

What Has Happened in Christendom?

Church History As Seen From a Biblical Perspective

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of the heavens is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:

Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Matt. 13:31, 32).

(There are two places in the New Testament which provide a succinct, complete history of the Church throughout the dispensation. And this history has been provided *from God’s perspective, not man’s, showing where God views and places the emphasis in Church history.*

These two places can be found in parabolic form in Matthew chapter thirteen and through the record of that occurring in seven existing first century Churches in Revelation chapters two and three. Matthew shows matters from one perspective and John from another, with both having to do with the same central subject, both *showing how God views matters and where He places the emphasis.*

The first four parables in Matthew chapter thirteen provide the complete picture from one perspective. These parables were spoken after Christ had left “the house” [signifying *the house of Israel*, left “empty, swept, and garnished” in the previous chapter (v. 44)], and they were spoken down by “the seaside” [signifying *the Gentiles* (v. 1)].

This article deals with matters mainly through using the third of these four parables [the parable of the mustard seed], set within context in relation to the parables on both sides [two preceding and one following]

These four parables *begin* by showing Christians sown different places in the world, with a view *to one thing* — *to fruit-bearing* [first parable (vv. 3-9, 18-23); they then *continue* in the second parable by showing *Satan’s efforts to prevent Christians from bearing fruit* [vv. 24-30]; this is then *continued* in the third parable by showing *the results of Satan’s*

activity, carrying matters in this respect throughout the dispensation [vv. 31, 32]; then the fourth parable takes matters to the end of the dispensation [v. 33], showing a completely leavened Christendom [the preceding is the subject matter of the subsequent article, fully developed throughout the article].

Fruit-bearing, with the proffered kingdom in view, is the subject seen throughout the four parables [note the reference to “the word of the kingdom,” in relation to fruit-bearing (vv. 19ff)]. This is that which God deems central when dealing with a history of Christendom throughout the dispensation [and Rev. 2, 3 deals with exactly the same subject, though from a different perspective], and this is where Satan has centered his attack throughout the dispensation as well.

This may not be what one will find in man’s Church history books — in fact, it isn’t, not in any of them — but, nonetheless, *this is the way God views Church history, where He places the emphasis. EVERYTHING in His arrangement of Church history centers around fruit-bearing, with the kingdom in view [Matt. 13] or overcoming [inseparably connected with faithfulness, which will result in fruit-bearing], with the kingdom in view [Rev. 2, 3]. And if an individual remains with that revealed in the unchangeable Word, the emphasis MUST be placed exactly where God previously placed it.*

Note that material in these parables, as material dealing with the seven Churches in Rev. 2, 3, *has NOTHING to do with the message of salvation by grace, to be proclaimed to the unsaved.* Rather, this material in both places has to do with *the saved, with Christians, with the coming kingdom in view.*

Dealing with these Scriptures in relation to the unsaved — seen almost universally throughout Christendom today — is one of the great tragedies of where the work of Satan throughout the dispensation, as seen in the first four parables in Matt. 13, has taken Christendom. *The simple message of salvation by grace has been corrupted on the one hand, and the true message being dealt with in Matt. 13 and Rev. 2, 3 has been destroyed on the other.*

For supplemental material on this article, refer to the author’s articles, “A Worldly Church, a Churchly World” and “Christians and Politics.” For information on all seven parables in Matt. 13, refer to the author’s book, “Mysteries of the Kingdom.” For information on the seven Churches in Rev. 2, 3, refer to Chs. IV-XI in the author’s book, “Judgment Seat of Christ.”)

In relation to the central message of the New Testament — *the Word of the Kingdom* — first century Christianity and twentieth century Christianity would have very little in common. Things have changed in Christendom to that degree, and they have not changed for the better. Rather, relative to correct, Biblical teachings regarding the Word of the Kingdom, over the past two millennia there has been a steady deterioration.

The central message of the New Testament was universally understood and taught throughout the first century Church. But this same message, except in isolated instances, is not understood or taught at all throughout the twentieth century Church.

