The Seven Parables of Matthew 13

**Excerpts from** [**The Central Message of the New Testament**](http://www.koffeekupkandor.com/gods-word-five.php#The Central Message of the New Testament) **by Charles Strong and**

[**Dragnet / Separation / Furnace of Fire / Kingdom**](http://www.koffeekupkandor.com/gods-word-three.php#Dragnet / Separation / Furnace of Fire / Kingdom) **by Arlen Chitwood.**

An understanding of the Word of the Kingdom is *the key* to a proper understanding of Scripture as it relates to Christians, and Satan knows this.  He knows that if he can corrupt or destroy that which will open the door to a proper understanding of the numerous other Scriptures bearing on the subject, he can best accomplish the purpose for his present work among Christians.

Satan’s efforts toward this end are something easily seen in the first four parables in **Matthew** **13**.  These four parables present a chronology of Satan’s work as he seeks to subvert the Word of the Kingdom, and this chronology covers the progressive results of his work in this respect throughout the entire dispensation.

Satan’s attack in the first parable, the parable of the sower (**Matthew** **13:3-8**, **18-23**), was seen to be against *those hearing the Word of the Kingdom*.  He sought to stop the matter at that point, preventing individuals from understanding this message and subsequently bringing forth fruit.  Four types of individuals are seen responding to the message, with Satan being successful in his attack against three of the four.  Those seen in the first three of the four categories fell away and bore no fruit.  But Satan’s attack against those in the fourth category proved to be unsuccessful.  They heard the Word, received and understood the Word, overcame Satan’s attack, and bore fruit.

Then the next parable, the parable of the wheat and tares (**Matthew** **13:24-30**, **36-43**), centers on Satan’s attack against *the ones bearing fruit from the previous parable*.  Satan placed those with a false message (false teachers) in the midst of those bearing fruit, seeking to subvert the message and stop that which was occurring.  That is to say, he sought to corrupt the true message by introducing a false message.  And this was done with a view to stopping that which had resulted from a proclamation of the true message.  This was done with a view to stopping those Christians who were bearing fruit from doing so.

Then the next parable, the parable of the mustard seed (**Matthew** **13:31**-**32**), shows *that which happened in Christendom over the course of time during the dispensation because of this false message*.  The mustard seed germinated and took a normal growth for a while.  But then something happened, which caused it to take an abnormal growth and eventually become *a tree*.  And after this abnormal growth had occurred — after the mustard bush had become a tree, something that it wasn’t supposed to become at all — the birds of the air (ministers of Satan, seen in the first parable [**Matthew** **13:4**]) found a lodging place therein.

And the fourth parable, the parable of the leaven (**Matthew** **13:33**), *completes the picture*.  The false message introduced near the beginning of the dispensation is likened to leaven placed in three measures of meal (“three” is the number of *divine perfection*,and “meal” is that which is used to make *bread*. Leaven [a corrupting substance] was placed in the meal [resulting in corruption in the bread]).  And this leaven would continue to work (this false message would continue to permeate and corrupt the true message) until *the whole* had been leavened (until *the whole* had been corrupted).

This is the revealed direction that Christendom would take relative to the true message concerning the *Word of the Kingdom* following the introduction of the leaven, following the introduction of a false message concerning the *Word of the Kingdom*.

These four parables together show *a history of Christendom throughout the dispensation in relation to the Word of the Kingdom*.  This message — *the central message of the New Testament* — was universally taught throughout the churches during the first century.  But the introduction of a false message resulted in changes.  Christendom itself took an abnormal growth; and this abnormal growth was such that the false teachers eventually found themselves welcomed within that which they, through their false message, had corrupted.

Corruption though didn’t stop at this point.  The working of the leaven continued, and it would continue until this false message had permeated all of Christendom.  This corrupting process would continue, according to the text, “*till the whole*” *had been leavened*.

And, viewing the matter solely from the standpoint of that which can be seen in the world today, what has been the end result of the working of the leaven?  As the dispensation draws to a close, where does the Church find itself today?

The answers are easy to ascertain.  All one has to do in order to see and understand that which has happened is to go into almost any church of the land (fundamental and liberal alike) and listen for any mention of things having to do with the *Word of the Kingdom*.  *A person will listen in vain*.  Because of the working of a leavening process that is in its final stages, the true biblical message surrounding Christians and the coming kingdom is practically nonexistent throughout Christendom today.

