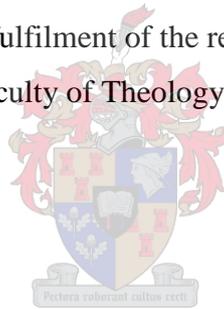


Collective meaning and specific, prophetic reference in the parables of Matthew 13?

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Theology in the Faculty of Theology at the Stellenbosch University



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December 2013

Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates whether the parables of Matthew 13 can be understood, both individually and collectively, when they are connected to specific, prophetic referents. After a review of parable research, hermeneutical guidelines are identified in order to interpret the parables of Matthew 13 (chapter 2). Novel guidelines identified include the identification of specific, prophetic referents, the possibility of using details already explained in Matthew 13 in a contextually consistent manner, focusing on the collective meaning of this parabolic discourse and identifying what is new and old in each parable. After considering the structure of Matthew 13 (in chapter 3), these hermeneutical guidelines are applied, focusing on the contextual background (chapter 4) before analysing the parables individually (chapter 5) and collectively (chapter 6). The time period covered by the parables of Matthew 13 as a group is from the days of John the Baptist until the second coming of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of heaven is understood to *exist* from Pentecost onwards but will only be *established* when Christ returns, that is, the kingdom of heaven “exists-but-is-not-yet-established”. In Matthew’s presentation, the parable of the sower covers the time period during which Jesus presents the word (or gospel) of the kingdom to Israel only. During that time, Jesus authenticates his Messianic claims to Israel and, by doing so, displays the authority and power bestowed on the Christ to them. But when Jesus is rejected, the treasure is hidden and he goes to the cross to provide the sign of Jonah. After purchasing the field, having received all authority in heaven and on earth, the Son of Man sends good seed not only to Israel, but to all the nations of the world. The sons of the kingdom first sent must include Peter and the other ten disciples who are commanded to go and make disciples. The surprising growth of the Church after the great commission includes, perhaps unexpectedly, also Gentiles, for the Son of Man commences his pearl ministry by baptising not only Jewish and Samaritan but also Gentile believers with the Holy Spirit. At the end of this age, the gospel of the kingdom will again be preached. This time, however, it will be preached not only to Israel, but as a witness to all the nations — and then the present age will end. After the tribulation and judgment of those days, the King returns to unveil the treasure in order to establish the Messianic kingdom on earth. It is submitted that, regardless of one’s eschatological view (this thesis is presented from a dispensational, premillennial perspective), by focusing on specific, prophetic referents and by considering this series of parables in a collective and contextually consistent manner, the parables of Matthew 13 (and perhaps the Gospel of Matthew as a whole) can be understood differently. And it is about understanding all these things that Jesus questions his disciples.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek of die gelykenisse van Matteus 13, sowel individueel as kollektief beskou, verstaan kan word wanneer dit met spesifieke, profetiese referente in verband gebring word. Ná ’n oorsig van navorsing oor gelykenisse word hermeneutiese riglyne ontwikkel waarmee die gelykenisse van Matteus 13 geïnterpreteer kan word (hoofstuk 2). Nuwe riglyne wat aangebied word, sluit in die identifisering van spesifieke, profetiese referente, die moontlike gebruik van referente wat reeds in Matteus 13 verklaar is op ’n kontekstueel konsekwente wyse, ’n fokus op die kollektiewe betekenis van hierdie paraboliese diskoers en om wat in elke gelykenis nuut en oud is, te identifiseer. Nadat oorweging aan die struktuur van Matteus 13 geskenk is (hoofstuk 3), word die hermeneutiese riglyne toegepas, eers op die kontekstuele agtergrond (hoofstuk 4), en daarna word elke gelykenis individueel ontleed (hoofstuk 5) voordat dit kollektief beskou word (hoofstuk 6). Daar is bevind dat die tydperk wat hierdie gelykenisse as ’n kollektiewe eenheid dek van die dae van Johannes die Doper af tot by Jesus Christus se wederkoms strek. Die koninkryk van die hemele word begryp as dat dit *bestaan* vanaf Pinkster maar sal eers *opgerig* word as Christus terugkeer, dit is, die koninkryk van die hemele “bestaan-maar-is-nog-nie-opgerig-nie”. In Matteus se aanbieding dek die gelykenis van die saaiër die tydperk waartydens Jesus die woord (of evangelie) van die koninkryk alleen aan Israel aanbied. Gedurende hierdie tydperk bekragtig Jesus sy Messiaanse aansprake aan Israel en daardeur vertoon Hy aan Israel die mag en krag waarmee die Christus bedeel is. Maar wanneer Jesus verwerp word, word die skat verberg, en Hy gaan na die kruis toe om die teken van Jona te verskaf. Nadat die saailand gekoop is, nadat Hy alle mag in die hemel en op aarde ontvang het, stuur die Seun van die Mens goeie saad, nie net na Israel toe nie, maar na al die nasies van die wêreld. Die seuns van die koninkryk wat eerste gestuur is, moet Petrus en die ander tien dissipels wat beveel is om dissipels te gaan maak, insluit. Die verrassende groei van die Kerk ná die groot opdrag sluit, miskien onverwags, ook heidene in, want die Seun van die Mens begin sy pèrel bediening deur Joodse, Samaritaanse en ook heidense gelowiges met die Heilige Gees te doop. Aan die einde van hierdie eeu sal die evangelie van die koninkryk weer verkondig word, dan egter nie net aan Israel nie maar tot ’n getuienis aan alle nasies — en dan sal hierdie eeu eindig. Ná die verdrukking en oordeel van daardie dae sal die Koning terugkeer om die skat te openbaar en om die Messiaanse koninkryk op aarde te vestig. Daar word voorgestel dat, ongeag die eskatologiese siening wat gehuldig mag word — en hierdie tesis word aangebied vanuit ’n dispensasionele, premillennialistiese perspektief — die gelykenisse van Matteus 13 (en miskien ook die Evangelie van Matteus as ’n geheel) anders verstaan kan word as daar op spesifieke, profetiese referente gefokus word en hierdie reeks gelykenisse op ’n kollektiewe en kontekstueel konsekwente manier benader word. En juis oor ’n begrip van al hierdie dinge is waaroor Jesus sy dissipels uitvra.

Acknowledgements

I thank my mother, Winy, who first told me about God when I was a little boy (“You mean He can see through the roof?”) and my late father, Gert, who loved truth and whose abilities as a researcher I wish to imitate in a small way.

For the theological teaching they provide, I also thank Piet Venter (he preached the gospel at the time I was saved), the late Ray Stedman (authentic Christianity) and Chuck Missler (be a Berean and discover what God says in his Word). Further, I also thank Jacob Prasch and Arnold Fruchtenbaum for the Messianic Jewish perspective on the Scriptures both provide, albeit from slightly different hermeneutical positions.

To my study leader, Dr Marius Nel, thank you for your patience, for bearing with views that are different from yours and for insisting on a strict focus on the Gospel of Matthew.

To my wife, Veronica, thank you for your love and encouragement; without you these “official” theological studies would not have started.

This study was initiated when I asked Jesus why He thinks well of the scribe in Matthew 13:52 but is ‘so down’ on other scribes. Understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is *given* to his disciples, and Jesus asks us, “Have you understood all these things?” In whatever small way this attempt to understand the parables of Matthew 13 contains truth, to that extent what has been given is simply offered back to the Lord whom I worship and want to glorify.

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1. Introduction

The parabolic discourse¹ in Matthew 13 is contentious, with Ryrie (2005:80) even describing it as a “battleground” for interpreters. According to Long (1997:8), the subject of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, referred to in 13:11, is even more contentious and has therefore often been largely neglected, misunderstood or misapplied. This thesis focuses on two research problems regarding this contentious discourse.

1.1 Research problems identified

1.1.1 Specific, prophetic referents in the parables of Matthew 13?

In discussing Matthew 13, Davies and Allison (1991:381) write that “one wonders whether it is not a mistake to insist that all of the synoptic parables be approached with one method or with one set of fixed expectations as to what a parable must be.” Saucy (1994:190-191) points out that Jesus did not explain any of the kingdom parables to the crowds and argues that this implies that kingdom parables can be distinguished from other parables. Are the parables² of Matthew 13 thus perhaps different from other parables and, if so, in what ways do they possibly differ?

First, unlike other parables, the parables of Matthew 13 are described as containing mysteries³ of the kingdom of heaven (13:11,35). New Testament mysteries are not about general providential acts of God (5:45), but God reveals through these mysteries His⁴ secret thoughts, plans and dispensations (13:11,35; cf.11:25-27). The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven probably highlight specific new prophetic truths, major turning points or even “eschatological secrets”⁵ during the time period that these parables jointly cover – and not what is general or mundane.

Is there perhaps, regardless of one’s hermeneutic, one’s view of the kingdom or one’s view of eschatology, general agreement as to the *time period* the parables of Matthew 13 collectively cover? There appears to be general agreement. Bailey (1999d:446), a dispensationalist⁶ and

¹ This discourse contains the parables of the sower (13:3b-9,18-23), tares of the field (13:24-30,36-43), mustard seed (13:31-32), leaven (13:33), hidden treasure (13:44), pearl (13:45-46), dragnet (13:47-50) and householder (13:51-52).

² Parable research is considered in chapter 2.

³ As discussed in 4.4, a New Testament mystery has the sense of something unrevealed in the past (the Old Testament) that has now been revealed and refers to “the secret thoughts, plans, and dispensations of God that are hidden from humanity and must be revealed by divine revelation” (Fruchtenbaum 1996:274).

⁴ References to God and pronouns referring to God is used in accordance with the usage of the New King James Version. The gender-inclusive “human beings” is preferred over the generic use of “man”.

⁵ See Davies and Allison (1991:387-389), France (2007:508,511) and Hagner (2000:372,390).

⁶ Dispensationalism is defined in 1.3.

therefore⁷ also a pre-millennialist,⁸ states that the parables of Matthew 13 focus on the “phase of God’s kingdom program that extends from the time of Israel’s rejection of Jesus in his earthly ministry to the time of judgment at his second coming.” France (2007:499), an a-millennialist,⁹ states that these parables “challenge the hearer to think through how God is working out his sovereign purpose in this world, as this is now being implemented through the ministry of Jesus in Galilee.” To Allis (1945:80), a post-millennialist,¹⁰ the mysteries of the kingdom given in Matthew 13 “obviously” describe the result of the presence of the Gospel in the world during the present age, that is, the time of seed-sowing which began with our Lord’s personal ministry and ends with the harvest (13:40-43). It cannot be denied that the parable of the tares of the field considers a time frame until the time of the harvest at the end of the age (13:30, 39; cf. 13:49-50). If the above views are representative of a-millennialists, pre-millennialists and post-millennialists alike, then there is considerable agreement that the time period covered by these parables is from the days of John the Baptist (11:12a) until Jesus’ second coming (24:29-30).

From the perspective of that day when He delivered this parabolic sermon (13:1,36,53), Jesus may have prophetically foretold via these parables about persons, processes or events that will be key to the kingdom of heaven during the aforementioned time period that these parables jointly cover. As some or most of the parables of Matthew 13 deal with events future relative to that day, Jesus may in effect be prophesying in much of this parabolic discourse. Further, many commentators (Davies and Allison 1991:387-389; France 2007:508, 511; Hagner 2000:372, 390) link these mysteries of the kingdom of heaven to eschatology – if not to eschatological secrets.¹¹ The parables of the tares in the field (13:40-43) and the dragnet (13:47-50) undeniably foretell of a judgment at the end of this age, an eschatological event. Unlike most other parables, the

⁷ Couch (1996:9) says all dispensationalists are pre-millennialists but not all pre-millennialists are dispensationalists. Both dispensationalists and pre-millennialists believe that Christ will return to the earth bodily, before the millennial age begins, and He will reign over the kingdom then established (Hayes 1996:311). Commenting on the theology of the parables, Blomberg (1990:304,309-313) says that these parables support pre-millennialism, although he is not a dispensationalist.

⁸ Pre-millennialists hold that the “second coming of Christ will be followed by the establishing of His kingdom on earth for 1000 years” (Ryrie 1999:629).

⁹ A-millennialism is “the teaching that the only visible coming of Christ to this earth which the Church is to expect will be for judgement and will be followed by the final state. It is anti-chilastic or a-millennial, because it rejects the doctrine...of a thousand years” (Allis 1945:2; cf. Walvoord 1959:6; Clouse 2001:771).

¹⁰ Postmillennialism is that system of theology which “teaches that the Second Coming of Christ will follow the thousand years of peace and righteousness” (Ryrie 2005:13; cf. Allis 1945:2). Postmillennialism “holds that the present age will end with a period of great spiritual blessing corresponding to the millennial promises accomplished through preaching the gospel. The whole world will be Christianized and brought to submission to the gospel *before* the return of Christ. The name is derived from the fact that in this theory Christ returns *after* the millennium (hence post millennium)” (Walvoord 1959:7; cf. Clouse 2001:771).

¹¹ In line with the Jewish background to the term, mysteries are often used in connection with God’s secret purposes for the last days, as in Daniel 2:27-28 (Davies and Allison 1991:389; cf. Carson 1995:307).

parables of Matthew 13 contain mysteries of a prophetic and sometimes also an eschatological nature.¹²

Second, near the conclusion of this parabolic discourse, Jesus instructs the scribe who has been made a disciple of the kingdom of heaven to bring forth out of his treasure things *new and old* (13:52). Opinions vary as to the meaning of “new and old”¹³, often influenced by various views of the kingdom. Regardless of the effect that one’s hermeneutic may have on an understanding of the kingdom or on a definition of “things new and old”, the new and old must still be brought forth out of these parables of Matthew 13. Therefore, as Hagner (2000:402) rightly points out, the “key here – indeed the key to the parables themselves – is the combination of new and old. The parables, like Jesus’ other teaching about the kingdom, involve old and familiar things but newly juxtaposed with new elements.” According to Toussaint (1980:176), because of the Jews’ rejection of the Messiah, these parables reveal new truths regarding the kingdom of heaven which were not predicted in any OT¹⁴ prophecies. The “old” truths regarding the Coming One and the kingdom are contained in OT prophecies. Bailey (1999c:294) holds that “those who follow Jesus are disciples of the kingdom, and are to bring to others older revelation of the kingdom program as well as the new.” And the “new” truths Jesus calls “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (13:11,35) which may contain content of a prophetic and sometimes also eschatological nature. If so, the eight parables of Matthew 13, unlike (any?) other parables of Jesus, may juxtapose new and old prophecies regarding the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps, like Asaph of old, Jesus speaks in parables to juxtapose new and old *prophecies* about God and especially Christ’s mighty works regarding the kingdom of heaven (13:35; cf. Ps 78:2).

Third, the genre of parables does not preclude investigating the possible prophetic content of parables. Snodgrass (2008:22) states: “The more a parable is a *prophetic* instrument the more we should expect the reality to show through.” According to Pentecost (1991:212), a parable is true to life, for “in parables transference is always through a historical reality”. The question thus arise

¹² Concerning these parables and the parable of the seed growing secretly (Mk 4:26-29), Long (1997:38; cf. Lockyer 1963:185) argues that this “group of parables gives us a prophetic view of God’s plan, His methods, power, sovereignty, and patience.”

¹³ Davies and Allison (1991:447) identify the most likely “new” to be the new revelation in Jesus and the most likely “old” to be the Torah and the Old Testament. For Wenham (1989:33; cf. Carson 1995:333), the new refers to Jesus and his message of the kingdom and the old to Moses and the prophets.

¹⁴ In this thesis, the “New Testament” and the “Old Testament” are abbreviated NT and OT respectively, unless an author directly quoted uses the unabbreviated form. Further, abbreviations of books of the Bible are made in accordance with the Harvard style of reverencing sources – unless an author quoted directly uses another abbreviation.

if each parable is intended to be, or capable of being transferred to “a historical event”, and if it is, is it transferable to more than one historical event or is it singularly specific?

In the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:23-35), an incident is pictured that contains a general moral truth that can be applied multiple times in history, by many people, as often as forgiveness is required. But, contrary to Jülicher, the parables of Jesus do not all contain general moral truths only (Stein 1981:55). Other parables are more specific. The moment Nathan tells David, “You are the man!” (2 Sam 12:7), it becomes possible to identify *specific*, but in this case *historical*, referents for that parable. Moving on to parables in Matthew 13, an example of a specific, prophetic referent is given, for the man that sowed good seed in his field is identified as the Son of Man (13:24,37). In the parable of the tares in the field, the Son of Man sends sons of the kingdom not to Israel only (10:7; cf. 15:24) but to the world (13:38). At the time Matthew wrote this parable, what was prophetic had however already been fulfilled, that is to say, the predicted event had occurred in history. The question thus arises if one should not also consider *when* this occurs and *who* the good seed first sown into the world are. Are all of Jesus’ parables as specific like this? Only some are.

If these parables find prophetic fulfilment, that is, if the truth they teach is not necessarily of a general or moral nature but refers to something specific and prophetic at the time when Jesus uttered the parable (and which may or may not still have been prophetic when Matthew wrote his Gospel as it had already been fulfilled), is their general application thereby reduced? Dodd (1953:195) addresses this concern, albeit in the context of Jesus’ parables in general, rather than the parables of Matthew 13 in particular:

It may perhaps have seemed that by ruling out any interpretation of the parables which gives them a general application, and insisting upon their intense particularity as comments upon an historical situation, we have reduced their value as instrument of religious teaching, and left them with no more than an historical interest. The parables, however, have an imaginative and poetical quality. They are works of art, and any serious work of art has significance beyond its original occasion. No pedantry of exegesis could ever prevent those who have “ears to hear”, as Jesus said, from finding that the parables “speak to their condition”.

If the parables of Matthew 13 contain content of a prophetic and sometimes eschatological nature, should one not consider whether these parables refer to, or will in future refer to, specific persons, events or processes? In other words, will these parables find multiple transferences to reality or will they find a single specific, prophetic and literal fulfilment? Does Jesus not connect the

parables of the sower, the tares of the field and the dragnet to specific and/or prophetic referents? If reference has to do with the thing (*denotatum*) to which a sign refers (Vorster 1985:28), the question is whether signs or details in the parables of Matthew 13 may refer to *specific, prophetic events, persons or processes*. The focus of this thesis is only on the parables of Matthew 13. If the parables of Matthew 13 contain mysteries regarding the kingdom of heaven which have referents that are not general and if these mysteries cover the time from the days of John the Baptist (11:12a) until Jesus' second coming (24:29-30), it would seem that the interpreter should be sensitive to the possibility of connecting these parables to specific, prophetic referents. In 2.2.6, methodological rules will be identified to ascertain what qualifies as a specific, prophetic referent.

This thesis investigates, firstly, whether the parables of Matthew 13, in their interpretation, each require specific, prophetic referents.

1.1.2 The collective meaning of the parables in Matthew 13?

Near the conclusion of this parabolic discourse in Matthew, Jesus asks his disciples whether they have understood “all these things” (*Συνήκατε ταῦτα πάντα*; 13:51; cf. 13:10-17,34). By asking this, Jesus joins the first introductory parable of Matthew 13, with its focus on understanding and fruit bearing (13:8,10-17,19,23), to the eighth and concluding parable of this series (13:52). Matthew refers twice to “all these things” in this parabolic discourse (13:34,51), thereby connecting Jesus' four parables spoken in public by the sea (13:1-33) to his four parables spoken in private in a house (13:36-53; Nolland 2005:570; Hagner 2000:390,401; Carson 1995:331). If the focus on the prophetic content of Matthew 13 is correct (see 1.1.1 above), prophecies may add new revelation without contradicting the old, implying a measure of consistency and coherence. The question thus arises why these parables are presented and grouped together in Matthew?¹⁵ Only a few commentators,¹⁶ after considering the parables individually, focus on their collective

¹⁵ According to Aune (2003:330-331), the Gospel of Matthew contains twenty-two parables, whereas Mark contains six and Luke twenty-eight parables. Three parables are grouped together in Mark 4. Snodgrass (2008:145) stresses that particularly “for Mark and Matthew, the arrangement of their parable collections is carefully structured”. According to Lane (1974:149), “Mark’s grouping of parabolic material in Ch. 4:1-34 constitutes the largest unit in his Gospel devoted entirely to the teaching of Jesus. ...Mark appears to have selected these parables and placed them at this point in his presentation to illustrate the coming of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus.” The thematic unity of the parables collected in Luke 15 is described by Edersheim (1899:385) as “the ‘recovery of the lost’: in the first instance, through unwearied labour; in the second, through the anxious care, of the owner; and in the third Parable, through the never-ceasing love of the Father”.

¹⁶ Carson (1995:300-334), Hagner (2000:361-402) and Nolland (2005:520-572) offer an exegesis of each parable in Matthew 13, but they do not consider what these parables may be saying collectively. Luz (2001:295-298) understands the basic message of the parables discourse as an address to the community but does not consider what the parables may mean collectively. Barbieri (1983:52-53) provides an overview of his understanding of the meaning of all the parables in Matthew 13 — as do Bailey (1999d:443-451) and Couch (2000:216-220).

meaning. The limited focus by scholars on the parables of Matthew 13 as a collective unit is surprising as Matthew is inspired to group them together. Kinnebrew (2010:10) summarises the case for considering the parables of Matthew 13 collectively, “If one is to understand the meaning of any of these parables, he must understand “all” of the parables. None of the parables should be considered as “stand alone” creations. Rather, they are each an important piece of a grand mosaic.”

Various structural outlines of the Gospel of Matthew have been proposed,¹⁷ and there is a general consensus that Matthew is a highly structured book. Regarding the discourse in Matthew 13, Davies and Allison (1991:449) affirm that it exhibits a thematic unity and Wenham (1979:516-522) proposes that Matthew structured this discourse as a chiasmus.¹⁸ It is further clear that in Matthew 13 the literary genre of parables is often used, probably eight times. According to Wiersbe (1980:110; cf. Thomas 1985:197; Kinnebrew 2010:8-9), interpreters should use Jesus’ explanations in the parables of the sower, the tares of the field and the dragnet in a consistent manner when interpreting the other five, unexplained parables of Matthew 13. However, context is important for metaphors which “may have diverse uses: the lion at different times symbolizes both Satan and Jesus” (Carson 1995:319). And Bailey (1999a:64) likewise emphasises that a “hermeneutical principle to be kept in mind is that a term may not have the same symbolic significance every time it is mentioned.” In a highly structured Gospel with chapter 13 containing a thematic unity and possibly a chiasmic structure, the fact that the parables of Matthew 13 share the same immediate and wider context strengthens the case not only for a collective perspective, but also for considering whether symbols may be used consistently in Matthew 13.

This thesis investigates, secondly, what the parables of Matthew 13 may mean not only individually but also collectively.

¹⁷ Kingsbury (1975: x), for example, divides the Gospel into three parts (1:1-4:16; 4:17-16:20 and 16:21-28:20). Combrink (1983:61-90) focuses on this Gospel as a narrative and views it as an eleven-part chiasmic structure. France (2007:3-4) structures Matthew along geographical lines, whereas Turner (2008:9-10) prefers to structure this Gospel using Matthew’s alternating narrative/discourse pattern.

¹⁸ In presenting the value of chiasmus for NT interpretation, Man (1984:153) notes that “seeing a chiasmic structure may also help in communicating a book’s major purpose or theme”. If this is true for a whole book, it only seems reasonable that the same should be true for a chapter in the Gospel of Matthew that appears to be structured chiasmically.

1.2 Primary and secondary research questions and working hypothesis

In light of the two above-mentioned research areas, the following primary research questions have been identified: (1) *Do the parables of Matthew 13 have specific, prophetic referents and, if so, what may these be?* (2) *Can the parables of Matthew 13 be viewed collectively and, if so, will a collective approach assist in understanding them, both individually and collectively?* The working hypothesis for the present study is: *The parables of Matthew 13 can be understood, both individually and collectively, when they are connected to specific, prophetic referents.*

The primary research questions are addressed by answering the following secondary research questions:

- What guidelines can be identified for the interpretation of the parables in Matthew 13?
- What is the structure of Matthew 13?
- What understanding of the kingdom of heaven can be ascertained from the OT and Inter-testamental literature, from Jesus and from Matthew's presentation of it in the Gospel? What is the setting of these parables and what occasion or problem prompts the eight parables of Matthew 13?
- What are mysteries?
- Using the guidelines identified, what are the literary structure and details, including words used, of each parable? What occasion or problem prompts a particular parable and what new and old things does each of these parables teach? Can Jesus' explanations in three of these parables be used in other parables in Matthew 13?

1.3 Hermeneutical presuppositions and delimitations

The working hypothesis will be investigated from a pre-millennial dispensational perspective. Perspectives with the same and different hermeneutical starting points will be critically engaged and commentaries that are deemed relevant to this study will be consulted regardless of their theological positions.¹⁹ The intention is to answer the primary and secondary research questions and to test the working hypothesis, wherever these questions or the hypothesis may lead. This thesis in no way suggests or implies that the pre-millennial dispensational perspective is the only correct perspective or that such position is a pre-requisite for the interpretation of Matthew 13. It

¹⁹ After noticing that to be 'critical' does not mean the same as 'sceptical' just as 'academic' is not necessarily the opposite of 'spiritual', Ramm (1970:114-115) states that the true "critical spirit, or scholarly spirit, in Biblical interpretation has as its goal to discover the original meaning and intention of the text. Its goal is *exegesis* – to lead the meaning out of the text and shuns *eisegesis* – bringing a meaning to the text."

is also not suggested that persons holding to different hermeneutical views must necessarily come to the same conclusions reached in this thesis. This thesis invites the reader to an alternative way of reading the parables of Matthew 13.

Dispensationalism can be described as that system of theology which “views the world as a household run by God. In this household-world God is dispensing or administering its affairs according to His own will and in various stages of revelation in the process of time. These various stages mark off the distinguishably different economies in the outworking of His total purpose, and these economies are the dispensations” (Ryrie 2007:31). A pre-millennial dispensational perspective is considered appropriate to the Gospel of Matthew because it distinguishes between Israel and the Church and is thought to enhance an understanding of God’s kingdom programme as it relates to Jesus Christ, the Messianic kingdom²⁰ and to the Church age.²¹ Salvation in the divine reckoning is always “by grace through faith” and rests upon the basis of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Unconditional and unfulfilled prophecies of the Bible are viewed as having a specific literal fulfilment in time. This thesis argues from a pre-millennial dispensational perspective that from Pentecost onwards the kingdom of heaven *exists* even though its *establishment* awaits the second coming of Jesus Christ. After a thousand year reign of the Coming King, this kingdom of heaven will merge in the eternal state²², that is, the kingdom of heaven will continue forever in God’s universal and eternal kingdom.

In agreement with the Reformers’ view of *Sola Scriptura* and the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (“CSBI”), this thesis endorses the principle of a literal interpretation of Scripture²³, also referred to as the grammatical-historical method. This principle of literal interpretation should not be equated with woodenness regarding figurative language (Ryrie 2007:91; Ramm 1970:126). Johnson (cited in Stallard 2000:20) states that the term “literal” can be used in two senses, namely to describe a system of interpretation (the consistent use of the grammatical-historical method) and, once inside that system, literal refers to whether or not a specific word or phrase is used in its context in a figurative or literal sense. Regarding the second sense of “literal”, Ramm (cited in Ice n.d.:4) says: “The literal meaning of the figurative

²⁰ Once it is established, the Messianic kingdom will be an earthly, literal kingdom ruled by the Messiah from the throne of David (Fruchtenbaum 1989:611).

²¹ The Church age is defined in 1.3.2.

²² The eternal state is God’s rule over all of his creation in eternity, after the millennial reign of Christ.

²³ Ryrie (2007:91-92; cf. Ramm 1970:123-127) gives three reasons to support the principle of literal interpretation of Scripture: (1) Philosophically, the purpose of language itself seems to require literal interpretation; (2) Biblically, the OT prophecies concerning the first coming of Christ were literally and historically fulfilled; and (3) Logically, without the use of plain, normal or literal interpretation, all objectivity is lost.

expression is the proper or natural meaning as understood by students of language. Whenever a figure is used its literal meaning is precisely that meaning determined by grammatical studies of figures. Hence, figurative interpretation does not pertain to the spiritual or mystical sense of Scripture, but to the literal sense.” Ramm (1970:124) also notes that all secondary meanings of documents still depends on the literal stratum of language and thus, “Parables, types, allegories, symbols, figures of speech, myths and fables presume that there is a level of meaning in language prior to the kind of language this kind of literature is.” How is the second sense of literal identified? Tan (cited in Johnson 2000:35) says

The key to determining the figurative from the non-figurative lies in ascertaining whether a given word or act is at variance with the essential nature of the subject being discussed. If a word or act, taken in the literal sense, fails to harmonize with either the flow of thought in the text or context, or with the analogy of Scripture, it is to be understood as figurative. Otherwise, it is non-figurative. To know the context and the flow of thought in the text under study, as well as in the totality of prophetic Scripture is to understand the distinction between what is figurative and nonfigurative in prophecy.

The theological position assumed in this thesis affects the conclusions that this study will reach.²⁴ What material impact may this study’s pre-millennial dispensational hermeneutic have on the interpretation of Matthew 13? Areas identified include the application of the grammatical-historical method to unconditional and unfulfilled OT prophecies, the view that the Church has not replaced Israel, the historicity of the Gospels and the offer of the kingdom. These are discussed below.

1.3.1 Literal interpretation of unfulfilled OT prophecies

This thesis argues that “new and old” things (13:52) refer to new and old prophecies regarding the kingdom of heaven. The old prophecies are viewed as unfulfilled promises that God unconditionally gave to Israel (or her representatives) and which will be fulfilled to Israel — and not to the Church. If this stance materially affects the results of this study, what are the grounds for holding to this theological position?

According to Heyns (1963:73-74; emphasis in the original), pre-millennialism misinterprets Scripture and does not do justice to it because the basic problem of chiliasm is its *unjustified*

²⁴ This statement is likely true for other theological positions as well.

combination of truths of Scripture.²⁵ It is claimed that pre-millennialists force a paradigm regarding eschatology and the millennium onto the Scriptures (Heyns 1963:3,9; cf. Wijnbeek 1974:59; Du Rand 2013:157). The interpretation of OT prophecies in particular is viewed as problematic (Heyns 1963:27; cf. Du Rand 2013:157). It must be mentioned that Covenant theology and dispensationalism both accept the principle of literal interpretation: “In fundamental theory there is no difference between Berkhof’s *Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics* (amillennial) and Chafer’s *The Science of Biblical Hermeneutics* (dispensational). Both agree that the grammatical, historical method is basic to understanding the Bible” (Ramm 1970:243). Differences arise from the *application* of the grammatical-historical method. According to Saucy (1986:155), the less than literal approach to Israel by non-dispensational systems

[S]tems not from an *a priori* spiritualistic or metaphorical hermeneutic, but rather from their application of the same grammatico-historical hermeneutic used by dispensationalism to the New Testament Scripture from which they conclude that these Scriptures teach the equation of the Church which Israel. It is this conclusion based upon their application of normal evangelical hermeneutics which leads them to their differing interpretation of the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures.

1.3.1.1 Biblical and systematic theology

In the words of progressive dispensationalist Turner (1985:275), the one basic issue is “the continuity of Scripture in progressive revelation.” Or as Heyns (1963:74) asks, how should Scriptural truths be combined? The issue is therefore the harmonisation of the Old and New Testaments, the sequence and order in which biblical and then systematic theology should proceed (Stallard 1997:11-15). Biblical theology recognises that it is limited to the Bible as the only source of truth to be systematized and therefore, “logically and chronologically, Biblical Theology should take precedence over Systematic Theology, for the order of study ought to be introduction, exegesis, historical backgrounds, Biblical Theology, and finally Systematic Theology” (Ryrie cited in Stallard 1997:16).

An understanding of the OT is often subordinated to an understanding of the NT. For example, Berkhof (cited in Ryrie 2007:223) writes “The main guide to the interpretation of the Old Testament is certainly to be found in the New.” Ramm (1970:167) holds that the main burden of theology should rest on the teachings of the New Testament: “Although the Old is prior in time the New is prior in method.” LaRondelle (cited by Pettegrew 2007:195-196) argues that the OT

²⁵ “Ons grondprobleem met die chiliasme bly egter sy *ongeregverdigde kombinasie* van Skrifwaarhede” (Heyns 1963:74).

Scriptures can be interpreted accurately only by studying the NT; the NT is the goal and fulfilment of the OT, therefore read the OT through the lens of the NT. Stallard (1997:16-19)²⁶ and Pettegrew (2007:196-197) postulate that for covenant theologians, biblical and then systematic theology proceed as follows:

- (1) Formulate a biblical theology from the NT based upon a literal interpretation of the NT text,
- (2) Formulate a biblical theology of the OT based upon the NT understanding of the OT text, and
- (3) Produce a systematic theology by harmonizing all the above.

In contrast, Stallard (1997:16-19) and Pettegrew (2007:196-197) view the order of the steps that dispensationalists take as follows:

- (1) Formulate a biblical theology from the OT based upon a literal interpretation of the OT text,
- (2) Formulate a biblical theology of the NT based upon a literal interpretation of the NT, using the backgrounds arrived at 1 above, and
- (3) Produce a systematic theology by harmonizing all the above.

Regarding biblical and then systematic theology, why does this thesis prefer the dispensational sequence? First, it takes the nature of progressive revelation into account. By its very nature revelation not only builds upon previous revelation but it also cannot contradict it. One's chosen "theological superstructure should resemble in some form the revelational foundation from which it has been derived" (Stallard 1997:19). According to Ryrie (2007:95-96),

A word or a concept cannot mean one thing in the Old Testament and take the opposite meaning in the New Testament. If this were so, the Bible would be filled with contradictions, and God would have to be conceived of as deceiving the Old Testament prophets when He revealed to them a nationalistic kingdom, since He would have known all the time that He would completely reverse the concept in later revelation. ...To pursue the illustration of Israel and the church further, the amillennialist's hermeneutics allow him to blur completely the meanings of the two words in the New Testament such that the church takes over the fulfilment of the promises to Israel.