The false message concerning the kingdom, introduced by Satan very early in the dispensation through false teachers (apostates) in the Church, resulted in a continuing deterioration which has left Christendom in its present condition, two millennia later. And it matters not whether one is viewing Christendom from the standpoint of those in fundamental circles or those in liberal circles. In relation to a knowledge of and attitude toward the Word of the Kingdom, *exactly the same thing can be seen among those in both groups.*

Those in fundamental circles don't understand any more about *the Word of the Kingdom* than those in liberal circles do. And anyone daring to proclaim this message today will be fought against by those in both groups — usually more so by the fundamentalists than by the liberals. *In relation to this message, both groups exist in an almost completely leavened state; and both are seen described in Rev. 3:17 as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."*

The seven parables in Matthew chapter thirteen have to do with both *Christendom and Israel.*

The first four parables cover a history of Christendom in relation to *the Word of the Kingdom* which extends throughout the dispensation; and the last three parables continue with events which will occur after the dispensation has run its course, events having to do with both *Christendom and Israel*, events during and immediately following the Tribulation which lead into the Messianic Era.

Never in the history of the Church has it been more important for Christians to understand that which is revealed in these parables than it is today, for never in the history of the Church has *the Word of the Kingdom* been more misunderstood and spoken against than it is today.

Christians are in a race — the race of “the faith” — with its corresponding spiritual warfare. And the highest of all possible prizes is being held out for the victors — *that of being accorded the privilege of ascending the throne with God’s Son and ruling over the earth as co-heirs with Him for 1,000 years.*

A Christian can overcome in the present race, in the present warfare, and occupy one of these positions with God’s Son; or he can be overcome in this race, in this warfare, and fail to occupy one of these positions. This is the message which Satan has fought so hard to destroy.

And, is it any wonder that Satan has expended so much time and effort to do away with this message? Christ and His co-heirs are to take the kingdom and rule the very domain which Satan and his angels rule today. Satan and his angels are to be put down, and Christ and His co-heirs are to ascend the throne in their stead. And this is something which Satan, at all costs, has sought to avoid.

This is the realm where Satan centers his attack against Christians and against the Word of God. This is at *the heart of all things* surrounding the spiritual warfare.

Satan attacks Christians, seeking at all costs to bring about their defeat in *the race of the faith*, causing them to be disqualified for *the prize set before them.* And he attacks the message which relates these things — *the Word of the Kingdom* — seeking at all costs to corrupt and destroy this message.

And how well Satan has succeeded can be seen on every hand today. This message is all but absent in the Churches throughout the land, and the vast majority of Christians throughout these same Churches lack any real spiritual direction and purpose in their lives. This is what the leaven which the woman placed in the three measures of meal in Matt. 13:33 has done during a period encompassing almost two millenniums.

This is the state in which Christendom finds itself near the end of the dispensation. And this existing state of Christendom should surprise no one, for Scripture clearly reveals that this is the way the dispensation would end. The parable of the mustard seed continues with *the same central thoughts* set forth in the previous parable, the parable of the wheat and tares. *Fruit-bearing* remains at the forefront (v. 31), as well as *Satan's continuing activity as he seeks to stop Christians from bearing fruit*. And the method which Satan uses as he seeks to stop Christians from bearing fruit, revealed in the previous parable, is *through sowing tares among the wheat*.

(For information on *the tares*, refer to "False Teachers," pp. 7-15, in this article. Also, refer to Ch. IV, *Parable of the Tares*, in the author's book, "Mysteries of the Kingdom.")

Then the parable of the mustard seed reveals that which would happen because of this activity of Satan. In this respect, the parable of the mustard seed is simply a commentary on the previous parable, providing additional explanatory help.

In the true sense of the definition of a parable and why the Lord used parables — to provide additional information pertaining to previously revealed truths — the parable of the mustard seed was given to help explain the parable which had previously been given, the parable of the wheat and tares.