This leavening process recognizes no bounds or barriers.  Fundamental Christendom finds itself just as permeated with the leaven, as it relates to the *Word of the Kingdom*, as does liberal Christendom.  From the theology schools to the pulpits of churches to the pews in these churches, the whole of Christendom finds itself *in exactly the same state* insofar as that which is revealed throughout the first four parables in **Matthew** **13** is concerned.

Many of the fundamentalists, not understanding the true nature of the leavening process, look upon themselves as having escaped this corruption.  But such is not the case at all.  Insofar as any understanding and proclamation of the *Word of the Kingdom* is concerned, the fundamental groups find themselves *in exactly the same state* as the liberal groups.  They find themselves *permeated through and through with exactly the same corrupting leaven*.  There is absolutely no difference between the two groups in this respect.  Neither understands nor proclaims this message.

Seminaries — fundamental and liberal alike — are training students in everything but the one message that will open the Scriptures to their understanding.  And these same seminaries are turning out graduates who are filling the pulpits of churches with a message completely void of any reference to the *Word of the Kingdom*.  These seminary graduates don’t know the truth of the matter, and, as a result, *their entire ministries* are negatively affected.  The various flocks that the Lord has entrusted to their care are not being properly fed; and, in reality, for the most part, *Christians under their ministries are slowly starving to death*.

Christians throughout the churches today are simply not hearing the one message, above all other messages, which they should be hearing.  And the reason is given in the first four parables of **Matthew** **13**.  The working of the leaven over almost two millennia of time has produced a corruption extending throughout Christendom that has all but destroyed the message surrounding the *Word of the Kingdom*.  And, as a result of this corruption, the Bible, for the most part, remains *a closed book for the vast majority of Christians*.

The preceding is why a person, untrained in the theology schools of the land, but understanding the *Word of the Kingdom*, often has a better grasp of the whole of Scripture than many of those who are teaching in the theology schools.  The person having an understanding of the *Word of the Kingdom* possesses *a key* to Scripture that a person without this understanding does not possess. *He can go to the Scriptures and bring forth things both* “*new and old*”; but the same thing cannot be said for those who lack this understanding.

The proceeding are excerpts from [The Central Message of the New Testament](http://www.koffeekupkandor.com/gods-word-five.php#The Central Message of the New Testament) by Charles Strong.

The last of the seven parables in Matthew 13, the parable of the net, begins by briefly mentioning events occurring throughout the present dispensation (Mat. 13:47); then the parable in the three succeeding verses (Mat. 13:48-50) immediately moves to and centers on events occurring at the end of the age, after the dispensation has run its course (seen in the first four parables) and after the inheritance has been redeemed and the bride has become Christ’s wife (seen in the fifth and sixth parables).

The “*dragnet that was cast into the sea*” (Mat. 13:47) is a reference *to God*’*s work among the Gentiles throughout the present dispensation*. The “*sea*” refers to *the Gentiles*, and the “*dragnet*” cast into the sea, drawing from the sea (cast out among the Gentiles, drawing from the Gentiles) refers *to God working among and removing from the Gentiles* “*a people for His name*” (Acts 15:14).

After Israel had rejected the proffered kingdom of the heavens, another nation, separate from Israel, was called into existence to be the recipient of that which Israel had rejected (Matthew 21:33-43; 1 Peter 2:9-11). A nation, which was neither Jewish nor Gentile, was called into existence to be accorded the opportunity to bring forth fruit where Israel had failed. And this new nation, comprising *a new creation* “*in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:17), was to be taken from both of the prior two creations — from both the Jews and the Gentiles — though mainly from the Gentiles.

God set aside an entire dispensation, lasting two days, 2,000 years, during which time He would remove *from the Gentiles* “*a people for His name*,” though “*a remnant according to the election of grace* [believing Jews]” was to be included as well (Romans 11:5). And, according to the parable of the dragnet, the removal of these people had to do with *the kingdom of the heavens*.

This removal is likened to a dragnet which was cast out among the Gentile nations, and those removed from the Gentiles via the dragnet (becoming part of *the new creation* “*in Christ*”) are seen being removed *for a purpose*.Their removal has to do with *the kingdom of the heavens*.Their removal is with a view *to their occupying positions in the proffered kingdom*, *the kingdom previously rejected by and taken from Israel.*

Thus, the removal from the sea itself is not the central subject of the parable. Rather, this information was given in order to introduce the central subject — *the purpose for their removal from the sea*.

All three of the parables that Christ gave after He had reentered the house draw from previous events — events occurring either *before or during* the present dispensation — but these parables center on events occurring *after* the dispensation has run its course. These parables have to do centrally with events occurring at the very end of the age, during and immediately following the time when God completes His dealings with Israel.