Second, the dispensational sequence "allows the interpreter to read the OT with a consistent grammatical-historical hermeneutic" (Pettegrew 2007:197). If the interpretation of the OT is subordinated to the conclusions of NT biblical theology, then Stallard (1997:18; emphasis added) notes this in essence becomes "the abandonment of literal interpretation of the OT (*at least in eschatology*) and is the basis for the classical debate about "literal" versus "allegorical"

²⁶ Stallard (1997:16) first adds the recognition of one's own pre-understanding to these lists.

interpretation.” By reading the NT back into the OT, *especially with regard to unfulfilled and unconditional OT prophecies*, Pettegrew (2007:196; emphasis added) argues that covenant theologians may in effect “minimise the historical-grammatical interpretation of great sections of the OT and produce allegorizations of the OT. ... [These theologians] admit that the OT says one thing (i.e., “Israel”), but it must mean something else (i.e., “church”), because they have restricted its meaning only to what they think the NT directs the OT to say.”

Third, the dispensational sequence is preferred because there is “no priority of one testament over another except in a chronological order of progressive revelation. In the end it is superior to insist that an OT text must not be stripped of its original meaning in its context, found through historical-grammatical interpretation and biblical theology” (Pettegrew 2007:197).

1.3.1.2 Special hermeneutic for certain OT prophecies

It is sometimes argued that a special hermeneutic is required for some prophetic passages of Scripture, especially unfulfilled OT prophecies.²⁷ The Bible’s use of symbols and metaphors in its genre of prophetic literature apparently gives clues to the reader that such material is to be interpreted symbolically. For example, Heyns (1963:27; translation, emphasis added) argues that prophecy “in its use of figurative language *often rises above the boundaries of reality*, must be interpreted differently than the lyric of Psalms with its strong subjectivity and also differently from the historical passages which present themselves as history and which should be read as such.” In reply, the following can be stated.

First, prophetic and/or apocalyptic literature do employ symbols, “but they stand for something actual” (Ryrie 2007:99). Regarding literal interpretation, “the very existence of any meaning of a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader” (Ryrie 2007:91). According to Ramm (1970:253), when interpreting prophecy, “The interpreter should take *the literal meaning of a prophetic passage as his limiting or controlling guide*. How else can he proceed? This is the footing for the interpretation of any passage in Scripture.” Thus even when the second sense of the term “literal” is encountered in a prophetic passage, its interpretation cannot be divorced from its first sense, namely the principle of literal interpretation, for otherwise we are indeed unreal, outside the boundaries of reality.

²⁷ Harbin (1986:254) says this is the “foundation for the distinction between a-millennialism and pre-millennialism.”

Second, one should indeed recognise what genre a biblical text is using. But epistemologically, you find the genre of a text by applying the principle of literal interpretation, the grammatical-historical method. “While genre is one input to the exegetical process, it is not an extra-biblical truism that is somehow the pre-judge of the text before the exercise of the normal reading of the text. In other words, genre does not “regulate” one’s ultimate reading of the text. Rather it classifies or describes what is found” (Stallard 2000:23). Thomas (2002:308) is adamant that when “literary genre wields control that overrides normal rules of interpretation, evangelical hermeneutics has sunk to unprecedented depths.”

Third, it is submitted that dispensationalists’ *consistent* use the principle of literal interpretation is neither bad nor inferior to the special hermeneutic which some non-dispensationalists allow for prophetic passages.

1.3.1.3 The use of the OT by the NT

A special hermeneutic or non-literal approach to unfulfilled and unconditional OT prophecies is often justified by arguing that the NT uses the OT in a special or non-literal way. Ramm (1970:261) asks: “What hermeneutical method does the New Testament use in employing the Old? Certainly this should be decisive if it could be unequivocally settled.” A detailed discussion of how the NT uses the OT is not attempted here. What follows is to briefly list various approaches of evangelical scholars to classify the NT’s use of the OT. It is thereafter reasoned that a special hermeneutic or non-literal approach to unfulfilled and unconditional OT prophecies does not abrogate or abandon these promises of God.

1.3.1.3.1 Six evangelical approaches

Bock (1985:209-223) identified evangelical approaches to the use of the OT by the NT, namely (1) Full human intent school (proposed by Walter C. Kaiser); (2) Divine intent–human words school (S. Lewis Johnson, J. I. Packer, Elliott Johnson); (3) Historical progress of revelation and Jewish hermeneutic school (Earl Ellis, Richard Longenecker, Walter Dunnett) and (4) Canonical approach and NT priority school (Bruce Waltke). To this list, Bock (1985:306-319) adds his own (5) Eclectic approach. Thomas (2002:241-270) proposes the (6) Inspired *sensus plenior* application (ISPA). Each of these approaches is briefly described below.

According to the Full human intent school, there is no bifurcation between the divine author’s intended meaning and the human author’s intended meaning even though God recognises the full significance of a promise (Bock 1985:211). The NT writers use the OT contextually in accord with the authorial intent of the OT authors as discovered by historical-grammatical hermeneutics

– there is single meaning but multiple application (Vlach 2011:3). This approach denies that there is divine meaning that is hidden from the human OT author.

The divine intent-human words school proposes that “prophetic passages all draw on the human author’s words but that the human author did not always fully intend or comprehend the prophetic reference, while God did intend the full reference” (Bock 1985:212-213). Human authorial intent can be discovered and is anchored by historical-grammatical hermeneutics, but God’s intended full meaning is discovered in the progress of later NT revelation as (a) *sensus plenior* or (b) *sensus singular* but references *plenior* (Vlach 2011:4). Proponents of this school says God’s hidden meaning neither contradicts the human author’s meaning nor does the fulfilment give the OT text a meaning foreign to its wording and conceptual sense (Bock 1985:213). The OT prophet’s message remains demonstrably the basis for NT fulfilment: “This limitation prevents a charge of arbitrary fulfilment being raised against the New Testament. Their limitation is either “the implication of the words” in light of the progress of revelation (S. Lewis Johnson) or the “defining sense” of the human author’s words (Elliot E. Johnson)” (Bock 1985:307).

The Historical progress of revelation and Jewish hermeneutic school argues the NT uses the OT as a reflection of the “progress of revelation in Jesus Christ (“the Christological glasses” of the New Testament writers) and as especially making use of methods of first-century Jewish interpretation and exegesis (concepts such as midrash, pesher, and Hillel’s rules of interpretation)” (Bock 1985:216). This approach often appeals to *sensus plenior*. According to Longenecker (cited in Bock 1985:216), the “Jewish roots of Christianity make it *a priori* likely that the exegetical procedures of the New Testament would resemble to some extent those of the contemporary Judaism.” This approach neither uses the historical-grammatical method exclusively nor is it contextual at all times. It justifies this as being the way the Jewish community at that time interpreted the OT (Vlach 2011:6).

The Canonical approach and NT priority school “asserts the unity between the Old Testament writers’ ideal language and God’s intention” (Bock 1985:219). With this approach, the meaning of OT texts is not found primarily in its historical-grammatical contexts but rather in the growing canon (Vlach 2011:8). It is not hidden meaning (*sensus plenior*) but *added meaning* to earlier texts. “So Waltke’s position is that the whole of the Old Testament is to be reread ultimately in light of the New Testament; as a result the original expression of meaning in the Old Testament passage is overridden and redefined by the New Testament” (Bock 1985:220).

Instead of focusing on either the historical-exegetical or the theological-canonical issues in the debate about how the NT uses the OT, the Eclectic approach of Bock avoids an ‘either-or’ and chooses a ‘both/and’ paradigm; it is “single meaning, multiple contexts and referents” (Vlach 2011:10). Bock (1985:309,315) allows for a distinction between divine and human intent and, regarding the language-referent, he states that meaning resides in both the sense (the definitions of words within a passage) and in the referents (the larger context of a passage’s theological context). The Eclectic approach allows for “new referents” as new contexts and revelation unfolds (Vlach 2011:10).

For Thomas (2002:242), NT writers use the OT in two ways, first, by abiding and applying the grammatical-historical sense of the passage and second, by sometimes adding to the NT context an inspired *sensus plenior* application of the OT. Regarding the first use, this is *sensus singular* where a literal prophecy was made in the OT and which the NT writers confirm has now been literally fulfilled in actual events or principles that satisfy the grammatical-historical sense of the OT passage. Regarding the second use of the OT by the NT authors, today’s interpreters cannot imitate what these NT writers did when last-mentioned went beyond the grammatical-historical meaning to assign an OT passage an additional meaning in connection with its NT context: “The New Testament writers could do it because of their status as writers of inspired Scripture” (Thomas 2002:264). Why did the NT writers add a *sensus plenior* meaning to some OT passages? The proposed answer of Thomas (2002:253) is relevant to this thesis:

In almost every instance, if not every instance, the new meaning given to an Old Testament passage relates to Israel’s rejection of her Messiah at His first advent and the consequent opening of the door to a new people... The new people consisted of both Jews and Gentiles as fellow members of the body of Christ. That such a union would exist was unrevealed in the Old Testament, as Paul points out in Ephesians 3:1-7. New meanings through special divine revelation were necessary to give this new program a relationship with what God had been doing throughout the Old Testament period.

In summary, the first (Kaiser) and fourth (Waltke) approaches affirm that God did not intend more in an OT passage than what the human author intended. Regarding the Full human intent school, Daniel admitted he heard but did not understand some of the prophecies he had penned down (Dn 12:6-8) and other prophets admitted same (1 Pe 1:10-12). The canonical approach states later revelation is ‘added’ and not ‘hidden’ meaning but nevertheless this approach has been critiqued in 1.3.1.1. The remaining four approaches allow for hidden meaning, either on the grounds of *sensus plenior*, *sensus singular* but references *plenior* or on how first century Jews interpreted the OT. If Thomas is correct, then current interpreters cannot imitate the inspired

sensus plenior application of the inspired NT writers. But if Thomas is wrong, to prevent arbitrary fulfilment being raised against the NT, it is worth repeating that the OT prophet's message remains the basis (and also limitation) for NT fulfilment: "Their limitation is either "the implication of the words" in light of the progress of revelation (S. Lewis Johnson) or the "defining sense" of the human author's words (Elliot E. Johnson)" (Bock 1985:307).

1.3.1.3.2 Unfulfilled and unconditional OT promises

Even if the inspired NT authors assign *sensus plenior* or references *plenior* to OT texts, does this justify a special hermeneutic whereby referents in unconditional OT promises are viewed as having been irrevocably changed from say "Israel" to the "Church"? Bock (1985:309) asks,

Does a "heavenly" referent for the New Testament fulfilment of passages like Psalms 2 and 110 nullify what appears to be an "earthly" reference in the original Old Testament contexts? A-millenarians will answer yes to this question, while dispensationalists answer no and covenant pre-millenarians vacillate. Are New Testament fulfilments final, initial, or decisive-but-not-final?

One of the ways in which the NT uses the OT is to change the *referent* of the OT passage and applying it to a NT situation. According to Fruchtenbaum (1989:844-845), this is a *literal plus application* use of the OT by the NT. Two examples follow of how referents have been changed, first when Matthew 2:17-18 quotes the historical passage of Jeremiah 31:15 and second, when Acts 2:16-21 quotes a prophetic passage from Joel, both citations classified as being fulfilled in a *literal plus application* way:

In the original context, Jeremiah is speaking of an event soon to come as the Babylonian Captivity begins. As the Jewish young men were being taken into captivity, they went by the town of Ramah. Not too far from Ramah is where Rachel was buried and she was the symbol of Jewish motherhood. As the young men were marched toward Babylon, the Jewish mothers of Ramah came out weeping for sons they will never see again. Jeremiah pictured the scene as Rachel weeping for her children. This is the *literal* meaning of Jeremiah 31:15. The New Testament cannot change or reinterpret what this verse means in that context, nor does it try to do so. In this category, there is a New Testament event that has one point of similarity with the Old Testament event. The verse is quoted as an *application*. The one point of similarity between Ramah and Bethlehem is that once again Jewish mothers are weeping for sons that they will never see again and so the Old Testament passage is applied to the New Testament event. This is literal plus application. The original text may be history or prophecy. The Jeremiah quote is an example of history. An example of prophecy is in Acts 2:16-21 which quotes Joel 2:28-32. Nothing that happened in Acts 2 is predicted in Joel 2. What actually did happen in Acts 2 (the speaking of tongues) was not mentioned by Joel. What Joel did mention (dreams, visions, the sun darkened, the moon turned into blood) did not happen in Acts 2. Joel was speaking of the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the whole nation of Israel in the last days, while Acts 2 speaks of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Twelve Apostles or, at most, on the 120 in the Upper Room. This is a far cry from Joel's *all flesh*. However, there was one point of similarity, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, resulting in unusual manifestations. Acts 2 does not change or reinterpret Joel 2, nor does it deny that Joel 2 will have a literal fulfilment when the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the whole nation of Israel. It is simply applying it to a New Testament event because of one point of similarity.

This thesis holds that God's character guarantees that unconditional promises He has made will be fulfilled literally before or at the final judgment. Moreover, God will fulfil such promises to those persons He made the promises to for His calling and gifts are irrevocable. Therefore, even though a point of similarity exists between what happened in Acts 2 and Joel 2:28-32, the promises that God made to Israel in Joel 2:28-32 has still not been fulfilled literally to that people. Consequently, even if one argues that a special hermeneutic exists because of the way the NT uses the OT, it still cannot abrogate or abandon God's unconditional and as yet unfulfilled promises.²⁸

To reiterate, this thesis argues that 'old' (cf. 13:52) and unfulfilled promises regarding the kingdom of heaven that God unconditionally gave to Israel will literally be fulfilled to her. The author recognises that the debate about the interpretation of unconditional and unfulfilled promises is far from over and that the theological position taken in this thesis in this regard materially affects the results of this study. Perhaps Bock's (1985:310) apt summary can be used to conclude: "The eschatological debate turns on the question whether the Old Testament earthly sense is removed by the heavenly thrust of some New Testament passages. Pre-millennialists answer this question with a firm no." To which one can add: other views answer yes.

1.3.2 Israel and the Church

Another result of the theological position taken in this thesis is that the Church has not permanently replaced, displaced or typologically fulfilled national Israel in God's plan. This influences an understanding of the parables of Matthew 13.

Is the Church a reconstituted "new or spiritual" Israel? For non-dispensational Diprose (2004:30), the expression 'replacement theology' refers to "the cessation of Israel's special elective status and thus the eclipse of her significance in salvation history." The word "supersession" comes

²⁸ Conditional and unconditional promises are discussed in 2.2.6.

from two Latin words: *super* (“on” or “upon”) and *sedere* (“to sit”), thus “it carries the idea of one person sitting on another’s chair, displacing the latter. The title replacement theology is often viewed as a synonym for supersessionism” (Vlach 2009:58). In the context of Israel and the Church, supersessionism is the view that “the New Testament church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded the nation Israel as the people of God” (Vlach 2009:60).

Different reasons are given why Israel has been replaced or super-ceded by the Church. According to Vlach (2009:60-65,69), *Punitive supersession* emphasizes Israel’s disobedience as the reason for its displacement as the people of God²⁹; *economic supersession* emphasizes that national Israel’s role as an ethnic people of God expired with the coming of the universal, non-ethnic New Testament church; and *structural supersession* is an approach to the canon that minimizes the role of the Hebrew scriptures. Two further forms of supersession are identified: *strong supersession* does not believe in a future salvation or restoration of Israel whereas *mild supersession* believes in a salvation of the nation Israel but no restoration to a place of prominence (Vlach 2009:65-69).

Replacement theology often invokes Matthew 21:33-46 (especially v. 43) as support for the view that the Church has permanently replaced the nation Israel as the people of God. As an example of *economic supersession*, France (2007:800,817) is of the view that this parable appears to teach a “reconstitution of Israel”, a new entity drawn from both Israel and the Gentiles which is characterised not by ethnic origin, but by faith in Jesus. But France (2007:800; cf. Nolland 2005:876) also admits the vineyard refers to Israel and what is being replaced is not the vineyard but the vinedressers. It is not Israel that is being replaced, but its leaders. Commenting on 19:28, Turner (2002:60) notes that the “correspondence of the twelve apostles of Jesus with the twelve tribes of Israel is significant for the national imagery of 21:43. The apostles were the new leaders of the nation; they would produce the fruit that the recalcitrant farmers refused to give the landowner.” Davies and Allison (2004:367) note that in this parable nothing is implied about the eschatological fate of Israel: “While many exegetes have found in our passage the final dismissal of the Jews, that is eisegesis.” The conclusion of Turner (2002:61; emphasis added) also contains a warning about the risk of supersession:

The parable of the recalcitrant farmers should not be interpreted as a transferral of God’s redemptive program from the nation of Israel to the church. To read this passage as Israel’s rejection and replacement by the Gentile church is to read into it a later theology of

²⁹ Tasker (1961:204) exemplifies *punitive supersession*: “Because of this rejection of Jesus the Messiah, which came as the climax of a long series of rejections of the prophets God had sent to it ([21:]35,36), the old Israel as such would forfeit the right to receive the blessings appertaining to the kingdom of God.”

supersession. Such a view is dubious exegetically and has contributed, perhaps unwittingly in some cases, to anti-Semitism. ...Matthew 21:33-46 should be interpreted as referring to a transfer of leadership in the kingdom from the fruitless Jerusalem religious establishment to the fruitful Matthean Christian Jewish community, *led by Jesus' apostles*. ...Although the church will eventually expand primarily by winning Gentiles to Jesus, its roots in the promises of God to the seed of Abraham must not be forgotten.

Why does the new entity, the Church, not permanently replace Israel in God's programme, why does it not reconstitute a "new or spiritual" Israel? "The logic of replacement theology required that much of the Old Testament be allegorized. Only in this way could the Church be made the subject of passages in which the nation of Israel is addressed" (Diprose 2004:169). This is similar to the argument already presented regarding the order and sequence of the steps in biblical and then systematic theology.

National Israel is sometimes viewed as a prophetic type pointing to its fulfilment in the antitype Christ and his Church, thus a new reconstituted or spiritual Israel. However, the unconditional Abrahamic, Land, Davidic and New covenants belong to Israel, not to the Church (Jr 31:31-37; Heb 8:8-13). These unconditional covenant promises will still be fulfilled to Israel, not as a type but as a literal, national, ethnic group. Further, this same Jeremiah passage foretelling of the New covenant also promises the continued existence of Israel forever (Jr 31:35-37). In Matthew, not only is a future for Israel promised (19:28; Saucy 1997:336-337), but Christ reiterates that Israel must accept him as Lord before they will see him again (23:39; cf. 22:41-46; Ac 1:6-7). Currently, there is a *partial* (not complete) and *temporary* (not permanent) hardening of Israel but once the fullness of the Gentiles have come in, all Israel will be saved as unconditionally promised in the New covenant (Jr 31:31-37; cf. Rm 11:25-27).

The New Testament does not refer to the Church as Israel. Even after the Church has been established, national Israel is still identified as such. According to Romans 9:6, out of the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not all these Jews are spiritually saved. Were the Pharisees and Sadducees physical children of Abraham? Were these men physically circumcised on the eighth day in terms of the Abrahamic covenant (the sign of this covenant)? But were they spiritually saved? According to John the Baptist they are brood of vipers, unless they repent and bear fruit worthy of repentance (3:7-8). Thus he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit (Rm 2:28-29; cf. Dt 10:16). Does that mean when a Gentile is justified by faith in Christ and this Gentile person's heart is circumcised

by the Spirit, that all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles are of the past (cf. Gl 3:28)? Regarding *justification by faith in Christ*, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, man and woman, etc. But does the woman stop being a woman; does the Gentile now become a spiritual Jew? For all those that boast in the cross of Christ, who has learnt that neither circumcision nor un-circumcision avails anything *in the area of justification*, but a new creation, to those who walk according to this rule, peace and mercy upon them (Gentile believers) and upon the Israel of God which is a reference to Jewish believers (cf. Gl 6:14-16). Commenting on Galatians 6:15-16, Fruchtenbaum (1989:252) says:

[T]here are two groups mentioned in the passage: the *them* and *the Israel of God*. As has been shown before, there is no textual or contextual reason to depart from the primary meaning of *kai*, which means “and”, or to resort to a secondary meaning of “even”. The *them* refers to the Gentile believers to and of whom Paul had been writing throughout the epistle. The *Israel of God* refers to Jewish believers specifically and not to the Church at large. There is no exegetical reason to make Israel here a reference to the Church.

What is the Church’s relation to the New covenant? Did she inherit it, did she take it over or is she perhaps fulfilling it? As noted above, the New covenant belongs to Israel. In Christ Jesus, the Church *partakes* in the spiritual blessings of the covenants that belong to Israel, especially the New covenant, but she does not inherit or take these covenants *over* or away from Israel as Replacement theology holds (Eph 2:11-3:13). Three groups are mentioned in Ephesians 2:11-19: Israel, the Gentiles and the Church. According to Fruchtenbaum (1989:253), “Paul states in no uncertain terms that the *new man* is composed of believers from the commonwealth of Israel and from the Gentiles. What Paul does not do is apply the term *Israel* to the *one new man*.” During the Church age, Gentiles *as Gentiles* can participate in the spiritual blessings of Israel’s unconditional covenants without having to be physically circumcised as was the case when the rule of life was the Mosaic covenant. During the time when the wall of partition (the conditional Mosaic covenant) was the rule of life in Israel (Eph 2:14-15), a male Gentile believer *as a Gentile* could not share in the spiritual blessings arising from Israel’s unconditional covenants unless that male Gentile believer was physically circumcised – *not* in terms of the Abrahamic covenant, but in terms of the Mosaic covenant. Further, this Gentile believer had to keep the Sabbath because keeping the Sabbath was the sign of obedience to the Mosaic covenant. But at the cross of Christ, the conditional Mosaic covenant came to an end when the veil was torn from top to bottom (27:51). During the Church age, Christ is creating in Himself one new body out of circumcised (Jewish and Samaritan) and un-circumcised (Gentile) believers (Eph 2:15). From Pentecost onwards, in Christ, Gentile believers *as Gentiles* share in the spiritual blessings of Israel’s covenants, particularly the New covenant, without having to be physically circumcised and these

Gentile believers should *not* keep the Sabbath, for the Mosaic covenant has come to an end at the cross. The uniting of Jewish and Gentile believers into one body of Christ is a mystery, something previously unrevealed and not prophesied in the OT (Eph 3:1-7; Fruchtenbaum 1989:434; Thomas 2002:253). From Pentecost onwards, believers in Christ are under the law of Christ in terms of the New covenant. According to Stendahl (1976:132), there should not be an anti-Jewish attitude, no “religious imperialism of Christianity” because the apostle Paul warns “Gentile Christians against feelings of superiority toward Judaism and the Jews.”

The Church age began on Pentecost when the baptism of the Spirit commenced (Ac 2; 11:15-17; 1 Cor 12:13) and will continue until the rapture of the Church (Jn 14:2-3; 1 Cor 15:51-58; 1 Th 4:13-18). Regarding the beginning of the Church, it was future when Christ first mentions it (16:18) and still future in Acts 1:5. The apostle Paul relates the beginning of the Church to the resurrection and ascension of Christ, for Christ is made Head of the Church after being raised from the dead and after being seated in the heavenlies (Eph 1:20-23). Further, the functioning and operation of the Church is dependent on the giving of the gifts to the body and these gifts in turn depended on Christ’s ascension (Eph 4:7-12). Therefore, the Church did not come into functional and operational existence until the day of Pentecost (Ryrie 2007:147). The baptism of the Spirit which commenced at Pentecost is defined as the Spirit’s activity that joins the believers to the body of Christ at the time of salvation (Ryrie 1999:624); it is a unique ministry that will not be repeated after the rapture (Lightner 1996:172). From Pentecost onwards, Jewish, Samaritan and Gentile believers are baptised in Christ who as high priest according to the order of Melchizedek mediates the spiritual blessings of the New covenant to his body, the Church. This is indeed a new entity drawn from both Jews and the Gentiles, characterised not by ethnic origin but by faith in Jesus, but this still does not mean that the Church is a new or spiritual Israel. Once the Church has been raptured³⁰, God will continue his kingdom programme through Israel. Commenting on “things new and old” (13:52), Bailey (1999c:295) notes that the “mysteries (the new element) of the kingdom present what God will do with His kingdom in the world apart from the nation of Israel. Later of course He will fulfil what He said He will do in the future through Israel.”

1.3.3 The historicity of Matthew 13

The author of this thesis without equivocation holds to the historical integrity and verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture. The inspiration of Scripture extends not only to the facts of history that are reported in the Bible but also to the theological interpretations of such historical facts that are

³⁰ The rapture is held to be the “catching away of the Church from earth to heaven” (Ryrie 1999:630).

presented. The NT documents are viewed as fundamentally reliable in their presentation of Jesus, not only in basic content (which includes supernatural causation in history) but also the basic chronological arrangement of their data (cf. Saucy 1997:310). These assumptions and theological positions meet the “maximalist approach” outlined by Moyise (2010:7, 107), that is, dealing with differences between the Gospels by presupposing that the material we have in the Gospels is a reliable account of what Jesus said and did. Although harmonisation is not the main focus of this thesis, the Synoptic problem is not underestimated: explanations for problems of harmonisation between the Gospels can be found but the solution to remaining problems must await further research and discoveries (cf. Thomas and Gundry 1978:266). Given a view of Scripture as portrayed by the CSBI, it is submitted that there is no *a priori* reason to doubt that Jesus as he is presented in the Gospels (*geschichte*) is how Jesus actually was in history (*historie*). In agreement with the CSBI Article 18, “We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for any sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.” How do the above statements affect the interpretation and results of the parables of Matthew 13 in this thesis?

First, this thesis accepts the placements of statements of or about Jesus in the historical contexts in which the Gospel of Matthew presents them. If the historical facts of Matthew 13:1-53 refer only to one historical setting, then it either refers to Jesus’ presentation of the parables on “that same day” or it refers to another historical period. Carson (1995:300) holds that the parables of Matthew 13 were all given on the occasion of “that same day” (13:1,36,53), the day on which some of the controversies described in Matthew 12 occurred.³¹ This view is shared by non-dispensationalists³² and dispensationalists³³ alike. This thesis recognises that other views about the historicity of these parables of Matthew 13 exist but proceeds on the basis that the brute historical facts surrounding Jesus’ presentation of the parables of Matthew 13 can be placed, temporally, on a specific day sometime during the years 28 to 32 and, geographically, on a boat at the sea of Galilee (13:1-2) and then in a house nearby (13:36). It occurred on “the same day” that the unpardonable sin was committed and when Jesus promised to provide the sign of Jonah.

³¹ Regarding the way Matthew brackets the five main discourses by introductory and concluding remarks, “it seems the wiser course to believe Matthew intended to present real, historical settings for his discourses” (Carson 1995:125).

³² See Patte (1987:183) and Nolland (2005:522-523).

³³ See Wiersbe (1980:107-108), Toussaint (1980:169-170), (Bailey 1998:177), Saucy (1997:331) and Thomas (2002:298). Pre-millennialist Ellisen (2001:83-85) also holds this position.

Second, even though the writer of Matthew may later add theological interpretations (such as the comments in 13:34-35) as to the significance of earlier historical events, these interpretations do not change the historical facts. Further, these theological interpretations about historical events are inspired Scripture, carrying God's authoritative approval. Therefore, except for a brief period in Egypt when he was a child (2:13-15) and a brief period in Tyre and Sidon (15:21-29), the Gospel of Matthew is understood as portraying the life of Jesus in Israel. In Matthew, Jesus' ministry is only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (15:24; cf. 10:5-7). A Jewish setting during the years approximately -5 BC to about 33 is thus the primary historical focus of this Gospel. That the Gospel of Matthew was written after Jesus' ascension does not change the primary historical setting to which this Gospel refers. Matthew writes *in* the year x but he is still primarily describing *earlier* historical events in the life of Jesus. According to Bauckham (1998:15), the local context *in* which a Gospel was written does not necessarily mean it was written *for* such local community only. On the contrary, Bauckham (1998:44-48) goes so far as to say that today's consensus has "a misplaced desire for historical specificity", calls the reconstruction of the four Gospel-communities "hermeneutically irrelevant" and that the Gospels were written for a wide audience. But certainly not all agree with Bauckham.

Third, the focus of the present study is on the parables of Matthew 13 as they are presented in this Gospel and not on the possible sources of development of the Gospel of Matthew (cf. Smit 1987:23). Even if there were a period of mainly oral transmission of material about Jesus, perhaps in small units and in certain standard forms, and even if early members of the Church changed or kept this material unchanged, this thesis holds that the autographical text of the Gospel of Matthew is inspired and it is this text which carries the authority of God's Word.

This thesis fully recognises that different views regarding the tension between text and reality exist. For example, many scholars define the life setting in Matthew's community and date the writing of the Gospel sometime during the years 70 to 85 (see for example Hagner 2000:lxv-lxxvii; Combrink 2007:19-21). Another example is Luz (2001:295-298) who says Matthew 13 condenses and anticipates the story of the entire Gospel in a concentrated form but it is "at the same time an address to the [Matthean] community." The deliberate choices taken in this thesis regarding the historicity of Matthew 13 is one view among many and it is not the intention of this author to argue or imply that the views chosen are better or more valid than other views. This thesis invites the reader to an alternative way of reading the parables of Matthew 13 and one way in which it may be different is because of its views regarding the historicity of Matthew.

1.3.4 The offer of the kingdom

Another way in which the pre-millennial dispensational position assumed impacts the results in this thesis is its understanding of the offer of the kingdom of heaven in Matthew.

According to France (2011:531; cf. Wenham 1989:23), the Jews expected the Messiah to be a warrior king who would bring victory over Israel's enemies (such as Imperial Rome) as well as glory and peace for Israel. The Jews expected an age to come when the Coming One would establish the kingdom in Israel, the righteous will experience blessing but the wicked will be judged (cf. Hagner 2000:46). Field (2011:563) holds that the Jews hearing John the Baptist and Jesus (3:2; 4:17) expected a person of power, status and a national figurehead. "But such assorted apocalyptic and political expectations would have brought about a profound misunderstanding of the kingdom being preached" (Carson 1995:101). Field (2011:564) says that the expectant audience was in for a shock, because Jesus turned their ideas about the kingdom upside down: the purpose of Jesus' sign-miracles was to "bring divine healing and release to ordinary people who had been crippled by physical, psychological, social and spiritual disorders." Hagner (2000:298; cf. Carson 1995:101) argues that Jesus offers Israel salvation and even though a turning point is reached in Matthew 11:2-12:50, *only a spiritual kingdom* is in view and there is no fundamental change in the teaching of Jesus in chapter 13.

This thesis argues that the kingdom offered to the Jewish generation living at the time of Christ's first advent is identical to what the OT prophets predicted. This kingdom will be earthly, literal and national but those who will inherit it must *also* meet spiritual requirements to enter into it. Judgement will therefore precede the establishment of this kingdom to exclude the wicked from entering it (3:7-10). What was offered was *not only* a spiritual kingdom. "At least in the initial stage of his ministry, Jesus appears to be taking the Kingdom according to the eschatological root present in Judaism. His Kingdom is the reign of Yahweh manifested historically, politically, spiritually, and nationally" (Saucy 1997:329). Why does this thesis hold to this view?

First, if *only* a spiritual kingdom was offered then it would have been offered not to Israel only but made available universally from the start (10:5-7; 15:24). Only after this generation rejected the Son of David and only after the cross does the great commission to all the nations start. The timing of the establishment of the prophesied kingdom in terms of the unconditional Davidic covenant was contingent also upon the reception of it by the nation of Israel (Toussaint 1980:62). The Lord undoubtedly insisted on a *spiritual basis* for his kingdom: Jews must repent and bear fruit worthy of repentance (3:2,8); mere physical descent of Abraham does not guarantee entrance

into the kingdom (3:9) but rather one must be born again (Jn 3:3,5). Further, Jesus repudiates the righteousness of Pharisaic Judaism which focused too much on externals and not on regeneration and inner motivation (5:20; 9:13; cf. Barbieri 1983:24). Nevertheless, insisting on a spiritual basis for the kingdom does not abrogate the moral, ethical, political, social, economic and other aspects of the restored Davidic kingdom.

Second, as no formal definition of the kingdom is provided by John, Jesus and the apostles, the Jews were expected to know what was meant by the offer of the kingdom (Barbieri 1983:24). Did they expect a spiritual kingdom *only*? McClain (1959:303) says

[I]f the Kingdom, announced as “at hand” by the Lord, had been exclusively a “spiritual kingdom”, or as some have defined it, “the rule of God in the heart”, such an announcement would have had no special significance whatever to Israel, for such a rule of God had *always* been recognized among the people of God. Compare the psalmist’s affirmation concerning the righteous, “The law of his God is in his heart” (37:31). Any denial of this would certainly be a new kind of dispensationalism.

Third, the apostles expected a literal kingdom before and even after the cross; Jesus did not correct any misunderstanding they had, but said the timing of the establishment of the kingdom is in the Father’s hands (20:20-21; Ac 1:6). Similarly, Jesus’ answer to John the Baptist (11:3-6) interprets the OT prophets and clarifies the relation of Christ’s message to their vision of the kingdom: “And to us Christ’s words should prove what to John needed no proof; namely, that when the Kingdom is established on earth, it will be a literal Kingdom, exhibiting all the varied aspects revealed by the Old Testament prophets” (McClain 1959:279; cf. Toussaint 1980:148).

Four, the use of the terms “kingdom of heaven” and “Son of Man” found in Matthew can be traced back to the “Book of Daniel, where the association of their underlying ideas with the Messianic kingdom is so obvious and striking that it cannot be fairly denied” (McClain 1959:302). As prophesied in Daniel (2, 7), the God of heaven will set up a divine kingdom which will never be destroyed (Dn 2:44). This divine kingdom will destroy and supplant the existing Gentile kingdoms on earth – and these existing kingdoms are political, earthly, socio-economical, etc. Thus when the kingdom of heaven is established on earth, it will not only be spiritual.

Five, the purpose of Jesus’ signs and miracles was to authenticate his Messianic claims, to get Israel to accept him as the Son of David.