And the same thing could be said concerning why the Lord gave the parable of the wheat and tares. It was given to help explain a part of the parable given prior to this one, the parable of the Sower.

Then, looking ahead to the parable following the parable of the mustard seed — the parable of the leaven — the same thing can be seen. This parable was given to provide additional explanatory help for the parable of the mustard seed.

That's the evident Divinely designed interrelationship which exists between the first four parables in Matthew chapter thirteen. The parable of the Sower, the first parable spoken outside the house, by the seaside, *introduces the matter*; and the succeeding three parables spoken outside the house, by the seaside, *simply build, after a successive fashion*, on that introduced in the first parable.

Natural, Unnatural Growth

In the second parable — the parable of the wheat and tares — Satan is seen sowing contrary-minded individuals in the midst of Christians bringing forth fruit (seen in the latter part of the first parable, the parable of the Sower), seeking *to stop fruit-bearing*. This is how matters *had become* in Christendom relative to fruit-bearing, with the kingdom of the heavens in view. Then the third parable, the parable of the mustard seed, presents how matters *would continue* in this respect.

This parable first depicts the mustard seed germinating, with a natural growth occurring for a time. The natural growth of this particular seed, “the least of all seeds,” would result in *an herb*, referred to as “the greatest among herbs” when grown. And, beyond that, a natural growth of this herb would result in *fruit-bearing* (v. 32), as seen in the previous two parables.

Thus, Satan’s success in stopping fruit-bearing would be contingent on his success in preventing the continuance of a natural growth of the mustard seed. One would go hand-in-hand with the other.

The mustard seed in the parable represents, not individuals per se, but *an entity* made up of individuals — *the good seed, the sons of the kingdom* from the previous parable. And a *natural or unnatural growth* of the mustard seed would represent a *natural or unnatural development* of those comprising the good seed.

Should Satan be *unsuccessful* in his efforts to prevent a *natural development* of those comprising the mustard seed, *growth* would eventually result in that which God had intended; and *fruit-bearing* would go hand-in-hand with their growth and development.

However, should Satan be *successful* in his efforts to prevent the continuance of a natural development of those comprising the mustard seed, *growth* would eventually result in something other than that which God had intended; and *barrenness* would ensue.

And the latter is exactly what is seen in this parable. The mustard seed, following a period of normal growth (which, if not interfered with, would result in “the greatest among herbs”), is seen experiencing an abnormal growth and *becoming* “a tree.”

And not only did this abnormal growth ensue, but the mustard seed is seen developing so abnormally that it not only grew into *a tree*, but the nature of this tree allowed “the birds of the air,” individuals doing the work of Satan, *to find a lodging place in its branches* (v. 32; cf. vv. 4, 19).

Thus, the third parable, continuing the thought from the second parable, presents the tares being *quite effective*. They are seen deceiving fruit-bearing Christians to the degree that they bring about an unnatural spiritual growth among these Christians, resulting in *unfruitfulness, barrenness*; and the matter is carried to the point that, in the end, the tares are able to simply *settle down* in that which they had produced, finding *acceptance* among those whom they had deceived.

False Teachers

This work of Satan — producing an unnatural growth, resulting in barrenness — could only have been accomplished through *one means*. It could only have been accomplished through the promulgation of *false doctrine*. It could only have been accomplished through Satan placing *false teachers* (tares) in the midst of fruit-bearing Christians (wheat), leading them away from *the truth of the Scriptures*, leading them away from *an adherence to the faith*. And this is exactly the way Scripture elsewhere reveals that the matter occurred.

There are multiplied warnings numerous places in Scripture concerning false teachers who would arise and teach “perverse things,” particularly relative to *the faith, the Word of the Kingdom*. And these false teachers would arise, not from the world, but *from within Christendom itself*. These false teachers would arise *from the ranks of Christians, from within the Churches* (Acts 20:29-32; cf. I Tim. 4:1-3; II Tim. 2:8, 18; 3:7, 8; 4:1-4; II Peter 2:1ff; Jude 3ff).