Events in these parables occur during the Tribulation and during the time immediately following Christ’s return. In this respect, they occur during the last seven years of Man’s Day and at the very first of the Lord’s Day, which immediately follows (during Daniel’s unfulfilled Seventieth Week [Dan. 9:24-27] and during the seventy-five days immediately following, seen at the end of Daniel’s prophecy [Dan. 12:11-13]).

Events in the last of the three parables given back inside the house (parable of the dragnet [Mat. 13:47]) chronologically follow events in the preceding two parables (parables of the treasure [Mat. 13:44] and pearl [Mat. 13:45]). As previously stated, events in all three of these closing parables are seen in a chronology of this nature. Each of these parables begins by referring to events in past time. But the central subject of each parable is not about these past events. Rather, the central subject of each parable rests on these past events and has to do with *future events*, events occurring after the dispensation has run its course.

All three of these parables have to do with *the kingdom of the heavens*, and all three have to do with events that move toward the same revealed goal — *the end of the age and the beginning of the next age*, *the end of Man*’*s Day and the beginning of the Lord*’*s Day*.

**The Separation**

Those removed from the sea during the present dispensation (Mat. 13:47) are seen being dealt with at the end of the age after a revealed fashion. They are seen being separated into two main categories and then dealt with according to the category in which they had previously been placed (Mat. 13:48ff).

Once those removed from the sea via the dragnet have been brought to “*shore*,” the picture in the parable relates a separation of “*the good*” from “*the bad*.” And once separated, *the good* are gathered into vessels, but *the bad* are cast away (Mat. 13:48). Then the next verse reveals how this will be accomplished — carried out by angels (Mat. 13:49).

Exactly the same picture was presented earlier in this sequence of parables, at the end of the second parable, the parable of the wheat and tares (Mat. 13:25). There was a harvest, followed by a separation of the wheat and the tares. The tares were bound in bundles to be burned, but the wheat was gathered into the Master’s barn (Mat. 13:30).

And after the Lord had gone back inside the house, prior to giving the last three parables, He gave the explanation to that which had occurred at the close of the parable of the wheat and tares, which would be the same as that occurring at the close of the three parables that He was about to give:

*Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire*, *so it will be at the end of this age*.

*The Son of Man will send out His angels*, *and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend*, *and those who practice lawlessness*. (Matthew 13:40-41)

The preceding two verses parallel the two verses under discussion in the parable of the dragnet (Mat. 13:48-49). These verses reveal a separation of “*the wheat*” from “*the tares*,” a separation of “*the good*” from “*the bad*.” And this separation will occur at “*the end of the age*.”

(Events occurring at the end of the age, depicted in both the parable of the wheat and tares and the parable of the dragnet, are *the same*. These two parables simply present *two different pictures of the same thing*.

Note that the things depicted in these two parables do not have to do with events at Christ’s judgment seat. The things depicted in these parables have to do with subsequent events, occurring at least seven years later, which are based on previous decisions and determinations rendered at the judgment seat.)

1) Subject of the Parables

Bear in mind that the parables in Matthew 13 — all seven of them — have to do with *the kingdom of the heavens*. They have nothing to do with salvation by grace through faith (though salvation, with respect to eternal verities, would be alluded to several places in these parables [*e.g.*, in the last parable through a removal from the sea]).

Salvation by grace through faith is simply not the central subject seen throughout these parables. And when these parables deal with a separation (as seen in the second [Mat. 13:25] and seventh [Mat. 13:47] parables), along with the results of this separation, everything stated must be taken at face value and related to the subject at hand.

And whether or not this lines up with man’s ideologies or his doctrinal statements in the realm of eschatology (it usually doesn’t) is of no moment whatsoever. An omniscient God, who sees and knows the end as well as He sees and knows the beginning, has spoken. He has established these parables, structured them a certain way, and placed them in a particular order and place in His Word. And that which God has established, along with the manner in which He has established it, is *the end of the matter*.

In the closing parable, God Himself has revealed to man *the end* of all that which had been dealt with in the preceding six parables. There will first be a separation of those taken from the sea. This separation will occur at the end of the age (which will *follow* events surrounding the judgment seat and the subsequent marriage festivities of the Lamb), it will be carried out by angels, and it will occur in relation to entrance into or exclusion from the kingdom.

Thus, the subject of all seven parables centers on *the proffered kingdom of the heavens*. This subject is given at the beginning of each parable, something that cannot possibly be missed. And this subject *must be kept in view* throughout these parables; else the parables cannot be properly understood.

