

# THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Understanding the Christian Life And  
The Relationship of the Old and New Covenants



***"To Him who opened His mouth in parables and  
uttered things hidden since the creation of the world."***

Psalm 78

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Coming to these parables we find Jesus speaking to the people of God bringing them their last opportunity as a nation to see and understand the grace and heart of God... in an offering of the establishment of their promised kingdom. He made it clear in His teachings that this promised kingdom would not only be on earth, it would also be heavenly and eternal. He was there to bring forgiveness of sins and not to destroy the kingdom of Rome.

The Parables are the direct words of Jesus - God Himself. As He stands with His disciples and teaches them - may we listen as He says, *"But I say to you,"* and *"You who have ears for hearing, be hearing these words."*

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## **ABOUT THE SERIES:**

Bible study is such an important feature of the Christian's life. This series is designed to teach the then current importance of Jesus' interactions with His disciples, the Pharisees, scribes, religious leaders - and teach the now current importance of Jesus' teachings for us as 21<sup>st</sup> century believers. Often the bottom line is, "this is what was wrong with the Nation of Israel, learn of it, and don't repeat their lack of understanding and faith." Many of these lessons are difficult for us - that doesn't make them any less important for us.

Parabolic stories are literally stories that have been "thrown alongside (Gk. Alongside, thrown)" to give understanding to that Jesus was talking about. They are not always labeled as "parables." They are not just simple stories - they are often quite complex.

In the mind of God these stories were intended to give different messages to different categories of people.

**To His disciples** the meanings had to do with their immediate circumstances, with a look towards what they would understand after His death and resurrection. The disciples often had trouble understanding the parables, even after a couple of His explanations. Later, they would say, "Oh, that's what He meant." The importance lay with the establishment of the Church and the fuller understanding that would come with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God.

**To the general followers** that surrounded Him the meanings were to draw them closer to Himself - to encourage questions and find insight into just who He was. Many would eventually fall away, and many of His parables mentioned that. Some would find themselves in Jerusalem at the temple meetings shouting, "Crucify Him." Some would find themselves buried in tears at the thought of His crucifixion.

**To the Pharisees** and other leaders that followed Him to find fault and condemnation, His words would serve to enrage them into caustic actions and lies that would provide their leadership with reasons to kill Him.

Of enormous importance to every one of us is that as we study His words... they don't mean what "we" want them to mean. He is the author of creation, His message to us concerns what He intends for us to learn and know.

Nothing of the Word of God is open to interpretation outside the knowledge and discipline of the whole word of God. 2 Peter 1:20-21 reminds us, "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved the Holy Spirit and spoke from God."

**As we listen** and learn the words of Jesus... He reminds us that "What we already know"... like the Jews and Pharisees of His day, may not be exactly what He wants us to know, for He said to His disciples and followers, "But I say to you..."

Throughout the series we'll be using a techniques I like to call "linear text." We'll take the text from each place it occurs in the Bible and separate out the best lines and words of each occurrence and put them into a single statement that tells the most vivid story - without straying off into fiction.

Here's an example taken from the first study in the series - "You are the Salt of the Earth." Here's our *Linear Text*:

*[Mt 5:13a] "You are the salt of the earth; [Mk 9:50b] salt is good, but if the salt becomes unsalty, [Mt 5:13c] how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, [Lk 14:35a] It is useless either for the soil or for the manure pile, [Mt 5:13d] except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. [Mk 9:50c] Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another. [Lk 14:35c] He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

If you are at all familiar with this parable, you can see that combining the three instances... we have considerably more detail - and all in one place. But what does it all mean? For that we need to be aware of one of the most important disciplines of good Bible study...

### **Context Is Everything!**

We don't really know or understand what Jesus was talking about unless we know the who, what, where, and why of His situation. There are some basics we need to know and remember! So, first it is imperative that we understand that absolutely everything you find and read in the Bible is by God's intention and will. From before the creation of the universe to the far distant existence in eternity - God planned it. Mankind was created to be eternal and as holy as He is - created in His image and likeness. God's plan to bring forth a people for His own, both Jew and Gentile, from birth to eternity is included in that eternal plan. It includes the Angels and their fall; Mankind and our fall; redemption built upon belief and faith, the entrance of the Son of God into our story, His life, suffering, death, resurrection and

ascension, the believer's place beside Him, and the unbeliever's place completely apart from Him in a suffering eternal existence.