As it was surrounding Christ’s first coming and the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Israel, *so would it be* surrounding Christ’s second coming and the offer of the kingdom of the heavens to Christians. *Jewish religious leaders were responsible* for that which happened in the past dispensation surrounding the

proffered kingdom at Christ's first coming, and *Christian religious leaders are responsible* for that which is happening during the present dispensation surrounding the proffered kingdom and Christ's second coming.

The religious leaders in Israel followed Christ about the country and sought, at every turn, to speak against that which was being seen and heard. Christ's ministry centered around supernatural signs, which pointed to that which Israel could have — supernatural healing, supernatural provision — if the nation would repent. But the religious leaders would have no part in the matter; and they misled the people, resulting in the nation's rejection of the proffered kingdom and the subsequent crucifixion of the nation's King.

And the situation relative to the proclamation of the Word of the Kingdom throughout the present dispensation has been no different. Christians down through the years have been misled, not by those in the world, but *by their own religious leaders*. Scripture is very clear on this matter.

1) *At the Beginning of the Dispensation*

The message of the hour at the beginning of the dispensation — one proclaimed throughout Christendom — centered around *the faith, the saving of the soul, the Word of the Kingdom*. This was the message which Paul referred to as “my gospel” (Rom. 16:25), “our gospel” (II Cor. 4:3), and “the glorious gospel of Christ [*lit.*, ‘the gospel of the glory of Christ’]” (II Cor. 4:4); this was the message which Paul had been called to proclaim to Christians throughout the Gentile world (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:11, 12, 16; 2:7); and this was the message which Paul and others, during the first few decades of the existence of the Church, “preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Col. 1:5, 6, 23).

(The reference to “every creature which is under heaven” in Col. 1:23 would, contextually, refer to *the saved alone*, not to the unsaved. This would be a reference to *all of the saved* having heard the message which saved individuals are to hear following their salvation — *the Word of the Kingdom*.)

The unsaved cannot be in view in this passage, for the only mes-

sage which they are to hear is the good news that Christ has died for their sins. Only after they have heard this message and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ are they in a position to hear the message referenced in this verse in Colossians, which has to do with the purpose for their salvation, the reason why they have been saved.)

Thus, during the first century of the Church's existence, the message surrounding the proffered kingdom was something universally proclaimed throughout Christendom. And this message could only have been well-known and understood by Christians everywhere, resulting in at least a segment of Christendom developing in a natural fashion and these Christians, correspondingly, bearing fruit.

It was within a setting of this nature that Satan sowed tares among the wheat, seeking to stop the natural growth and development of the seed which had been sown; and success in stopping this natural growth and development would, in turn, over time, ultimately result in *a barren condition of the plant*.

Now, note the problem which Satan faced at the beginning of the dispensation. He faced the problem of countering a message which was being proclaimed and received throughout Christendom. Christians who had received the true message were *developing after a proper fashion* (growing from immaturity to maturity), with a *corresponding fruitfulness*.

To counter the true message, Satan simply placed individuals proclaiming a false message in the midst of those Christians who had received the true message. Then, over time, the false message progressively took root and did its damaging work, accomplishing its purpose.

This false message, once received, resulted in an improper development in Christendom (an improper growth from immaturity to maturity). And, *developing after an improper fashion, a corresponding barrenness ensued*.

And Satan's work in this manner is how Scripture reveals that he stops fruit-bearing. He places individuals with a false message relative to the kingdom among those bearing fruit for the kingdom. The false message takes root, growth becomes progressively

unnatural, and fruit-bearing is stymied. Then, the false message continues to take hold until the point is reached where growth becomes so unnatural that fruit-bearing can no longer exist.

a) *The Messengers*

Both Peter in his second epistle and Jude begin their epistles by exhorting Christians to strain every muscle of their being in the present race of the faith (II Peter 1:2-11; Jude 3); and that which necessitates this exhortation, in both epistles, is *the presence of false teachers in their midst* (II Peter 2:1ff; Jude 4ff).