In this thesis, Matthew chapters 3 to 12 are understood as tracing the offer of the kingdom to Israel by the Son of David. When the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit occurs (12:31-32), the established of the kingdom of heaven in terms of the Davidic covenant is postponed and Christ promises the sign of Jonah. Matthew 13 indicates a significant change: after the sign of Jonah has been provided and until the Son of David is accepted by Israel, the kingdom of heaven will exist in a way not prophesied in the OT. In agreement with a-millennialists, from Pentecost until Christ's return the kingdom will only be spiritual in terms of the New covenant but in disagreement with a-millennialists, this does not abrogate or eliminate God's unconditional promises regarding the Davidic kingdom which is yet to be restored. Contrary therefore to the already-(established)-but-not-yet-(consummated) view, it will be argued in this thesis that the kingdom of heaven *exists* spiritually from Pentecost onwards but will only be *established* when Christ returns, thus the view espoused is it "exists-but-is-not-yet-established". This pre-millennial dispensational perspective regarding of the kingdom of heaven materially affects the results of this study.³⁴

1.4 Research design and methodology

Regarding parable research, a literature survey is conducted on the work of non-dispensationalists (except for two commentators).³⁵ Even though parable research in general is considered, the aim is to identify hermeneutical guidelines *only for the parables of Matthew 13*. When applying these guidelines to the parables, considered individually and collectively, the work of a number of non-dispensational and dispensational commentators³⁶ on Matthew is taken into account.

1.5 Chapter overview

In line with the order of the primary and secondary research questions, chapter 2 contains a literature survey of parable research in order to identify guidelines for the interpretation of the parables of Matthew 13. In chapter 3, the structure of Matthew 13 is considered. Chapter 4 presents a contextual background to the parables of Matthew 13 by applying the first three guidelines identified in chapter 2: an understanding of the kingdom is presented, the setting of

³⁴ In fairness, it must be conceded that understanding the kingdom of heaven as *only* spiritual likewise significantly affects the interpretation of Matthew 13.

³⁵ The work of non-dispensationalists K.E. Bailey, C.L. Blomberg, M.I. Boucher, C.H. Dodd, A.M. Hunter, K.W. Herzog, J. Jeremias, S.J. Kistemaker, J.W. Sider, K.R. Snodgrass, R.H. Stein and D. Wenham is considered, together with relevant articles. The parable research of dispensationalists M.L. Bailey and J.D. Pentecost has also been consulted.

³⁶ The work of non-dispensationalists D.A. Carson, W.D. Davies & D.C. Allison, R.T. France, D.A. Hagner, U. Luz and J. Nolland is considered as well as dispensationalists M.L. Bailey & T. Constable, L. Barbieri, D.B. Long, J.D. Pentecost, W.H.G. Thomas, S.D. Toussaint, J.F. Walvoord and W. Wiersbe. The work of progressive dispensationalist D.L. Turner is also taken into consideration.

Matthew 13 is discussed and the occasion or problem that prompts the eight parables of Matthew 13 is identified. The chapter ends with a discussion of the concept of mystery. Once the contextual background has been identified and the necessary building blocks put in place, chapter 5 discusses each parable of Matthew 13 individually before they are considered collectively in chapter 6. Conclusions are presented in chapter 7.

2 Parable research and hermeneutical guidelines

In this chapter, the literary genre of parables is considered in order to identify hermeneutical guidelines for the interpretation of the parables in Matthew 13.

2.1 Parable research

Jesus' parables are not only a source of delight to children (Hunter 1960:7) but also perplexing “weapons of controversy” (Cadoux n.d.:13) that have “challenged expositors” (Pentecost 1982:6). This ambivalence towards parables is due to their complex nature. While Jesus draws real-life pictures of the world around him that are readily understood (Kistemaker 1980:9), there is not always agreement about their point or lesson, the *tertium comparationis* (Boucher 1981:15; Dodd 1953:11). It is, therefore, important to clarify what a parable is, how biblical parables are composed and classified and what the purposes of Jesus' parables are. Thereafter, hermeneutical guidelines for the interpretation of the parables of Matthew 13 are identified.

2.1.1 What is a parable?

In order to identify what a parable is, it seems best not to start with a definition of “parable” in an English or even a Greek dictionary, because Jesus neither lived in a primarily Greek-speaking environment nor was the NT written in English (Stein 1981:15-16). One should rather start with a definition that was used at the time when the New Testament was written. The Hebrew term *māšāl* (מָשָׁל) would have been familiar to Jesus and his followers, due to their Hebraic background. Carson (1995:303; cf. Wenham 1989:225-226) notes that *māšāl* refers to “proverbs, maxims, similes, allegories, fables, comparisons, riddles, taunts, stories embodying some truth”, and Stein (1981:17-18) adds bywords, satire and word of derision to this broad list. While the English word “parable” usually refers to a short narrative with two levels of meaning, the Greek and Hebrew words for “parable” have a much broader semantic potential and cover a variety of literary forms (Snodgrass 2008:2). According to Stein (2000:41), it is unsurprising to find that the parables of Jesus in the Gospels exhibit a similar breadth and semantic range of meaning as found in the case of the OT *māšāl*.

Boucher (1981:31) identifies the double meaning of the narrative as the distinguishing feature of parable as a literary genre. Thus, every parable is tropical¹ in structure. According to Sider (1995:35): “Analogy is the chief literary feature common to the sayings called *parabolai*. Nothing else about them justifies making one genre of such diverse materials” – a saying of Jesus is a “parable” because it involves a comparison by analogy.² Stein (2000:43) argues that basic to the genre of *māšāl* and *parabolē* is the idea of a comparison between unlike things. Snodgrass (2008:2,8-9) agrees with Sider’s view that parables are expanded analogies and he also concurs with Boucher’s argument that parables are indirect communication: “Except for five of Jesus’ parables ... they are stories with two levels of meaning, the story level through which one sees and the truth level, the reality being portrayed”. That it is reality that must be portrayed, is argued by Snodgrass (1998:189-190): “The number of points of comparison between a story and the reality it seeks to mirror cannot be derived by some pre-set literary definition. ... To some degree every parable is molded on its reality or it would not have been told. ... If the story had no representational significance, it would not have been told.”

What can one expect of the literary genre of parables? Sider (1995:19) credits Jülicher with linking the proportional formula $A: B = a: b$ to parables.³ According to Sider (1995:29-30), Jülicher identified two essential steps in interpreting any parable, namely identifying firstly the tenor and vehicle of a parable and, secondly, its point of resemblance. Snodgrass (2008:9) affirms that parables are proportional analogies⁴ and states:

The logic of Jesus’ parables is proportional analogy. Corresponding to the German terms *Sache* and *Bild*, the English terms *tenor* and *vehicle* are used to explain how analogy functions. *Tenor* refers to the theme being compared, the item for which insight is sought, and *vehicle* refers to the pictorial image, the parable, the instrument by which insight is conveyed. An analogy explicitly or implicitly draws one *or more* points of resemblance.

¹ Boucher (1981:25) states: “In all speech, there are only two possible *modes, or kinds, of meaning*: (1) *literal* meaning, and (2) *tropical* meaning. Literal meaning is familiar to all and requires no explanation here. Though the word “tropical” (trope-ical) may be unfamiliar, its sense is quite well known to everyone. It is what we often call “figurative” meaning. “Tropical”, the more accurate term, is ... meaning in addition to the literal.” According to Aune (2003:478), *trope* is “from the Latin word *tropus* (“figure of speech”), derived from the Greek word *τρόπος* (“turn, turning”), referring to a word that has been “turned” from its normal meaning and hence is a “figure of speech.”

² Sider (1995:18) argues that the evangelists’ “usage of *parabole* corresponds to the common Greek usage of their time (quite apart from Greek rhetorical theory) as ‘analogy’ whether story or not ... not all parables are stories, but every parable is an analogy.”

³ Other commentators (Kistemaker 1980:10; Stein 1981:16) also affirm that parables use analogy.

⁴ Knowledge of analogy is relevant, because the “most significant rhetorical function of analogy is focusing thought by selecting one or more aspects of a subject and concentrating attention upon them to the practical exclusion of others” and, in “controversy the focusing power of analogy could be conclusive, cutting to the centre of an issue and having the last word; in teaching it could establish a new agenda for reflection” (Sider 1985:4-5).

For example, a disciple is to God (tenor) as a slave is to a master (vehicle) with respect to unsurpassable obligation (point of resemblance).

2.1.2 How are parables composed and how have they been classified?

Simply put, each parable makes an *analogy* and comprises of a *theme* that is being compared (whether explicitly stated or not) and a *vehicle* by which insight is conveyed. How are the pictorial images of the vehicle of a parable formed?⁵

For Hunter (1960:9; cf. Stein 1981:18-19), expand a simile “into a picture and you get a similitude like *The Lost Sheep*. Expand it into a story by using past tenses and circumstantial details, and you get a story-parable like *The Prodigal Son*.” In a simile, the “presence of a comparison is expressed directly by *like, as, so*, or some similar signal of comparison” (Sider 1995:260; cf. Stein 1981:18-19). If a simile is an explicit comparison, then “similitudes are extended similes” (Snodgrass 2008:12). In other words, when a simile is expanded from a simple explicit comparison into a picture, we then have a similitude (Stein 1981:19), but it is not yet elaborated sufficiently to constitute a story parable (Sider 1995:261).⁶ Snodgrass (2008:12) identifies the distinguishing marker of a similitude as being an extended analogy that lacks plot development.

Pentecost (1982:7-10) relates the figure of speech to the signal of comparison of the analogy: simile (an explicit, stated likeness), metaphor (an implied likeness), similitude (transference from the known to the unknown realm via common knowledge) and story (truth transferred from a specific incident). As Stein (2000:47) rightly points out, however, the metaphysical-like distinctions attributed to certain of these forms are exaggerated and unhelpful, for it is not the form of the parables that transforms the reader, but the divine truth that they contain.

The classification of parables differs depending on one’s definition of a parable⁷ but, more specifically, how have the parables of Matthew 13 been classified? Commentators classify the

⁵ Boucher (1981:26) states that figurative language (trope) uses a wide variety of types, such as metonymy, irony and others, but that parables make use especially of metaphor and synecdoche.

⁶ Although Boucher (1981:17-18) states that a similitude narrates a typical or recurrent event, usually but not always in the past tense, Snodgrass (2008:12) disagrees, arguing that neither is tense a factor in distinguishing forms nor does a similitude always narrate a recurring event. He asks: “Is finding a treasure typical or recurring?” (Snodgrass 2008:12).

⁷ For example, Stein (1981:18-21) distinguishes parables in the NT in general as proverbs, a metaphor or figurative saying (making use of simile), similitude, story-parable, example parable and allegory. Boucher (1981:17) classifies parables into three groups, namely similitude, parable and exemplary story. Snodgrass (2008:11) classifies parables into aphoristic sayings, similitudes, interrogative parables, three kinds of narrative

first two parables in Matthew 13 differently. For example, the parable of the sower is viewed as a story (Wenham 1989:226), allegory (Stein 1981:21) or a fourfold similitude (Snodgrass 2008:576). The parable of the tares of the field is described as an allegory (Wenham 1989:227-228; Stein 1981:21), double indirect narrative (Snodgrass 2008:576) or story parable (Kistemaker 1980:10). There is more agreement about the classification of the remaining parables in the chapter: Wenham (1989:226, 229) views the next five parables in Matthew 13 (mustard, leaven, treasure, pearl and dragnet) as similes, but Stein (1981:18-19) and Snodgrass (2008:576) view these five parables as similitudes. Stein (1981:18-19) classifies the parable of the householder as a similitude.

2.1.2.1 What about allegory?

Some parables make use of allegory to communicate. Allegory means “to say something different from what one means”, that is, “to speak figuratively or metaphorically” (Aune 2003:30). Allegories require numerous details in them to be “decoded” (Blomberg 1990:30). According to Aune (2003:30), allegory “is a rhetorical term with two distinct uses ... (1) to deliberately allegorize in speech or writing is a rhetorical strategy that uses brief comments framed in metaphorical language ... and (2) to interpret a text allegorically in a way not intended by the author, a hermeneutical move.” With respect to the first distinct use, Klauck (cited in Blomberg 1990:44) calls allegory a rhetorical device applicable to many literary genres; allegory gives a symbolic dimension to a text. According to Sider (1995:19; cf. Boucher 1981:28-29), allegory is not a literary genre but “a device of rhetoric that never appears by itself as ‘an allegory’, but always as a feature in a literary genre that goes by some other name.” With respect to the second distinct use, it should be noted that, in this thesis, the principle of literal interpretation is followed and therefore the allegorical method of interpretation is not favoured.

Hunter (1960:10; cf. Jeremias 1972:18-19) warns against allegory, because it “need not conform to the laws of life-likeness and probability and may stray off into some ‘never never’ world where eagles can plant vines and stars become bulls”. However, the idea that parables are realistic stories whereas allegories are unrealistic stories is opposed by a number of interpreters (Sider 1995:13; Blomberg 1990:29-49; Snodgrass 2008:15-17). The assertion that allegory is necessarily unrealistic is disputed: “The claim is made that allegory says something other than what it means by placing pictures in front of reality, but *parable does the same thing*” (Snodgrass 2008:15-16). Moreover, Snodgrass (2008:33) continues,

parables (double indirect parables, juridical parables and single indirect narrative parables) and “how much more” parables.

[I]t is clear no one should reject a feature of Jesus' parables because it has allegorical significance. If Jesus' figures did not bear some relation to reality, he would have no reason to use them. Parables do function as lenses onto another reality, and without question more than one point of comparison may exist between story and reality.

According to Sider (1995:259), allegory is selectively, but not pervasively, symbolic. Although some commentators (Dodd 1953:13; Jeremias 1972:81; Boucher 1981:80) agree that *some* of the parables in the Gospels, notably the parables of the sower, the tares of the field and the dragnet, contain allegorical elements that have been identified, other commentators (Stein 1981:55; Kistemaker 1980:11,15), while acknowledging allegorical elements in some of the parables, caution that it is wise "not to interpret the parables of Jesus or the details of the parables allegorically unless such an interpretation is absolutely necessary." Most interpreters agree with Klauck (cited in Blomberg 1990:44) that unbridled allegorising "which ascribes to a text hidden, often anachronistic meanings which its author never intended" should be avoided.

According to Wenham (1989:229; cf. Blomberg 1990:20), many parables, if not most, have more than one point and many have "allegorical" features. Sider says, "Jesus' parables generally elaborate one proportional analogy into a series of related analogies" (1995:19). Since the Gospels have parables that contain allegorical elements requiring its decoding, in this thesis it is accepted that Jesus used allegory as a rhetorical device in some of his parables. In particular, and relevant to this study of the parables of Matthew 13, Jesus decodes many of the details of the parables of the sower, the tares in the field and of the dragnet. Blomberg (1990:133) goes further, arguing that the "Synoptic parables attributed to Jesus are allegories and they are authentic." Admitting the use of allegory or allegorical elements in some of Jesus' parables, however, does not mean that the allegorical method of interpretation should be accepted (Smit 1987:23; Ellisen 2001:45). Further, in the present study, Wenham's (1989:214) view that the Gospels "should be taken very seriously as historical accounts of Jesus' life and ministry" is followed.

If allegory or allegorical elements are found in a parable, does it necessarily follow that the parable's analogy is expanded to more than one point of resemblance? Or is the parable's vehicle simply being given more pictorial details (for example by using not simile but a similitude), without expanding the analogy to more than one per parable? This debate is intense and often divisive. On the one hand, Aune (2003:33) thinks that it "is perhaps better to admit the polyvalent character of the parable", and Smit (1987:20-21, 24) emphasises that parables are in a sense open

and unfinished, awaiting the concrete and existential response of the hearers.⁸ Similarly, Zimmermann (2009:174) states:

The reduction, postulated by Jülicher, to a single *tertium comparationis* (the third of the comparison) must certainly fail here. ... The ambiguity of a parable thus corresponds to its structure of appeal. Because the meaning of the figurative language is not exactly defined in the text, it must first be sought and found by the reader. Because parables are so open to interpretation, they are at the same time active in interpretation — that is, they evoke an interpretation. Formulated in another way, parables invite readers and hearers to open themselves up to a process of understanding.

By contrast, Weder (cited in Carson 1995:302) states that what distinguishes a parable from an allegory is not only that the former has one central point *but that the former alone ties all its elements to one another within the parable's framework*. For Bailey (1998a:35), understanding “the central analogy of the parable is a safeguard against excessive allegorizing.” Linnemann (1973:11-12) describes the point of comparison from a narrative perspective:

The narrative of a parable has a strong direct flow, which is determined by the point of comparison. Without halts and detours the narrative runs on to the point of comparison. All the individual features of the narrative join in this dramatic movement, and have a function in the development of the narrative. Only when the flow of the narrative has reached its goal is the listener released from suspense. ... The point of comparison forms the end of the parable.

Although the literature survey on this point can easily be expanded, it is clear that there is little consensus among commentators about whether a parable's analogy can be expanded to more than one point of resemblance.

2.1.3 How should “parable” be defined?

How should “parable” be defined or, in particular, how do the Gospels depict this literary genre? Stein (2000:47) points out that “at the core of the Old Testament *māšāl* and the New Testament *parabolē* is a comparison of two unlike things.” According to Snodgrass (2008:7-11), the parable is a form of indirect communication, as it addresses its hearers or readers indirectly. Sider (1995:259) defines a parable as follows:

[A] saying that is labelled *parable* in one of the Gospels, or any similar saying of Jesus. It expresses or implies the logic of analogy in the language of either simile or metaphor

⁸ According to Blomberg (1990:165-166), Sider (1995:254) and Snodgrass (2008:9), a parable can have more than one point of resemblance.

elaborated into a form of allegory that is selectively, but not pervasively, symbolic. Often this allegorical elaboration of the image of a parable is narrative — usually creating a story-parable, but occasionally an example-story.

Considering the parables of Matthew 13, an amended version of Bailey's (1998a:30; cf. Ellisen 2001:43) definition of "parable" is followed in the present study: A figurative narrative that can be related to life and is designed to convey through analogy some specific truth(s) usually relative to God's kingdom program.

2.1.4 What are the purposes of parables?

Bailey (1997:92) suggests that Jesus employs parables for historical and pedagogical purposes. With respect to the historical purpose, Jesus told parables to reveal *mysteria* of the kingdom of heaven to his disciples but also to conceal them from non-disciples (13:11-12). To his disciples, Jesus gives more (13:12) but not to those who do not do the will of the Father (12:50) and who do not respond to the word of the kingdom (13:13). According to McClain (1959:322), "the giving of these parables, therefore, must be regarded as a *divine judgment* upon the nation of Israel. Because they had not received the simple announcement of the Kingdom, they now are given something they cannot understand."

With respect to the pedagogical purpose of Jesus' parables, Stein (1981:35) states that Jesus teaches in parables to disarm and to penetrate the hostility and hardness of his listeners' hearts. According to Snodgrass (2008:8), the "immediate aim of a parable is to be compellingly interesting and, in being interesting it diverts attention and disarms. A parable's ultimate aim is to awaken insight, stimulate the conscience, *and* move to action."⁹ That a person must respond to Jesus' parables cannot be denied; a decision is required. But Carson (1995:302) points out that whatever "else Jesus was, he was no twentieth-century existentialist!" The application of a parable's truth today should not be divorced from the historical context in which the parable is set. That Jesus' parables are linguistically interesting, if not aesthetically pleasing, cannot be denied either. But Stein (1985:253-254) warns that parables are neither self-standing creations of art that possess beauty and power in and of themselves, nor do the metaphors they contain possess any regenerating power. The rhetorical purpose of parables is to inform, convince, or persuade their audiences (Bailey 1998a:30). Jesus also told parables to fulfil prophecy (13:34-35) and to ascribe responsibility to scribal disciples of the kingdom of heaven to bring forth things

⁹ Kierkegaard (cited in Snodgrass 2008:8) sees parables as a form of indirect communication intended to "deceive the hearer into truth".

new and old (13:52). Dake (cited in Lockyer 1963:18) summarises the purposes of Jesus' parables:

- (1) To reveal truth in interesting form and create more interest (Mt 13:10-11,16);
- (2) To make known new truths to interested hearers (Mt 13:11-12,16-17);
- (3) To make known mysteries by comparison with things already known (Mt 13:11);
- (4) To conceal truth from disinterested hearers and rebel hearts (Mt 13:11-15);
- (5) To add truth to those who love it and want more of it (Mt 13:12);
- (6) To take away from those who hate and do not want it (Mt 13:12);
- and (7) To fulfil prophecy (Mt 13:14,17,35).

2.2 Hermeneutical guidelines for the interpretation of the parables in Matthew 13

With respect to the study of Jesus' parables, according to Bailey (1976:16), the modern period¹⁰ was initiated by Adolf Jülicher who demonstrated the inadequacies of the allegorical method. While Jülicher erred by finding the main point of the parables invariably connected to a general moral truth (Hunter 1960:38; Stein 1985:248), Dodd and Jeremias attempted to interpret the parables in their historical contexts in the life of Jesus and in the Gospel records (Bailey 1998a:29). Stein complements Dodd for showing that the parables of Jesus are thoroughly eschatological but also adds that "Dodd consistently overemphasized their realized eschatological dimension at the expense of their futuristic dimension" (Stein 1985:251). Jeremias, however, "taught that the kingdom was in the process of coming" (Wenham 1989:232). Stein (1981:62; cf. Wenham 1989:233) identifies a third modern trend as that of redaction criticism with its "interest in the theological emphasis and interpretations" of the evangelists.

Contemporary trends in parable research include (a) the new hermeneutic, (b) new criticism (or formalism) and (c) post-structuralism. The new hermeneutic is a development of modern philosophy, building on the work of Hesserl and Heidegger and practiced by Fuchs and Via (to name but a few). Wenham (1989:234) notes that this approach highlights the existential and contemporary interpretation of the parables. The new hermeneutic emphasises "the subjectivity of the process of interpreting the biblical texts, over against the traditional quest for objectivity" (Blomberg 1990:134). The new hermeneutic fuses the horizons of the text and the interpreter: "In other words, it focuses on ways in which the "text interprets the reader", challenging his inherited presuppositions (a process often called a "language event"), instead of looking simply at ways in

¹⁰ For Bailey (1976:16-26), major trends in parable research of the modern period continues building on the historical-eschatological approach of Dodd and Jeremias. Building upon their historical work, Jones then concentrates on the aesthetic, that is, developing Jones's (historical)-aesthetic view. The historical-existential approach of Linnemann was followed by the (historical)-existential-aesthetic view of Via.

which the reader interprets the text” (Blomberg 1990:135). The parables are therefore viewed as instruments of confrontation; modern readers should be confronted by the parables in the way the ancient reader was: one must experience the same “language event” (Wenham 1989:234). But Stein (1985:252-253) holds that parables are not self-standing creations of art possessing power in and of themselves and do not have a life of their own. Blomberg (1990:142; cf. Wenham 1989:234) notes that the new hermeneutic cannot have its language event but deny propositional truths in the parables. Among the advantages of the new hermeneutic is that it emphasises how Jesus’ parables challenged conventional beliefs of his day and the parables call for a decision to be made.

The new criticism focuses more on the structures and forms of a piece of literature, be it deep structures (structuralism) or surface structures (such as rhetorical criticism). Structuralism holds that Jesus’ intended meaning in the parables is not accessible to modern readers (Wenham 1989:233) and deliberately ignores the historical background of a text (Stein 1985:252-253; Wenham 1989:233-236). Therefore, new criticism rather focuses on the ‘deep structures’ of meaning which lie below the surface of a narrative, often expressed in common codes of kinship patterns in the author’s unconscious mind and which one should seek to identify to arrive at the deeper structure and meaning of the text (Stein 1985:65-66). Blomberg (1990:144-145) states,

As a world view, structuralism is inherently bound up with dialectic philosophy, determinism and atheism. It is deterministic and atheist in that it claims that language determines thought. Thus it denies the possibility of both transcendent revelation and true personal freedom. Language controls speech and writing rather than vice versa. It is dialectic in that it seeks to identify oppositions in texts and how they are mediated or overcome.

What are its advantages? Structuralists have discerned patterns of narrative which they believe characterise the authenticity of Jesus’ parables and their work also assist in classifying the parables (Blomberg 1990:146-148). Focusing on surface structures, Bailey (1976:74-75) in particular is sensitive to the presence of chiasmus or inverted parallelism, arguing that it has exegetical significance.

Post-structuralism denies key ideas of structuralism such as that objective meaning can be found in structures of the text but it agrees with structuralism that one cannot reconstruct authorial intent (Blomberg 1990:152). Post-structuralism argues that the individual reader should create meaning, leading to two broad approaches: deconstruction (that is, generating conflicting meanings from the same text) or reader-response criticism (Blomberg 1990:152-153). As an example of reader-response criticism, Wittig (1977:75) asks: Even if deep structures exist, why do different readings

of the parables by different readers yield different meanings? In postulating her theory of multiple meanings for the parables, Wittig (1977:76) argues that a parable text can be pluri-significant because this (its polyvalence) “is the product of a duplex sign system which operates denotatively and connotatively at the same time, and which has at least two signifieds: a stated and an unstated signified, a *denotatum* and a *designatum*.” Further, the unstated signified must be supplied by the reader or hearer who creates this meaning within the constraints imposed by the *denotatum*, within the context of the framing structure in which the sign system is embedded and in the context of the reader’s or hearer’s belief system (Wittig 1977:75). In reader-response criticism, the reader creates meaning, not the language event of the new hermeneutic. Although a reader-response typically focuses on the personal application of the parabolic teaching, Bailey (1998a:29) considers the glass half empty: “More recent trends have tended to see parables as literary art at the expense of the historical interpretation.”

According to Kistemaker (1980:17), interpreting the parables do not “call for a thorough training in theology and philosophy, but it does imply that the exegete adhere to some basic principles of interpretation. These principles in brief are related to the history, grammar, and theology of the biblical text.” Perhaps that may suffice as a general statement regarding principles of interpretation. The focus of this thesis is *only* on the parables of Matthew 13. With this in mind, the following hermeneutical guidelines have been identified to assist in the interpretation of the parables of Matthew 13.¹¹

2.2.1 An OT understanding of the kingdom of God

Stallard (2000:132) states that “there are several preliminary considerations that affect one’s reading of Matthew thirteen”, and he identifies an OT understanding of the kingdom of God as an issue that directly relates to one’s methodology in interpreting Matthew 13. A Jew living during the OT times would have based her expectations of a concrete, ethnic, national and political kingdom ruled by the Messianic Davidic king on OT prophecies (Stallard 2000:136-139). Since the Gospel of Matthew does not define what is meant by “the kingdom of God” or “the kingdom of heaven”, the context for the interpretation of these terms must be found in the OT and, with lesser authority since it is not inspired Scripture, also in Inter-testamental literature. Moreover, Kinnebrew (2010:10) notes that “these parables were spoken in the context of Jesus’ kingdom

¹¹ Although also identified by other commentators, this thesis is indebted to five guidelines identified by Bailey (1998a:29-38) in his *Guidelines for interpreting Jesus’ parables*. These include: understanding the setting of the parable, uncovering the need that prompted the parable, analysing the structure and details of the parable, stating the central truth of a parable and its relationship to the kingdom and responding to the intended appeal of the parable.

offer to Israel. The kingdom and kingship of Jesus is the major theme of the Gospel of Matthew.” It is generally accepted (Blomberg 1990:291; Wenham 1989:16,20) that the parables of Matthew 13 concern, directly or indirectly, the kingdom of heaven.¹²

The first guideline for interpreting the parables of Matthew 13 is, therefore, to understand what βασιλεία (*basileia*, kingdom) means in the context of Jesus’ teaching. Given the OT prophecies regarding the kingdom and other Inter-testamental literature on the topic, how would Jesus’ disciples have understood the term (cf. Stallard 2000:134)?¹³

2.2.2 Understand the setting of the parables of Matthew 13

According to Stein (1981:75), one should seek to understand the *Sitz im Leben* in which the parables was uttered. The parables should be explained in the context of Jesus’ own historical situation and purpose, and the interpreter must start from Jesus’ intended meaning (Wenham 1989:233,235; Snodgrass 2008:3).¹⁴ Generally speaking, the interpreter ought to make a study of the historical setting of the parable, including a detailed analysis of the religious, social, political and geographical circumstances revealed in the parable (Kistemaker 1980:17). More specifically, Ellisen (2001:11,53-54) states that Jesus told parables to solve problems and therefore the historic scene (or occasion) and its needs that gave rise to the parable must be understood, as the timing and chronological of the parables in the historical development of Jesus’ ministry are not accidental. Further, one ought to also investigate what is the theological, redactional emphasis of the evangelist (Stein 1981:78; Boucher 1981:60-62) and how the parables are woven into the narrative of his Gospel (Snodgrass 2008:26). Sider (1983:61) remarks that sound “interpretation requires sound literary criticism: on that point of parable study biblical scholars and students of general literature are agreed.” Matthew’s Gospel presents the reader with a literary and historical context; the historical events leading up to these parables and the literary context in which they are set must be understood.

Bailey (1976:27-37) specifically focuses on the cultural background of the parables, calling his approach “Oriental exegesis”. He identifies three tools for studying the cultural setting: (1) understanding contemporary conservative peasants to see what the parables mean in their setting,

¹² The parable of the sower refers to the word of the kingdom (13:19), the next six parables each have as their major referent the kingdom of heaven (13:24,31,33,44,45,47), and the scribe is a disciple of the kingdom of heaven (13:52).

¹³ This guideline is considered in 4.1.

¹⁴ These statements are reminiscent of Dodd (1953:26): “The task of the interpreter of the parables is to find out ... the setting of a parable in the situation contemplated by the Gospels, and hence the application which would suggest itself to one who stood in that situation.”

(2) how Oriental churchmen through the centuries have translated the text and, (3) reading the parables with ancient literature pertinent to it. Although Bailey (1998a:32) agrees that studies “in the local color of the parables have turned up a rich store of information”, he (1998a:33) also adds that an “awareness of first-century culture allows the parables to retain their true-to-life nature and unlocks the parabolic references to the religious and social cultures of the original settings of the parables.”

The second guideline is, therefore, to understand the setting of the parables of Matthew 13.¹⁵ The first two guidelines have a more contextual or macro-perspective.

2.2.3 Uncover the problem that prompts (*all*) the parables of Matthew 13

According to Pentecost (1982:15; cf. Kistemaker 1980:18), one should observe the immediate context, because each “parable thus was designed to solve a problem or to answer a question. ... If the answer does not suit the question or problem, the interpreter has either misunderstood the question or misunderstood the parable.” The advice of Wenham (1989:237) is practical: the interpreter should be “guided by the contextual and other interpretive hints given by the evangelists. These are, if nothing more, our earliest clues to the interpretation of the parables.” Zuck (cited in Bailey 1998a:34) suggests nine kinds of occasions or purposes that led to Jesus’ parables:

[P]arables in answer to questions, parables in answer to requests, parables in answer to complaints, parables given with a stated purpose, parables of the kingdom given because of Israel’s rejection of Jesus as Messiah, parables following an exhortation or principle, parables that illustrate a situation, and parables with the purpose implied but not stated.

Since the parables of Matthew 13 concern things new and old (13:52), it is not only the immediate context of chapter 13 that has a bearing on the reasons these parables are given. The relevance of the wider Matthean context and relevant OT teaching regarding the kingdom should also be considered. Moreover, since these parables are presented by Matthew as being spoken on the same day by Jesus (13:1,36,53), they collectively share the same immediate context. And yet, there is also a reason why each individual parable of Matthew 13 is given.

The third guideline is, consequently, to identify the reason that prompts not only *all* the parables of Matthew 13 but also each *individual* parable. This guideline focuses on the *wider* context as

¹⁵ This guideline is considered in 4.2.

presented in the Gospel of Matthew (perhaps focusing more on Matthew 1-12 than Matthew 14-28) and also the *immediate* context in Matthew 13. The wider context is considered in 4.3, and the immediate context when considering each parable of Matthew 13 individually.

2.2.4 Analyse the literary structure, details and wording of each parable of Matthew 13

Kistemaker (1980:18) notes that the “exegete must pay close attention to the literary and grammatical structure of the parable”; Boucher (1981:58) seeks “the meaning of the whole parable and the meaning of its parts”, and Snodgrass (2008: 26-27) holds that one “must interpret each parable as a whole to determine *how the analogy works*. ... The only reason to identify correspondences is to know to what the analogy refers.” Traina (cited in Bailey 1998a:34) identifies five ways in which a literary structure can be arranged to carry along the thought process of the reader:

Biographical progression, which tracks the lives of people; historical progression, which follows the sequence of events; chronological progression, which unfolds the narrative with time indicators; geographical progression, which journals the changes of place; and ideological progression, which focuses on the development of ideas.

Kim (1996:186-187) points out that the interpreter can concentrate on the rhetorical function of the parable discourse in Matthew 13 by focusing on the scene, act, agent, agency and purpose of each parable. With respect to the details and wording of the parable, Kistemaker (1980:18) pays attention to the most significant moods and tenses and also to word studies in their biblical context as well as in extracanonical writings. Snodgrass (2008:28) summarises aspects of Sider’s work (1995:237-241) that are relevant to each parable’s literary details and wording:

The criterion of proportion: In general, the more central a feature is, the more likely it is to be symbolic; the more marginal, the less likely. The criterion of indispensability: Is the element required to make the story work or merely “part of the machinery” of the story? Is the element so central or unusual that it must have symbolic significance? The criterion of analogy: Knowledge of part of the analogy sheds light on other elements of the analogy. If the Great Supper is eschatological, the coherence of the picture sheds light on the identity of the characters in the story.

The fourth guideline focuses on the structure, details and wording of *each individual parable*.

2.2.5 Find the central truth of each parable of Matthew 13

To seek the main point of a parable is a guideline many interpreters stress (Stein 1981:72; Boucher 1981:60). Kistemaker (1980:18) adds that “the main point of a given parable should be checked theologically against the teaching of Jesus and the rest of Scripture.” More particularly, since each of the parables in Matthew 13 refers to the kingdom of heaven, directly or indirectly, each parable’s central truth must inform the “theology of the kingdom” (Bailey 1998a:37). Bailey (1998a:36) states that the “central truth can be identified by understanding what question, occasion, problem or need is portrayed in the historical setting.” Stein (1981:56) identifies questions one can ask to find the central truth of each parable:

What terms are repeated in the parable? Which are not? Upon what does the parable dwell, i.e., to what or to whom does the parable devote the most space? What is the main contrast found in the parable? What comes at the end of the parable? (This has been called “the rule of end stress”.) What is spoken in direct discourse in the parable? (Frequently what is most important in the parable appears in direct discourse.) What characters appear in the parable? Which are the least important? Which are the two most important characters? (Usually a parable zeroes in on two characters to establish its main point.) How would you have told the parable? If Jesus told it differently, does this reveal anything?