2) Those Being Dealt with in the Parables

Those being dealt with throughout the parables in Matthew 13, as seen in previous studies, are *the saved alone*. Scripture doesn’t deal with the unsaved in relation to the message that pervades these parables — a message pertaining to *the kingdom of the heavens*. The unsaved are *always* dealt with only in relation to the message of salvation by grace through faith, never in relation to the message of the kingdom. *The message of the kingdom is for the saved alone*, something that can be aptly illustrated from any of the seven parables.

But note the closing parable in this respect. Those dealt with in this parable are seen being removed from the sea via a dragnet that had been cast out into the sea. That is, within the symbolism used, the parable pictures individuals being removed from the Gentiles; and their removal is for *a revealed purpose* — a purpose that, for part of them, would not be realized.

They were removed from the sea strictly *on the basis* of their having been in the dragnet. And, once removed, they were no longer associated with the sea. That would be to say, once removed; they were no longer associated with the Gentiles.

Thus, their removal from the sea is a metaphorical way of saying that they had been removed from the Gentiles. And, if removed from the Gentiles, within the time-frame seen in the previous six parables, there’s only one group with which they could possibly have then been associated — *the* “*one new man*”(Ephesians 2:15). They had become part of *the new creation* “*in Christ*” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

A person is a Jew, a Gentile, or a Christian. And any terminology that fails to clearly distinguish between these three creations — *e.g.*, “Jewish Christian,” “Gentile Christian,” “professor” (as opposed to “possessor”) — emanates from man, not from the Scriptures. Scripture sees the matter as completely black or white, never as a gray area lying between any two of the three. A person is either *a new creation* “*in Christ*,” or he is not. And, if he is not, then he has to be either *a Jew* or *a Gentile*.

The matter is that simple. And if this were understood, along with understanding that all of the parables in Matthew 13 are about *the kingdom of the heavens*, there would be far less confusion when interpreting these parables.

(Though Scripture makes a clear distinction between *Jew*, *Gentile*, and *Christian*, Scripture sometimes refers to believing individuals removed from the Jews or the Gentiles through reference to their national origin — “Jew” and “Gentile” [*e.g.*, Acts 28:28; Romans 1:13, 16; 2:9-10; Galatians 1:16; 2:2; Ephesians 3:6, 8]. This was something seen during the re-offer of the kingdom to Israel [33-62 A.D.], allowing an identifying distinction to exist between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

But Scripture *never* refers to such individuals as “Jewish Christians” or “Gentile Christians,” for Scripture *never* brings two of the three creations together in this manner. And when “Jew” or “Gentile” is used after this fashion, the context is *always* very clear that those being referenced are individuals removed from the Jews or the Gentiles, not Jews or Gentiles per se.

For additional information on the preceding, refer to the author’s book, [Bible One - Arlen Chitwood's The Study of Scripture, Ch. 6](http://bibleone.net/SS06.htm), “Jew, Gentile, Christian.”)

And, in keeping with the preceding, Scripture *never* pictures a mixture of saved and unsaved individuals through the use of a metaphor such as that seen in the parable of the dragnet — individuals removed from the sea, removed from the Gentiles. The picture explains itself, if allowed to so do.

(A similar picture is presented by the seven churches in Revelation 2; 3. *Christians alone* are being referenced and dealt with throughout the messages to all seven churches. Referring to the Church as comprised of the unsaved, or both saved and unsaved individuals, would be *an oxymoron*.

The word “church” is the translation of a Greek word that means *called out* [Greek, *ekklesia*, a compound word from *ek*, “out” and *kelsis*, “to call”]. *Only the saved have been called out*; *only the saved can comprise the Church.*)

All in the dragnet had been removed from the sea, and all those who had been removed from the sea were no longer associated with that which the sea represented. They were no longer associated with the Gentiles. Rather, following their removal, they were associated with an entirely separate and distinct creation — *the new creation,* “*in Christ*.”

And their removal, along with everything that followed, was with a view to *the kingdom of the heavens*.Eternal verities are not seen in the matter at all. They can’t be seen. Such would be an impossibility. The matter surrounding their eternal destiny was settled at the time they were removed from the sea. And, had it not been settled, there could have been no removal. They could only have remained in the sea.

**The Furnace of Fire**

Only one group of individuals — though separated into two classes — could possibly be in view through the use of the expressions, “*good*” and “*bad*,” or “*just*” and “*wicked*” (Mat. 13:48-49). *All had been removed from the sea*; *all had been removed from the Gentiles*. Thus, no room could possibly exist for an inclusion of unsaved individuals in this parable. By the very nature of the subject matter (the kingdom of the heavens) and those being dealt with in this parable (those removed from the sea), *only the saved could possibly be in view*.