These are the same *false teachers* to which Christ had referred in the parables in Matthew chapter thirteen, who would produce an unnatural growth among fruit-bearing Christians; and these are the same *false teachers* to which Paul subsequently referred, who would arise among Christians, take truths concerning the Word of the Kingdom, and distort and twist these truths (Acts 20:30, 31).

These are *the apostates*, dealt with extensively in Scripture — a type individual identified by the meaning of the word itself. Our English word, “apostasy,” is simply an Anglicized form of the Greek word *apostasia*. This is a compound word comprised of *apo* (‘from’) and *stasis* (‘to stand’). The word means “to stand away from”; and the word refers to a person *standing away from* a place which he had previously occupied.

The apostasy in view has to do with “the faith” (cf. II Tim. 2:18; 3:8; Jude 3). Thus, *true apostates relative to the faith* can only be individuals who had, at one time, *received* the message concerning the faith; but then, at a later time, they had *departed* from an adherence to this message. These are individuals who had initially *heard, understood, and received the truth*; but then they had *apostatized*. They “stood away from” the truth. They turned from the truth, began to speak out against the truth, and, in the process, taught that which was untrue.

These are the type individuals referred to in Paul’s warnings in both Acts and his epistles, as well as Peter’s and Jude’s warnings in their epistles. These are the type individuals — those quite familiar with the matter which they were speaking against — whom Satan knew that he could use *the most effectively*, whom Satan knew that

he could use to do *the most damage*.

Thus, Satan simply began to place individuals of this nature in the midst of those Christians bringing forth fruit. And they began to “draw away disciples” *after themselves* (Acts 20:30). They began to reproduce *after their kind* (cf. Gen. 1:11), resulting in fruit also *after their kind*, an “evil fruit” (Matt. 7:15-20; cf. vv. 13, 14, 21-23).

Aside from Paul’s identification of these individuals in Acts 20:30 — “of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things...” — note Peter’s identification of them in II Peter 2:18-20:

“For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.”

Note particularly the word “knowledge” in verse twenty. These individuals had escaped the “pollutions of the world” through the “knowledge [Gk., *epignosis*, ‘mature knowledge’] of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” They had come into *a mature knowledge* of the things in view — things surrounding the Word of the Kingdom. And having come into a mature knowledge of these things, they turned from these things and began *to teach perverse, contrary things*.

That these were saved individuals is evident, for an unsaved person cannot even come into a rudimentary knowledge of these things (I Cor. 2:14 [*gnosis*, the regular Greek word for “knowledge,” appears in this passage]), much less the mature knowledge seen in II Peter 2:20. Thus, the text can only have to do with *saved individuals turning from the central message of that day, distorting and twisting the truth as they taught false doctrine relative to the Word of the Kingdom*.

Satan used this type individual — after this manner, during the opening decades of the Church’s existence — to do his

bidding, to stop Christians from bearing fruit. And though the ones whom Satan used were also Christians, they were doing the works of Satan; and doing works of this nature, they were identified with Satan, referred to as “tares,” “sons of the wicked one” (cf. John 8:31-44).

b) *Their Message*

The teaching of the apostates is spoken of as “damnable heresies [*lit.*, ‘destructive heresies’ or, ‘heresies that lead to destruction’]” (II Peter 2:1). And the destruction in view has nothing to do with salvation by grace through faith, with the Christians’ presently possessed free gift of eternal life.

Eternal life is not even in view. The destruction has to do solely with *the Word of the Kingdom*, the subject matter at hand. The apostates taught heresy of a nature which led Christians to a destructive end relative to *the proffered kingdom*.

Numerous statements are given concerning the teaching and action of the apostates (cf. II Peter 2:1-3, 10ff; Jude 4, 8ff). But one thing in Peter’s second epistle stands out above everything else. There is a septenary structure to Peter’s second epistle, with a particular reference to and emphasis upon Christ’s return within this structure (1:16-18; 3:4-8).