The fifth guideline is to find the central truth(s) of each of the parables in Matthew 13.

2.2.6 Identify specific, prophetic referents for the parables of Matthew 13

In 1.1.1 it was argued that the parables of Matthew 13 may be different from some of the other parables of Jesus. Further, these parables in general cover the time from the days of John the Baptist (11:12a) until Jesus’ second coming (24:29-30). If the parables of Matthew 13 contain mysteries, both new and old prophecies regarding the kingdom of heaven, they may not have multiple references to different events in history. If one should be sensitive to the possibility of connecting these parables to specific, prophetic referents, how should one identify it?

Matthew uses *πληρώω* (*plēroō* “fulfil”) in ways more nuanced than simply prophetic prediction and literal fulfilment. Commenting on chapter 2 of this Gospel’s use of the OT, France (2007:45) concludes that in Matthew one must allow for “different classes of readers who might be expected to engage at different levels with Matthew’s argument, from the relatively superficial level of direct promise and fulfilment to a more nuanced and allusive appreciation of themes and strands of OT prophecy and type.” This thesis, however, is limited to an investigation of whether

the parables of Matthew 13 contain prophecies that will literally be fulfilled. Before identifying specific methodological rules, general comments about prophecy and prophets are in order.

First, as noted in 1.3, the principle of literal interpretation holds irrespective of whether or not a biblical passage contains prophetic or eschatological content. Therefore, whether or not Matthew 13 contains content of a prophetic or eschatological nature, the “difficult task of the interpreter is to investigate this figurative language to discover what literal truth there is” (Benware 2006:26). To interpret figurative language consistently with the rest of Scripture, one must take into account its immediate context, then the larger context of the entire book in which the symbol is found and lastly the historical-cultural context (Benware 2006:31; Hitchcock 2012:54-57).

Second, according to Hitchcock (2012:57-58; cf. Benware 2006:28-29), prophecy should be interpreted by comparing prophecy with prophecy, and Scripture with Scripture. Interpretations should be contextually consistent, in this case within Matthew 13 itself and also with the rest of this Gospel.

Third, prophecies should be interpreted in light of possible time intervals *between* prophetic fulfilments (Benware 2006:29).

Fourth, one should distinguish between fulfilled and unfulfilled prophecies, determining whether the specifics of the prophecy have actually occurred at some point in time (Hitchcock 2012:58). Regarding various interpretations of “things new and old” (13:52), Bailey (1999c:294) observes the following:

If any of the “old” is not yet fulfilled, there cannot be a wholesale setting aside of the old in favour of the new. Also the new cannot be a partial fulfilment of the promises of the old, because both, not just the new, is (sic) brought out of the treasure. Further, if the new simply fulfils the old, then it is really not new. ... But, while there is an emphasis on the new, it is not new *instead* of the old; both new and old are brought forth.

Fifth, some prophecies may be conditioned but others are unconditional. For example, and focusing on covenants, Pentecost (1995:59) distinguishes between a unilateral or unconditional covenant and a conditional (or bilateral) covenant, as the former depends “for its fulfilment solely on the one making the covenant. That which was promised was sovereignly given to the recipient of the covenant on the authority and integrity of the one making the covenant, entirely apart from

the merit or response of the receiver.” Importantly, an unconditional covenant or an unconditional prophecy can have conditional sub-clauses. Toussaint (1994:226) asks, “If conditionality is implied in certain prophetic pronouncements, how can anyone know if unconditional promises exist? Can conditionality vitiate any and all promises?” Peters (1972:177; emphasis added) provides eleven marks by which one may distinguish predictions that will be fulfilled from those that are merely conditional:

1. Predictions that are bound up with the Divine Plan of Redemption, as e.g. those referring to Christ’s birth, life, death, etc. ...3. *Those that are incorporated in the Covenants, as e.g. the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants.* 4. Predictions which expressly declare that they will take place irrespective of what man will do, as e.g. Dan. Chs. 2 and 7, the Apocalypse, Ps 89:33,34, etc. 5. Predictions that form the basis of succeeding ones and of promises... 6. *Those that are illustrated by a parable, as e.g. parable of the tares, net, nobleman, etc. (the parable enforces, or takes the fulfilment for granted).* 7. Predictions relating to the destiny of the good, whoever they may be. 8. Those referring to the destiny of the wicked, whoever they are. 9. Prophecies given to the Jews respecting other nations,, and not to those nations themselves for purposes of repentance, as e.g. Babylon, Tyre, etc. 10. *Those that relate to the establishment of the Kingdom of God, being a revelation of God’s will and pleasure respecting redemptive ordering.* 11. *Those that describe the final restoration of the Jewish nation, this being (as will be fully shown hereafter) essential to secure the manifestation of the Kingdom and the Salvation of the Gentiles.*

To test whether someone is a true prophet, Jesus teaches that prophets will be known by their fruits (7:15-20). Prophets not only forth-tell but also foretell. Focusing on foretelling: if the content of any unconditional foretelling does not happen or come to pass, the Lord has not spoken it (cf. Dt 18:22). If an unconditional prediction comes to pass in the near future, exactly as foretold, one may confidently expect unconditional predictions as yet unrealised to also be fulfilled in the same way, at the appointed time. Applying this to Matthew 13, and from the perspective of *that day* in history (13:1), some parables may depict events that had already occurred, some may predict events which took place shortly afterwards, and some may be prophecies about events in the distant future. If Matthew 13 contains new and old prophecies regarding the kingdom of heaven, given by way of parables, whatever one’s interpretation of the parable, the new can neither contradict the old nor be inconsistent with the new of other parables in Matthew 13. There should further be an emphasis on contextual unity. Moreover, as indicated in the citation from Peters (see above), these new and old prophecies must refer to unconditional prophecies, since these parables of Matthew 13 take their fulfilment for granted. The unconditional prophecies refer to the establishment of the kingdom, are related to covenants

(specifically the Abrahamic, Davidic and New covenants) as well as to prophecies which expressly declare that they will come to pass (cf. Dn 2 and 7). Further, since it concerns mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11), these parables may be related to God's secret thoughts, plans and dispensations which were kept secret since the foundation of the world but have now been revealed (cf. 13:17,35).

As the sixth guideline, the following will be used to identify possible specific, prophetic referents for the parables of Matthew 13:

- A person, process or event that qualifies as a specific, prophetic referent must be *significant* in God's purpose in history to establish His kingdom (a right to rule, a rule, a realm to be ruled and the exercise of the function of rulership) *and* redemption programmes on earth. From a narrative perspective, this guideline is in line with what Powell (1990:49) identifies as the main plot of Matthew's Gospel, namely "the divine plan by which God's rule will be established and God's people will be saved from sin."
 - The historical period under review is from the days of John the Baptist (11:12a) until Jesus' second coming.
 - Questions to be considered include the following: who acted, what actions are performed or will be performed in future, and, if it can be determined, when did, or will, the events take place?
 - Also, if persons, processes or events are so significant, they are likely to be corroborated by more revelation in Matthew.
- The significant person, process or event identified (see above) is unlikely to be repeated often in history, if at all. However, there may be many *applications* of these parables.
- In line with the criterion of analogy referred to in 2.2.4, knowledge of part of the analogy may shed light on other elements of the analogy — if you know the Great Supper is eschatological, the coherence of the picture sheds light on the identity of the characters of the story (Snodgrass 2008:28). In other words, the identification of specific, prophetic referents should aid in connecting most, if not all, of the details of a parable to the prophetic content it may be communicating. The risk of allegorising should be *diminished* by a good fit of many of the details of these parables in Matthew 13.

2.2.7 Use details explained in Matthew 13 consistently to interpret other parables in Matthew 13

According to Matthew, Jesus identifies referents for some of the details used in the parables of the sower (13:18-23), the tares of the field (13:36-43) and the dragnet (13:49-50). Whenever a

detail referenced in Matthew 13 is used in another parable in Matthew 13, should such a referent be considered to have been used consistently? Strauss (1980:53-54,64) answers affirmatively, arguing that there is harmony in the preaching of these parables which form a connected and completed whole. Regarding the first two parables in Matthew 13, Pentecost (1982:13) states that since “this was a new method of communicating truth, Christ interpreted these two parables to set a pattern of interpretation for all His parables.” In the context of the parable of the mustard seed, Wiersbe (1980:110) notes that, since “Jesus did not explain this parable, we must use what He did explain in the other parables to find its meaning.”¹⁶ Carson (1995:319), however, notes that metaphors “may have diverse uses: the lion at different times symbolizes both Satan and Jesus.” Bailey (1999a:64) also emphasises that a hermeneutical principle to be kept in mind is that a term may not have the same symbolic significance every time it is mentioned. Although the point made by Carson and Bailey is certainly valid, it must be borne in mind that, according to Matthew, Jesus spoke these parables on the same day (13:1,36,53) and that, therefore, the immediate and larger contexts for these parables are the same. Repetition, consistency and non-contradiction should be expected. For that reason, it seems reasonable to consider whether a detail that is given a referent in one of the three explained parables in Matthew 13 may be understood similarly or consistently if it occurs again in one of the five unexplained parables in Matthew 13.

As the seventh guideline, bear in mind that the reference or explanation of a symbol in Matthew 13 may need to be interpreted consistently.

2.2.8 Identify the collective meaning of the parables of Matthew 13

According to Matthew, not only does Jesus present these parables on the same day (13:1,36,53) but he also asks his disciples if they understood “all these things” contained in the unified presentation (13:51; cf. 13:34). Is there a reason why these parables are presented and specifically grouped together? Davies and Allison (1991:449) affirm that Matthew’s parabolic discourse exhibits a thematic unity and that no parable is out of place. Hagner (2000:392) acknowledges the “propriety of understanding all the parables as in some sense belonging together and addressing aspects of the same reality, i.e., the mysteries of the kingdom (v 11)” and adds (2000:401) that only “if the disciples have understood these things will they be in a position to be fruitful for the

¹⁶ In the context of the parables of the mustard seed and of the leaven, Thomas (1985:197) advocates a similar argument: “Since our Lord gave no recorded explanation of them, it is necessary to use caution in their interpretation. But, since they probably were spoken on the same day and form two of eight, there ought to be a consistent rendering of meaning and a harmony with the first two parables.”

kingdom (cf. v 23)". Despite statements of this sort, however, it seems that few commentators, after considering these parables individually, specifically focus on what they might mean collectively. Because Jesus stresses "all these things" and because these parables exhibit a thematic unity, a focus on the parables of Matthew 13 as a joint unit does not seem unwarranted.

It appears that Matthew 13 not only exhibits a thematic unity but is also structured carefully. Wenham (1979:516-522; cf. Blomberg 1990:113-114) proposes that Matthew structured this chapter as a chiasmus.¹⁷ According to Blomberg (1989:7), the centre of a chiasmic structure, which forms its climax, should be a passage worthy of that position in light of its theological or ethical significance. It is suggestive that the centre of the chiasmic structure, 13:34-43, which includes the explanation of the parable of the tares of the field (13:36-43), explains seven symbols specifically, with more that can be inferred.¹⁸ So, what might Matthew 13 as a whole be teaching? Kinnebrew (2010:10) sums up a focus on the collective meaning of these parables: "If one is to understand the meaning of any of these parables, he must understand 'all' of the parables. None of the parables should be considered as 'stand alone' creations. Rather, they are each an important piece of a grand mosaic." Using referents possibly in a consistent way for the parables of Matthew 13 (see 2.2.7) may assist in understanding each *individual* parable, but it simultaneously makes it *more difficult* to force any preconceived ideas onto these parables as a group. Further, whatever interpretations are advanced, they must also adhere to Jesus' instruction to combine "things new and old" (see 2.2.10 below).

Therefore, the eighth guideline for the parables of Matthew 13 is to focus on their collective meaning.¹⁹

2.2.9 Anachronism

Regardless of the specific text in question, anachronism in exegesis should be avoided. It is therefore important to clarify what is meant by anachronism. Three scenarios can be used to clarify what is meant by anachronism.

¹⁷ The structure of Matthew 13 is discussed in chapter 3 (including views that this chapter does not have a chiasmic structure).

¹⁸ Fay (1989:65-81) indicates a chiasmic structure for Mark 4:1-34, with the explanation of the parable of the sower as its centre. If the suggestion that symbols explained in Matthew 13 be interpreted consistently throughout the chapter is accepted, and if Fay's presentation of Mark 4:1-34 is correct, then it would be interesting to see if the same approach yields good fruit if applied to Mark 4.

¹⁹ This focus is addressed in chapter 6.

What the disciples of Jesus would have understood when these parables were given cannot be viewed as anachronistic (“Scenario A”). Since Jesus expected the disciples to understand the parable of the sower (13:11; cf. Mk 4:13), this parable must include events during a time period which the disciples can be expected to have shared or known about.

What the twelve apostles would have known when the Gospel of Matthew was written sometime after the events of Matthew 13, can be considered anachronistic in a qualified sense, because the writer of the Gospel of Matthew weaves some of his own time into the events described in Matthew 13 (“Scenario B”).

What can be rejected as anachronistic (“Scenario C”) is reading today’s knowledge or events back into or onto the text of Matthew 13. The following comment of Davies and Allison (1991:448-449) is relevant in this regard:

Commentators of an earlier time were often encouraged to divine in the seven parables of Mt 13 a prophetic outline of church history. ... If scholars nowadays do not take chapter 13 to be an allegorical representation of ecclesiastical history, this is in part because the interpretation is inevitably anachronistic: it must read into the text events which could not possibly have been on the minds of a first-century author and his readers.

What makes Matthew 13 potentially unusual is that the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, as has been argued in 1.1.1, may refer to prophetic or eschatological secrets (Davies and Allison 1991:387-389; France 2007:508,511; Hagner 2000:372, 390), containing not only old but also new things (13:52) regarding the kingdom of heaven. If some of the parables in Matthew 13 contain prophetic matter, anachronism may have to be nuanced appropriately for Scenario B.

The disciples did not understand the parables *the moment* they heard it. Jesus had to explain three of these parables in Matthew 13, once on request (13:36).²⁰ Given that the parable of the sower couples understanding (13:19,23) with varying degrees of fruitfulness (13:8), it is also clear that some disciples are going to understand more than other disciples. In their discussion of 13:12, Davies and Allison (1991:391) state the following: “‘To him who has will be given’ refers to the disciples, who have understanding and will be given more understanding. ... Knowledge is rewarded with knowledge, ignorance with ignorance. Like begets like.”²¹ If this is so, and if the epistemological necessity of understanding the parable of the sower has been met, disciples’

²⁰ According to Mark 4:10-13, Jesus also explains the parable of the sower on request.

²¹ The statement of Papias (Hagner 2000: xliv) regarding the Gospel of Matthew, namely that “each one translated (or: interpreted) it as he was able” receives a different flavour if placed next to Matthew 13:12.

understanding of the remaining parables in Matthew 13 may be viewed as gradual and contingent on obeying truth already received. In other words, disciples have indeed been given the *ability* to understand these mysteries (13:11), but understanding *more* about them depends on obeying the truth already received. However, nothing is given to unbelievers (13:11-13).

Concerning the disciples' affirmative answer to Jesus' question in 13:51, Carson's (1995:331; cf. France 2007:544) view seems to be valid: like "another positive response in this Gospel (see on 20:22-23), this one cannot simply be dismissed as presumptuous enthusiasm (as if they think they know everything when in fact they know nothing) nor taken at face value (as if their understanding were in fact mature)."

An epistemological test of whether an interpretation given to a parable of Matthew 13 is anachronistic or not, is to consider whether the eventual twelve apostles would have been likely to be able to understand whatever interpretation of a parable of Matthew 13 is being advanced. If it is unlikely that the apostles could have derived the suggested understanding from the parable in question, the interpretation runs the risk of being anachronistic. For example, an understanding that the parable of the tares of the field envisages something "new", like the start of the great commission, is not considered anachronistic. However, according to this test, an argument that the three measures of meal in the parable of the leaven depict the division of Christendom into Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism, is anachronistic.

2.2.10 Things new and old

In the concluding parable, Jesus instructs the scribe of the kingdom of heaven to bring forth out of his (or her) treasure things new and old (13:52). It is submitted that this instruction concerns "all these things" (13:51), that is, it concerns the whole parabolic discourse of Matthew 13 with its mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Accordingly, as a hermeneutical guideline and regardless of one's view of what the "new and old" may refer to, scribes obedient to Jesus' instruction should bring the "new and old" forth for *each* of the parables of Matthew 13. In this thesis, the "new" is viewed as new truths or unconditional prophecies regarding the kingdom of heaven that will be fulfilled during this present age whereas the "old" is viewed as unconditional and unfulfilled OT prophecies regarding the kingdom of heaven which will be fulfilled in the age to come.

2.2.11 Application

Stein (1981:79) states that one must “seek what God is saying to us today through the parable”, and Wenham (1989:238; cf. Kistemaker 1980:18) notes that reflection about the contemporary message of a parable should be based on its historical meaning. After the exegesis of each parable in Matthew, one must seek to apply the central truth(s) these parables teach to the current situation.

2.3 Conclusion

Geisler and Roach (2011:266-267) identify six causes of meaning, applying as an example the making of a chair before identifying the six causes of meaning of a written text:

Six causes of meaning	
<i>Making a chair</i>	<i>The meaning of a written text</i>
The <i>efficient</i> cause of meaning, that <i>by which</i> something comes to be, for example a carpenter making a chair.	The writer is the <i>efficient</i> cause of the meaning of the text.
The <i>material</i> cause of meaning, that <i>out of which</i> something comes to be, that is the wood.	The words are the <i>material</i> cause of its meaning.
The <i>formal</i> cause of meaning, that <i>of which</i> something comes to be, for example the form or shape of the chair.	The writing is the <i>formal</i> cause of the meaning of a text.
The <i>final</i> cause of meaning, that <i>for which</i> something comes to be, for example to sit on a chair.	The writer’s purpose is the <i>final</i> cause of its meaning.
The <i>instrumental</i> cause of meaning, that <i>through which</i> something comes to be, such as the tools to make a chair.	The laws of thought are the <i>instrumental</i> cause of the meaning of the text.
The <i>exemplar</i> cause of meaning, that <i>after which</i> something comes to be, that is, the blueprint or pattern.	The writer’s ideas are the <i>exemplar</i> cause of its meaning.

According to Geisler and Roach (2011:267),

Meaning is found *in* the literary text itself, not in its author (efficient cause) or purpose (final cause) but in its literary form (formal cause). Meaning is not in its individual words (material cause)... The locus of verbal meaning is found in the *verba*, the text. Meaning is not found *beyond* the text (in God’s mind), *beneath* the text (in the mystic’s mind), or *behind* the text (in the author’s unexpressed intention or purpose); it is found *in* the text (in the author’s expressed meaning).

If the above analysis of Geisler and Roach is correct, the following table sets out an understanding of the causes of meaning, viewed collectively and individually, for the parables of Matthew 13:

Understanding Matthew 13	
<i>The parables of Matthew 13 viewed jointly</i>	<i>Each individual parable in Matthew 13</i>
The <i>efficient</i> cause of meaning: The Holy Spirit and the apostle Matthew (so assumed).	The <i>efficient</i> cause of meaning: The Holy Spirit and the apostle Matthew.
The <i>material</i> cause of meaning: What are parables? ²² Are the parables of Mathew 13 different from other parables?	The <i>material</i> cause of meaning: Consider the individual parable as well as any literary devices used.
The <i>formal</i> cause of meaning: What is the literary structure of the writing of Matthew 13? ²³	The <i>formal</i> cause of meaning: What is the structure, details & wording of each parable of Matthew 13? ²⁴ Are there specific, prophetic referents?
The <i>final</i> cause of meaning: What is the need that prompts <i>all</i> the parables of Matthew 13? ²⁵	The <i>final</i> cause of meaning: What is the need that prompts a <i>specific</i> parable of Matthew 13? ²⁶
The <i>instrumental</i> cause of meaning: The laws of logic as applied to proportional analogy. What are the <i>mysteries</i> of the kingdom of heaven? ²⁷	The <i>instrumental</i> cause of meaning: Apply the laws of thought; pray for insight to be given into these mysteries.
The <i>exemplar</i> cause of meaning: Did Jesus or the OT provide a blueprint to understand these parables jointly? ²⁸	The <i>exemplar</i> cause of meaning: Apply the things “new and old” to “all these things” - to each parable of Matthew 13. ²⁹

A literature survey was presented in chapter 2, focusing on what a parable is (2.1.1), how parables are composed and classified (2.1.2), defining “parable” (2.1.3) and identifying the purposes of parables (2.1.4). The primary aim of this chapter, however, was to identify specific hermeneutical guidelines (2.2) in order to interpret the parables of Matthew 13. Some of these hermeneutical guidelines can be used for all of Jesus’ parables but not all. These hermeneutical guidelines are developed with a focus to interpret Matthew 13. In chapter 3, the structure of Matthew 13 will be considered.

²² This chapter 2 considered parable research and hermeneutical guidelines. Why the parables of Matthew 13 may be different from some of Jesus’ other parables are discussed in 1.1.1, 1.1.2, 2.2.6, 2.2.7 and 2.2.8.

²³ An analysis of the structure of Matthew 13 is presented in chapter 3.

²⁴ The proposed central truth of each parable is considered in chapter 5.

²⁵ The occasion or problem that prompts *all* the parables of Matthew 13 as literarily presented in Matthew is considered in 4.3. The historical background to this is presented in 4.1 and 4.2. What these parables may mean jointly is discussed in chapter 6.

²⁶ The need or reason that prompts *each* parable is considered in chapter 5.

²⁷ Mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are discussed in 4.4.

²⁸ Jesus instructs the scribe of the kingdom of heaven to bring forth things “new and old” out of “all these things” (13:51-52). This thesis views the things “new and old” as *prophecies* of the kingdom of heaven. Further, the possible consistent use of details already referenced is considered.

²⁹ Consider specific, prophetic referents as part of the things “new and old” for each parable in chapter 5.

3 The structure of Matthew 13

Since the Seventies,¹ many scholars have focused their attention on the literary structure of biblical passages, including Matthew 13. According to Luz (2001:229), scholarship has not arrived at a unanimous presentation of the structure of Matthew 13, and he identifies three basic types of arrangement of Matthew 13: a two-part model with a break after 13:23, a two-part model with a break at 13:36 or a model of inclusion.² Davies and Allison (1991:371; cf. Nolland 2005:522), however, present a three-part model (13:1-23; 13:24-43; 13:44-52) with a break after 13:23 and again after 13:43. Since the structure to be proposed in this study is a chiasmic one, a brief discussion of chiasmus is presented before the proposed structure is discussed.

3.1 What is a chiasmus and what is its purpose?

Chiasmus “is a term derived from the Greek letter χ (*chi*, which resembles the English letter “X”) and refers to a form of inverted parallelism” (Aune 2003:93). Bailey (1976:48-49) states that often the “word *chiasm* is used loosely to refer to all types of literary structures, particularly those with some inversion of themes.”³ Lowth (cited in Unger 1951:282) identifies three types of parallelism in Hebrew poetry, namely synonymous, antithetic and synthetic parallelism:

Synonymous parallelism is the repetition of the same thought with equivalent expressions, the first line (or, stich) reinforcing the second and giving a distich (or, couplet). ... Antithetic parallelism is the repetition of a contrasting thought in the second line to emphasize or confirm the thought of the first. ... Synthetic parallelism is the progressive flow of thoughts in which the second (or following) lines add something to the first, or explain it.

According to Man (1984:146), *chiasmus* “may be defined as a stylistic literary figure which consists of a series of two or more elements followed by a presentation of corresponding elements

¹ Bailey (1976:45-47) provides a review of earlier scholarship on the question of literary structures and notes that, in the eighteenth century, Bengel made brief references to the presence of chiasmus in a number of passages in the NT. Jebb called attention to inverted parallelism in biblical passages in the nineteenth century — as did Boys, who focused on the literary structure in the Psalms. Contributors to this work during the twentieth century include Burney, Manson, Mowry and Lund before Bligh, in 1965, “organizes the entire book of Galatians into interlocking structured literary forms ... in the Seventies [1970s] many scholars in different fields are taking literary analysis seriously” (Bailey 1976:45-46).

² Lund (1942:40-41), Clark (1975:63-72) and Blomberg (1989:5-8) have proposed criteria for chiasmic structures, but these have to some extent been critiqued (Porter and Reed 1998:214-221).

³ For Lund (1942:31), the term *chiasmus* denotes a literary figure or principle which consists of “a placing crosswise, diagonal arrangement so that the first word or line corresponds with the fourth, and the second with the third”.

in reverse order”. But McClister (1996:550) understands chiasmus as “a special type of inverted parallelism. Inverted parallelism has the pattern A B B’ A’ (with an even number of elements), but chiasmus has the pattern A B C B’ A’ (with an odd number of elements). Thus the special feature of chiasmus is that it has a single central element, which is the focus of the structure.”⁴

Bailey (1976:74-75) emphasises the exegetical significance of chiasmic structures:

When the author is using a literary structure the discovery of that structure is found to be crucial for exegesis for several reasons. The structure may: (1) Identify the climactic center; (2) Show how the author is relating the center to the outside; (3) Make clear the turning point of the passage and alert the reader to look for a significant shift of emphasis in the second half; (4) Provide a crucial key to understanding by enabling the reader to see what words, phrases, or sentences are matched with what words, phrases, or sentences in the structure; (5) Demonstrates where newer material has been fitted into an older piece of literature; (6) Mark off the literary unit itself with clarity (the beginning and the end are usually distinct and thus is identified); and (7) Provide crucial evidence for textual problems.

For McClister (1996:550-551), chiasmus aids in memorising oral material, provides order in a literary work, draws attention to the material at the centre of the structure and places materials in parallelism with each other, thus allowing them to interpret each other by way of comparison, contrast, or completion. In addition to the aforementioned purposes, Douglas (2007:27-28) highlights *authentication*⁵ while Davis (2003:316) focuses on *argumentation*.⁶ In summary, Dorsey (1999:31) says that symmetric (or chiasmic or inverted) patterns have several compelling advantages, namely their beauty, coherence, sense of completeness, central pivot, being an aid to memory and opportunities to exploit repetitions. However, these patterns also have their disadvantages: recognising them is more demanding on the audience, and creating them requires more work from the author.

⁴ Dahood (cited in Aune 2003:94) distinguishes between micro-chiasmus and macro-chiasmus, the former involving relatively simple chiasmi of four lines, whereas “macro-chiasm involves larger segments of texts, even entire books.” But the concept of chiasmus, especially macro-chiasmus (or chiasmic structure), is not without its detractors. Porter and Reed (1998:217) claim that chiasmus is not a category that can be applied to entire literary works: “If chiasm is identified in ancient documents, apart possibly from instances of reverse parallelism in four-clause sentences, a modern category is being utilized, one probably unknown and unrecognized by the ancients.” Analysis of supposed chiasmic structures must be done cautiously.

⁵ “Complex conventions of writing or speaking fulfil a role in validating a message. ... A well-crafted composition is its own authentication. ... Simply by virtue of its symmetry and intricate completeness, the ring form conveys authority and prestige” (Douglas 2007:27-28).

⁶ “The chiasmic structure, including the surrounding components of the system, constitutes a specific style of rhetorical argument” (Davis 2003:316). According to Derickson (2006:424), “invariably chiasms reflect a logical arrangement of ideas that serve to focus the reader on the point being made by the author, whether explicitly stated or implied ... the central unit or units serve as its teaching point.”

3.2 The proposed structure of Matthew 13

Combrink (1983:71) and Derickson (2006:426-428) view the Gospel of Matthew as an eleven-part chiasmic structure, the centre containing the parables of the kingdom of heaven. For Derickson (2006:429), “Matthew’s placement of the parables at the center of his Gospel is purposeful and thus exegetically significant.” He (2006:437) adds:

Since Matthew focused his message on the parables of the kingdom, their role is central to his message. Thus, as noted, one of Matthew’s purposes was to explain why, since Jesus is the Messiah, the kingdom had not yet come. This is demonstrated by the chiasmic structure of the Gospel of Matthew with its focus on the interadvent age and God’s work during this time, a work that includes the church but extends before and after it.

Not only is the structure of the Gospel of Matthew important, but, according to Wenham (1979:522), the structure of Matthew 13 must also be taken into account by the redaction critic and by every serious interpreter of the Gospel of Matthew. Referring to this important chapter, Derickson (2006:432; cf. Snodgrass 2008:174) underlines that “the fact that Jesus ‘rejected’ His family (12:48-50) just before He taught the parables and was rejected at Nazareth right after He taught the parables (13:53-57) shows that Jesus gave the parables with His and the nation’s rejection in mind.” Following the work of Wenham (1979:516-522) and Blomberg (1989:5-8), the following chiasmic structure is proposed for Matthew 13:

- A. Introduction (13:1-3a)
 - B. First parable to all: The parable of the sower (13:3b-9)
 - C. Q&A: Purpose (reveal & conceal) and explanation (13:10-23)⁷
 - D. Three parables to all: tares of the field, mustard and leaven (13:24-33)
 - E. Purpose (fulfilment) and Q&A: explanation (13:34-43)
 - D.’ Three parables to the disciples: hidden treasure, pearl and dragnet (13:44-48)
 - C.’ Explanation and Q&A: Purpose (understanding all) (13:49-51)
 - B.’ Last parable to the disciples: The parable of the householder (13:52)
 - A.’ Conclusion (13:53)

⁷ In addition to the structure of chapter thirteen of Matthew, Bailey (1976:61-62) also proposes a chiasmic structure for a subsection within the chapter, namely Matthew 13:13-17.

Major structural issues include whether 13:52 contains a parable, whether the parable of the sower and the parable of the householder (if indeed it is a parable) concern the kingdom of heaven and the implied change of scene in 13:10.

With reference to the proposed structure, A, E and A' contain direct statements that Jesus spoke parables. Matthew 13:3a and 13:53 provide evidence for taking 13:52 to contain a parable, not merely a saying of Jesus, as Davies and Allison (1991:371) understand it. Wenham (1979:516) argues that “the saying about the scribe trained for the kingdom of heaven in v. 52 was probably intended by Matthew to be regarded as a parable”. Reasons provided are that the form of the words ὁμοίως ἐστὶν in 13:52 is exactly the form used earlier in the chapter to introduce parables (cf. 13:31,33,44,45,47), as well as the words καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ... τὰς παραβολὰς ταύτας that immediately *follow* v. 52 (Wenham 1979:516; Carson 1995:303). Admitting that the “eighth parable, if it is such, differs from the preceding six parables, since it speaks about a person trained for the kingdom of heaven, whereas they all compare the kingdom of heaven itself to something”, Wenham (1979:516-517) says this is no argument against recognising it as a parable: “[I]n this particular respect it is similar to the first parable of the chapter, the parable of the sower, since that speaks about those who ‘hear the word of the kingdom’ (v. 19) and does not directly compare the kingdom to anything.” Also: “A recognition of v. 52 as a parable with some similarity to the parable of the sower opens up an intriguing possibility for the analysis of the structure of Matthew XIII, since the chapter then falls into two halves each containing four parables” (Wenham 1979:517).

Toussaint (1964:352, 354-355) notes that in the first parable of Matthew 13, in contrast to the six parables which follow, the kingdom is not likened to any truth in this parable. But the parable of the householder also differs from the preceding six parables since the “point of comparison in the subject is not the same (kingdom versus scribe)” (Stallard 2000:4). For Toussaint (1964:351), just as “the parable of the householder is the conclusion to this series of parables, so the parable of the sower serves as a preface to those which follow.” If so, then the first and last parables in Matthew 13 “serve as bookends to identify general ideas contained in the entire cluster and to tie the cluster to the on-going argument of the entire book of Matthew” (Stallard 2000:3).

According to Davies and Allison (1991:370), the change of scene in 13:10 argues against dividing the chapter into two halves, with one section addressed to the crowds and the other to the

disciples only. For Davies and Allison (1991:370), Matthew is fond of triads,⁸ and their proposed structure (13:1-23; 13:24-43; 13:44-52) takes this into account. However, Hagner's (2000:364) argument seems valid and is followed in this thesis:

There is, however, a rather clear transition point in the discourse caused by the narrative insertion at v 36, where Jesus departs from the crowds (contrast vv. 2-3) and teaches his disciples in private. ... No convincing structural analysis can afford to ignore this break, despite the fact that such a division separates the parable of the weeds from its interpretation. ... This change of audience is a major factor to which all other structural features must be subordinate.

What examples are there of parallelism between the two halves of the proposed chiasmus? Both sections contain a geographical movement of Jesus, first from the house to the boat on the sea (13:1-2), then from the boat back to the house (13:36), before moving on (13:53). As already pointed out, each section contains a "bookend" parable: the first, an introductory parable followed by three parables one after the other, and the second section, three parables one after the other, followed by a concluding parable. Each half (C and C') contains a private question and answer session (13:10-17; 13:51), a reference to the purpose of the parables, as well as an explanation of a parable (13:18-23; 13:49-50). Each section contains a triplet (13:24-33; 13:44-48) which in itself includes a pair (or doublet) of parables (13:31-33; 13:44-46). The parable of the tares of the field includes in its interpretation the judgment at the end of this age (13:40), also referred to in the parable of the dragnet. It should also be noted that the doublets in each section cover an intervening period. Verbal parallelism includes the question and answer sessions (13:10-17; 13:49-51) with an emphasis on understanding. Further, near the end of D, in E and at the start of D', the word κρύπτω ("hide") appears in some form. The first four parables are told to the crowds and the disciples; the last four parables are told only to the disciples.

In terms of the chiastic structure proposed for Matthew 13, its centre or climax contains the statement that Jesus fulfilled prophecy by speaking in parables and that He uttered mysteries, as well as the explanation of the parable of the tares of the field. In the proposed chiastic structure, that Jesus spoke "in parables" occurs in A, B, D, E, D', B' and A'; that He spoke "mysteries"

⁸ The proposed structure of Davies and Allison, mentioned in 3 above, links the parable of the tares and its interpretation in one section whereas the chiastic structure proposed in this thesis contains (*à la* Davies and Allison 1991) a triad (C, E, C') in which question and answer, purpose and explanation are variously linked. Regarding the interpretation of the parable of the tares in the field, it "could be argued that there is nowhere else Matthew could have put it without upsetting the chiastic balance between the two halves of the chapter" (Wenham 1979:518).

connect C, E and, implicitly, C'. The three explanations that Jesus provides for three of these parables link C, E and C'.