In order to understand Jesus' parables we have to go way back in the Scriptures to:

### **The Angels and their High Calling.**

The angels were created to be the "messengers" of God. Some were chosen even to stand in the very presence of Almighty God and shout, "Holy, Holy, Holy is our God..." When some of these angels CHOSE to believe that there was a better way, a better god - even one of their own, the "evil one." They were cast out of heaven, cast away from Almighty God's immediate presence, and were to never be given any form of forgiveness... because of their high calling. They gave up all that God Almighty could provide, because they chose NOT ALMIGHTY GOD. Then the was

### **The story of MAN**

Created by God to care for His garden planet. And What did Man and Women choose to do - They gave up their HIGH CALLING and all its benefits, in order to BELIEVE the evil one, instead of BELIEVE GOD. They were cast from God's presence in the Garden - but were given the chance for forgiveness and redemption - if they would believe and put their trust in God Almighty once again.

And this brings us to the CONTEXT of Jesus' time and situation - Israel!

Here's some brief history that should help us understand the situation.

### **"Who Was the Nation of Israel?"**

Genesis 12:4 God tells Abram, a Chaldean pagan (Iran) to go home, collect his stuff, get some sleep, and leave in the morning for a place he doesn't know where it is yet. He goes home, collects his stuff, got some sleep, and left. - Counted to Him as Righteousness by God.

Genesis 22 God tells Abraham, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love - Isaac - Sacrifice Him as a burnt offering." Abraham goes and when he gets there he tells his servant, "Stay here, WE WILL BE BACK!" Abraham believed God's promise. If God required Isaac's death, He would provide a substitute or resurrection from the dead. God would keep His promise. He and Isaac then go up the mountain, make the offering table, and Abraham takes his knife and raises it to sacrifice his son... And a messenger Angel

stays his hand - and God forgives the curse and provides a ram for the sacrifice, and lets them return home - and it is Counted to them as Righteousness by God (Abraham becomes the only Ancient Father of the Faith who foreshadows God the Father). As a result, God made a unilateral covenant (one sided agreement - only God decided it), that the Abrahamic family would be a people, have a land, and a kingdom... forever. This family has received a High Calling indeed!

### **Israel's High Calling**

Abraham's family - Isaac, Jacob, Jacob's twelve sons become a nation in Egypt. Levi, a son of Jacob, has a grandson named Moses with a brother named Aaron, whom God calls upon to deliver the Israelite nation from the Egyptians and they wind up at mount Sinai in the wilderness of south eastern Arabia and God makes another COVENANT with them. In this covenant God pledges to be faithful to this new people - **IF** they are faithful to Him. The First covenant still stands - the Abrahamic family will continue and be fruitful, and have their own kingdom - forever, but the second covenant makes His protection dependent upon their faithfulness. They are again given the place of a HIGH CALLING.

Then... Moses' brother Aaron leads the nation in rebellion against God while Moses is receiving the 2nd Covenant. Later the nation is shown a land that is promised to them for a new beginning - and they refuse to go into it. They then spend 40 years in the desert wilderness that should have been only an 11 day's journey - a stiff necked people. Cycle after cycle of God's gifts and Israel's rebellion against Him - about a thousand years of it - and then God removes His presence from them (Ezekiel 9-10) and removes His Glory from the Temple and He no longer "dwells amongst His people". God's love for them through the Abrahamic Covenant still stands, His immediate relationship to them has changed because of their continued unfaithfulness to Him and His HIGH CALLING.

The nation had been divided in two, their division and constant rebellion eventually sent them into two separate captivities, first Assyria takes the northern nation of Israel, and then Babylon takes the southern nation of Judah. 400 years of silence ensue and we find ourselves with the days of Jesus. Those days are no accident. They have been carefully planned before

the foundation of the world. In order for the redemption of mankind to come about... Jesus must go to the cross!

### **Their End Result In Jesus' Day**

King Herod hears of the birth of a new king of Israel - Jesus - and attempts to have Him killed.

Jesus comes of age to begin His ministry as the Anointed One, Messiah, Christ (all the same word) and the Jewish religious leadership already know who He is and already are plotting for finding a way to have Him killed. The whole nation has never changed. They have constantly and relentlessly refused to honor God or to worship Him as their King.