The apostates are seen “walking after their own lusts [‘desires’ — desires which would be *soulical* (‘their own desires’), not *spiritual* (that which the Lord would desire)]” (3:3; cf. 2:18). And, within this type walk, they are seen proclaiming a message which would strike *at the heart* of all sound Biblical teaching surrounding Christ’s return and the Messianic Kingdom:

“Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were *from the beginning of the creation*” (3:4).

Then the verses which follow (vv. 5-9) — answering the apostates false message through referring to events beginning with the opening verses of Genesis — make matters very clear that *the heart* of the apostates’ message had to do with *denying Christ’s return at the end of six thousand years, with attendant destruction on the one hand and attendant blessings on the other*. They had willingly al-

lowed the things surrounding this entire panorama of teaching to escape their attention, and they are seen infiltrating the ranks of fruit-bearing Christians everywhere, seeking to promulgate their false doctrine.

The misleading, destructive doctrine proclaimed by the apostates is seen taking numerous forms. But *the foundation* upon which all their false teaching rested is seen taking only *one form*. All their false teaching is seen resting on *a totally perverted form of the true foundation set forth in Gen. 1:1-2:3* — the God-established foundation upon which all subsequent Scripture rests.

In all the various forms that their false teaching took, they sought to do away with two things:

- 1) *The septenary structure of Scripture as set forth in the beginning, in Gen. 1:1-2:3.*
- 2) *Teachings surrounding Christ's return within the framework of this septenary structure (at the end of six days, at the end of 6,000 years).*

Then, building on a totally perverted foundation of this nature, the apostates sought to spread all types of destructive heresies relative to the various facets of the Word of the Kingdom among fruit-bearing Christians. And, over time, as seen in the parable of the mustard seed, they were quite successful.

The mustard seed germinated and grew, normally for a time, but then in an abnormal manner; and, over time, it became something which it was not supposed to become at all. It became *a tree*. And not only did it become a tree, but it became the type tree which allowed the false teachers to take up residence in the branches of the tree, continuing their destructive work from within.

Proper growth can come *only* from that which has not been corrupted (I Peter 2:1, 2). And the converse of that is equally true. *Only* improper growth can result when corruption has occurred.

Thus, to bring about improper growth, the false teachers simply proclaimed a corrupted form of the only thing which God had provided for the nourishment and well-being of the spiritual

man. And through so doing, they went back to and began with *the very heart of the matter — the foundation itself, in the opening two chapters of Genesis.*

It was *the work of the apostates* which brought about the conditions seen in the parable of the mustard seed. A corrupted and improper diet of spiritual food resulted in a corrupted and improper growth; and a growth of this nature, over time, ultimately resulted in barrenness. Then the false teachers simply took up residence within that which they had produced, assuring that conditions would remain in a corrupted and barren state.

2) *At the End of the Dispensation*

Near the end of the dispensation (today), relative to the Word of the Kingdom, conditions throughout Christendom are seen to have become completely turned around from the way that they existed at the beginning of the dispensation. After almost two millennia, the Word of the Kingdom — taught and understood throughout the Churches at the beginning of the dispensation — is seldom even heard in Christian circles. And, with the message not being proclaimed, Christians throughout the Churches of the land, correspondingly, have little to no understanding of truths surrounding the coming kingdom.

Thus, during the present day and time, Satan has little need for apostates to infiltrate and settle down within the ranks of Christians. Christendom is too far gone for any type overall change or recovery to occur. And, beyond that, though little infiltration of apostates need exist on Satan's part today, he would undoubtedly be hard-pressed to find very many true apostates during the present time.

For a person to be a true apostate, he would, first of all, have to come into an understanding of the Word of the Kingdom before he could apostatize. And those having *a conversant knowledge* of this message today — the only ones in a position to apostatize — are far and few between.

That which exists in Christendom today is *the aftermath, the end result*, of Satan sowing tares among the wheat, of Satan bringing about an abnormal growth of the mustard seed. In general,

in relation to the Word of the Kingdom, because of that which has occurred in the past, *a corrupted Christendom* presently exists.