Blomberg's (1990:113-114) view that eight parables are grouped together in Matthew 13 in an intrinsically structured chiasmic sequence, with its centre and climax focusing "on the allegorical interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the tares", is followed in the present study. But what could be so significant, theologically, ethically or otherwise, about the parable of the tares of the field so as to justify its central position in the chiasmic structure? First, with the establishment of the Messianic kingdom postponed, the fact that good and evil will co-exist until Jesus' second coming, followed by judgment of unbelievers, may well be viewed as significant in God's kingdom programme. Second, Stallard (2000:7) points out that it "highlights the transition from the multitudes to the disciples in Jesus' explanations. ... This is in keeping with the larger development in Matthew's narrative concerning the shift away from ministry specifically centered on Israel (e.g., Matt. 10:5-6) to a different focal point". A third possible reason, alluded to in 2.2.7, is the possibility of interpreting details referenced in one of Jesus' explanations consistently in other parables in Matthew 13. It is at least suggestive that the chiasmic centre of Matthew 13, if not of the Gospel of Matthew as a whole, focuses attention on the explanation of the tares of the field where seven details of the parable of the tares in the field are given reference.

3.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, the literary structure of Matthew 13 was analysed and a chiasmic structure for Matthew 13 was proposed. The explicit change of scene in 13:36 and the identification of 13:51-52 as a parable were shown to be important for the identification of the proposed chiasmic structure of Matthew 13. The parables of the sower (13:3b-9,18-23) and the householder (13:51-52) were presented as bookends to identify general ideas within the entire cluster and to tie the cluster to the on-going argument of the entire book of Matthew (Stallard 2000:3). The triads of parables, spoken first to all (13:24-33) and then to the disciples only (13:44-48) were also pointed out as important, as was the view that each triad contains a pair of parables (13:31-33 and 13:44-46).

In chapter 4, the first three hermeneutical guidelines identified in order to interpret the parables of Matthew 13 will be applied, followed by a discussion of the NT use of the term "mystery".

4 Contextual background to Matthew 13

As noted earlier, the working hypothesis is investigated from a pre-millennial dispensational perspective and in this chapter the first three hermeneutical guidelines identified to interpret the parables of Matthew 13 are considered. These first three guidelines are of a more general or contextual nature than the other guidelines. A discussion of an understanding of the kingdom is followed by a focus on “mysteries”, in particular the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (13:11). To reiterate, this thesis does not suggest or imply that the pre-millennial dispensational perspective is the only correct perspective or that such position is a pre-requisite for the interpretation of Matthew 13. Persons holding to different hermeneutical positions can investigate the text of Matthew 13 and are likely to come to conclusions different from those in this thesis. This thesis invites the reader to an alternative way of reading the parables of Matthew 13.

4.1 The kingdom of heaven at hand

The first hermeneutical guideline identified for the interpretation of the parables in Matthew 13 is to avoid anachronism by understanding what βασιλεία meant in the context of Jesus’ teaching (Stallard 2000:134). Given the OT prophecies regarding the kingdom and other Inter-testamental literature on the topic, how would Jesus’ disciples have understood the kingdom of heaven proclaimed to be *at hand* (3:2; 4:17)? Further, given that “old things” (13:52) concerning the kingdom of heaven are in view in these parables, what would these disciples have expected?

The concept of the kingdom of God is not peripheral to the OT (or Inter-testamental literature). On the contrary, the “kingdom of God is, in a certain important sense, the grand central theme of all Holy Scripture” (McClain 1959:4-5). According to Barrick (2012:173; cf. Selman 1989:182-183), referring “to the overall kingdom program as the universal kingdom and to the outworking of that kingdom through history as the mediatorial kingdom helps in the discussion and development of theological thought.” The concept of a “kingdom”, be it the Hebrew מְלָכּוּת (*malkût*) or the Greek βασιλεία (*basileia*), envisages at least *four* essential elements: “first, a *right to rule*; second, a *rule*; third, a *realm* to be ruled; and fourth, the exercise of the function of

rulership” (Barrick 2012:176).¹ According to Barrick (2012:175), a survey of the Hebrew root *mlk* reveals that the concept of kingship and kingdom to be distributed throughout the OT, as forms of this root (*mlk*) occur 3 154 times in the Hebrew Bible.² Lattke (1984:73) states that in investigating the Jewish background of the Synoptic concept of “the kingdom of God”, one cannot restrict oneself to occurrences of the word *malkût* but must also consider those texts which speak of God as “king” (*melek*), and as being king or becoming king (*malak*).

4.1.1 The kingdom of Yahweh in the OT

The phrase “kingdom of Yahweh” appears only fifteen times in the OT.³ Not only is the kingdom of Yahweh everlasting (Ps 145:11), it is also universal over all that is in heaven and on earth, He is exalted over all (1 Chr 29:11; Ps 103:19). The kingdom, throne, power, glory, majesty and victory is the LORD’s (1 Chr 29:11; Ps 103:19). Although God is enthroned in heaven over his everlasting kingdom, encompassing all of creation, the LORD has promised that a descendant of David will be established in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever (1 Chr 17:14). For example, God chose Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom over Israel (1 Chr 28:5). After the kingdom in Israel came to an end with the Babylonian captivity, God promised that after these [Gentile] kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; this kingdom shall break in pieces and consume all these [Gentile] kingdoms and shall stand forever (Dn 2:44). The greatness of the kingdoms under heaven shall be given to Him [Christ] and to the people, the saints of the Most High (Dn 7:14,18,27).

What can be inferred from these direct references to the “kingdom of Yahweh”? First, God is ruling as king over his eternal and universal kingdom. Second, the *earthly* manifestation of this kingdom was evident in the Theocratic kingdom in Israel. Third, although this Theocratic kingdom over Israel ended with the Babylonian kingdom, the kingdom of Yahweh will yet be set

¹ Although McClain (1959:17; cf. Ladd 1977:18-19) identifies only three aspects, namely a ruler, a realm of subjects to be ruled and the actual exercise of the function of rulership, he mentions that the ruler must have adequate authority and power. Postma (1969:59) states that a realm includes an *area* over which a ruler rules.

² After surveying the five different Hebrew forms which are translated as “kingdom”, Bailey (1997:48-52) makes the following conclusions about the kingship of God and His kingdom: (1) The image of God as the sovereign King is developed from all phases of Israel’s history and and is therefore justifiable to conclude that the concept was common and well established in Israel. (2) The sovereignty of God can be said to be universal as well as particular over Israel. (3) This sovereign authority of God is seen to extend from creation to the eschatological consummation. (4) The universal sovereignty of God is His by right of Him being God and the exercise of His rule over all creation. (5) God’s particular sovereignty over Israel was/is His as a result of the history of His saving acts and by virtue of the covenant which He established with them as the representative nation (kingdom) for Him in the world.

³ According to Selman (1989:162), this phrase appears in Ps 22:28; 103:19; 145:11-13; Ob 21; Dn 2:44; 4:3; 4:31; 6:26; 7:14,18,27; 1 Chr 17:14; 28:5; 29:11 and 2 Chr 13:8. Perhaps Psalm 45 can be added to this list.

up on earth and the Messiah will mediate the rule of God in history on earth before this earthly kingdom will merge with God's eternal kingdom (Dn 2:44; cf. Bailey 1997:52). Selman (1989:182-183) notes that OT references to the kingdom of God often emphasises "the Davidic line – in the past, as in Chronicles, in the present, as in the Psalms, and in the future, as in the prophets. The kingdom is also mediated through the divine/human figure of a son of man."

4.1.2 An OT understanding of the kingdom

What understanding of the kingdom is found in the OT? God's kingdom appears to be portrayed in the OT as two overlapping yet distinguishable realms, namely the one rule of God over the *Universal kingdom* and the *Mediatorial kingdom* (McClain 1959:21; cf. Selman 1989:182-183). According to Beacham (1996:235), in terms of *scope*, the Universal (or Eternal) kingdom of God is His dominion over all creation, at all times (Ps 103:19-22), directly administered by God through the divine Son to whom all things have been delivered without human intermediary (2 Ki 19:15; Is 14:26-27). Beacham (1996:235) defines it as "God's macrocosmic rule through his exclusive, sovereign dominion over all of creation, a rule without pause or end." Yet, Psalm 2:6-9 (cf. 1 Chr 17:10b-14) also presents God's rule as administered indirectly through a human mediator *just over the earth* and portrays God as establishing the Messiah as King to rule over the nations and all parts of the earth (Showers 1990:159; Dn 2:44-45; Zch 14:9). It would seem, then, that God the Father rules over the earth through the Son, but via appointed, human representatives. The Scriptures thus describe a more limited divine kingdom, an earth-oriented, time-related, ethnic-centred kingdom called the Mediatorial kingdom of God (Beacham 1996:235).⁴

What does the OT teach about the history of the Mediatorial kingdom of God on earth? God gave Adam the authority to rule over the earth as his representative but Adam fell (Gn 1:26-28; 3:6). Pentecost (1995:40-50) traces the early history of the Mediatorial kingdom of God from Adam to the call of Abram.⁵ According to McAvoy (1996:27), the *unconditional*⁶ Abrahamic covenant is important:

⁴ Some commentators (Fruchtenbaum 1989:610; Pentecost 1995:323) identify a Spiritual kingdom, composed of all individuals, from Adam onward, who have experienced the new birth by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, that is, God's rule in the heart of the believer. However, it seems the "Scriptures refer only to two *divine* kingdoms: the macrocosmic, *universal* kingdom of God and the microcosmic, *mediatorial* kingdom of God" (Beacham 1996:235). The Spiritual kingdom can at best be listed under the Universal kingdom of God.

⁵ As a result of the fall of Adam, the *bilateral* Edenic covenant (Gn 1:28-30; 2:15-17) and the dispensation of innocence ended. During the next dispensation of conscience, the *unilateral* Adamic covenant (Gn 3:14-19) was the rule of life, followed by the dispensation of human government based on the Adamic and *unilateral* Noahic (Gn 9:1-17) covenants.

From an interpretive standpoint, the Abrahamic covenant ... governs God's entire program for Israel and the nations and is thus determinative of God's program in history. ... It is the key to both the Old and New Testaments and is foundational to the whole program of redemption. ... The essence of God's covenant with Abraham consists of three basic aspects: *land*, *seed*, and *blessing*. ... Each of the divine covenants that follow are (sic) the outworking of the Abrahamic covenant. The Palestinian covenant (Deut. 28-30) amplifies the *land* aspect of the Abrahamic covenant. The Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:8-17) amplifies the *seed* aspect, and the new covenant (Jer. 31:27-37; Ezek. 36:22-32) amplifies the *blessings* aspect. ... The Abrahamic covenant, then, is determinative for the entire outworking of God's program for both Israel and the nations and is the key to biblical eschatology.

By calling Abram, God segregates a people ethnically as part of His purpose on earth (Gn 12:1-3), and when the bilateral Mosaic covenant is ratified at Sinai, this ethnic group becomes a theocratic body politic among whom God dwells and rules (Beacham 1996:235-236). Thus begins the Theocratic kingdom,⁷ a phase of the Mediatorial kingdom of God. God reigned as King but Israel later wanted a king like the other nations around them (1 Sm 8:5-7). Saucy (1997:312) notes,

Yahweh still reserved the right to choose the Israelite king who would rule as Yahweh's son over Yahweh's realm (1 Chr 17:11-14). In this context of vice-regency, the uniqueness of the Davidic rule in Israel occasioned a covenant between David and Yahweh which guaranteed the eternal, physical manifestation of Yahweh's dominion through David's seed over the land and the people of Israel (2 Sm 7:7-16).

But with the *Shekinah* glory of God (שְׁכִינָה) leaving the temple in Jerusalem and returning to heaven (Ezk 8-11), the Theocratic kingdom ended even if Israel eventually regained its political identity after the Babylonian captivity (Beacham 1996:236). Concurring with Beacham (1996:236), "God was not finished with this kingdom. The OT prophets who had forecasted its demise also consistently foretold its consummate restoration (Lev. 26:40-46; Ezek. 11:14-20; Hos. 1:10-11)." The prophets foretold that when the Messiah comes, He would set up a kingdom

⁶ Regarding the unilateral Abrahamic, Palestinian (Ezk 16:1-63), Davidic (1 Chr 17:10b-14; Ps 89:1-52) and New covenants, God made these covenants with Israel or its representatives, and "a literal interpretation requires the perpetuation of national Israel and their restoration to the land in blessing and everlasting possession" (McAvoy 1996:28).

⁷ According to Fruchtenbaum (1989:610), the Theocratic kingdom is God's rule by means of, and through, a theocracy over Israel. Two forms of it can be observed during its history: the *mediatorial* form, whereby God ruled through mediators (from Moses until Samuel), and the *monarchical* form, whereby God ruled through monarchs (from Saul until Zedekiah). When the Theocratic kingdom went into a decline in quality, the prophets began announcing a future, better form of God's kingdom programme, namely the Messianic kingdom.

on earth and rule as King, hence the term “Messianic kingdom”. The Messianic kingdom will not only concern Israel and its unconditional covenants, but the Son of Man will also rule over all peoples, nations and languages (Dn 7:14; cf. Gn 12:3). According to Stallard (2000:136), this kingdom will be an earthly, literal kingdom over which Jesus will rule from the throne of David:

There is the explicit promise to restore Davidic rule to all the tribes, north and south, as outlined in Amos 9:11-15. ... The many pictures of a coming kingdom in Isaiah demonstrate its national character and focal point in the specific place of Mount Zion or Jerusalem (e.g., Is. 2:1-4), its fulfilment of hopes concerning the Davidic throne itself (Is. 9:1-7), the regathering of the people of Israel literally to a specific land (11:11-16), *etc.*

Following the end of the Theocratic kingdom and until its restoration in the Messianic kingdom, how does God Most High rule over the earth? God reveals to Daniel *secrets*, or *mysteries*, regarding his continued Mediatorial kingdom programme on earth. The Times of the Gentiles⁸ is taken to be the period of time when four Gentile empires have been given rule on earth, namely the Babylonian, Median and Persian, Grecian and Imperial (Roman) forms of rule, ending when the Son of Man comes *in glory* (Dn 2:34-35,44-45; 7:13-14; Showers 1982:25). According to Daniel 9:24-27, *during* the Times of the Gentiles, God has determined seventy sevens over the people of Israel and the city of Jerusalem, and also provided Israel with a timetable for the Messiah’s first coming (Walvoord 1971:228; Feinberg 1981:131; Unger 2002:1666-1667).⁹

Merrill (2011:38) notes that the psychological and spiritual trauma of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, of the land and the cessation of the Davidic kingdom was immeasurable: “A major element of the patriarchal covenants was the land of promise; in fact those covenants were theologically incomprehensible without the land. How then could there be a covenant community

⁸ This designation is derived from Jesus’ words in Luke 21:24 (Dn 2:31-45; 7:1-28; Rv 13:1-10; 17:7-14). The Times of the Gentiles is held to be the time between the rule of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, and the actual *exercise* on earth of the *rule* of the Son of David and King of the Jews, from Jerusalem, over the *realm* of Israel and all the earth (Unger 2002:1603). The Times of the Gentiles covers the time between the Babylonian captivity until the second coming of Christ (Showers 1982:90). The Times of the Gentiles covers the time between the end of the Theocratic kingdom and the *actual establishment* of the Messianic kingdom on earth. Even if Jerusalem is not trampled by the Gentiles during this time, even if Jerusalem is ruled by Jews during this time, such rule will remain temporary; it will only be under permanent Jewish rule when Christ returns (Walvoord 1968:7).

⁹ To dispensationalists, the 70 sevens are referred to as the “seventy weeks”, or “490 years”. These eschatologically important years are not understood to run uninterruptedly: from the time of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem until the Messianic Prince was to be 69 weeks (Dn 9:25), or 483 years — a total of 69 weeks running successively (Unger 2002:1665-1671). *After* the 69th week, or 483 years, the Messiah was to be cut off (Dn 9:26), dying a violent death. There is a gap of time between the 69th and 70th week (Dn 9:26). Daniel’s 70th week can be identified with the seven-year Tribulation period (24:9,21) and will commence when the Antichrist confirms a covenant with representative leaders of Israel (Dn 9:27). Christ will return at the end of the Tribulation period (24:29-30), an “eschatological period of divine judgment preceding the time of national Jewish redemption and the establishment of God’s kingdom on earth” (Price 1996:76-78).

without temple, king or territory?” These matters were addressed by pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets such as Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi and all held out the hope that the exile was temporary, there would be a return to the land, the temple and city would be rebuilt and a scion of David would occupy the ancient throne (Merrill 2011:38). Saucy (1997:313) emphasises that although Jews looked forward to a restored Davidic kingdom, this nationalistic aspect of the promise should not be seen as being in conflict with the universal dimensions of the OT hope: “Consider the juxtaposition of the universality of the hope and the Jewishness of that hope in Isaiah 2:2-4. It is to *Jerusalem* that the nations would come to learn the ways of God.” Evidence of this hope is found in Second temple Judaism.

4.1.3 Second temple Judaism

After the Babylonian empire ended in 539 BC, Cyrus the Great allowed Judeans (or Jews) to return to Israel a year later in 538 BC and many Jews returned to Israel. Ezra and Nehemiah led another wave of returnees back in the years 458 to 432 BC. The temple was then rebuilt and the city of Jerusalem repopulated and fortified. The conquest of Persia by Alexander the Great in 334 BC inaugurated the Hellenistic period. After Alexander’s death, the Greek empire was divided between four generals, with Judea first part of the kingdom of Egypt (of the Macedonian Ptolemies) from 301 BC until a century later when Judea was conquered by the kings of Syria (the Seleucids) in 200 BC (Cohen 2006:2). A seminal event occurred in the 160s BC, as Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king of Syria, profaned the temple in Jerusalem and persecuted the Jews. In 164 BC, under the clan of Mattathias the Hasmonean and his son, Judah the Maccabee, the temple was reconquered, purified and twenty years later the Seleucid rule ended (Cohen 2006:2). The Maccabean or Hasmonean period lasted until the Romans conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC and they would rule via vassal kings¹⁰ or through Roman administrators. Two kinds of provincial government existed, depending on whether a province was loyal to Rome or not: if loyal, the province was governed by proconsuls; if disloyal, provinces were ruled by prefects, or procurators, answerable to the emperor who appointed them (DeSilva 2004:58-59). Pontius Pilate was such a prefect. According to Cohen (2006:4), the Second temple period essentially came to an end in 70 AD when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed. Central landmarks of the world behind the Gospels therefore include remnants of the third Gentile empire that Daniel prophesied about, namely Hellenization, the Maccabean revolt against it and thereafter the rise of the fourth Gentile empire, namely the Imperialism of Rome and its ideology (DeSilva 2004:55).

¹⁰ Such as Herod the Great (37 to 4 BC) or his descendants such as Herod Agrippa I (41-44 AD).

More than four hundred years would pass from the last post-exilic prophet to the appearance of John the Baptist. During these years, the Jewish religion did not remain static and the classical religion of the OT Israel evolved into Judaism (cf. France 2011:528). The latter part of the Second temple period, from the rise of the Maccabees until 70 AD, was a rich and significant chapter in Jewish history, as Cohen (2006:5) describes: “This was the rise of age of the sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, the Qumran community, Christians, Sicarii, Zealots, and others) and of sectarian literature; of apocalypses and of varied speculations about God’s control of human events, the nature of evil, and the secrets of the end time...” Many Jews, especially in the first century, thought they lived on “the edge of history” and expectantly awaited the promised deliverer: “Usually this was understood to mean deliverance from the Romans, a mentality that is evident in the Gospels...” (Cohen 2006:96; cf. 188-191).

4.1.4 Inter-testamental literature regarding the kingdom

Lattke (1984:75) argues that the time period relevant to a study of the Jewish background to a Synoptic understanding of the kingdom¹¹ should start at the beginning of the fourth century BC and end no later than the first century AD¹² Scott (1995:20) warns not to anachronistically read into the NT setting those events, conditions, practices and ideas which arose after 70 AD.

Evident in some Apocalyptic writings, notably 2 Esdras 4:11-12¹³ (4 Ezra is referred to as 2 Esdras) and 2 Baruch 40:3,72-74, is the same Danielic pattern of four Gentiles kingdoms to be followed by the kingdom being ruled by the Messiah, as well as references to two ages, namely *this age* and *the age to come*. According to Helyer (2004:597), apocalyptic Judaism views history as unfolding “in a two ages framework, “this age”, inaugurated by creation, and “the age to come”, inaugurated by the Day of the Lord (1 Enoch 71:15; cf. 48:7).”¹⁴

If Jesus says that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either *in this age or in the age to come* (12:32), what is meant by “this age” (12:32; 13:39-40,49-50; 24:3,6,14; 28:20)? Price (1996:103; cf. Hindson 1996:109) comments that the rabbis and Jews of the Inter-testamental period distinguished between this age (הַזֶּה הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה *ha-‘ōlām hazzeh*), corresponding to

¹¹ Lattke (1984:76-77) favours the following sources and in this chronological order, namely Apocalyptic writings, Qumran scrolls, Hellenistic Judaism and then Pharisaic and early Rabbinic witnesses.

¹² Lattke (1984:76-77) adds that the work of Philo (who moralises the kingdom as a virtue of wisdom) and Josephus (who writes too late) have little to offer such a study.

¹³ See also 2 Esdras 7:26-27, 33-44,70 and 12:31-34.

¹⁴ According to Fruchtenbaum (1996:87), the Day of the Lord always refers to the Tribulation period, or Daniel’s 70th week. Pre-millennial dispensationalists hold that the Day of the Lord has not been inaugurated.

the present age including the Tribulation, and the age to come (הַעוֹלָם הַבָּא *ha-‘ôlām habbā’*), the Messianic age.¹⁵ The Tribulation therefore serves as a transition period from this age to the age to come. Burrows (1955:4) emphasises that “fulfilment in the Bible, OT and NT alike, means filling up an appointed measure of time. Biblical Hebrew does not speak of fulfilling time, but of fulfilling days or years.” Burge (2001:1195) argues that, in the Scriptures, time is presented as linear (or horizontal) and says both “this age and the age to come will appear in the same historical plane.” It would be unnecessary to refer to various “ages” in the *Eternal* kingdom of God; rather, such “ages” more likely refer to phases of the Mediatorial kingdom of God on earth.

Both the OT prophecies and Inter-testamental literature contain “the tension between the prophecies of the restoration of Israel in particular and the supernatural and transcendent kingdom of eternity” (Bailey 1997:53). This is evident in 2 Esdras. Although Stone (1983:243) finds that the term “the end” in 2 Esdras denotes “the crucial turning point of the eschatological process”, he (1983:230,235) also is of the view that “the end” denotes at least two different eschatological events. According to 2 Esdras 11:39-46 (cf. 5:41; 6:25; 12:9,43), “the end” is to come with the destruction of the fourth, wicked, heathen empire, followed by the Messianic kingdom. But the term “the end” in 2 Esdras 7:112-113 also refers to a day of judgment as part of “universal eschatology” (Stone 1983:236). According to Keulers (cited in Stone 1983:235), the day of judgment in 2 Esdras 7:112-113 refers to a universal judgment of all human beings where the wicked is damned to hell and the new earth and heaven appears. Pre-millennialists reconcile these two “ends” as Christ’s judgment of the fourth Gentile empire and the nations prior to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom (25:31-46) and then at the end of the millennium another final judgment of all the wicked of all times at the great white throne. Once the last enemy (death) has been defeated, the Messianic kingdom will merge in God’s Eternal kingdom.¹⁶ Commenting on 2 Enoch, Helyer (2004:606) concludes that it “may witness to a millennial tradition involving a temporal kingdom on the earth preceding the eternal state.”

If the theme of the kingdom and OT prophecies concerning it is widened to include the major topics in Inter-testamental eschatology, Sanders’ (1992:290-294) outline is instructive: the twelve tribes of Israel will be assembled¹⁷; the Gentiles will be converted, destroyed or subjugated¹⁸;

¹⁵ The *age to come* was the common Jewish term for the Messianic kingdom (Fruchtenbaum 2005:76; Barbieri 1983:50,52).

¹⁶ 2 Baruch 50:4 alludes to a judgment as does 2 Esdras (6:17-28; 7:33-44) whereby the wicked will be cast into Gehenna but the righteous will behold the glory and majesty of God.

¹⁷ According to Sanders (1992:291), references include Ben-Sira 35:11, 48:10; Baruch 4:37; 5:5; 2 Maccabees 1:27; cf. 2:18; Jubilees 1:15; Psalms of Solomon 11:2; 17:28-31; cf. 17:50 and 1 QM 2:2,7; 3:13; 5:1.

Jerusalem will be made glorious and contain a rebuilt temple¹⁹; and worship will be pure and the people will be righteous.²⁰ Schürer (cited in Scott 1995:285) also presents an overview of the eschatology of Inter-testamental literature: Elijah as precursor to the coming of the Messiah; the final ordeal and confusion (the Tribulation period) which include the last assault of the hostile powers and their destruction; the renewal of Jerusalem and the world and the re-gathering of the dispersed; the kingdom of glory in the Holy Land; and a general resurrection at the last judgment.

4.1.4.1 Elijah as forerunner to the Messiah

As specifically noted by Malachi, the Coming One and the age to come are to be preceded by a forerunner, identified as Elijah.²¹ “His task will be to prepare the way for the LORD by restoring all things...This he will accomplish by issuing a call to Israel to repent” (Scott 1995:288). According to Scott (1995:289),

The most widespread image likened the final age to a renewed Davidic kingdom, the golden age of Hebrew history. This image looked to the return of the conditions which existed during the era of David and Solomon, when Israel was the superpower of the day.²²

The final age, it was hoped, would restore the nation to the political, military, geographical, and spiritual grandeur it had reached during that time. The Messiah as the Son of Man and Davidic king would fulfil the promises of an eternal kingship and dominion.

4.1.4.2 The Tribulation period

According to Wenham (1989:23), many in Israel understood the significance of the Messiah and the kingdom to be that the Roman imperialists and their unprincipled and unpleasant rulers “were about to be driven out of Palestine: ‘kingdom’ to many of them, like ‘revolution’ to many of us, suggested something primarily political and military”. Tenney (1985:87) argues likewise: “The Messianic expectation of the advent of a political deliverer for Israel was strong in the intertestamental period.” These expectations were not unfounded: “The Old Testament prophets looked forward to the time when God would impose his kingly rule on the world” (Wenham 1989:21). Some Inter-testamental groups expected the final age (or dispensation) on earth to be

¹⁸ According to Sanders (1992:291-292), references include Ben-Sira 36:1-9; Jubilees 24:29; 1 Enoch 90:19; Psalms of Solomon 17:24,31; Testament of Moses 10:7 and Sibylline Oracles 3:616f, 670-672; 3:709-721,772

¹⁹ Sanders (1992:292-293) notes the following references: Tobit 13:16-18;14:5; 1 Enoch 90:28; 91:13; Jubilees 1:17,27,29; 25:21; IiQT 29.8-10; Psalms of Solomon 8:12; 17:30 and Sibylline Oracles 3:657-709; 5:420-425.

²⁰ Jubilees 33:11,20; War Scroll 2:7; Psalms of Solomon 17:26f and Sibylline Oracles 3:756-781 (Sanders 1992:294).

²¹ The Biblical references are Mt 17:10-12 and Mk 9:11-13. See also Sirach 48:10.

²² According to Psalms of Solomon 17:4-10, 21 and 2 Esdras 12:31-32.

preceded by a special period of affliction and trouble, the woes or the birth pangs of the Messiah (Scott 1995:287).²³

As part of the Apocalyptic writings of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the *Testament of Dan* (5:10-13) makes reference to a holy eschatological war against Beliar, followed by Israel's release from captivity, a rejoicing over Jerusalem because the holy one of Israel will be among them and will be king over Israel (Lattke 1984:78). According to Lattke (1984:78), this "proclamation of the eschatological kingdom of God certainly refers to OT promises, and in a thoroughly eschatological context." In chapters 7-10 of the *Assumption of Moses*, written before the end of the first century B.C., the dawning of God's rule is described:

And then his kingdom will appear over all creatures; then there will be no Satan anymore and no sorrow...The heavenly one will rise from his seat of dominion and step forth from his heavenly dwelling in anger and indignation on account of his children. Then the earth will tremble...and the sun give no more light...and the sea will retreat...for the most high God, the eternal one, will arise, will come forward openly to punish the heathen and to annihilate all their idols. Then you will be happy, my Israel.

In the Qumran scrolls, the eschatological kingdom of the people of Israel is mentioned in the War Scroll (XII.3, XIX.8 and XVII.8), alluding to Exodus 19:6. According to the War Scroll, Israel's rule will begin when the holy war against Beliar and his sons of darkness has been fought victoriously and then the "king of kings" (XIV.16, in 4QMa) will regain his kingdom (VI.6; XII.7) and "he will exercise his power through the holy ones of his people" (VI.6; cf. Lattke 1984:83). According to the War Scroll (1QM 1), "this shall be a time of salvation for the people of God...the battle of destructions for the sons of darkness. And it shall be a time of [great] tribulation for the people which God shall redeem; of all its afflictions none shall be as this, from its sudden beginning until its end in eternal redemption."²⁴ Moreover, Scott (1995:288) adds that there will be "threatening signs in the cosmic order, between nations, between individuals and in the spiritual realm. Sin and wickedness will run rampant and rule the earth."²⁵ These references find matches in the eschatological parts of the Olivet discourse: the earth will quake in various places (24:7), nation will rise against nation (24:7), it will be a time of great tribulation (24:15), the sun will be darkened (24:29) before the coming of the Son of Man (24:30).

²³ Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 97a; Sibylline Oracles 3:635-661; 2 Baruch 25. The concept of birth pangs is used in Mt 24:8 and Mk 13:8 but has its OT allusions in Is 13:8; 26:17; 66:7-9; Jr 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 49:22; 50:43; Hs 13:13; Mi 4:9-10.

²⁴ See also 1 Enoch 3-8.

²⁵ Sibylline Oracles 3:796-808; 2 Baruch 26-29; 48:38-41; 2 Esdras 4:52-5:13; 6:20-24; 9:1-6; 13:29-32; Testament of Moses 10.

Although there is little unanimity in the Inter-testamental literature as to the sequence of events leading up to the restoration of Israel, the “prevailing opinion seems to have been that the Messiah, empowered by the Lord, would defeat the enemy” (Scott 1995:291).²⁶ Following the defeat of the enemy and his forces, the Messiah will execute judgment²⁷ and then, after “victory and judgment the Messianic kingdom will be set up in the land of Israel and have dominion over the whole world” (Scott 1995:291). Israel will be delivered of her enemies, all Jews will be re-gathered to the land²⁸, Israel will become the head nation and all nations shall flock to a magnificent and beautiful Jerusalem, the city of the king where the temple will be.²⁹

4.1.4.3 The Messianic age

What will the nature of the age to come be? It is to be a time of peace, rest and security³⁰ not only between nations and individuals³¹ but also among animals.³² Human beings will live long lives³³ and, as a result of the curse being lifted³⁴, childbearing will not be painful and work will not be done in the sweat of one’s brow.³⁵ The rule of the Messiah will be universal and characterised by righteousness and obedience to the law.

How long will the Messianic kingdom last? 2 Baruch states “until the world of corruption has ended”, 2 Esdras 7:28 gives 400 years, Jubilees 23:27 mentions ambiguously 1 000 years and the Talmud tractate Sanhedrin 97a sets a period of 2 000 years (cf. Scott 1995:292-293). In the Sibylline Oracles (3.616f., 716f.), reference is made to the coming royal rule of God: “And then he will erect a kingdom for all ages, over all men, he, who once gave the holy law to the pious, to

²⁶ The NT identifies the Antichrist as the leader of the forces that Christ will defeat (2 Th 2:1-12; 1 Jn 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 Jn 7; Rev 13). 2 Baruch 40:1-2 calls the enemy the “last ruler” whereas in the Dead Sea Scrolls the enemy is usually called “Satan or the evil king” (cf. Scott 1995:290). Concerning the battle that the Antichrist will lead, see 1 Enoch 90:13-19; Sibylline Oracles 3:663-668; Jubilees 23:22-24; 2 Esdras 13:31-35; 2 Baruch 39-40; War Scroll (1QM) 15-19.

²⁷ According to 1 Enoch 45:3; 49:3-4; 53:2; 55:4; 61:8-10 and especially chapters 62 and 69. See also 2 Esdras 13:37-38, the Testament of Moses 10:7, Sibylline Oracles 3:669-701,761. See also Mt 25:31-46.

²⁸ Sirach 36:13-14 (cf. Is 49:22; 60:4 and 66:20). 1 (Greek) Baruch 5:5-9 reads, “Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look forward toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them.” According to Psalms of Solomon 17:28, “He [the Messiah] will distribute them upon the land according to their tribes; the alien and the foreigner will no longer live near them.” See also 2 Esdras 13:39-47 and Psalms of Solomon 11.

²⁹ Is 2:2-4; 54:11-12; 60; Ezk 40-48; Hg 2:7-9; Zch 2:6-12; 14:16-21; Testament of Dan 5:12-13; Psalms of Solomon 17:30; 1 Enoch 53:6; 90:28-29; 2 Baruch 32:2-4; 2 Esdras 7:26; 10:44.

³⁰ Testament of Levi 18:10-14; Testament of Dan 5:12; 2 Baruch 4; 2 Enoch 8; 2 Esdras 7:36-44, 123.

³¹ 1 Enoch 45:4-5; 62:15; Sibylline Oracles 3:371-380.

³² Is 11:6-9; 65:25; 2 Baruch 73:6.

³³ Is 65:20; Jubilees 23:27-28,30; 2 Baruch 73:2-5,7.

³⁴ 1 Enoch 10:22-22; Psalms of Solomon 17:26-46; 18:9; Sibylline Oracles 3:377-380.