### **What is the root problem?**

#### **The Human Heart - Who Can Know It**

Here's a quick side trip that's completely necessary right now... Jeremiah, Chapter 17, and verse 9.

*"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"*

This is a central theme of the Scriptures - even though only stated like this here in Jeremiah, The only way one can see and understand the incredible offer that God has made, through His Son Jesus, is to turn away from that deceitful heart - through the reception of the Holy Spirit of God - and to then see the heart of God and receive His Son as the payment of all our sin.

The rejection of that incredible offer therefore brings an equally incredible negative result. No offer of salvation, into a place of no presence of Almighty God, His love, or His grace - forever. That place is called "Hell."

### **Who Is Jesus With?**

At this moment, in this text, we find that Jesus has gathered His following and begins to address them. In the background of our parable is the educated "teachers of the Law," (Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees) who would stand and lecture their listeners on the importance of keeping the

"Oral Law" (The Talmud, as rewritten by them), and faithfully following the demands of formalistic ritual in every exact detail - they taught... in order to please God.

### **Jesus is Teaching as a Rabbi**

His ministry is just beginning and we find Him near the sea of Galilee, in Capernaum, telling "large crowds" about "The Good News of the Kingdom." You remember, way back at Mount Sinai when Israel refused to enter that special land... If Israel would finally believe in Him and follow Him - they were once again at the river, and looking into that promised land (You've heard Jesus say, "The Kingdom of God is at hand") - that promised Kingdom and Jesus is inviting them to join Him there. He's about to tell them about what it will be like there - as he begins His "Sermon on the Mount," [Mt 5]

12 verses into His sermon He pauses and says... **"You are the salt of the Land,"**

I'm emphasizing the word "land" here for He's talking about salt that comes from the ground of the earth. As the continents have shifted over time the ocean and the great flood has deposited it's salt in and on the ground. It is a natural substance that WE ALL ARE FAMILIAR WITH - That's the point - believers are a natural part of our world.

Just a few verses into this sermon on the mount, He tells those who choose to follow Him "It's Not what they told you..., It's What I Tell You" - [think about that]

### **Who is this Jesus?**

The Son of God, the Anointed One, The Messiah, The Christ!

Jesus, as the **expected teacher of the Law** turns to His disciples and says, **"But I say to you...."**

### **Ears Are For Hearing**

**This series on Jesus' Parables is all about changing your lives according to what Jesus says... "But I say to you!"**

## **"You who have ears for hearing, be hearing these words."**

Over and over again, especially in the parables, Jesus tells -- in fact warns His disciples, "You, who have ears for hearing, be hearing these words." This message was not only for them then then, but for us today, "You, who have ears for hearing, be hearing these words!"

The parables were told in a situation story manner. The truths told would seem for some to be child's nonsense. To others His words would speak to their wayward and rebellious hearts as religious leaders - condemning them.

For there is more than one kind of audience that Jesus was speaking to. But to those He gave ears to hear the Gospel... they would receive understanding of some of the deepest desires of the Lord God for the instruction of those who were the recipients of His saving grace.

Way back at the beginning I talked about Jesus' audience. Our question now is:

### **Who was Jesus' audience?**

#### **His Disciples**

There were His disciples - what is Jesus' message to them with this parable? - They wouldn't get it until after the Resurrection - then they would understand their most valued contributions to this world " the beginnings of The Body of Christ - The Church and its foundations in the Word of God.

#### **His followers**

The followers " Many would come to faith through the teachings of Jesus and understand the parable - many would not - no ears for hearing.

#### **The Pharisees and Scribes and their minions**

Also contained in this parable is the hint that if those touched by the words of Jesus would have actually brought them to active belief... then those who followed Jesus would stand up in Judea against the Jewish religious leadership and reform the culture to a Biblical standard - that the Messiah/King would lead them back into their calling as the SALT of the

earth. But this did not happen. Instead we see mobs of Judean people shouting, "Crucify Him, Crucify Him, Crucify Him!"

Knowing the story from end to beginning, we can see that the nation of Israel and its leadership, was and is destined to wait until, once again they are brought forward, chastised and then - finally - willingly - brought into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ - By The King at His 2nd coming. We will be there too... but that's another story.