Those occupying the pulpit are silent on the subject, and those occupying the pew, accordingly, know little to nothing about the matter. And, should the subject ever emerge — as it sometimes does — those occupying the pulpit are usually quick in their attempts to squelch the message. This message encompasses things which are out of line with the training which they received in the theology schools of the land; and they, accordingly, view the message after an erroneous fashion.

In this respect, the effectiveness of the false teachers at the beginning of the dispensation is evidenced by two things near the end of the dispensation. It is evidenced by *the condition of Christian leadership in particular and the condition of the Church in general*.

Thus, a completely different situation exists in Christendom during the present day and time than existed during the first several centuries of the dispensation. There would be some need for true apostates, for there are individuals — one here, and one there — who believe the Word of the Kingdom and are bringing forth fruit. But such a need would be minimal.

In this respect, with conditions as such, Satan could concentrate his efforts on bringing to completion that which he began almost two millenniums ago. He could concentrate on *maintaining the status quo as he continues his efforts to produce total corruption*. And, as will become evident in the completion of the parables given outside the house, by the seaside (the parable of the leaven), *total corruption* is exactly the picture which these parables (and Scriptures elsewhere) present of conditions in Christendom at the end of the dispensation.

A Tree

The particular type abnormal spiritual growth seen resulting from the false message of the apostates is something which can be seen in both Church history throughout the course of the dispensation and in the Church of today near the end of the dispensation. The abnormal growth of the mustard seed in history resulted in a

tree, in which those who had brought about its abnormal growth are, in the end, seen resting in its branches; and the tree remains to this day, with its roots sinking ever deeper into the earth, with Satan's emissaries resting in its branches.

1) *Symbolism of a Tree*

To fully comprehend and understand that which is in view, note the symbolism of *a tree* in Scripture. A "tree" is used in Scripture to symbolize *a national power*.

In Judges 9:8-15, which relates the oldest known parable in the world, "trees" are seen symbolizing *nations* which had sought to elect a king to reign over them.

Daniel, in his prophecy, refers to the vision of "a tree in the midst of the earth," which "reached unto heaven." And this "tree" is said to symbolize *the kingdom of Babylon* (Dan. 4:10-12, 20-22).

Israel is referred to in Joel's prophecy by a "fig tree" (1:7). And Christ not only referred to *Israel* through the symbolism of a "fig tree" during his earthly ministry but He also referred to *the surrounding Gentile nations* through the symbolism of "all the trees" (Matt. 21:18, 19; 24:32; Luke 21:29).

There can be no question concerning Scripture using "trees" in a symbolic sense to signify *national powers*. And, remaining within the confines of the symbolism which Scripture itself provides, there can, as well, be no question concerning that which is in view through the mustard seed germinating and eventually becoming *a tree*.

The teaching, through the symbolism given, is clear. That represented by the mustard seed germinated and eventually became *a national power* — something which it was not supposed to become at all during the present dispensation, something reserved for the coming dispensation. It became a national power during the time Satan ruled within the kingdom of the heavens; it became a national power within the present kingdom of Satan.

And any Biblical thought of Christians exercising power in the world was to be reserved for a future day, a time after Satan had been put down and Christ had taken the sceptre; power of this nature was to be exercised *solely within the future kingdom of Christ*.

(In short, Satan, through his action as seen in the parable of the mustard seed, caused Christendom, forming the Church, to grow into *a national power* which would be under his control and sway.

Satan, throughout Man's Day, following man's fall, has ruled the earth through the nations [once national powers had been brought into existence]. This though would exclude Israel [once the nation had been brought into existence], for Israel was not to be "reckoned among the nations" [Num. 23:9].

This type rule by Satan is revealed in Dan. 10:12-21, with Satan and his angels ruling through the nations, but with Israel occupying a position separate from the nations and Satan's rule in this respect [*ref. the author's books, "The Most High Ruleth" and "The Spiritual Warfare," for additional information on this subject*].