³⁵ 1 Enoch 10:18-19; 2 Baruch 73.

whom he promised to confer the whole earth, and the world and the gates of the blessed and all joys and an immortal spirit and a happy heart.” In agreement with Saucy (1997:314), the physical, historical, and national hope of the reign of Yahweh in Israel funded the literature of Inter-testamental Judaism:

While it is true that the hope of intertestamental Judaism is typically more apocalyptic in the style of its presentation, that is, as to content it is more fanciful, cataclysmic, cosmic, and dualistic than the OT, nevertheless the national and historic strain is still present. Writings like *Psalms of Solomon 17*, *Testament of Moses 8-10*, and *Sibylline Oracles 3:47, 767* allow Collins to say of the Messiah’s kingdom that it is ‘essentially the restoration of a national Jewish kingdom’.

4.1.5 Expectations of the King and the kingdom in first century Judaism

According to Guignebert (1959:151), just before the birth of Jesus, speculations as to the “Messianic reign, the coming of the Messiah, the Day of Yahweh, the Resurrection and the Last Judgment were central in Jewish thought. ...the common people found in their expectation of *what was to come* consolation and stimulus, not unmixed with anxiety.” Davies (1967:35; cf. Hagner 2000:46; Sanders 1993:184) confirms that apocalypticism belonged not only to the fringes of first-century Judaism but instead many were intensely concerned with the future, the hope had arisen of the age to come. The writing and use of apocalyptic material “were not limited to specialized groups but were broadly distributed within Jewish society. This stream of Jewish hope and religious expression influenced the Essenes, Pharisees, Jesus, and some of the revolutionaries in the first century” (Saldarini 1994:20).

Although most Jews were not members of any sect or school of thought, nevertheless within first century Judaism one can identify at least four main groups or schools of thought, namely the modernist Sadducees, the separatist Essenes, the traditional Pharisees and the activist Zealots. What special interests and expectations did the afore-mentioned groups have of the kingdom and of the Messiah?

After the return from the Babylonian exile, the high priest acted as head of Israel but the office of the high priesthood suffered during the radical Hellenization of Jerusalem in 175-164 BC and was basically auctioned off to the person with the most affluent supporters (DeSilva 2004:67). Since the high priests were chosen from the ranks of the Sadducees (Machen 1976:34), many Jews such as the leading aristocratic priestly families thought it would be better to be ruled by priests (albeit under the distant supervision of a foreign governor), calling this a ‘theocracy’ whereby God ruled

through priests (Sanders 1993:42). As the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection (22:23) and were thus placing their treasures only on earth (6:19), the call to repentance by both the forerunner and Jesus met with resistance from the Sadducees. They would have preferred both the comfortable *status quo* while entrenching their economic interests even further. “The Sadducees stressed this world (in which they ruled) rather than a coming, ideal world” (Saldarini 1994:25). The Sadducees play a minor role in Matthew “until the end of the Gospel when, through their control of the cultic hierarchy and the high priesthood, they play a major role in condemning Jesus to death” (Hagner 2000:50).

The Essenes at Qumran looked forward to two Messiahs, one a descendant of Aaron the high priest and the other a descendant of David (cf. Hagner 2000:46). For these Essenes, the high priestly Messiah has the real authority whereas the Son of David seems to do very little (Sanders 1993:89). According to Saldarini (1994:22), the Essenes waited “for the coming of the Lord with his angels to destroy the human and demonic agents of evil and re-establish a pure temple and a just society.” In preparation for these cosmic events, the Qumran society withdrew into their own world, devoting themselves to God according to their understanding of the Bible (cf. Saldarini 1994:22). The Essenes believed that in the final great battle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness, God would vindicate their faithful witness and restore the true sanctuary (France 2011:530). The Essenes would probably have looked askance at Jesus’ announcement that many will come from east and west to sit down with the patriarch in the kingdom (8:11).

Starting as a religious and social group in the mid-second century BC (Saldarini 1994:23), the Pharisees aimed to build a hedge around the Law of Moses to prevent Israel from again breaking it.³⁶ The Pharisees added more and more human traditions to the Law of Moses, making the commands of God to no effect and even transgressing it (15:1-20; cf. Hagner 2000:49). “In order to ensure the keeping of the law the scribes had put about it [the Mosaic Law] a ‘fence’ of oral tradition, which in the guise of interpretation really imposed new legislation of the most oppressive kind” (Machen 1976:34). Davies (1967:35; cf. Guignebert 1959:167) notes that the Pharisees shared in the apocalyptic hopes of first-century Judaism. The Pharisees looked for the imminent advent of the kingdom, the “survival of the Jewish state and in its triumphant return to power at some future date” (Guignebert 1959:167). But it also seems reasonable to postulate that the Pharisees may have expected a Messiah who would honour their traditions and improve their fence around the Law of Moses by adding more rules to it.

³⁶ Many scribes were Pharisees, trained interpreters of the Torah who copied and studied the Law to provide answers to questions of faith and practice (DeSilva 2004:83).

The Zealots came to the fore during the Jewish revolt against Rome that started in 66 BC. The Zealots were closely akin to the Pharisees and were intolerant of the godlessness of many of their compatriots as well as the subjugation of God's people to the yoke of the Gentiles (Guignebert 1959:169). If the Messiah called Israel to arms, the Zealots probably would have been the first to actively serve such a warrior-king.

According to Saucy (1997:317), first century Judaism is often portrayed in modern research as “kaleidoscopic” as to its beliefs and “lacking an orthodox centre”, but this is not so regarding its basic hope for the future: the fundamental nature of the Jewish hope for Yahweh's reign was political, historical, and rooted in the OT. “This was the hope of Jesus' day. His options therefore were only two: use his ancestral hope, or create his own” (Saucy 1997:317).

4.1.6 The kingdom of heaven in the early chapters of Matthew

The Gospels do not define the phrases “kingdom of God” or “kingdom of heaven”. If the kingdom of heaven referred to a completely new concept or form of the kingdom, such as a spiritual kingdom *only*, one would expect the Gospels to explain what is meant; otherwise, the logical question of the Jewish people hearing John the Baptist, Jesus and his apostles (3:2; 4:17; 10:7) would have been: What do you mean by the kingdom of heaven (Barbieri 1983:24)? Since no such explanations are given, one may assume that the kingdom of heaven refers to an already-known aspect of the kingdom based on OT revelation (Toussaint 1980:61-63; Stallard 2000:136) and possibly confirmed in Inter-testamental literature.

Moreover, the kingdom of heaven can reasonably be interpreted as a *restoration* of a *Jewish* kingdom (cf. 17:11),³⁷ for Matthew emphasises that during Christ's first coming, the gospel of the kingdom is preached *only* to the Jewish nation (15:24; cf. 10:7).³⁸ Toussaint (1980:62) argues that this message is preached to the Jews exclusively because the coming kingdom prophesied in the OT was also contingent (in terms of *timing*)³⁹ upon their reception of it. McClain (1959:305) adds the following:

³⁷ The apostles' understanding of the concept of the kingdom of heaven seems to have remained similar even after Christ's resurrection and forty days of teaching about the kingdom of God (Ac 1:3). The apostles were still expecting Jesus to *restore* the kingdom *to Israel* (Ac 1:6). Jesus did not remedy this view but merely corrected their expectations regarding the *timing* of the actual establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

³⁸ If this is a spiritual kingdom only, why preach it only to Israel and not universally to all?

³⁹ Issues surrounding contingency are discussed in 4.4.

Our Lord's words [in 15:24] did underscore two things: first, that to Israel alone belonged the special covenanted rights of the Davidic kingdom; and, second, if the Gentiles received any of its blessings, these must be acknowledged in humble faith as having fallen from the table appointed by God for the "children" of Israel.

Therefore, the King offers the kingdom first to the Jewish nation and authenticates his Messianic claims to Israel in line with the unilateral Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Toussaint 1980:35-37). "At least in the initial stage of his ministry, Jesus appears to be taking the Kingdom according to the eschatological root present in Judaism. His Kingdom is the reign of Yahweh manifested historically, politically, spiritually, and nationally" (Saucy 1997:329). According to Bailey (1997:58), in the early chapters of Matthew the announcement to Israel of repentance, given the nearness of the kingdom, came without any change of meaning from the OT. Whether the concept of the kingdom of heaven changed later in Matthew is discussed in 4.3 and 4.4.

Although repentance is stressed, it is submitted that the kingdom that Jesus offers the generation of the Jews living during the time of his public ministry was not a spiritual kingdom *only* but rather the hoped for restoration of a national Jewish kingdom which indeed must have a *spiritual basis*. Since he was not interested in external conformity only, Jesus repudiates Pharisaic Judaism (5:20) by teaching that true spirituality is internal and of the heart (cf. 8:13) but this must lead to external behaviour that matches with the inner spirit: a tree must bear good fruit (12:33; cf. 3:10).

The OT promise that "all Israel will be saved" (cf. Is 45:17; 59:20-21; 60:21; Jr 31:31-34; cf. Mi 2:12-13) refers to the eschatological and national repentance, salvation and restoration of Israel at the time when the kingdom will be established, that is, national Israel will all be saved at the end of the Tribulation period (Johnson 1996:187; Toussaint 1980:69). Only *then* at that stage, will every Jew still *physically* living have turned to Christ in faith and be saved; only *then* will the remnant of Israel comprise every Jew then physically living (Fruchtenbaum 1996:201). But most Jews misunderstood this, arguing that being physical descendants of Abraham automatically qualified them for entrance into the kingdom when it was established (3:9). Concerning the Jews who heard John the Baptist preaching a baptism of repentance, Edersheim (1912:270-271) writes:

[D]id they imagine that, according to the common notion of the time, the vials of wrath were to be poured out only on the Gentiles, while they as Abraham's children, were sure to escape – in the words of the Talmud, that "the night" (Is xxi.12) was "only to the nations of the world, but the morning to Israel"? For, no principle was more fully established in the popular conviction, than that all Israel had part in the world to come (Sanh x.1), and this, specifically, because of their connection with Abraham. This appears not only from the

New Testament, from Philo, and Josephus, but from many Rabbinic pages. “The merits of the Fathers”, is one of the commonest phrases in the mouth of the Rabbis.⁴⁰

Against this common Jewish misunderstanding that all Jews of all times has a share in the age to come, both John and Jesus proclaimed the need to repent, for righteousness was the means for entering the kingdom; to see the kingdom being established in their day required Israel’s acceptance of Jesus as the Messianic King (Fruchtenbaum 1989:615). Not only was Jesus not necessarily the Messiah that the Jews expected, but they also did not prepare themselves for the Son of David and his Davidic kingdom.

After noting that the OT eschatological program did not have the Church age in view, Toussaint (1980:64; cf. Constable 2013:169) states the following: “The program of the Lord in case of His acceptance by Israel would be in this order: (1) the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, (2), the cross, (3), the seven years of Jacob’s trouble, and (4) the return of the Messiah to establish the kingdom.” The length of the period *between* the cross/ascension of the Lord Jesus (step 2) and the start of the Tribulation period (step 3) is undefined. But since John the Baptist *could have been* Elijah had Israel accepted him (11:14), followed by the acceptance of the King and his offer of the kingdom of heaven, the inference is that the period between Christ’s ascension and the start of the Tribulation period may not have been long. Was the timing of Christ’s cross contingent? Constable (2013:169) states that had the “Jews accepted their Messiah when He offered the kingdom to them, He still would have died on the cross and experienced resurrection and ascension. He could not have been the Messiah without doing so, in fulfilment of many Old Testament prophecies (Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Dan. 9; Zech. 13).” For that reason, Toussaint (1980:64) states: “One can only conclude that Christ came to offer the kingdom by way of the cross.”

It is therefore proposed that the Jewish people listening to John the Baptist (3:2), Jesus (4:17,23; 9:35) and the twelve apostles (10:5-7) would have expected a *restoration* of the Theocratic kingdom under the rule of the Messiah; that is, and can only be, the Messianic kingdom. According to Stallard (2000:138), “it would be exceedingly anachronistic to read back into the Old Testament any later post-Christian historical developments of a kingdom-in-the-heart idea or rulership of God in the world through the church. The burden of proof is on those who wish to diminish the aspect of Jewish expectation.”⁴¹ Following the first guideline for understanding the

⁴⁰ Edersheim (1912:270-271) also refers to other passages from the Targumum: “Jer. Targ. on Gen xlix.11; Targ. on Is xi.4; Targ. on Amos ix.11; Targ. on Nah i.6 and on Zech x.3,4.”

⁴¹ Importantly, an announcement of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven could not have referred to the Universal kingdom of God, since it already existed and had not come to an end. Moreover, if indeed it is a

parables of Matthew 13, it is submitted that the *kingdom of heaven*⁴² mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew consistently refers to the Messianic kingdom (Toussaint 1980:61-62; cf. Beacham 1996:232). In summary:

The Messianic kingdom ... was a major area of Old Testament prophecy. This was the kingdom proclaimed as being at hand by John the Baptist. This was the kingdom Jesus offered to the Jewish people. It is this kingdom that was rejected. As a result of the rejection of the Messianic kingdom, the offer was rescinded or “taken away” from that generation and from a human perspective the Messianic kingdom was “postponed” and not to be set up at this time ... [but to] be offered to the Jewish generation of the Tribulation, which will accept it.

(Fruchtenbaum 1989:611)⁴³

4.2 The setting of the parables of Matthew 13

At the time of Jesus’ first advent, an imperial cult had been introduced to the provinces of the Mediterranean world. Except “for Italy itself, the bulk of the Roman world consisted of territory under provincial government” (Tenney 1985:14). While Rome ruled politically, the cultural influence of Hellenism was great. In much of the Roman Empire, the *lingua franca* was Greek, especially east of Rome, but Latin, Aramaic and Hebrew were also spoken (Tenney 1985:54).⁴⁴ Greek religion and philosophy also played a unifying role in the Roman Empire (Machen 1976:29). In the religious sphere, the Greco-Roman pantheon was worshipped, but a growing cosmopolitan consciousness in the empire gave way to the worship of the state (Tenney 1985:65-67). Mystery religions, the occult and various philosophies were also followed (DeSilva 2004:90-100).

separate aspect of the kingdom, the Spiritual kingdom could also not have been said to be near or at hand, for God had been offering people the gospel since the fall of Adam. It seems reasonable, then, to state that an announcement of the nearness of the kingdom of heaven had to refer to the Mediatorial kingdom of God.

⁴² Whereas Mark, Luke and John use the phrase “kingdom of God” exclusively, the Gospel of Matthew employs the expression “kingdom of heaven” thirty-two times, and the phrase “kingdom of God” four or five times. Given its usage in Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10 (to give but one example), commentators (for example Hagner 2000:47-48; Nolland 2005:175-176) point out that the phrase “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” are used interchangeably in the Gospels. Apparently, Matthew avoids “kingdom of God” to “remove unnecessary offense to Jews who often used circumlocutions like ‘heaven’ to refer to God” (Carson 1995:100). However, since Matthew uses the word “God” some fifty times and “kingdom of God” at least four times (12:28; 19:24; 21:31,43), if not also a fifth time (in 6:33 — see Paine 1945:270-272), France (2007:101) correctly notes that Matthew has little inhibition about referring to God by name.

⁴³ Matthew 23:39 seems to be particularly relevant in this regard: Christ will come again to a repentant nation of Israel at the end of the Tribulation to establish the Messianic kingdom on earth (Toussaint 1980:265-266; Barbieri 1983:75-76).

⁴⁴ According to Machen (1976:28), “when the Romans became masters of a Greek-speaking world, the Greek language continued to be the language of trade, the language of international intercourse, the ordinary language of the cities, and along with Latin, the language of government administration”.

In Israel and in the rest of the Roman world, the social strata consisted of a wealthy aristocracy, a peasant class (almost decimated as a result of Rome's imperial conquests) and then slaves, criminals and poor people (Herzog 1994:56-66). Herzog (2000:253-254) sketches a socio-economic-political world where Rome enforced its rule over Israel through a corrupt temple hierarchy and other retainers who used Torah interpretations to solidify control and domination over peasant rural villagers. Agriculture and manufacture were important to the Imperialistic economy. Given an agricultural and fishing industry around the lake of Galilee, Stein (1981:36-39) correctly highlights that "the parables ... arose in a rural environment" and display "a down-to-earth, real-life character". Culturally, however, the "Judeans despised their northern neighbours as country cousins, their lack of Jewish sophistication being compounded by their greater openness to Hellenistic influence" (France 2007:6).

According to Davies (1967:33), the life of Jewry in first-century Judaism turned around the Law of Moses, the Temple, the Festivals and the Synagogue.⁴⁵ Religious life in Israel centred on temple service; sacrifices were performed in Jerusalem, and synagogues were scattered throughout the land to provide places for worship and instruction (Machen 1976:36).

The book of the prophet Haggai (2:20-23; cf. Feinberg 1990:247) ends with a prophecy that the Lord will destroy the strength of the Gentile kingdoms; Zechariah (14:1-21; cf. Baron n.d.:489-532) ends with the destruction of the enemy, the return of the Messiah and a description of the Messianic kingdom; Malachi (4:1-6) culminates in the day of the LORD, the Sun of Righteousness and the coming of Elijah. After these post-exilic prophets, God does not speak to Israel through prophets for about four centuries. It is in this setting⁴⁶ (the second guideline identified in chapter 2) that the anointed King proclaims, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (4:17).

4.3 The occasion or problem that prompts *all* the parables of Matthew 13

The third guideline is to uncover the occasion or problem that prompts all eight parables of Matthew 13. From a narrative perspective, the "story of Jesus is one of conflict, so that its plot turns on conflict" (Kingsbury 1992:347). Moreover, according to Turner (2008:44; emphasis added), this key motif in Matthew is a conflict *over authority*. Toussaint (1980:19) sets the scene:

⁴⁵ Davies (1967:33) divides the main groups at Jesus' first advent in terms of their attitude to the Law.

⁴⁶ A more narrowly considered setting for the parables of Matthew 13 is presented in 5 and 5.5.

A nonbelieving Jew would scoff at any assertion of the Lord Jesus being the Messiah, let alone King. “If Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, where is His kingdom? Where is the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises to Israel?” he would ask. ... Therefore the objector would contend that Jesus could not be the Messiah because He did not fulfil Old Testament prophecies promising a kingdom for Israel. ... Because of the validity of this objection, Matthew explains God’s kingdom program as it relates to Jesus, to Israel, and to the church.

God’s promises to the house of David in terms of the Davidic covenant are unconditional. Even though the Son of David received the right to rule the kingdom of heaven in Israel, his exercise of this rule is contingent upon Israel accepting Jesus as her Messianic King. At his first advent, the King presents his Messiahship and the offer of the kingdom by way of the gospel of the kingdom (4:17,23; 9:35), to Israel only (15:24; cf. 10:7). That is because God made promises to Israel in terms of the unconditional Abrahamic, Land, Davidic and New covenants as well as the conditional Mosaic covenant (McAvoy 1996:27-32). By referring to him as the “Son of David” (1:1), Matthew immediately connects Jesus via the Davidic covenant to the *seed* aspect of the Abrahamic covenant (Fruchtenbaum 1989:632). The title “Son of Abraham” (1:1) emphasises Jesus’ Jewishness in terms of the Abrahamic covenant (Pentecost 1991:33-39; Fruchtenbaum 1989:334-344). Since Jesus was a direct descendent of Abraham, this title also highlights a legal claim to the *land* of Israel (Long 1997:9) and will, via the New covenant, bring *blessings* — salvation included (1:21). As King of the Jews (2:2; 27:11), the Messiah will be “a ruler who will shepherd My people Israel” (2:6). If national Israel had heeded the call to repentance and accepted Jesus as Messiah, judgment would have preceded the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth.⁴⁷ In Matthew, this contingency in terms of the *timing* of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom is important.⁴⁸

At Jesus’ baptism, God the Father and the Holy Spirit identify Him as the Anointed One (3:16-17). The obedience and character of Christ are then tested (4:1-11). Satan even makes a counter-offer: Jesus is offered the kingdoms of the world and their glory (4:8; Stallard 2000:146). All the prophets and the law prophesied until John (11:13; cf. 5:17; 7:12) but from the days of John the

⁴⁷ Should the generation living at the time of Jesus’ first advent reject Christ, this still will not annul or abrogate God’s unconditional promises.

⁴⁸ “That our Lord understood the contingent nature of his kingdom proclamation is clear from his evaluation of John the Baptist and his career” (McClain 1955:215). If you are willing — *if* ... he is Elijah who is to come (11:14; Barbieri 1983:44). According to McClain (1955:215; cf. Barbieri 1983:28), the “immediate establishment of his kingdom was contingent upon the attitude of the nation of Israel, to whom pertained the divine promises and covenants ...”

Baptist (11:12a),⁴⁹ the messenger prepares the way of the Lord (3:3) and the kingdom of heaven is presented to Israel as being “at hand” (3:2; 4:17; 10:7). Hagner (2000:47) states that the “meaning of the verb ἤγγικεν refers normally to that which is at the point of arriving”. Toussaint (1980:63; cf. Toussaint and Quine 2007:138) rightly points out that *to draw near* does not mean *to be here*: “If Israel had accepted its Messiah, the earthly kingdom would have been inaugurated by the King.”

The gospel of the kingdom is preached to *Israel only*, emphasising the nearness of the eschatological, earthly Messianic kingdom, but this gospel includes an emphasis on personal salvation: “First, the hearers were to repent so that they could enter the kingdom when it arrived. ...A second reason existed for the necessity of repentance: it was necessary for Israel to repent for the kingdom to come” (Toussaint 1994:232). Jews had to repent, both individually and nationally, for the kingdom of heaven was near. Pentecost (1991:87,193) states that “[a]t the time of the ministry of the Twelve, a message needed to go to Israel announcing to that nation that her King had arrived. Israel herself needed to come to faith before blessings could flow out from Israel to the nations of the earth.” Old Testament prophecies (Is 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Ezk 39:25-29; Jl 2:28-3:1; Zch 12:8-13:1) connect an outpouring of the Holy Spirit with the national salvation and restoration of Israel immediately prior to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom (Penney 1996:215-216; Ger 2004:24). Toussaint (1994:232) boldly states: “The whole world could turn to Christ, but until Israel accepts Jesus as her Messiah, the millennial kingdom will not come.” Israel must say to their Messiah: “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD” (23:39). If the King is present, will the subjects meet the requirements to enter the kingdom of heaven? In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ argues that the interpretation of righteousness presented by the scribes and the Pharisees (5:20) will *not* provide entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The righteousness of Christ exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees.

But what evidence authenticates Jesus’ Messianic claims? “The purpose of all His miracles between chapter 4-12 were (sic) to serve as signs to Israel in order to authenticate His person (He is the Messiah) and His message (the gospel of the kingdom). If they would accept Him, He would establish the Messianic kingdom of the Old Testament prophets” (Fruchtenbaum 1989:616). Concerning miracles and Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom, Saucy (1996:307; emphasis added) insightfully observes the following:

⁴⁹ Johnson (1956:36) states that “John preached both a personal salvation, involving the remission of sins (Mark 1:4), and a national salvation, involving the establishment of the millennial kingdom with Israel delivered out of the hand of their enemies (Matt. 3:2; Luke 1:71-75).”

By the testimony of His miracles Jesus could legitimately lay claim to a messianic role as presented in canonical and noncanonical witnesses. His miracles also show the kingdom's interface with human decision about His ministry. *Jesus' miracles indicate the presence of kingdom power, and yet they are not the presence of the kingdom because they are not the kingdom in its fullness; of this reality they are only signs.*

Israel's response to the King and the offer of the kingdom of heaven is hinted at early in Matthew: children are put to death (2:16-18), the scribes and Pharisees teach false doctrine (5:20; cf. 3:7-10), Israel is implicitly rebuked for its unbelief (8:12), the scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy (9:2-6), and Judas is identified as the betrayer (10:4). In Matthew 9:15, the "King gives the first intimation of His violent death ... After Israel's Bridegroom has been taken away and all the consequent blessings of the kingdom postponed, the disciples and Israel shall fast again" (Toussaint 1980:131; cf. Ellisen 2001:69-70). But what is merely hinted at early in the Gospel of Matthew becomes pronounced as the narrative continues.

John hears about Christ's works (11:2) and wonders whether he has been mistaken about Jesus' Messianic identity (Bailey and Constable 1999:19-20). If Jesus is indeed the Coming One (11:3; cf. 3:11), where is the (Tribulation) wrath preceding the establishment of the Messianic kingdom (3:7), when the chaff will be burned (3:12; cf. 7:19) and the followers of Christ be baptised with the Holy Spirit (3:11)? Jesus' answer does not spiritualize away Israel's expectation of the Davidic kingdom, but He notes that what people can see and hear — his teaching, preaching and various mighty works — authenticates his Messianic claims (11:3-6,20,21,23). Saucy (1997:323) emphasises that when "Jesus literally healed the lame, the blind, and the deaf, we can know that the prophets had not looked for just a spiritual allegory when they spoke of healing in the coming Kingdom. The Kingdom will not be fulfilled in the spiritual realm alone." Moreover, by referring to these miraculous signs (11:3-6), Jesus emphasises the *exercise of the power* of the kingdom by the Spirit of God (cf. 12:28).

But from the days of John the Baptist until Christ, the kingdom of heaven suffers violence — taking βιάζεται as passive (Nolland 2005:458; Turner 2008:295) — and the violent take it by force (11:12; 23:13). Towns in Israel witnessing the mighty works of Christ remain unrepentant (11:20-24), and God the Father *hides* these things — the mighty works of Christ — from the wise and prudent (11:25). If Matthew 11 sketches the rejection of Jesus implicitly, Matthew 12 pictures an explicit rejection and consequent plot to destroy Jesus (12:14). Kingsbury (1992:351-352) notes that, for the first time in Matthew's story, the conflict between Jesus and the religious

authorities has intensified to the point where this conflict has become “mortal” (12:14), a “struggle to the death” and “beyond reconciliation”. After the Sabbath controversies and following a miracle (12:1-23), the Pharisees show that they are decisively against Jesus when they attribute “what is in fact the work of God’s Spirit (v. 28) to his ultimate enemy, Satan” (France 2007:482; cf. Nolland 2005:505).

What is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and why is it unpardonable (12:31-32)? There is considerable divergence of scholarly opinion about this concept. Nolland (2005:505) argues that this sin excludes people from participating in what God is doing in Jesus and thus from the “forgiveness project” – *if* they remain unrepentant. If this is true, how can it be reconciled to 12:31-32 which clearly states that this sin will not be forgiven (οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται)? France (2007:483-484; emphasis added) rightly points out that “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit stands out from the run of “ordinary” sins as being uniquely serious”, because the significance of Jesus’ exorcisms was plain for all to see: “there could be *no excuse for misinterpreting this work of the Holy Spirit and attributing it to Beelzebul.*” In agreement with dispensational commentators,⁵⁰ the unpardonable sin committed by *this generation* in Israel, that is Jesus’ contemporaries, is viewed as a sin which cannot be committed today. The following explanation may be considered representative of the dispensational perspective:

The content and definition of the unpardonable sin is the *national rejection* of the Messiahship of Jesus by Israel while He was physically present on the basis that He was demon possessed. This sin is unpardonable, and judgment was set. The judgment came in the year A.D. 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple and the world-wide dispersion of the Jewish people. ... From this point on a special emphasis is placed on *this generation* in the gospels, for it was guilty of a very unique sin. At this point, His offer of the Messianic kingdom was rescinded. It will not now be established in their day because of the unpardonableness of that sin.

(Fruchtenbaum 1989:617; emphasis added)

In *Matthew’s* presentation, once the unpardonable sin has been committed (12:24) by *this generation* in Israel (cf. 11:16; 12:31-32,39-45), the kingdom of heaven is not presented as *at hand* anymore (Toussaint 1980:164; Fruchtenbaum 1989:616-620). Individual Jews living during

⁵⁰ See Ironside (1920:95), Cooper (1941:27), McClain (1959:315-316), Toussaint (1980:165) and Pentecost (1991:207). According to Barbieri (1983:47), this “specific sin cannot be reproduced today for it required Jesus’ presence on earth with His performing miracles through the Spirit’s power. ... If, however, the leaders, acting on behalf of the nation, concluded that Jesus was empowered by Satan, they would commit a sin that would never find national or individual forgiveness (in this Age or in the Age to come). The consequences would bring judgment on the nation and on any individual who persisted in that view.”

this time could escape judgment by repenting and changing their mind about the identity of Jesus Christ (12:33,39-40), but *national* repentance of *this generation* in Israel was not possible anymore because the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus was blasphemed.⁵¹ In Matthew 11-12, the rejection of the Messiahship of Jesus is *unofficial*, to become *official* when, on the day of his triumphal entry, Jesus was still rejected (21:1-9; Beacham 1996:236). But regarding Matthew 12:22-37, Barbieri (1983:48) states that, while their “full rejection of Him did not occur until later, the die was cast.” The unpardonable sin (12:24,31-32) signals that an irrevocable turn had been taken and that the establishment of the kingdom of heaven on earth was postponed. Walvoord (1974:96) explains this postponement:

The concept of a kingdom postponed must be understood as a postponement from the human side and not from the divine, as obviously God’s plans do not change. It may be compared to the situation at Kadesh-Barnea, when the children of Israel, bound for the promised land, because of unbelief, had their entrance postponed for forty years. If they had believed God, they might have entered the land immediately.

The timing of Jesus’ parabolic teaching, therefore, comes at a point of crisis in the offer of the restored kingdom to Israel: “The kingdom parables, then, were not intended to define the kingdom in its offer but to explain the effects of its rejection” (Beacham 1996:232). The parables of Matthew 13 explains a phase of God’s kingdom programme which was not anticipated in the OT, namely that there would be an extended period of time between the first advent of the Messiah and the second advent of Christ – after which time the unconditional OT prophecies regarding the kingdom will be fulfilled (cf. Bailey 1997:50). In accordance with the third guideline for interpreting the parables of Matthew 13, the question that prompts *all* the parables of Matthew 13 and which addresses all aspects surrounding a kingdom (a right to rule, a rule by the ruler, a realm to be ruled and the actual exercise of authority) can be summarised as follows: *Given that the establishment of the kingdom of heaven in terms of the Davidic kingdom has been postponed, what is going to happen to the King, what is going to happen to the kingdom of heaven, and how, if at all, will the rule of the kingdom of heaven be exercised?*

⁵¹ In line with the discussion in 1.3.2 regarding super-session, the unconditional covenants still belong to Israel. God’s unconditional plans for and with Israel will still be fulfilled, even after *this generation* in Israel committed the unpardonable sin. Further, salvation is available to all human beings by God’s grace through faith in Christ Jesus. This is true for the Jew first and to the Gentile. For the avoidance of doubt, under no circumstances should this thesis be understood as being in any way against any Jew. On the contrary, this thesis supports Israel’s special place in God’s plans and awaits the soon coming of the King of the Jews to establish the “times of the Jews” during the Messianic kingdom. To be sure, and to present a balance, at the time of writing, God is working out his plans in this dispensation through the Church, a body that is composed of Jewish, Samaritan and Gentile believers in Christ.

4.4 Mysteries

In Matthew 13, Jesus presents *mysteries* of the kingdom of heaven (13:11), utters things kept secret from the foundation of the world (13:35b) and instructs the scribe of the kingdom of heaven to bring out of his treasure things new and old (13:52). The question thus arises, what is meant by “mysteries”?⁵²

Brown (1958:417-422) traces the idea of “mystery” in its historical development and notes that the Hebrew word סֵדֶר *sôder* refers to confidential talk, a circle of people in secret or in council, and the Aramaic word רִזְרָא *rāz* means knowledge (or secrets) of heavenly mysteries. The Septuagint translates the Aramaic *rāz* in Daniel 2 with μυστήριον, and this refers to both the dream and its contents (Brown 1958:423). Bornkamm (cited in Brown 1958:423; cf. Krämer 1991:447) states that, in Daniel 2, “μυστήριον has the sense of an eschatological mystery: a veiled announcement of future events predetermined by God, whose unveiling and real meaning is reserved to God alone and the one inspired by His spirit.”⁵³ Wiley (1985:351; cf. France 2007:511) summarises the OT concept of “mystery” as divine secrets that can be known and understood only if God reveals them to his people through a prophet.

In classical Greek, μυστήριον occurs in the context of Greek mystery religions characterised by cultic ceremonies (Krämer 1991:446). It refers to secrets revealed only to initiates (France 2007:511; Wilson 1994:10) and the dispensing of cosmic life as “salvation” to devotees together with a required vow of silence (Wiley 1985:350; cf. Gn 3:5). In contrast to these mystery religions, scribes of the kingdom of heaven should teach these mysteries (13:51-52); understanding these mysteries does not provide salvation, but rather presupposes it, since this understanding is not given to unbelievers (13:11-12,16-17). Moreover, because there are various levels of fruitfulness (13:23), believers should search out these matters (13:12; cf. Ps 25:2) which God reveals to little children (11:25-27; 13:11,16-18).

⁵² The word μυστήριον appears twenty-eight times in the NT (if 1 Corinthians 2:1 is also taken to include it): Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; Romans 11:25; 16:25; 1 Corinthians 2:1,7; 4:1; 13:2; 14:2; 15:51; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3,4,9; 5:32; 6:19; Colossians 1:26,27 (twice); 2:2; 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:7; 1 Timothy 3:9, 16 and Revelation 1:20; 10:7; 17:5,7.

⁵³ Nolland (2005:533) says that “God is seen as the revealer of the mysteries of the end of days concerning the coming kingdom that shall never be destroyed”, and France (2007:511) adds that “God gives Daniel privileged access to the divine ‘secret’ which other wise men have failed to penetrate, so that he can then communicate it to the king.” This is in line with Daniel 2:28 (NKJV): “But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.”

In the NT, Jesus reveals the mysteries of the kingdom during his earthly ministry (13:11; Mk 4:11; Lk 8:10), and more mysteries are later revealed to the apostles and prophets (Eph 3:5), especially to Paul (1 Cor 4:1).⁵⁴ Contrary to Krämer (1991:449), NT mysteries are not “unspeakable or inaccessible to reason but accessible to faith.” Mysteries are not against reason (Geisler 2000:515); if the Holy Spirit provides insight,⁵⁵ a believer’s reason can access and explain it.