### **Who Else Is In Jesus' Audience?**

#### **YOU**

Yes, YOU ! Today, and all of your Christian life... you are Jesus' audience. It is His words that should change you the most. The Bible has over 40 writers, roughly 1500 years of writing, 66 books of infinite knowledge and instruction - and all of it finds its focus and meaning in the one whose parables we will be studying in the weeks ahead - Jesus.

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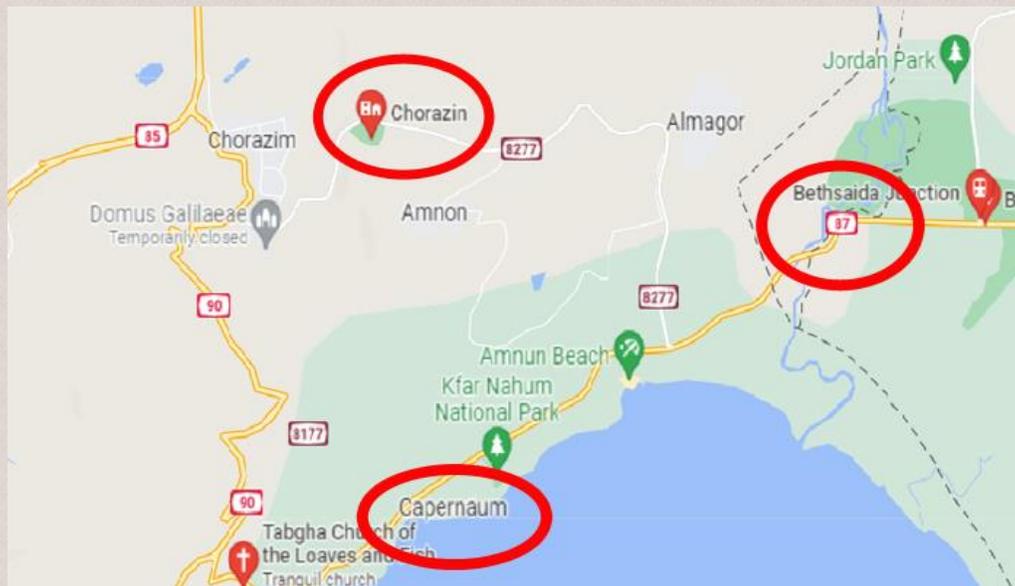
## INTRODUCTION TO THE BACKGROUND OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS



### Why Was Jesus' Ministry Centered In Galilee?

Jesus focused His ministry in one small place in Israel: Galilee, in the three cities of Corazin (about 3 miles North of the Sea of Galilee), Capernaum (on the North West coast of the Sea of Galilee), and Bethsaida (about 2 miles North East of the Sea of Galilee). Although many people today assume that Galileans were simple, uneducated peasants who lived in an isolated area, the

truth is they interacted more with the world than the Jews of Judah and Jerusalem. The Via Maris trade route which connected Egypt with the northern empires of Syria, Anatolia (Turkey), and Mesopotamia (Iran-Iraq), passed through Galilee, exposing them to many different peoples and cultures.



The Galileans were also the most religious Jews in the world during Jesus' time. They revered and knew the Scriptures well. They were passionately committed to living out their faith and passing their faith, knowledge, and lifestyle to their children. This led to the establishment of vibrant religious communities; a strong commitment to families and country; and active participation in the local synagogues; the community centers of that day. In fact, more famous Jewish teachers came from Galilee than anywhere else.

The Galileans resisted the pagan influences of Hellenism [under Greek culture and influence] far longer than their Judean counterparts, and when the great revolt against the Romans and their collaborators finally occurred (AD 66-74), it began among the Galileans. In fact most of those who followed Jesus everywhere He went fully believed He was the Messiah, the chosen and anointed One of God.

Clearly God carefully prepared the environment in which Jesus was born and reared so that he would have exactly the context he needed in order to present his messages of *"The Gospel,"* and *"the kingdom of heaven"* effectively, and so that people would understand and join his new movement. He was born in

Bethlehem, Judea. He moved to Nazareth to minister to those who would “hear” what He had to say.

A deeper knowledge of Galilee and its people helps us understand the great faith and courage of Jesus' disciples, who left Galilee and shared the “good news” with the world (Evidence indicated that Judas Iscariot was apparently the only non-Galilean among Jesus' twelve, closest disciples). The disciples' courage, the message they taught, the methods they used, and their complete devotion to God and his Word were born in Galilee's religious communities.