And, viewing that to which this parable refers, these saved individuals are seen being dealt with on the basis of prior decisions and determinations — decisions and determinations having previously been made at the judgment seat. And these decisions and determinations, emanating from the judgment seat, will have been based on prior faithfulness to one’s calling (judgment will be on the basis of “works,” but the works being judged will have resulted from *faithfulness*, or *unfaithfulness* [1 Corinthians 3:12-15; cf. Hebrews 11:17-19, 31; James 2:21-25]).

But seeing *the saved alone* being dealt with in this parable presents major problems for numerous Christians, for some of those in the parable are cast into “*the furnace of fire*.” And these same Christians, who would never consider thinking along the lines of Christians being cast into such a place, are invariably forced into an erroneous position, resulting in an erroneous interpretation. They are forced into the position of seeing saved and unsaved individuals (“*good*” and “*bad*”) being dealt with in the parable, along with seeing these individuals being dealt with in relation to eternal life or eternal damnation.

The preceding though is simply not what Scripture has to say about the matter. Scripture is clear that the parable deals with *the saved alone*, and these saved individuals are dealt with in relation to *the coming kingdom*. And the fact that those described as “*bad*” and “*wicked*” are cast into “*the furnace of fire*” must be understood within this framework. It must be understood within the framework of both *those* who are being dealt with and *that* which is being dealt with — *Christians*, *and the kingdom*.

Thus, to deal with this parable on the basis of eternal verities, with the unsaved being cast into the lake of fire, is *completely outside the scope of the subject matter seen in any of these seven parables*. Such a teaching, derived from these parables, is both textually and contextually wrong. Any thought of dealing with any of these parables after this fashion, from a Scriptural standpoint, *could not even be open for discussion*.

If the text is dealt with in a literal sense, apart from metaphors, *only one possible conclusion* can be reached. At the end of the age a segment of the saved, a segment of Christians, are going to be cast into what is called in this parable, “*the furnace of fire*.” And that is exactly what Christ had previously stated within His explanation of the parable of the wheat and tares:

*The Son of Man will send out His angels*, *and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend*, *and those who practice lawlessness*,

*And will cast them* [*i.e.*,the offensive and lawless ones,the tares in this parable*,* those doing the works of Satan] *into the furnace of fire*: *there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth*”. (Matthew 13:41-42)

Or, note the same thing in the parable of the dragnet:

*So it will be at the end of the age*. *The angels will come forth*, *separate the wicked from among the just*,

*and cast them into the furnace of fire*. *There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth*. (Matthew 13:49-50).

So, exactly what is being dealt with through these two references to “*the furnace of fire*”?

Should the expression be looked upon in a literal sense, referring to an actual furnace of fire? Or, is this a continuation of the metaphorical language seen earlier in the parables, describing something related to but apart from a literal understanding of the reference?

When a person begins studying related Scripture having to do with “Gehenna,” “outer darkness [lit., ‘the outer darkness’]” and “the lake of fire” he will find exactly the same teaching as seen in these two parables. That which is seen in Matthew 13:42, 50 is not something peculiar to the parable of the wheat and tares and the parable of the dragnet. Rather, it is merely part of the same teaching seen so many places elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. John 15:1-6; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Hebrews 6:7-9; 10:26-31; Jude 1:20-23).

In this respect, note how teachings concerning *Gehenna*, *the outer darkness*,and *the lake of fire* appear in Scripture.

1) Gehenna, the Outer Darkness

*Gehenna* is an Anglicized Greek word (*Geenna* in the Greek text) used twelve times in the New Testament. The word appears eleven times in the three synoptic gospels (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5) and once in the epistle of James (James 3:6).

Christ alone used the word in the gospel accounts. And He always used the word in contexts having to do with *entrance into or exclusion from the kingdom of the heavens*.

Then, in James, the word appears in a text having to do with the tongue — “. . .*it* [the tongue] *is set on fire of hell* [*‘Gehenna’*].” And, though the word is used in a somewhat different sense in James, it appears within a context having to do with the saving of the soul and the coming kingdom (James 1:12, 21; 2:5, 14-26; 5:7-8, 19-20).

*Gehenna* (*Geenna*) is the Greek word for *Hinnom* from the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. *Hinnom* was the name given to a valley south of Jerusalem during Joshua’s day, named for the son of a person whose name was “Hinnom” (Joshua 15:8; 18:16).