Regarding 11:25-27, France (2007:445) notes that this passage depicts Jesus as the indispensable intermediary between God and the “little children” — it is only through Him that they have received, and can receive, their special knowledge of God’s truth, thereby anticipating 13:10-17. “These things”, hidden by the Father from the worldly-wise (11:25), include the works of Christ that John hears of (11:2,4-6), that is, these mighty works of the Son of Man that certain people and even entire towns reject (11:19-24). According to Carson (1995:277), “all things” (11:27) committed by the Father to the Son may have reference not only to all knowledge of “these things” (11:25), but also to “all divine knowledge”. In Matthew, it appears that the revelation of what is hidden (11:25) depends on being a true disciple (little child) of the Son (11:25-30; 12:46-50); otherwise these mighty works of Christ (11:2,4-6,20,21,23) remain hidden.⁵⁶

It can reasonably be claimed that the theme of the discourse in Matthew 13 is “the kingdom of heaven”, for this phrase is linked explicitly to each parable (13:11,24,31,33,44,45,47,52), even though “they illustrate quite varied aspects of this multifaceted concept” (France 2007:499). Because Jesus uses a literary genre that makes use of figurative language to communicate indirectly, the content of these parables remains hidden to those who have not come to Him (11:28-30; 13:10-17,35). But Jesus’ disciples are given understanding of these mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11), and they will understand them to different degrees of fruitfulness (13:8,23). That they understand it at all is a gracious gift from God, for the “normal state of humanity is ignorance of God’s eschatological secrets” (Davies and Allison 1991:389).

⁵⁴ Brown (1959:87; cf. Wiley 1985:350) states that “Paul and the NT writers could have written everything they did about *mysterion* if there had never been pagan mystery religions”.

⁵⁵ Geisler (2000:515) elaborates: “Finally, a mystery is distinguished from a problem. A problem has a *solution*; a mystery is the object of *meditation*. A problem calls for *extensive* knowledge; a mystery for *intensive* concentration. Like a missing word in a crossword puzzle, a problem can be solved by more knowledge; a mystery cannot. If it could, it would not be a mystery. Mysteries do not call for *answers*, but for *insights*.”

⁵⁶ Come to Son one must, because He is the revealer of all things which the Father has delivered to Him (11:25-30). Later revelation confirms that *all* the promises of God are yes in Christ (2 Cor 1:20a); the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy (Rv 19:10b).

Since Jesus opens his mouth in parables and utters things kept secret from the foundation of the world (13:35), it would seem that these mysteries (13:10-11) necessarily include new truths (13:52), for they have never before been revealed (Beacham 1996:232-233). A NT mystery can be defined, according to Hagner (2000:372), as “the secret thoughts, plans, and dispensations of God that are hidden from human reason, as well as from all other comprehension below the divine level, and hence must be revealed to those for whom they are intended.” Carson (1995:307) states that “mysteries” are “divine plans or decrees, often passed on in veiled language, known only to the elect, and usually relating to eschatological events.” For Constable (2013:208), mysteries are “secrets”, namely divine plans for the future, revealed by God to His elect and referring to what He knows will happen in the future.

How should one then define or describe the content of “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven” (13:11)? Suggested answers seem to be influenced by one’s view of the nature of the kingdom of heaven initially offered and subsequently during the inter-advent period. Turner (2008:42) understands the issues as follows: “Those who think of the kingdom as present focus on the dynamic ‘rule’ aspect of a kingdom whereas those who prefer to think of it as future focus on the concrete ‘realm’ aspect.” The debate is between proponents of “realised eschatology” (for example Dodd (1953) or Ladd (1980)), who advocate that Jesus’ ministry inaugurated the kingdom on earth, and those who hold to a “consistent eschatology” (for example Walvoord (1974) and Toussaint (1980)), who think of the kingdom as the future millennium on earth (cf. Turner 2008:42-43).

Has the kingdom of heaven been established or inaugurated on earth? Many answer affirmatively. Dodd (1953) states that the ministry of Jesus represents “realised eschatology”, that is, “the impact upon this world of the ‘powers of the age to come’ in a series of events, unprecedented and unrepeatable, now in actual process.” Ladd (1980:222) nuances this view slightly: “The mystery of the Kingdom is the coming of the Kingdom into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation. It is, in short, ‘fulfilment without consummation’.”⁵⁷ According to Hagner (2000:376), the “mysteries of the kingdom” affirm “the certain and real presence of the kingdom in the fulfilment of the OT, beginning with the ministry of Jesus, but also the delay of certain things expected to be part of that kingdom, i.e. the judgement of the wicked and the unmitigated

⁵⁷ Carson (1995:307) holds a similar view, namely that the “secrets of the kingdom” are the revelation to the disciples of certain eschatological realities and the “mystery of the Kingdom is the coming of the Kingdom into history in advance of its apocalyptic manifestation”. So too Blomberg (1990:297): “Christ inaugurated the kingdom during his lifetime, but its entire consummation awaits his return.” For him (1990:312), the parables of Matthew 13 teach that “the kingdom of God is present but not with irresistible power.”

blessing of the righteous.” The content of the mysteries of the kingdom is the “presence of the kingdom in Jesus and his ministry” (Davies and Allison 1991:389). Turner (2008:339) understands these mysteries as amounting to “kingdom truths signified in the parables of this chapter, centering on its present growth.” According to the above explanations, both the present and the future of the kingdom are in view; there is an “already and a not-yet” aspect to it.

Some commentators, mostly premillennial dispensationalists, hold that the kingdom of heaven has not been established on earth; rather, once the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ was ascribed to Beelzebul (France 2007:483-484), that is, once the unpardonable sin had been committed the establishment of the kingdom of heaven was postponed (Walvoord 1974:95-96; Toussaint 1980:170).⁵⁸ For these “consistent eschatology” proponents, Israel was offered the Messianic kingdom contingent on her accepting the Messiahship of Jesus, as evidenced in the words and deeds that Jesus in his humanity performed through the Holy Spirit. Even if their rejection of Jesus only officially occurs in the days immediately preceding the cross, Israel’s ultimate decision of rejection is already known in chapter 12 (Barbieri 1983:49). Normative dispensationalism sees the kingdom’s establishment in these parables as entirely future; it views the subject matter of these kingdom parables as

[N]ew revelation with regard to the prophesied kingdom. The mysteries of the kingdom, therefore, were not intended to describe some new kind of kingdom that was coming in mystery form. Nor was this a new revelation that confuted, overruled, or redefined previous kingdom prophecies. These were not truths that were found in the Old Testament but not yet fully realized or understood. In these kingdom parables, Jesus was relating truths about the prophesied kingdom that had never before been revealed.

(Beacham 1996:233)

Thus, in Matthew 13, Jesus presents new revelation (13:17,35) concerning the kingdom promised to the Jews, relating “to the time of the establishing of the kingdom, the preparation for it, and other such material which had never before been revealed” (Toussaint 1980:175).⁵⁹ “The reason ‘mystery’ is an appropriate designation is that what would be revealed in the parables of Matthew 13 (and beyond) had not been seen nor heard by the prophets of the Old Testament” (Bailey 1998b:176).

⁵⁸ See also Couch (1996:231), Beacham (1996:233), Bailey and Constable (1999:25) and Fruchtenbaum (1989:611).

⁵⁹ According to Pentecost (1995:219), the OT had not revealed that a long period “would intervene between the offer of the kingdom by the Messiah and Israel’s reception of the King and enjoyment of full kingdom blessings.”

Various objections have been raised against the above “consistent eschatology” view. *First*, Blomberg (1990:310) states that it is impossible to find any text prior to Jesus’ arrest and execution which decisively shows that the entire nation of Israel (or its representative leaders) ever rejected Christ’s teaching. However, this thesis holds that once the unpardonable sin had been committed on the basis that Jesus performed miracles by Satan’s power (12:24) and not by that of the Holy Spirit, an irrevocable rejection is already described in Matthew 12. These parables were given on the day that the unpardonable sin was committed (12:24,31-32), the same day the Pharisees plotted to destroy Jesus (12:14).

Second, it is asked how the work of a sovereign God can be contingent on a human response, in this case the nation of Israel. As noted in 2.2.6, even if an unconditional promise contains conditional sub-clauses, the eventual fulfilment of the promise remains unconditional. The word “contingency” does not mean “that the fulfilment of God’s promise to establish the millennial kingdom is uncertain and may be annulled. Instead ‘contingency’ means that the *timing* of the fulfilment is based on these three factors”, namely the sovereignty of God, the influence of the Spirit of God and humanity’s (especially Israel’s) responsibility for repentance (Toussaint and Quine 2007:131).⁶⁰ Moreover, since there is one Messiah but two comings, contingency is evident when considering the role of John the Baptist. *If* Israel had been willing to accept John, he would have been Elijah who was to come, but since this generation rejected him, he was not (11:13-14). Consequently, before Christ’s second coming, Elijah will indeed come first and restore all things (17:11-12; Toussaint 1980:211; Barbieri 1983:44).

A *third* objection is that dispensationalists overestimate the “rupture” between Matthew 12 and 13 (Blomberg 1990:311); their position is considered too cut and dried regarding Jesus’ supposed change in teaching method or strategy (Carson 1995:304). But Matthew affirms that a new development is taking place, namely that, from that time onwards, Jesus does not speak to the unbelieving crowds except in parables (13:34; cf. 13:10-11; Fruchtenbaum 1989:611).

Certain objections can also be raised against the “realised eschatology” view. *First*, if the kingdom has already been *inaugurated*, that is, its “dynamic rule” is present (Turner 2008:42),

⁶⁰ Constable (2013:54) anticipates another question: “Since the Jews rejected Jesus’ offer of the kingdom was His offer genuine? Had God not already determined that Israel would reject her Messiah? Jesus’ offer of the kingdom was just as genuine as any gospel offer of salvation to someone who rejects it.” McClain (1959:344) answers: “Those who cavil at the idea of an offer which is certain to be rejected betray an ignorance, not only of Biblical history (cf. Isa. 6:8-10 and Ezek. 2:3-7), but also of the important place of the legal proffer in the realm of jurisprudence.”

the question arises: Why does Jesus instruct his disciples to pray that the kingdom will come, that God's will be done on earth as in heaven (6:9-13)?

Second, when a *divine* kingdom is established, it cannot be divided *initially* or *ultimately*, for a kingdom divided against it cannot stand (12:25-26). If any rebellion against the will of God should manifest itself *after* the establishment of such a divine kingdom, the timing of any judgment on such rebellion depends on whether God extends a period of grace allowing for repentance, or not. If grace is extended, rebellion may, in the interim, exist in a divine kingdom, but not initially or ultimately. If the kingdom of heaven has already been established on earth, one may ask: When was all rebellion against the will of God expelled from this kingdom? From a "consistent eschatology" perspective, this judgement is still future, commencing during the Tribulation when the enemies of Christ will be made His footstool (22:44), and will be concluded immediately after the Tribulation when Christ returns (24:29-30; 25:31-46).

Third, if the kingdom had been established or inaugurated in the "presence of Jesus and his ministry" (Davies and Allison 1991:389), would Jesus' closest disciples not have known about it? Is it not strange that eleven apostles still expected the Lord to restore the kingdom to Israel after his resurrection (Ac 1:6)? After forty days of teaching regarding the kingdom of God (Ac 1:3), the Lord did not rebuke them for their question, but indicated that it was not for them to know the times or seasons which the Father had established in his own authority (Ac 1:7; cf. 24:36).

Four, after the rejection depicted in Matthew 11-12, the gospel *of the kingdom* is not again mentioned in Matthew except for 24:14, a passage in the Olivet discourse, showing that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the world just before the return of Jesus at the end of this age ("and then the end will come" — 24:14b). If the kingdom of heaven has already been established on earth, immanent in a veiled or secret manner and awaiting only its final consummation, why will it be necessary to preach the gospel of the kingdom at the end of this age?

Five, Jesus says that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either *in this age* or *in the age to come* (12:32). What is to follow in the *age to come* is disputed: a-millennialists and post-millennialists understand the age to come to usher in eternity, but pre-millennialists look forward to Christ's earthly kingdom which, after a thousand years, will merge into eternity, into the Universal or Eternal kingdom of God (Hindson 1996:109). It would be unnecessary to refer to various "ages" in the *Eternal* kingdom of God; rather, such "ages" more likely refer to phases of

the Mediatorial kingdom of God on earth. In Matthew, therefore, the end of this age refers to this present age, to be followed by the age to come, the Messianic kingdom. According to Beacham (1996:233), the details in the parables of the harvest (13:30,40-43) and the removal of bad fish (13:49-50) make explicit the time of the kingdom's establishment, namely at the end of *this* age — and parallel passages such as 25:31-46 further clarify this chronology.

Six, if Jesus, *in his humanity*, had already had all the authority in heaven and on earth, Satan's offer to give Him the kingdoms of this world and their glory (4:8) would not have been a real temptation. Since all authority in heaven and on earth is given to the resurrected Lord after the cross, Jesus could not, in his humanity, have been “dynamically ruling” in a mediatorial sense over all the earth until after the cross. As God the Son, the second Person in the Godhead, all things have been delivered to Him (11:25-27). But according to Constable (2013:430; cf. France 2007:1113; Toussaint 1980:317-318), “God restricted Jesus' authority before His resurrection because of His role as the Suffering Servant. Following His resurrection, God broadened the sphere in which Jesus exercised authority (cf. 4:8-10). He became the One through whom God now mediates “all authority” (cf. Dan. 7:14; Phil. 2:5-11). This was Jesus' great claim.”

Returning to the concept of a “kingdom” with its four essential elements (first, a *right to rule*; second, a *rule*; third, a *realm* to be ruled; and fourth, the exercise of the function of *rulership*), in what sense does the kingdom of heaven exist during the inter-advent period? First, concerning the right to rule, it is after the cross that the resurrected Lord has the right to rule in his divinity *and* in his humanity (11:27; 28:18).

Second, is He ruling the kingdom of heaven and, if so, how does Christ Jesus rule? It is submitted that during the inter-advent period the Lord Jesus Christ is *not ruling* in terms of the *seed* aspect of the Abrahamic covenant, that is, He is not ruling the kingdom of heaven as King in terms of the Davidic covenant in the present session (Ryrie 2005:81; cf. McAvoy 1996:27). As mentioned earlier, Israel must own the Son of David before the kingdom of heaven will be *established* on earth (cf. Toussaint 1994:232), that is, before Christ will start to rule in terms of the Davidic covenant. However, the New covenant was sealed and ratified by the blood of Christ at his death on the cross (Decker 1996:278; 26:28) and this covenant amplifies the *blessings* aspect of the Abrahamic covenant (McAvoy 1996:27). It is proposed that in the present session, Christ is not ruling the kingdom of heaven as King but, in terms of the New covenant, He is dispensing as High Priest spiritual blessings to His followers by the Holy Spirit. Saucy (2001:93-94) states that Psalm 110 is the most cited and alluded to OT text in the NT and yet, verse 2 of this Psalm is

never quoted: “The LORD shall send the rod of your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies!” According to Saucy (2011:94), in the present session,

Christ’s focus appears to be most directly concerned with the calling out (plundering the strongman’s house – Matt 12:44ff.) and building up his elect ones in the church for life in the present age. Toward his enemies, Christ operates presently only to contain their activities insofar as they concern the primary objectives he has toward his saints. The enemies are still allowed to retain their kingdom (Col 1:13) and to have their work over the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2) whose eyes are blinded to the truth of Christ (2 Cor 4:4), not to mention the schemes they are permitted to enact against believers (1 Pet 5:8; 2 Cor 2:11).

Third, concerning the realm of the kingdom of heaven which includes its subjects, in agreement with Toussaint (1980:172; emphasis added): “The kingdom *exists* in this intercalation only in the sense that the sons of the kingdom are present”. However, it may be argued that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (8:11), as well as Moses and Elijah (17:3), are also sons of the kingdom of heaven, so what difference is there, if any? Not all the OT saints received it or received it permanently but, it is submitted, with the New covenant already in force, *all* believers from Pentecost onwards receive the *permanent* indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Lightner 1996:173). Moreover, it seems that only Church saints are baptised by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, whereas saints living after the Church age will most likely not receive this baptism (Lightner 1996:172,176-177).

Four, as to the exercise of the function of rulership, from Pentecost onwards, believers taste some of the *powers of the age to come* even though the kingdom of heaven has not yet been established on earth. Christ did not reign during his first advent as King, so the Spirit leads Jesus’ disciples not to a crown but to a cross of a crucified life, for if we suffer with the crucified Christ, then we can also expect, by His grace only, to reign with Him when the kingdom of heaven is established.

As Beacham (1996:233; cf. Couch 2000:213) rightly points out, Matthew’s use of the term “kingdom of heaven” consistently refers to the Messianic kingdom, even after “this generation” in Israel rejected Jesus. In agreement with proponents of “consistent eschatology”, the establishment of kingdom of heaven has been postponed and Christ is *not ruling it as King in terms of the Davidic covenant*. However, in agreement with *some* of the teachings of the “realised eschatology” proponents, from Pentecost onwards, as High Priest, Christ is already dispensing, by the Holy Spirit, spiritual blessings of the kingdom of heaven to His followers *in terms of the New covenant*. However, the comment of Saucy (1997:335) is considered important because it shows a difference between a pre-millennial, a-millennial or post-millennial view of the nature of the kingdom,

This is not to say that the original character of the Kingdom as Jewish, historical, and political was necessarily abandoned with the mystery-teaching of the Kingdom. Rending the physical from the spiritual is the non-chiliasm's error...the error Jesus repudiates in his particular teaching on the Kingdom's futurity.⁶¹

The parables of Matthew 13 reveal new truths regarding the kingdom of heaven which were not predicted in any OT prophecies (Toussaint 1980:176).⁶² But these new truths must be juxtaposed with old truths regarding the kingdom of heaven. Bailey (1999c:295) explains:

Disciples of the kingdom should emphasize what God revealed through the Old Testament prophets as well as what He revealed through His Son in His earthly ministry. His disciples should also show the relationship between the old and new truths. ... Israel's expectation of the coming earthly kingdom, as revealed in the Old Testament, needs to be taught along with the truths of the present interadvent age, the mystery element unknown in the Old Testament. The mysteries (the new element) of the kingdom present what God will do with His kingdom in the world apart from the nation of Israel. Later of course He will fulfil what He said He will do in the future through Israel.

The above has implications for the parables of Matthew 13. In agreement with a-millennialists, from Pentecost until Christ's return, the kingdom of heaven will only be spiritual in terms of the New covenant but in disagreement with a-millennialists, this does not abrogate or eliminate God's unconditional promises regarding the restoration of the Davidic kingdom. Contrary to the already-(established)-but-not-yet-(consummated) view, this thesis holds that the kingdom of heaven *exists* from Pentecost onwards but will only be *established* when Christ returns. In other words, from Pentecost onwards, the view of the kingdom of heaven espoused is that it "exists-but-is-not-yet-established". According to the interpretation presented here, unconditional and unfulfilled OT prophecies regarding the Messianic kingdom (especially in terms of the Davidic covenant) will remain unfulfilled until at least the start of the Tribulation period. Mysteries or new truths (in some cases eschatological "prophecies") of the kingdom of heaven will be fulfilled in terms of the New covenant from Pentecost onwards until Jesus' second coming (24:29-30).⁶³ It

⁶¹ Peters (1972:622-623) also states that the kingdom of heaven should not be viewed as being only a spiritual one, before adding: "The rejection of the postponement of the Kingdom, is a rejection of *the only key* that can unlock the singular and otherwise mysterious saying of Jesus."

⁶² Regarding various interpretations of "things new and old" (13:52), Bailey's (1999c:294) convincingly argues: "If any of the 'old' is not yet fulfilled, there cannot be a wholesale setting aside of the old in favour of the new. Also the new cannot be a partial fulfilment of the promises of the old, because both, not just the new, is (sic) brought out of the treasure. Further, if the new simply fulfils the old, then it is really not new. ... But, while there is an emphasis on the new, it is not new *instead* of the old; both new and old are brought forth."

⁶³ The parable of the sower may be an exception to this general statement.

is these new and old prophecies that Jesus may be juxtaposing and which the scribe of the kingdom of heaven must bring forth.

4.5 Conclusion

By applying the first guideline identified in chapter 2, the kingdom that the King offered to Israel as being “at hand” or “near” was identified as the Messianic kingdom (4.1). Evidence from Inter-testamental literature corroborates this view. Moreover, various OT prophecies regarding the Messianic kingdom collectively comprise the “old” things regarding the kingdom. In line with the second guideline, the setting of Matthew 13 was identified (4.2). The third guideline (4.3) helped in discovering the occasion or problem that prompted all the parables of Matthew 13. It was submitted that the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven deal with new truths concerning the kingdom of heaven. The “new” things in these parables probably include prophecies. In chapter 5, the hermeneutical guidelines identified in chapter 2 for the interpretation of these parables will be applied to each parable *individually*.

5 The individual parables of Matthew 13

According to Matthew, the temporal setting for the parables of chapter 13 is the day of the Sabbath controversies (12:1-13:53). Toussaint (1980:170) correctly notes that if the ordinary “Jew was unable to comprehend the person of the King, he certainly would not understand the postponement of the kingdom. ... To instruct the ‘great multitudes’ ... of Israel openly about this matter would have engendered greater and premature hatred on the part of Israel for its King.” As for the Shepherd and his flock: “How could He wean them from their expectations of immediate glory to the prospects of suffering? And in making this shift, how could He keep from shattering their faith in the grand Old Testament promises of the Messiah’s coming?” (Ellisen 2001:84). Spoken to the crowds, the geographical setting of the first parables is by the lake in a boat (13:1-2), but only Jesus’ disciples hear the last four parables given in a house (13:36). What is going to happen to the King and to the kingdom of heaven? And how, if at all, will the rule of the kingdom of heaven be exercised? The eight parables of Matthew 13 assist in answering these questions.

5.1 The parable of the sower

Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23 (NKJV)

³ Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower¹ went out to sow.
⁴"And as he sowed, some [*seed*]² fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them.
⁵"Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. ⁶"But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. ⁷"And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. ⁸"But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"
¹⁸"Therefore hear the parable of the sower: ¹⁹"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand [it], then the wicked [one] comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. ²⁰"But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹"yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²²"Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. ²³"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands [it], who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

¹ Words underlined are considered to be important.

² According to Snodgrass (2008:150; cf. Hagner 2000:378), neither “Matthew nor Mark uses the word “seed”... Matthew refers to the seeds with plural pronouns in the parable and singular pronouns in the interpretation”.

The parable of the sower (13:18) and Jesus' interpretation of it appear in Matthew (13:3b-9,18-23), Mark (4:3-9,13-20) and Luke (8:5-8,11-15). Although analogies are made earlier in the Gospel, this is the first parable designated as such by Matthew (Luz 2001:228). Jesus emphasises that understanding this parable is a prerequisite for understanding his other parables (13:11-13 with 13:8,19,23). The parable of the sower has, therefore, been aptly called a "touchstone" (Toussaint 1964:354) or "paradigmatic" (Blomberg 1990:227) parable. However, Jesus also promises that those who have will be given more, so they will have in abundance (13:12a,16). It is, therefore, important that "*the* parable about parables" (Snodgrass 2008:145) be understood. Together with the parable of the tares of the field (13:24-30,36-43) and the parable of the dragnet (13:47-50), Jesus explains the parable of the sower privately to his disciples.

5.1.1 Literary structure, details and words

The parable of the sower may be outlined as follows: (1) The setting (13:3b); (2) four scenes of sowing with different results (13:4-8); and, (3) in 13:9, an exhortation to hear (Kingsbury 1977:33). This parable begins with the appeal to look or see (ἰδοῦ; Hagner 2000:368). In the agrarian economy of first-century Palestine (Wenham 1989:41), probably in a Galilean milieu (Hunter 1960:47), the picture of a sower going out to sow would have been readily understood. Regarding understanding, what happens in the sowing depends on the four different kinds of soil encountered: sowing by the wayside (παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν) are devoured by birds (13:4); those falling among stony places (ἐπὶ τὰ πετρώδη) without much earth (μὴ ἔχειν βάθος γῆς) sprout, but the plants are scorched and wither away because they have no root (13:5); some fall among thorns (ἐπὶ τὰς ἀκάνθας) that choke the plants (13:7); and those falling on good ground (ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν τὴν καλήν) yield fruit: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (13:8). Regarding fruitfulness, only two kinds of soil are presented, with the productive good soil positioned at the end of the parable — and with varying results. The scene is therefore of a sower sowing on different kinds of soil, the agency is what is sown, the purpose is to have a harvest of fruit, and counter-agencies include the birds, the sun and the thorns (Kim 1996:187).

5.1.2 The occasion or problem that prompts this parable

According to Davies and Allison (1991:374), the leading theme of the kingdom of heaven and its reception "comes up for treatment at this juncture in the gospel because of the rejection so far experienced by Jesus and his disciples". To argue, therefore, "as has often been done, that the parable is all about the assurance of an ultimate harvest despite disappointments is to do scant justice to the careful way in which the three unproductive areas are sketched and to the

differentiation in the yields achieved” (France 2007:503-504; cf. Patte 1987:185). The fact that each Synoptic writer adds a reference to Isaiah 6:9-10 between the parable and its explanation gives credibility to seeking the reason that prompts this parable in the historical situation of Israel. Moreover, it is the hearts of *this people* that have grown dull (13:15a) — a clear reference to Israel at the time. According to Ellisen (2001:88), the various hearers of the word of the kingdom refer to the people of Israel at that time, as evident from Jesus quoting Isaiah 6:9-10. The question that the parable of the sower addresses is, therefore, not to provide assurance regarding an ultimate harvest, but rather to explain the various responses of the soil in Israel at the time that Jesus not only authenticates his Messianic claims but also presents the Messianic kingdom to Israel.

5.1.3 Details of the parable that are explained

The parable does not identify the sower, but what is sown is identified by Matthew as “the word of the kingdom” (ὁ λόγος τῆς βασιλείας, 13:19), “the word” (ὁ λόγος) in Mark 4:14 and “the word of God” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ) in Luke 8:11. Carson (1995:312) states the following: “On the change from ‘word’ to ‘word of the kingdom’, compare Matthew’s ‘gospel of the kingdom’ (4:23; 9:35; 24:14).” Nolland (2005:539) makes the same link: “Matthew adds ‘of the kingdom’ to Mark’s ‘the word’ in order to establish a link with his language of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom in 4:23; 9:35; 24:14.” Many commentators³ hold that the phrase “word of the kingdom” is closely connected to the gospel of the kingdom.

The “soil” where the word of the kingdom is first sown, namely by the wayside, does not understand the word of the kingdom and loses what is sown in the heart to the evil one — symbolised by the birds (13:19). According to Hagner (2000:379), there is no inadequacy in the communication of the message itself but rather the problem of failing to understand results from the hardheartedness and unreceptive attitude of these hearers. Patte (1987:189) rightly points out that, while “that person is deprived of the word by ‘the evil one’ who comes and snatches it away, the receiver of the word remains responsible.” Carson (1995:313) states: “Some people hear the message of the kingdom; but like hardened paths, they do not let the truth penetrate, and before they really understand it the devil has snatched it away.”

³ Hunter (1960:101) states that, since the parable is addressed “to the multitudes, it was originally a challenging word on the responsibility of hearing the Gospel of the Kingdom”. Davies and Allison (1991:399-400; cf. Wenham 1989:47) explain that the “expression ‘word of the kingdom’ is unattested in ancient Jewish literature. It seems to mean ‘the preaching of the kingdom’.” Hagner (2000:379) holds that the phrase “word of the kingdom” is equivalent to the gospel of the kingdom. France (2007:519-520) identifies the “word of the kingdom” as the message which Jesus has been proclaiming since 4:17.

Sown on stony places is the person who hears and receives the word of the kingdom and does so with joy. France (2007:520) connects these hearers' enthusiasm to the crowds who have been following Jesus so eagerly since 4:24-25, but, although they hear and receive the word, do not understand it: "[T]heir enthusiasm is based on external stimuli, not on inner conviction, and so it will not last when the external is no longer there." The problem is that the plants are "without real root, there is no fruit; and external pressures, trouble, and persecution (24:9,21,29), like the sun beating on a rootless plant, soon reveal the shallowness of this soil" (Carson 1995:314). The result is that, when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word of the kingdom, this person falls away (13:21b).

The third scene pictures a sowing received but choked by thorns. Matthew (13:22) identifies the thorns as "cares of this world" and "deceitfulness of riches". The thorns choke the word of the kingdom, resulting in the hearers being unfruitful. For Carson (1995:314), this person "simply never permits the message about the kingdom to control him; life has too many other commitments that slowly choke the struggling plant, which never matures and bears fruit."

Contrary to the lack of understanding in the preceding verses (13:19-22) or the lack of hearing and seeing earlier (13:13-14), those who receive what is sown on good ground hear the word and understand it (13:23a). France (2007:521) states that this is a direct antithesis to 13:19: the "understanding" which was explicitly absent there is now at last achieved. Understanding, furthermore, must result in the response of proper conduct: those who receive the sowing of the word are the good soil who nurture it in discipleship and which bears fruit (Hagner 2000:380). As Patte (1987:189) rightly points out, understanding (13:23) is juxtaposed with not understanding (13:19-22); fruitlessness (13:22) with fruitfulness (13:23). According to France (2007:521), "this 'understanding' is not to be interpreted as a purely intellectual grasp of truth; it is rather the lifestyle commitment which the 'message of the kingdom of heaven' demands and which has been thwarted by adverse circumstances and divided loyalties in the previous two scenes." For Toussaint (1980:178-179), the fruit of 13:23 refers to more "revelation and understanding concerning the kingdom. ... The principle taught by the parable is this: reception of the word of the kingdom in one's heart produces more understanding and revelation of the kingdom. In this way the parable acts as an introduction to the remainder of the parables."

5.1.4 Discussion of the parable, including possible specific, prophetic referents

In keeping with the research focus of this thesis, can specific, prophetic referents for this parable be identified?

The title of the parable emphasises the sower (13:18).⁴ Bailey (1998b:180) argues that, although this parable illustrates various responses to the word of the kingdom, it nonetheless focuses on Jesus Christ and his kingdom. John the Baptist preaches the gospel of the kingdom (3:2), but his ministry is to prepare the way of the Lord (3:3; 11:10), to point to the Coming One (3:11; 11:2). The apostles (10:2-4) are commanded to preach the gospel of the kingdom (10:7), but theirs is a delegated authority (10:1,40-42), they are *given* understanding of these mysteries (13:11; cf. 11:25) by the Son (11:27) who reveals what OT prophets could only desire to see and hear (13:17). Many commentators,⁵ therefore, rightly identify Jesus as the sower: “The broader Matthean context, however, as well as 13.37 (‘he who sows ... is the Son of man’), encourages one to think of Jesus” (Davies and Allison 1991:399). Without a doubt, Jesus is *significant* in God’s purpose to achieve his kingdom and redemption programmes on earth, and this qualifies as a specific referent. Does the sowing of the word of the kingdom, however, refer to past events or to future events?

Bailey and Constable (1999:23) state that the time period covered by *all* the parables of Matthew 13 extends from the point of rejection in the earthly ministry of Christ to the time when He will return to earth, thereby implying that the time period covered by the sowing of the word of the kingdom in this parable starts only *after* the events of Matthew 11-12. However, if the time period starts with Israel’s rejection described in Matthew 11-12, then there will have been little time for the disciples to respond to the word of the kingdom (13:19), little basis for giving them these mysteries and not to others (13:11) and no reason for Jesus to expect them to understand the parable of the sower (13:8,16,23; cf. Mk 4:13). As a-millennialist France (2007:518) rightly points out, the sowing in *this Matthean parable* covers a narrower period, namely Matthew’s presentation from 4:17-13:53. Scofield (cited in Couch 2000:196) also states:

[T]wo preachings of this Gospel [of the kingdom] are mentioned, one past, beginning with the ministry of John the Baptist, continued by our Lord and His disciples, and ending with the Jewish rejection of our King. The other is yet future (Matt. 24:14), during the great tribulation, and immediately preceding the coming of the King in glory.⁶

⁴ According to Blomberg (1990:226; cf. Strauss 1980:42-43), the imagery of God as sower and the people as various kinds of soil was standard in Jewish circles.

⁵ Hunter (1960:101), Strauss (1980:43), Pentecost (1982:46), Thomas (1985:188), Wenham (1989:47), Wilson (1994:73), Hagner (2000:379) and Ellisen (2001:87) identify Jesus as the sower. For France (2007:519), the sower is “probably in the first instance Jesus himself”.

⁶ In between the aforementioned two preachings, that is, during the Church age, the content of the gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (12:39-40; 16:21). What Jesus alludes to in 9:15 and later announces as the sign of Jonah (12:39-40) is more explicitly stated in 16:21, 17:22-23 and 20:17-20, namely that the *content* of the gospel will change subsequent to the cross (Showers 1990:3). Couch (2000:196) states: “... [A]lthough salvation has always been and always will be by faith, the amount of knowledge one had of the

In Matthew, the gospel of the kingdom is indeed not again preached until just before the return of Christ (24:14). Bailey (1998b:176) explains:

Twice the ministry of Jesus had been couched in terms of the Old Testament expectation (4:23; 9:35). But after chapter 13 such vocabulary was no longer associated with Him until it was used again with reference to the Second Coming (Matt. 24-25; 26:29). The same could be said of the “nearness” language of the kingdom. After chapter 13 the verb “preach” (κηρύσσω) was also no longer used by Matthew to describe Jesus’ ministry.

Even though the kingdom of heaven is not said to be “near” or “at hand” in Matthew after this generation in Israel committed the unpardonable sin, Matthew 11-12 depicts the *unofficial* rejection of Christ, to become *official* on the day of the so-called triumphal entry or during the next few days leading up to the crucifixion, when Christ’s public ministry ended (Pentecost 1982:208). Consequently, when Jesus presents this parable of the sower, various responses to the word of the kingdom have already been demonstrated in the lives of many of “*this people*” (13:15). Because this parable finds historical precedents during Christ’s first advent, its content is not considered prophetic, but the responses in general are typical.

In Matthew, the *content* of the gospel is “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!” (3:2; 4:17), and this gospel of the kingdom is preached *only* to the lost sheep of the house of Israel to whom the unconditional covenants belong. It seems reasonable, therefore, that the Matthean version of the parable of the sower, with its emphasis on the word of the kingdom, covers the first preaching of the gospel of the kingdom (13:19), *only* to Israel (15:24; cf. 10:5-7; 13:15), during Christ’s first advent.