From: Focus on the Family (Edited)  
[thattheworldmayknow.com/the-amazing-galileans](http://thattheworldmayknow.com/the-amazing-galileans)

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### **Can anything good come out of Nazareth?**

Judeans despised their northern neighbors as country cousins, their lack of Jewish sophistication being compounded by their greater openness to Hellenistic influence. The Judean opinion was that Galileans were lax in their observance of proper ritual, and the problem was exacerbated by the distance of Galilee from the temple and the theological leadership, which was focused in Jerusalem. An impeccably Jewish Galilean who found himself in Jerusalem was as much of a foreigner as an Irishman in London. His accent would immediately mark him as “not one of us,” and the prejudice of the supposedly superior culture of the capital city would stand against Jesus' claim to be heard even as a prophet, let alone as the “Messiah,” a title which, as everyone knew, belonged to Judea (cf. John 7:40-42). Both Mark and Matthew have structured their narratives around a geographical framework dividing the north from the south, culminating in the confrontation of this prophet from Galilee and the religious establishment – “This is the story of Jesus of *Nazareth*.”

From: The Gospel Coalition (Edited)  
Justin Taylor, 7 Differences between Galilee and Judea in the time of Jesus.  
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/7-differences-between-galilee-and-judea-in-the-time-of-jesus/>

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**Why did the Jewish religious leadership hate Jesus so much?**“... In Scripture, we find people who reacted to Jesus with hostility, and chief among these people are the scribes and Pharisees. We read in Luke 20 that the scribes and the chief priests sought to have Jesus arrested. In John 5, we are

told that they wanted to kill Him, and in chapters 8 and 10, they tried to stone Him.

When we read these accounts in Scripture, we are prompted to ask, Why did these people speak the way they did and feel the way they did with such hostility toward Jesus? It's difficult to provide a complete answer as to why they were motivated in this way, but here are three reasons why the religious authorities hated Jesus so much.

The first is this: They were jealous of Him. Why would they be jealous of the Son of God? Everywhere Jesus went, He attracted huge throngs, multitudes, crowds pressing around to listen to His every word, watching His every move. He was profoundly popular among the people, whereas the rulers of the Jews laid heavy burdens on their people, and they approached the masses, the people of the earth, with something like a spirit of disdain and scorn. While they wouldn't think of having dinner with a tax collector, Jesus freely associated with people whom the Pharisees considered "rabble."

The people loved Jesus, and they received Him gladly, but what they felt from the Pharisees was judgment. The only thing the Pharisees looked at was the people's sin, and so they had a certain contempt for the common people. They saw Jesus associating with the common people and saw them cheering Him, loving Him. They couldn't stand it because they were envious and suspicious of His popularity.

The second reason why they hated Him was because He exposed them. Before Jesus came, it was the Pharisees particularly, as well as the Sadducees and scribes, who set the moral standard for the community. They sat in the highest places in the synagogue. They were the ones who were most honored and celebrated for their virtue, but their virtue, as Jesus taught repeatedly, was a pretense. It was external. He said: "You're like dead men's tombs, whitewashed sepulchers that are painted without blemish on the surface but inside are filled with dead men's bones. You clean the outside of the platter, but the other side, the inner side, is filthy. You do everything possible to hide that impurity, that grime, and that filthiness from public view. You pretend to be righteous, and you major in that pretense of being righteous."

... they masqueraded as devotees of righteousness and obedience. In a word, they were counterfeit. They were fake. And nothing reveals a counterfeit like the presence of the genuine. When Jesus walked this earth, true righteousness and holiness was manifested by Him before the eyes of the people. It didn't

take exceptional brilliance to discern the difference between the real and the counterfeit. So the Pharisees were exposed, and because they were exposed by the true and authentic holiness of Christ, they hated Him, and they couldn't wait to get rid of Him.

The third reason I think that they hated Him is because they were afraid—not so much of what He would do to them in His wrath but of the consequences of welcoming Him into their midst. Why were they afraid? Look at the history of Israel. In almost every generation going back to Abraham, the Israelites lived under the domination and oppression of a foreign nation. You've heard of the Pax Romana; there's also the Pax Israeliana. The Pax Israeliana, or the peace of Israel, was always extremely short-lived. Almost always, the people were a conquered people, a people who lived under the oppression and the tyranny of their enemies. In the case of the first-century Jews, the oppressor was Rome.