And, though this valley was used at times as a place where human sacrifices were offered during Old Testament days (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31), the valley was no more than the place where the refuse from Jerusalem was discarded at the time Christ was on earth.

(The word, *Hinnom*, has simply been transliterated in the English text of the Old Testament; but the same thing has not been done with *Gehenna* [*Geenna*, for *Hinnom*] in most English texts of the New Testament. Rather, in most versions, *Gehenna* [*Geenna*] has been translated “hell” each of the twelve times that it appears in the New Testament, resulting in confusion.)

Thus, *Gehenna,* at the time Christ and James used the word, was simply the name of the place where those in Jerusalem discarded their refuse. Even dead bodies (criminals, etc.) were, at times, cast into this place; and the fires burned continuously.

In this respect, Christ was doing no more than referencing a place where the refuse from the city of Jerusalem was discarded. And James was associating the misuse of the tongue with this same place.

Remaining within the gospel accounts, being cast into *Gehenna* always carries an identical association and meaning. Textually, in the gospels, being cast into *Gehenna* is always associated with *separation from regality within Christ*’*s kingdom.* It matters not which of the eleven references a person checks, he will find exactly the same thing each time. *Gehenna* is *never* used in the gospel accounts in a context dealing with the unsaved and eternal verities. Rather, the word always appears in texts set within contexts having to do solely with *the saved in relation to the coming kingdom*.

And “*outer darkness*” is used exactly the same way in the three instances in which the expression appears, all in the gospel of Matthew (Mat. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). The use of outer darkness is simply another way in which the Lord dealt with the same issue among the same group of people (the Jewish people, in relation to the proffered kingdom).

Viewing the matter from one perspective, those denied positions with Christ in His kingdom will find themselves in the place where the refuse from the city was discarded, *outside the city*. Viewing the matter from the other perspective, those denied positions with Christ in His kingdom will find themselves in a place separated from the One who said, “*I am the light of the world*” (John 8:12). With respect to occupying a position with Christ in His kingdom, they will find themselves in a place *outside*, a place associated with *darkness* instead of light — *the darkness outside*.

The use of *Gehenna* and *outer darkness* (the outer darkness) are simply two metaphorical ways that Christ used to call attention to the same thing.

(These expressions — *Gehenna*, *the outer darkness* — were used in the gospel accounts during and immediately following that time when the kingdom of the heavens was offered to Israel at Christ’s first coming. With Israel’s rejection of the proffered kingdom, the kingdom was taken from Israel and an entirely new entity [*the one new man* “*in Christ*”] was called into existence to be the recipient of that which Israel had rejected [Matthew 21:33-46; 1 Peter 2:9-11]. And with these events brought to pass, *Gehenna* and *the outer darkness*, as previously used relative to the Jewish people, would now be used relative to Christians.

These expressions are used in Scripture relative to *the recipients of the proffered kingdom* [*the kingdom of the heavens*], whether Israel in past time or Christians during the present time.)

2) The Lake of Fire

The description of “*the lake which burns with fire and brimstone*” in Revelation 21:8 is another way in which Scripture deals with the same thing again. The “*lake of fire*” in this passage is described as not only the place where unsaved man from the previous chapter (Rev. 20:11-15) will spend eternity but also the place where Christians who do not overcome (the world, the flesh, and the devil) during the present dispensation will find themselves during the coming dispensation. And this, of course, would be the same as Christians being cast into “*the furnace of fire*” in Matthew 13:42, 50.

The same thing is seen in the second of the seven overcomer’s promises in Revelation chapters two and three. These two chapters record seven short epistles to seven churches, and there is an overcomer’s promise at the end of each epistle. “*To him that overcomes* . . . .” “*He that overcomes* . . . .” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21).

These epistles are addressed to *saved individuals* (those in a position to overcome); and the Lord has set rewards, compensations, prizes before these individuals as *an incentive*, *encouragement* for them to run the present race of the faith in a manner that will allow them to overcome rather than being overcome.

And each of the overcomer’s promises is *millennial* in its scope of fulfillment. That in view through overcoming, or not overcoming — as the case may be — will be realized during the 1,000-year Messianic Era alone.

The fact that these are *millennial* in their scope of fulfillment can be illustrated quite easily. Note the promises to two of the seven churches in Revelation 2:26-27; 3:21. No such scene as presented in these verses will exist beyond the Millennium.

