this age regarding the *existence* of the first, spiritual phase of the kingdom are juxtaposed to those in the age to come when the literal phase of the kingdom will be *established*.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

## References

- Bailey, M.L., 1998, 'The Parable of the Sower and the soils', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155(618), 172–188.
- Bailey, M.L., 1999a, 'The Parables of the Hidden Treasure and of the Pearl Merchant', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156(622), 175–189.
- Bailey, M.L., 1999b, 'The Parables of the Dragnet and of the Householder', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156(623), 282–296.
- Beacham, R.E., 1996, 'The Parables of the kingdom' & 'The Universal and Mediatorial Kingdoms', in M. Couch (ed), *Dictionary of Pre-millennial Theology*, pp. 232–237, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids.
- Blomberg, C.L., 1990, *Interpreting the Parables*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove.
- Carson, D.A., 1995, *Matthew chapters 1 through 12 & Matthew chapters 13 through 28*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids. (The expositor's Bible commentary with the New International Version of the Holy Bible).
- Combrink, H.J.B., 1983, 'The structure of the Gospel of Matthew as narrative', *Tyndale Bulletin* 34, 61–90.
- Constable, T.L., 2014, *Notes on Matthew*, 2014 edn., viewed 05 December 2014, from <http://www.soniclight.com>
- Derickson, G.W., 2006, 'Matthew's chiasmic structure and its dispensational implications', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163(652), 423–437.
- France, R.T., 2007, *The Gospel of Matthew*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.
- Fruchtenbaum, A.G., 1989, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, Ariel Ministries, Tustin.
- Gibbs, J.A., 1987, 'Parables of atonement and assurance: Matthew 13:44–46', *Concordia Theological Journal* 51(1), 19–43.
- Hagner, D.A., 2000, *Matthew 1–13*, Thomas Nelson, Nashville. (WBC Commentary 33A).
- Johnson, E.E., 1992, 'Hermeneutical principles and the interpretation of Psalm 110', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149(596), 428–437.
- Kingsbury, J.D., 1977, *The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A study in redaction-criticism*, Clayton Publishing House, St Louis.
- Kingsbury, J.D., 1992, 'The plot of Matthew's story', *Interpretation* 46(4), 347–356. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/002096439204600403>
- Kistemaker, S.J., 1980, *The Parables: Understanding the stories Jesus told*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids.
- Luz, U., 2001, *Matthew 8–20: A commentary*, ed. H. Koster, transl. J.E. Crouch, Augsburg Fortress, Minneapolis.
- Nolland, J., 2005, *The Gospel of Matthew: A commentary on the Greek text*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids. (The New International Greek Testament commentary).
- Scholtz, J.J., 2014, 'The kingdom of heaven and Matthew 10', *In die Skriflig* 48(1), Art. #1782, 8 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v48i1.1782>
- Scholtz, J.J., in press, 'Reading Matthew 13 as a prophetic discourse: The four parables presented in public', *In die Skriflig*, Art. #1887.
- Snodgrass, K.R., 2008, *Stories with intent: A comprehensive guide to the parables of Jesus*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.
- Stallard, M., 2000, 'Hermeneutics and Matthew 13 Part II: Exegetical conclusions', *Conservative Theological Society* 5, 1–21.
- Toussaint, S.D., 1980, *Behold the King: A study of Matthew*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids.
- Turner, D.L., 2008, *Baker Exegetical commentary on the New Testament: Matthew*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids.
- Vine, W.E., 1997, *Vine's expository dictionary of Old & New Testament words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville.
- Walvoord, J.F., 1974, *Matthew: They kingdom come. A commentary on the First Gospel*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids.
- Wenham, D., 1979, 'The structure of Matthew XIII', *New Testament Studies* 25(4), 516–522. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500005221>