Those who were in positions of power and authority, as the Pharisees and Sadducees were, feared losing their power and authority. The Jewish leaders feared the consequences of a revolt against Rome. That's on almost every page of the New Testament. They feared the Romans. They feared that Jesus somehow would lead an insurrection, cause another uprising, and consequently bring a bloodbath, and so they sought to remove Him before He caused them trouble.

R. C. Sproul, *Why did the Pharisees hate Jesus so much?* (Edited)

<https://www.ligonier.org/posts/why-did-pharisees-hate-jesus-so-much>

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## **So, Why Parables?**

The parables [*Gk. Stories Thrown Alongside*], to many, seem like just a collection of interesting stories that Jesus throws in to confuse the religious leaders who confront Him. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The parables are specifically designed for the response of those who hear them. God specifically makes some to hear and some to not hear. The principles found in the parables can only be fully discerned by those who have been prepared by God and then, only by contact with the Word of God and

through Faith. It is Jesus who is the Word of God and understanding of these parabolic stories can only be understood through Faith in Him then and now.

The parables are a look into the mirror. We see who we are in relationship to Christ. They show us Christ and His will in and for us. They show us our heavenly Father and they show us His Son's Kingdom - both the easy and pleasant, and the hard and difficult. Jesus has come to be revealed not concealed. His words and His actions are to prove just who He is - Almighty God.

In this study of the parables, use your ears and pay attention. Hear the significance of what is veiled in these parables. Consider the truths revealed carefully. Just as in the whole of Scripture, the characters found there are used as our guides who point to Christ. Therefore, we will be responsible for what He has given us. Grace refused... will be grace withdrawn - it was so in Jesus' day; it is so today.

There are different categories of parables. It is important to note that we need to pay special attention to the beginning of each parable. Much of the language use is symbolic in nature, but Jesus quite often introduced the "object" of the parable in the first few words. He says things like, "The Kingdom of heaven is *like a man who....*," or "*The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed....*" These particular parables are about The King and His Kingdom, and the King is Jesus. Many miss this important feature. So, there are Kingdom Parables, Christian Life Parables, Wisdom and Folly Parables, Judgment Parables, and others.

Most of our studies will follow a chronological time-line. We will address story after story in pretty-much the same order as Jesus told them. Along the way we may get a glimpse at the local context and begin to identify with the people, the places, and the times.

Not all of our parables are labeled in the scriptures as "parables," but these symbolic stories carry the same purpose... Real truths veiled in symbolic stories.

Many of the people involved in the parables are symbolic of Israel, Israel's people, and Israel's leadership. Israel's past is full of the provision and love of God and their continual rejection of Him... followed by their falling away into idol worship. We need to remember that the Gospels are all about the end of the Old Testament [and the Old Covenant]. Jesus comes to "close out" that nation and that people for the most part and will shortly (the last verses of

the book of Matthew) instruct His disciples to move on to the Gentile world, so we should mostly look to those "Last Days" of Israel meanings first, then the application to all the people of God as it applies to both then and now.

It is also important to remember that Israel was a "covenant" nation. They were given a place before God of much love and blessing - just because He chose to love them. Their covenant relationship to Him was, and is, a "conditional" relationship. "If you will... then I will... If you won't... then I won't." Within the covenant relationship was the "salvation" of God - separate but integral to the plan of God for the people of the nation. In the plan of God for Israel, the "remnant" was always the focus of His salvation. It is clear from the scriptures that while God offered His "by grace salvation," only a percentage of people would ever choose and believe Him as their King, Lord and Savior. God is not done with Israel, but that is another story.

The parables lead up to Christ on the Cross. In fact, the last parable -- The land tenants and the monies earned through investment [Mt 25:14-29] -- end with Jesus' "Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem" and its great contrast of His death on the Cross. *"And when He had said these things, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem,"* Luke 19:28, and *"And when He drew near and saw the city, He wept over it,"* saying, *"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation"* [Luke 19:41-44]. There were two great sieges of Jerusalem. One 70 years before Jesus was born by the Babylonians and the final and complete siege of 70 AD by the Romans.

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Jeremiah 18:15

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