Christ and His co-heirs, beyond the Millennium, will no longer rule over the nations, as this rule is pictured in Revelation 2:26-27. Rather, the Gentiles comprising these nations will be brought into positions of rulership themselves with Christ and His co-heirs, as this rule extends beyond the earth, out into the universe (Revelation 22:2, 5). And the Son, beyond the Millennium, will no longer sit on His own throne, as seen in Revelation 3:21. Rather, He will sit on “*the throne of God and of the Lamb*,” from whence universal rule will emanate (Revelation 22:1, 3, 5).

It is the overcomer’s promise to the church in Smyrna that has to do with the lake of fire, something that can *only be millennial* within its scope of fulfillment. That is, the conditions alluded to for the non-overcomer in this promise will exist for *the duration of the Messianic Era*, not throughout the eternal ages beyond.

Scripture deals with *millennial rewards and/or loss*, never with eternal rewards and/or loss. This should be easy enough for anyone to understand, for if rewards are eternal, so is loss of rewards. And loss of rewards involves an association with *death* (Romans 8:13), something that Scripture clearly reveals will be done away with at the beginning of the eternal ages beyond the Millennium (1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 21:4).

The overcomer’s promise to those Christians comprising the church in Smyrna reads,

*He who has an ear*, *let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*. *He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death*. (Rev. 2:11; cf. Rev. 20:6)

There is a clear implication in this promise that those who do not overcome *will be hurt* by the second death. And any attempt to take this promise and make it mean something other than what it clearly states serves only to destroy the promise, something that the Lord sounded a solemn warning against (Revelation 22:18-19). The promise that those who do overcome *will not* “*be hurt by the second death*” would be meaningless unless this promise is taken at face value and allowed to mean *exactly what it says*, clearly implying that those who do not overcome *will* “*be hurt by the second death*.”

The “*second death*” in the book of Revelation is associated with *the lake of fire* (Revelation 21:8). And those who do not overcome (Rev. 21:7) are going to have their part in this lake of fire (Rev. 21:8). That is, *they will be hurt by the second death by having a part in the lake of fire*.

Revelation chapter twenty-one moves beyond the Millennium into the eternal ages, and the first six verses provide the complete story concerning conditions as these ages begin. Note the words, “*It is done*,” in the first part of verse six (Rev. 21:6). This is the translation of a verb in the perfect tense in the Greek text, indicating that the matter has been brought to completion and presently exists in that finished state.

Then, beginning with the latter part of verse six and continuing through verse eight (Rev. 21:6-8), overcoming and/or being overcome are again, for the last time, dealt with in this book. And this takes a person back to the same place seen in chapters two and three (Revelation 2-3).

Then, the remainder of the book is simply a commentary for the eight verses that open and begin this section. First, a commentary is provided for the first part of this opening section. Revelation 21:9-22:5 forms a commentary for this part of the section (Rev. 21:1-6a), which has to do with conditions beyond the Millennium. Note how this commentary in chapter twenty-two closes: “. . . *and they shall reign forever and ever* [throughout the endless ages]” (Rev. 22:5).

Then, the remainder of chapter twenty-two (Rev. 22:6ff) forms a commentary for the second part of this opening section, which has to do with conditions before and during the Millennium (Rev. 21:6b-8).

And this will explain why, *outside the gates of Jerusalem during the Messianic Era*, one will be able to find “*dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters*, *and whoever loves and practices a lie*” (Rev. 22:15). This information is given to shed light on and provide additional detail for verses in the preceding chapter (Rev. 21:7-8), and the information in these verses in the preceding chapter was given to shed light on the previous overcomer’s promises, particularly the one to the church in Smyrna dealing with “*the second death*” (Rev. 2:11).

To distinguish between millennial and eternal conditions in this respect, note that those *outside the gates* during the eternal ages will be the Gentile nations, as the New Jerusalem rests on the new earth (Rev. 21:24-27); but those *outside the gates* during the preceding Messianic Era, with the New Jerusalem in the heavens above the earth, will be the non-overcomers (Rev. 22:14-15). And the place that they will occupy is described at least four other ways in Scripture — through the use of *Gehenna*, *the outer darkness*, *the furnace of fire*, *and the lake of fire*.

The picture surrounding an association between *Gehenna* and *the lake of fire* appears unmistakable. As *Gehenna* was the place of refuse for the earthly city of Jerusalem, *the lake of fire* is seen as the place of refuse for the heavenly city of Jerusalem. And as *Gehenna* was on the opposite side of the city from that side where God dwelled (*south*, as opposed to *north* [cf. Leviticus 1:11; Isaiah 14:13]), thus will it be with the counterpart to *Gehenna* in the heavenly Jerusalem. The lake of fire is used with respect to a place completely apart from Christ and His rule. And those “*hurt by the second death*” are seen occupying this place during the 1,000-year Messianic Era.