Through Satan's efforts — producing an abnormal growth in Christendom, resulting in that symbolized by a tree — he sought to make Christendom *a national power* during the time when he rules through national powers, with his emissaries finding ready acceptance in this national power [the birds of the air lodging in the branches of the tree]. Satan sought to make Christendom *a national power, as the nations, through which he and his angels could exert rulership and control.*)

2) In History, During the Present Day

During the early part of the first century, when the apostates first infiltrated the ranks of fruit-bearing Christians, Christianity was looked upon in the Roman world as *an illegal religion*. And, in some quarters, Christians were looked upon by the Romans as being *guilty of treason*.

Rome practiced emperor worship, and, within this practice, "religion" and "state" became *one entity*. Christians, on the other hand, were monotheistic and spoke of a King other than Caesar and of a Kingdom other than Rome. Thus, it is little wonder that the Romans looked upon Christianity and Christians in *an illegal and a treasonous sense*.

It was these basic differences which resulted in all of the Roman persecution, lasting several centuries. But something else also happened during this time. The apostates progressively broke down the barriers separating the Roman Empire and Christianity, until the day came, near the end of the fourth century, when these

barriers no longer existed. And this was followed by a merger of Church and State.

Constantine, during the opening years of the fourth century put a stop to the persecution of Christians, and he himself later embraced Christianity (for reasons upon which historians differ). And all of this set the stage for that which was to follow.

In the year 380 A.D., Theodosius I issued an edict that made Christianity *the exclusive state religion*; and, in the year 395 A.D., Christianity was finally recognized as *the official and only religion of the Roman Empire*.

At this point, Christianity found itself completely enmeshed within a world power in the sphere of governmental authority over which Satan exercised control, completely out of line with God's plans and purposes for *the new creation* "in Christ."

This condition of Christendom though did not result from the previous Roman persecution. The previous persecution had only resulted in Christian growth. As Tertullian, a Christian living during the period of Roman persecution, said, "*The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.*"

That which ultimately occurred in Christendom was caused by *the apostates*. Their attack was not centered upon *the entity itself* (as was Rome's attack) but upon *that which brought the entity to a fruit-bearing stage*. They went back to that upon which the entity was fed and nourished, introducing corruption and destruction at this point.

And the end result was *exactly* as Christ had foretold. The mustard seed germinated, grew normally for awhile, then took an abnormal growth, and eventually became *a tree*. The abnormal growth, over time, ultimately resulted in *barrenness*; and Christians found themselves occupying a position which they were not supposed to occupy during the present dispensation at all. They found themselves *associated with Gentile world power within the present kingdom of Satan*.

And this is a position from which Christianity has never recovered. Down to the present day, though Rome has long since passed off the scene, Christians can still be found involving themselves in activities associated with *the tree* of Matt. 13:32. They can be

seen on practically every hand involving themselves in the present government after all types of fashions, attempting to exert some type influence or power in the present kingdom under Satan.

This though is *not the day* when Christians are to rule and reign. *That day lies in the future, after Christ has taken the kingdom and Christians have been placed in positions of power and authority.*

The entire present system is in its *death-throes* and is to be destroyed by Christ when He returns. Christians having works associated with the present system will one day see their works suffer the same fate which the system is about to suffer. Such works will be *destroyed, burned "in fire"* at the judgment seat; and even though these Christians will be "saved; yet so as by ['through'] fire" (I Cor. 3:11-15), they will be left with *nothing of value in relation to the coming kingdom of Christ*. And they will consequently *be rejected for regal positions with Christ*.

But for those Christians who will not have allowed the pseudo form of Christendom enmeshed within the present world system to govern their lives, things will be different. Their works will not suffer the same fate as those having works associated with the present world system. They will possess works which will endure the fire, and they will be left with *something of value in relation to the coming kingdom of Christ*. These are the ones who will have waited to exercise regal power and authority, and these are the ones who will *rule as co-heirs with Christ in His kingdom*.