(Why does Scripture associate non-overcoming Christians with the lake of fire in relation to Christ’s millennial reign, in this manner? The answer would be the same as the reason why Scripture associates the unsaved with the lake of fire throughout the endless ages of eternity, following the Millennium.

The lake of fire was not prepared for man. Rather, it was prepared “*for the devil and his angels*” [Matthew 25:41]. It was prepared for those who had rejected God’s supreme power and authority, as Satan sought to exalt his throne [Isaiah 14:13-14]. Thus, in this respect, the lake of fire is connected with *regality*.

And man, created to replace Satan and his angels, finds his connection with the lake of fire on exactly the same basis. *Saved man*, ignoring the very reason for his salvation [which is *regal*], will find himself associated with the lake of fire during the Millennium [an association connected with all that the lake of fire implies]. And *unsaved man*, ignoring salvation and the reason for man’s creation [which, again, is *regal*], will find himself associated with the lake of fire throughout the endless ages following the Millennium [an association connected with all that the lake of fire implies].)

But, relative to Christians and the coming kingdom of Christ, is Scripture dealing with something literal? Or is Scripture dealing with metaphors?

Note how Scripture uses metaphors to deal with this same thing elsewhere. In John 15:6 and Hebrews 6:8, saved individuals are spoken of in a metaphorical sense, where *a burning with fire* is referenced. And the context both places has to do with either bearing fruit or not bearing fruit, which is exactly the same thing seen in the Matthew thirteen parables. Or, as the matter is expressed in Revelation chapters two and three, either overcoming or being overcome.

And the negative side of the matter is expressed at least two other ways in Scripture — being cast into *Gehenna* (a reference to the place of refuse outside the city walls of Jerusalem at this time; Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 23:15, 33) or being cast into *outer darkness* (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30).

Overcoming or not overcoming and being unhurt or being hurt by the second death in Revelation 2:11 is expressed a slightly different way in Romans 8:13:

*For if you* [a reference to ‘brethren’ in Rom. 8:12] *live according to the flesh*, *you will die*; *but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body*, *you will live*.

Whether *Gehenna* or *outer darkness* in Matthew, *a burning with fire* in John and Hebrews, *being cast into a furnace or lake of fire* in Matthew and Revelation, or *suffering death or being hurt by the second death* in Romans and Revelation, different facets of exactly the same thing are in view. All of these are used in contexts showing that they have to do with *saved people in relation to fruit bearing and the kingdom*.

By comparing Scripture with Scripture, it is plain that these are simply different ways of expressing *the same thing*.And since a literal casting into outer darkness, Gehenna, or a furnace or lake of fire could not possibly be in view (for these different places could not possibly be looked upon as referring to the same place in a literal sense), it is evident that *metaphors* are being used throughout.

But relative to the unsaved and the lake of fire, this is simply not expressed in other ways in Scripture as it is with the saved, leaving no room for any thought other than understanding the matter as *literal*, not metaphorical.

Aside from the preceding, it is clear that all Christians, faithful and unfaithful alike, will be in the kingdom. This is seen in type in Genesis chapters eighteen and nineteen (Genesis 18-19). Both Abraham and Lot, in the final analysis, are seen on the mount (a “mountain” in Scripture signifies a *kingdom*). But note the stark difference in the place that each occupied. Abraham stood before the Lord, where he had always stood (Gen. 18:22; 19:27). Lot though found himself in a place separated from the Lord, in a place where he also had always stood (Gen. 19:1, 30).

**The Kingdom**

For the overcomers though — something not really dealt with in the parable of the dragnet, though dealt with in the previous explanation to the parable of the wheat and tares (Mat. 13:43) — conditions during the Millennium will be entirely different. The promise to the overcomers is that *they will not be hurt by the second death*, *they will be allowed to ascend the throne with Christ*, *and they will rule as co-heirs with Christ over the nations* (Revelation 2:11, 26-28; 3:21).

Christ and His co-heirs (who will form His wife, His consort queen) will rule over the redeemed inheritance, and this rule will last for 1,000 years. It will last until Christ and His co-heirs have *put down* “*all rule and all authority and power*.” It will last until *all enemies* (which includes *death*) have been put “*under His feet*” (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

It is at this time that Matthew 13:43 will be fulfilled:

*Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*. *He who has ears to hear* *let him hear*!

[Dragnet / Separation / Furnace of Fire / Kingdom](http://www.koffeekupkandor.com/gods-word-three.php#Dragnet / Separation / Furnace of Fire / Kingdom) by Arlen Chitwood.