Matthew presents examples of the different kinds of “soil” responses to Jesus’ sowing of the word of the kingdom to this people in Israel (13:15). Peter and Andrew (4:18-20), John and James (4:21-22), and Matthew (9:9) exemplify the increasing personification of what it means for “good soil” to hear and understand the word of the kingdom and to produce fruit. By way of contrast, the first soil includes those who hear the word but do not understand it. “The scribes and Pharisees, who had just demeaned Jesus’ work as satanic, admirably fit this description [of hardened and calloused hearts]” (Ellisen 2001:88). Some of this type of hearers are even called “offspring of vipers” (12:34) and seem to be people used by Satan to hinder the gospel of the kingdom (11:12). Examples of sowing in stony places or among thorns are also provided by

future death of Christ was limited, and thus the content of faith was different at different stages of God’s progressive revelation.”

Matthew, firstly in 8:19-20 where the potential disciple is reacting too quickly without counting the cost and, secondly, in Matthew 8:21-22, where a prospective disciple is reacting too slowly, allowing the cares of this world and the seduction of wealth to choke the bearing of fruit.

In this parable, Jesus as sower is viewed as a *specific* referent. In Matthew's presentation, this sowing of the word (or gospel) of the kingdom occurs from 4:17 until Matthew 13:53. Thereafter, in Matthew's presentation, the kingdom of heaven is not said to be at hand anymore.

5.1.5 Central truths of the parable of the sower

According to Hagner (2000:381), the “key issue is responsiveness or non-responsiveness to the message of the kingdom. It is in this sense that one either understands (v 23) or does not understand (v 19).” Moreover, what you do with the word of the kingdom should result in fruit (Patte 1987:192). If the scene concerns Israel during Christ's first advent, as has been suggested, a correspondence between the *Shema`* of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and this parable — as identified by Gerhardsson (1968:175-179) — is probable.⁷

It is proposed that the central truth of this parable concerns the various responses to the Messiahship of Jesus and his offer of the Messianic kingdom (through the gospel of the kingdom) during his first advent. Ellisen (2001:88) argues convincingly that, viewed negatively, Jesus' central point concerns the “barren soil of Israel”: “Having failed to prepare itself for the Messiah's coming (as exhorted by John), the nation had preconditioned itself for failure. Jesus pictured it as hardened in superficial ritual, shallow in spiritual life, entangled with the thorny growths of political and personal ambitions.” However, viewed positively, some Jews responded in faith to Christ, and to them understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is given (13:11). And, depending on obedience to truth already received, more will be given (13:12).

5.1.6 New and old things in the parable of the sower

According to Bailey (1998b:179):

Throughout the Old Testament, sowing and harvest were recognised metaphors for the eschatological expectation of the kingdom (Jer. 31:27; Ezek. 36:9; Hos. 2:23; cf. Matt. 9:35-38). ... The proclamations by John the Baptist and Jesus fit this same expectation of the coming of the Messiah to establish His kingdom and fulfill God's covenant promises.

⁷ The Lord God should be loved with all one's heart (13:19), all one's soul (one's life may be required during tribulation and persecution, as referred to in 13:20-21) and all one's might (13:22; being willing to give one's possessions).

However, John was rejected; they did not know him and did to him just as they wished. Likewise, the Son of Man suffered (17:12). Prior to the second coming of the Son of Man and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth, the OT prophecy that Elijah will come to restore all things will be fulfilled (17:11; Mt 4:5-6; Toussaint 1980:211; Barbieri 1983:44).⁸ From Matthew 13:11 onwards, however, as Patte (1987:184-187; cf. Beacham 1996:232) rightly points out, understanding of the mysteries and a surplus of knowledge about the kingdom of heaven are *also* given to the disciples of Jesus (the “you” of 13:18). More kingdom insight is something the prophets and righteous men could only desire and long for, but they did not live at a time when the Sower was there.

5.1.7 Application of the parable of the sower

Ellisen (2011:90-91) emphasises not only the work of planting the gospel widely and with careless abandon, but also that the soil must be prepared to receive the gospel.⁹ Preachers of the gospel in the present time can expect a similar variety of responses (regarding understanding) and fruitfulness. According to Thomas (1985:191; cf. Wilson 1994:74), Satan, the flesh and the world negatively affect the response of hearers; viewed positively, in good ground there is a “willingness to receive Jesus Christ as Life-Giver and Conqueror over all these forces”, and this leads to varying levels of fruitfulness. Preachers need to be aware of what causes the rejection of their message so as to be able to design a mission that will appropriately confront the situation (Patte 1987:191). Hagner (2000:381) argues that the absolute claim of discipleship should result in “unqualified, constant, and abundantly fruitful discipleship.”

5.1.8 Conclusion

The parable of the sower explains both the rejection and acceptance of the word of the kingdom in Israel when Jesus, acting as sower, authenticates his Messianic claims and presents the Messianic kingdom to Israel. Matthew thus provides various historical “soil-responses” in Israel at that time. Although the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth has been postponed, disciples of Jesus at that time, and also thereafter, are given understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11) by One greater than Solomon (12:42). And to those who have, more will be given.

⁸ Inter-testamental literature in this regard is set out in 4.1.4.1.

⁹ Stern (2006:33-34) holds that Jesus is the sower and then adds that each follower who spreads the message, like Jesus’ disciples, also becomes a sower. One should, however, guard against calling sowers during the Church age “sowers of the gospel of the kingdom”, because, as has been argued, the content of the gospel is different.

5.2 The parable of the tares of the field

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43 (NJKV)

²⁴ Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like¹⁰ a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵"but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. ²⁶"But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. ²⁷"So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' ²⁸"He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather¹¹ them up?' ²⁹"But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰"Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn".

³⁶ Then Jesus sent the multitude away and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." ³⁷ He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸"The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked [one]. ³⁹"The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰"Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. ⁴¹"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, ⁴²"and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³"Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

The parable of the tares of the field (13:24-30,36-43) is unique to Matthew. Together with the parables of the sower (13:18) and the fig tree (24:32), the parable of the tares of the field (13:36) is one of only three parables in Matthew to receive a title in the text. Jesus speaks this parable to the multitudes as he sits in a boat (13:1-2), but, when they ask him afterwards (13:36), Jesus explains it privately to his disciples in a house. Although following immediately after the explanation of the parable of the sower, the parable of the tares of the field is part of a triad together with the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. Together with the parables of the sower (13:19-23) and the dragnet (13:49-50), this unique parable is one of only three parables in Matthew 13 that are explained by Jesus (13:36-43).

¹⁰ The kingdom "has become like" ... see the discussion in 5.2.4.

¹¹ Snodgrass (2008:197) points out that "gather" (συλλέγω) appears in vv. 28, 29, 30, 40 and 41.

5.2.1 Literary structure, details and words

If the outline of this parable is based on formal and stylistic considerations, the first half is a narrative (13:24-26) and the second largely dialogue (13:27-30), but if the outline is based on the inner logic of the story, Kingsbury (1977:66; cf. Luz 2001:252) presents it as follows: the situation (13:24-28a), the reaction of the slaves (13:28b-c) and the directive of the master of the house (13:29-30).¹² Blomberg (1990:198) suggests an outline based on periods of time and says that each of the main characters of the story holds the upper hand as the parable unfolds: “At the beginning, the enemy and the weeds which he sowed seem to have triumphed (vv. 24-28a). In the middle, the wheat has survived, growing despite the presence of weeds (vv. 28b-30a). In the end, the farmer still harvests his crop, destroying the weeds and salvaging the wheat (v. 30b).”

The story has four characters: the man (13:24), an enemy (13:25), servants (13:27) and reapers (13:30). After the man — Blomberg (1990:197) calls him the “central authority figure” — sows good seed, and good seed only, in his field (13:24), an enemy sows tares (ζιζάνια 13:25) in it. Nearly all commentators propose that ζιζάνια should be identified as *lolium temulentum* (Snodgrass 2008:198). Botanically, this weed is closely related to bearded wheat (σῖτος), and in the early stages of growth it is hard to distinguish between it and the wheat (Jeremias 1972:224). And so, after the grain has sprouted and produced a crop, and the tares appear, the dialogue begins (13:26). The servants are surprised to find tares in the field. The story identifies the man as the master of the house (οἰκοδεσπότης 13:27; cf. 10:25) who is in dialogue with his servants (13:27-30). The first part of the dialogue (13:27-28a) repeats what happened in 13:24-26; Luz (2001:252) bemoans the fact that “half of this narrative consists of a discussion in which nothing happens!” In response to their second question, namely whether the weeds should be pulled up (13:28; cf. 15:13), the master provides his directive in 13:29-30. The story reaches its climax (Kingsbury 1977:74) when the master declares: “Let both grow together until the harvest” (13:30a). In summary, the scene is the field, the act is sowing, the agent is the owner, the co-agents are the servants and reapers, the counter-agent is the enemy, the agencies are the good seed and the tares, and the purpose is to obtain a yield at harvest time (Kim 1996:191-192).

5.2.2 The occasion or problem that prompts this parable

A compendium of reasons can be presented to explain why Jesus tells this parable. Dodd (1953:183) states that the parable is about good and bad members of the Church, but Blomberg

¹² See Hagner (2000:382-383) for a more detailed outline.

(1990:200) disputes this view.¹³ Pentecost (1982:50) emphasises Satan's activity during the course of this age. For Davies and Allison (1991:431), the text suggests that human failure is part of a larger, cosmic struggle between God and Satan, and the parable also addresses the problem of theodicy by putting it in eschatological perspective. The co-existence of good and evil for a while longer is the view of Wenham (1989:58); for Stein (1981:142,144), Jesus' followers must remain patient until judgment. Snodgrass (2008:206; cf. Carson 1995:317) states that the question in this parable is: "How can this be the kingdom if evil is still present?" Hagner (2000:382) stresses the delay of judgment.

The question of the servants (13:27) implies that they expected the field to contain no tares and only good seed. If, from the days of John the Baptist and the time Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom (4:17), there had been unbelievers in the world, what set of circumstances prevails to allow the implicit expectation of these servants? It appears as if the occasion or problem addressed by the parable of the tares of the field may be stated in the following questions: *If the Coming One (11:3; cf. 3:11) baptises with the Holy Spirit (3:11) and gathers wheat into his barn (13:30; cf. 3:12), how then does the field still have tares? Why is the chaff not also burned up with unquenchable fire (3:11-12)?*

5.2.3 Details of the parable that are explained

The interpretation that Matthew provides (13:36-43) can be divided into two parts. In the first part, seven symbols are identified in 13:37-39. The man who sowed good seed in his field (13:24) is identified as the Son of Man (13:37); the field (13:24) in which the wheat and tares appear is the world (13:38); the good seed (13:24) are sons of the kingdom (13:38); the tares sowed by the enemy (13:25) are sons of the wicked one (13:38); the enemy (13:25) is the devil (13:39); the harvest (13:30) is the end of the age (13:39); and the reapers (13:30) are angels (13:39). Unexplained details include the men who slept (13:25), the servants or slaves (13:27) and, in 13:30, the barn (France 2007:531). Kistemaker (1980:46) adds that no referent is provided for the wheat growing and maturing, and nothing is said of the bundling of the weeds. That the man who sows can be identified as the master of the house (13:24,27; Kingsbury 1977:68; Hagner 2000:383) is inferred from the parable story itself.

¹³ "To conclude that a 'mixed church' was inevitable, however, and to use this parable as a justification for doing nothing to attempt to purify the church (as with St. Augustine) goes well beyond anything demanded by the imagery of the narrative" (Blomberg 1990:200).

The second part of the interpretation (13:40-43) is introduced by a thesis statement in 13:40 followed by a replacement narrative in 13:41-43 (Nolland 2005:559).¹⁴ The beginning of the parable (13:24-26) is, to a limited extent, clarified by the catalogue of equivalences. But the intermediate period (13:26-29) receives little, if any, attention in the interpretation provided (Nolland 2005:560). Unexpectedly, the climax of the parable story (13:30a) is omitted from the interpretation (Snodgrass 2008:210). Rather, the interpretation focuses on the harvest. According to Snodgrass (2008:196), on “any estimation the interpretation goes beyond the parable and shifts the focus by emphasizing the ‘consummation (*synteleia*) of the age’” (13:39,40).¹⁵ In summary, the scene is the world where sowing, harvest and judgment take place; the act is separating the agencies which are the sons of the kingdom and the sons of the evil one; the agent is the Son of Man, the co-agents are the angels, the counter-agent is the evil one, and the purpose is to separate all human beings by judgment at the close of the age (Kim 1996:194).

5.2.4 Discussion of the parable, including possible specific, prophetic referents

Although its second part (13:40-43) focuses on the end of this age, the parable provides information from which more can be inferred about the beginning of the period it covers. Instead of describing the interpretation as “overly detailed” (Boucher 1981:85), it is suggested that the glossary is given to enable responsible inferences.¹⁶ In line with the research focus of this thesis, possible specific, prophetic referents for this parable will be considered.

The parable begins in an unusual way (13:24). According to Carson (1995:317; cf. 1985:277-282), the normal way for

synoptic parables of the sort “the kingdom is like” to express “is like” consists of ὁμοία ἐστίν (*homoia estin*, “is like”) plus dative. In Matthew, however, this pattern sometimes changes to aorist passive ὁμοιώθη (*homoiōthē* “has become like”, here and in 18:23; 22:2) or to future passive ὁμοιωθήσεται (*homoiōthēsetai*, “will become like,” 7:24,26; 25:1).

For Nolland (2005:544), the significance is that “passive uses of ὁμοιοῦν in the NT mean not ‘be compared with/likened to’, as might be expected from the normal active meaning, but ‘be or become like’. Here the choice of the aorist suggests that the reference is to a situation that has developed or something that has happened.” It is therefore likely that the parable begins specifically with a prophetic starting point in mind, a marked historical development. The

¹⁴ Davies and Allison (1991:429) state the seven explained references are used to construct a “second narrative”.

¹⁵ The interpretation about judgement is similar to the briefer interpretation of the parable of the dragnet in 13:49-50 (France 2007:531).

¹⁶ For France (2007:532), the glossary is “not ‘allegorical’ in the sense of making a surprising or arbitrary leap to a different area of discourse”.

kingdom of heaven *has become* like the situation of a man who, etc. (Carson 1995:316; Snodgrass 2008:212-213). As Bailey (1998c:267) puts it, this “parable describes a stage in God’s kingdom program that has already begun.”

Where did the Son of Man sow the good seed? As Matthew shows, the *gospel of the kingdom* was preached to the people of Israel only (10:5-7; 13:15; 15:24). But in this parable of the tares of the field, the Son of Man sows good seed into the field, identified as the world (13:38), indicating a universal mission (Luz 2001:268). According to Toussaint (1980:181), that “this is completely new is verified by the most casual comparison with Matthew 10:5-6 and 15:22-28.” Contrary to Kingsbury (1977:71; cf. Pentecost 1982:50), the field is not only Israel, and Carson (1995:316) warns that a view that the field is the Church is a “major error in category”. The text clearly states it is the world into which the good seed was sown (13:38), not only Israel or the Church. Commenting on “the field is the world”, Carson (1995:325) says this brief statement “presupposes a mission beyond Israel (cf. 10:16-18; 28:18-20) and confirms that the narrower command of 10:5-6 is related exclusively to the Twelve during the period of Jesus’ earthly ministry”. Turner (2008:352) also acknowledges that the “field is the world” implies the eventual global mission of the Church. Hagner’s (2000:393) comment is considered *important* for the argument of this thesis: “The field, explicitly identified as ὁ κόσμος cannot have been understood as the Church by the evangelist or his readers. This identification of the field as the world does, however, point in itself to the worldwide mission of the Church in the spread of the gospel...” The fact that the disciples did not know of the great commission on the day the parable was uttered, or perhaps even until the day of Christ’s ascension, does not render the interpretation anachronistic. In accordance with “Scenario B” as discussed in 2.2.9, this recognises that Jesus presented to them a mystery of the kingdom of heaven, a prophecy given in the form of a parable.

Furthermore, Carson (1995:316) rightly points out that the good seed sown by Son of Man “cannot be the ‘word’ or ‘message’ of vv. 19-23 but [are] people.” In the parable of the sower, the various types of soil (neither “field” nor “seeds”) refer to various Jewish hearts (Wiersbe 1980:109) into which the word of the kingdom is sown in Israel (13:15,19). But here, in the parable of the tares of the field, *people* are sown, the sons of the kingdom. They witness about Jesus; the content of the gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (12:39-40; 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-20).

When did the Son of Man commence this sowing of the good seed? It is proposed that this universal mission (the field is *the world*) envisages the great commission announced shortly

before Christ's ascension to heaven (28:18b-20). Previously, Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom only to Israel (15:24; cf. 10:6-7) and not to Samaria or to the Gentiles (10:5). But the scope of the great commission is clearly universal (28:18b-20).

Can the sons of the kingdom that the Son of Man *first* sowed into the world be identified? Matthew shows that Jesus commands the *eleven* disciples that meet Him at the mountain in Galilee with all authority (28:16-18a). Furthermore, among these disciples, it is to Simon Bar-Jonah that Jesus gives the keys of the kingdom of heaven (16:17-19). Therefore, one could reason that the first sons of the kingdom that the Son of Man sowed are Peter and the other ten disciples (28:16-18a; cf. 10:2-6) to whom the commission is delegated at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. Subsequently, sons and daughters of the kingdom of heaven continue the work of the great commission and make disciples as they obey Christ's command (28:18b-20).

The sowing of these first sons of the kingdom into the world by the Son of Man in terms of the great commission meets the criteria of specific, prophetic referents. It is prophetic because when Jesus utters the parable, its content (the great commission) refers to the future. The great commission is without doubt significant in God's purpose in history to achieve his kingdom and redemption programmes on earth. According to the interpretation presented, when Matthew wrote the Gospel, the first part of the parable had already become history, but the "replacement" (Nolland 2005:559) or "second" (Davies and Allison 1991:429) narrative of 13:40-43 is still awaiting its prophetic fulfilment in the future. Now that *possible* specific, prophetic referents have been identified to which the parable of the tares of the field *prophetically* pointed on the day Jesus uttered it, the problem that prompts this parable, why it was told, can now be discussed.

According to this parable, the Son of Man will gather the wheat into his barn (13:30) but also bind the tares together and burn it at the end of this age (13:40). However, John the Baptist prophesied that the Coming One "will baptize you with the Holy Spirit *and* fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand and He will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor, and gather his wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (3:11-12 NKJV). Moreover, various OT prophecies (Is 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Ezk 39:25-29; Jl 2:28-3:1; Zch 12:8-13:1) connect an *outpouring* of the Holy Spirit with the national salvation (Jr 31:33-34) and restoration of Israel immediately prior to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth (Penney 1996:215-216; Ger 2004:24). The question thus arises, *when* does Jesus commence baptising with the Holy Spirit, and will the Son of Man then simultaneously baptise with fire? Or, in the words of the

servants of the master of the house (13:27): “Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?”

Combining the question in the parable (13:27) and the judgment scene (13:40-43), if a new development has started — the kingdom of heaven *has become* like (13:24) — what occasion prompts this parable? The apostles and their fellow disciples had to learn that the baptism of the Holy Spirit of members of the Church is not the same as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all Israel immediately before the Messianic kingdom is established on earth (Jr 31:34; cf. 23:39). In terms of the New covenant, the Coming One (11:3) can baptise with the Holy Spirit without the Messianic kingdom being established on earth yet in terms of the Davidic covenant, since the prophesied judgment immediately preceding the establishment of the kingdom on earth has been *delayed* (13:40-42; cf. 3:7-12; 13:49-50). It is delayed during a time period that includes the Church age; judgment will commence during the Tribulation period (22:44).

During the time that judgment is delayed, Satan has commenced a counterfeit sowing (13:25,38b). Matthew warns of false apostles (10:4) and false prophets (7:15; cf. 24:24) and later warns of false christs (24:5,23), false evangelists (23:15; 24:23) and false teachers (23:16). As Wiersbe (1980:109) points out, “Satan cannot uproot the plants (true Christians), so he plants counterfeit Christians in their midst”. Stated positively, however, Jesus can be said to affirm: “Every plant which My heavenly Father has planted will not be uprooted” (15:13; cf. 13:29). At the end of this age (13:40), the Son of Man will send his angels to gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness (13:41). Bailey (1998c:273) also points out: “The kingdom is called ‘his kingdom’, since He is planting the seed of the kingdom, and since the harvest will be accomplished under his direction.”

5.2.5 Central truths in the parable of the tares of the field

Neither the story of the parable of the tares of the field (13:24-30) nor its interpretation (13:37-43) focuses on the intermediate period of time covered by the parable.¹⁷ At the beginning, the dialogue between the servants and the householder (13:27) emphasises what, for the servants, is a surprising appearance of tares in the field of the housemaster (“his field”). It also emphasises the directive of the master to uproot the tares only at the time of the harvest (13:30). Consequently, the continued existence of evil throughout the present evil age (Pentecost 1982:51) and the

¹⁷ Taking a collective approach, perhaps some of the remaining parables in this series may provide more details about this intermediate period of time.

continued counterfeit kingdom of the devil (Ellisen 2001:93-94) are aspects covered by the parable. Until the judgment, believers need to exercise patience (Stein 1981:144), knowing that “in the conflict between God and Satan, Satan loses out” (Kistemaker 1980:48; cf. Davies and Allison 1991:431). Judgment is the prerogative of the Son of Man (Bailey 1998c:276), and good and evil are allowed to co-exist in the world and grow together until the harvest (13:30); believers are not responsible for separating the righteous from the wicked before that event at the end of the age. Hagner (2000:392) rightly points out that the parable is not only about judgment, but also about the *delay* of judgment. In terms of the New covenant, the Church has been established, but the bride of Christ is not the Messianic kingdom. By the end of the Tribulation period which precedes the establishment of the Messianic kingdom (13:40-43; 24:29-30), the Son of Man will have thoroughly cleaned out his threshing floor (3:12), uprooted the tares (13:29-30) and will have gathered his wheat into the barn (13:30; cf. 3:12).

It is suggested that the parable teaches that the Son of Man sows good seed (13:24), that is, the eleven disciples (28:16-18a), into the world (13:38) in accordance with the great commission (28:18b-20). The *central truth* of this parable addresses the *delay of judgment* during the Church age even as the unique baptising ministry of the Holy Spirit has already commenced.

5.2.6 New and old things in the parable of the tares of the field

The Jews believed that, when the Messianic kingdom was established on earth, the Coming One would *pour* the Holy Spirit over all of Israel.¹⁸ The OT prophecies that speak of this will still be fulfilled at the end of the Tribulation to the generation of Jews then living (23:39).¹⁹ Another OT prophecy, confirmed by John the Baptist (3:12), is that the establishment of the Messianic kingdom will be preceded by judgment. Because no kingdom divided against itself will stand (12:25), at the *establishment* (or ultimate consummation) of a *divine* kingdom, no rebellion of the unsaved can be part of it. As the parable confirms, this judgment will occur at the end of the present age (13:40). Other OT prophecies, still unfulfilled, are also in view. That the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (13:43) alludes not only to Daniel 12:3 and Malachi 4:2, but also to the language “used in describing the transfiguration of Jesus in 17:2 and suggests the experiencing of the glory of God” (Hagner 2000:394). The title Jesus uses of himself, the Son of Man, is also found in Daniel 7:13 (cf. 26:64).

¹⁸ Is 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Jr 31:33-34; Ezk 39:25-29; Jl 2:28-3:1 and Zch 12:8-13:1 connect an *outpouring* of the Holy Spirit with the national salvation of Israel before the kingdom is established on earth.

¹⁹ See also the discussion in 4.1.3.

Scribes and Pharisees who travelled land and sea to make proselytes are not “new” (23:15). As for the sowing of the sons of the kingdom “into the world (13:38; 28:19-20)”, this is considered to be a new thing (Toussaint 1980:181). Moreover, on the day Jesus utters this parable, the totally new and unique work of the Holy Spirit to be commenced on Pentecost (Lightner 1996:172) was still prophetic. But since then this mystery (something “new”) has been fulfilled: the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit has commenced in terms of the New covenant in *this age* (13:40), even though the Messianic kingdom of the *age to come* (12:32) has not yet been established on earth in terms of the Davidic covenant. The judgment will still come, but it has been *delayed*; in the meantime, believers in Christ are baptised by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ during the Church age, after which judgment will commence during the Tribulation period.

5.2.7 Application of the parable of the tares of the field

During the Church age, disciples should obey the great commission by making disciples of Jesus. Since a counterfeit sowing is also commenced by Satan, Jesus’ disciples can expect persecution and tribulation. But at the end of this age (13:40-42), the judgment of the tares will find its prophetic (and even eschatological) fulfilment.

5.2.8 Conclusion

According to the interpretation presented, this parable has already found some specific, prophetic referents. Not only has the establishment of the Messianic kingdom been postponed, but so too has the judgment immediately prior to its establishment on earth in terms of the Davidic covenant been deferred. In terms of the New covenant, the Holy Spirit has commenced baptising believers into the body of Christ, and the “sons of the kingdom” that the Son of Man first sent into the world in terms of the great commission (28:16-20) are the eleven disciples. As these events transpired and the apostles and other believers in Christ were given to understand more of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11-12), they must have recalled this unique parable — prophetic at the time it was given — and considered afresh the words one greater than Solomon who utters things kept secret from the foundation of the world (13:35).

5.3 The parable of the mustard seed

Matthew 13:31-32 (NJKV)

³¹ Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, ³²"which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches".

Each Synoptic Gospel contains the parable of the mustard seed (13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19).²⁰ In Matthew 13, it is the third parable in the series, and catchwords such as "sow" and "his field" provide continuity with, and connects it to, the previous two parables (Hagner 2000:385). The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven are sometimes viewed as a pair (Jeremias 1972:146; Stein 1981:94-95). In Matthew 13, it is the first parable not explained by Jesus. It is the only parable expressly called a "parable of the kingdom" in all the Synoptic Gospels (Bailey 1998d:449).

5.3.1 Literary structure, details and words

After the introductory formula, the statement of analogy follows (13:31): It is the case with the kingdom of heaven as with a mustard seed (Jeremias 1972:101). The grammatical structure supports a twofold analysis: the seed in its small beginnings and the plant in its final growth (Bailey 1998d:452).

A man took a mustard seed and sowed it in his field (13:31). In Matthew, the verb "sow" is cast in the aorist indicative (ἔσπειρεν) to refer to a past event, but the rest of the action in the parable is described in the present tense (Kingsbury 1977:79).²¹ The mustard seed most likely refers to "black mustard", an annual herb with large leaves clustered mainly at the base of the plant and which produces yellow flowers and small, many-seeded fruits, and is also the source of oil and medicament (Wenham 1989:53). At that time, the mustard seed was proverbial for its smallness (Blomberg 1990:285), and small it certainly is: according to Hunzinger (cited in Bailey 1998d:452), it takes 750 mustard seeds to weigh one gram. Sproule (1980:39-41) emphasises that

²⁰ The parable of the mustard seed appears as part of a collection of parables in Mark 4; in Luke 13 it is combined with the parable of the leaven. Both Mark (4:30) and Luke (13:18) start this parable by asking two questions: To what shall we liken the kingdom and with what parable shall we picture it?

²¹ Mark uses the present tense (but includes the aorist subjunctive twice to refer to the seed's being sown), and Luke uses the aorist tense (Snodgrass 2008:216).

the reference is to *garden-variety* seeds, and *Sinapis nigra* is the smallest of *such* seeds. After noting that in Jesus' day most Jews had their own garden plot, Kistemaker (1980:52) states that in "every garden, the mustard plant had a place. The plant may most often have been grown in a field bordering a garden plot because of its demand for space." In Matthew, the man sowed the seed in "his field", in Mark in the ground, and in Luke in a garden. In agreement with Bailey (1998d:454), that "a single seed of mustard was sown in the field rather than the garden may highlight the hostile environment in which no one would expect growth."

In Matthew (13:32) and Mark (4:31), but not in Luke, the mustard seed is described as the *smallest* (or the least) of all the seeds but when it is *grown* (13:32), it is *greater* than the herbs and becomes a *tree* (13:32). "The words translated 'smallest' (*mikroteron*) and 'largest' (*meizon*) in Matthew and Mark actually are both comparative forms, but the comparative is often used for the superlative in NT Greek. Since the comparison is with 'all the seeds', a superlative meaning seems required" (Snodgrass 2008:220; cf. Sproule 1980:39). Although Pentecost (1982:53) holds the view that a mustard seed can grow in one year into a tree thirty-two feet in height, many commentators (Long 1997:44; Wilson 1994:75; Strauss 1980:65) agree with Blomberg (1990:286) that mustard "trees do not usually grow large enough to entice many birds to nest in them." This hyperbole emphasises the remarkable growth of this mustard seed, not only becoming greater than all the herbs, but also growing into a tree. In summary, the scene is the field, the agent is the man who acts to plant a single mustard seed, the agency is the mustard seed that becomes a tree, and the purpose is to produce a tree in which birds of the air come and nest in its branches (Kim 1996:197).

5.3.2 Literature review

A brief literature review about the parable of the mustard seed will be undertaken from 5.3.2.1 to 5.3.2.3.

5.3.2.1 The occasion or problem that prompts this parable

Commentators present different reasons for why this parable is told. Whereas Wenham (1989:54) focuses on the smallness of the mustard seed and claims that the parable addresses the *doubts* of those who had difficulty in recognising the kingdom in Jesus' ministry, Ellisen (2001:97) points to *encouragement*: the problem Jesus addressed was whether the new kingdom programme He was instituting would really survive. The view of Blomberg (1990:284) is somewhat similar: the "kingdom will eventually attain to significant proportions despite its entirely inauspicious outset." Kingsbury (1977:77) argues that both growth *and* contrast are portrayed, but Stein (1981:94)

proposes that this parable contrasts the beginning and the end rather than portraying progress. Carson (1995:318) notes that the Jews would have expected the kingdom to be great anyway, and it is therefore doubtful that the point should be the supernatural growth of the kingdom — it is rather about the “organic unity of small beginning and mature end”. For Bailey (1998d:456-459), the reference to the birds in the branches seems to argue for more than just the contrast between small beginnings and disproportionate growth; the focus seems to be on the extensive growth of the kingdom which will include the reaching of Jews as well as Gentiles in keeping with the promise of the future (8:11).

5.3.2.2 Aspects of this parable considered

Commentators disagree whether the details in 13:31 should be given reference:

- According to Nolland (2005:552; cf. Luz 2001:262; Kingsbury 1977:80; Thomas 1985:198), Jesus himself must be the sower, as in the earlier sowing parables. Blomberg (1990:284), on the other hand, says that the man and the woman (in the next parable of the leaven) have no significant role to play in these two short parables.
- Luz (2001:262) understands the person who sows as the Son of Man and the “field” as the world. For Nolland (2005:550), however, “Matthew (only) has the seed sown ‘in his field’ for the sake of continuity with the previous parable.”
- Some commentators (Kistemaker 1980:52; Luz 2001:261) emphasise that the man sowed a *single* mustard seed in his field. However, Snodgrass (2008:221) doubts that a specific instance can be assumed; Nolland (2005:550) holds a view contrary to Snodgrass.
- For Luz (2001:261), what is important is the characteristic of “the” mustard seed. Snodgrass (2008:220) holds that any characteristics of the mustard seed are irrelevant to the meaning of the parable, except that it grows so high from such a small seed.

Concerning 13:32, Blomberg (1990:285) claims that the parable ends with an allusion to Ezekiel 17:23 and related OT passages (Ps 104:12; Ezk 31:6; Dn 4:12), and in “that context the birds stand for all the peoples of the earth, that is, predominantly the Gentiles.” However, he (1990:285) immediately adds that it is hard to know if such a meaning is intended in Jesus’ parable as well.

Some dispensationalists hold that a mustard seed does not grow into a tree and that the growth depicted in the parable should, therefore, be viewed as unnatural, unhealthy (Strauss 1980:65) or malignant (Wilson 1994:76), resulting in a monstrosity (Long 1997:44). According to this view, if the “birds” in the parable of the sower (13:4) refer to the evil one (13:19), and if the image is

used consistently, the reference to “birds of the air” in the parable of the mustard seed (13:32) should also be taken negatively. It is submitted that the referent of “the birds” (τὰ πετεινά, 13:4) is not precisely the same as “the birds *of the air*” (τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 13:32). Therefore, it does not seem inconsistent to understand “the birds” of the parable of the sower differently from the “birds of the air” in the parable of the mustard seed. Toussaint (1980:181-182; cf. Ellisen 2001:97) points out that the birds of the air are not necessarily a reference to evil characters, but rather describes the prosperous growth in number of the heirs of the kingdom.

5.3.2.3 Central truths of the parable of the mustard seed

“Unimaginable endings from unremarkable beginnings” is the point of this parable, according to Hunter (1971:45). Hagner (2000:387; cf. Ellisen 2001:97) likewise notes that it is impossible to rule out an allusion to *growth* and says that, although the kingdom has humble beginnings, it is like a mustard seed, small and unimpressive, but destined to become an impressive entity in radical contrast to its beginnings. And Nolland (2005:552) states that one can be confident that the smallness of what has been sown leads inexorably to the unstinting fullness of an oversized mature plant. Davies and Allison (1991:416; cf. Carson 1995:318) propose that, notwithstanding the *contrast*, the “point is this: despite all appearances, between the minute beginning and the grand culmination there is an organic unity ... Indeed, the one (the tree/the eschatological climax) is an effect of the other (the seed/God’s activity in Jesus and his disciples). The end is in the beginning.” Bailey (1998d:458) states that, while “there is both contrast and continuity between the kingdom’s small beginning and its mature consummation, the focus of the parable seems to be on the extensive growth ... in which people of all races from all over the world will experience the blessings of the kingdom of heaven.”

5.3.3 Discussion of the parable, including possible specific, prophetic referents

The Synoptic Gospels contain no explanation of the parable of the mustard seed. Regarding referents, two extreme positions can be identified: attaching no referents to any of the details in the parable, or attaching referents to all of them. As Blomberg (1990:17) puts it: “In each of these interpretations [of the parables of the sower and the tares of the field], almost all the major details of the parables are explained by means of a series of one-to-one correspondences. ... Yet this is precisely the allegorical approach of the pre-modern era which has so roundly been rejected!” At the other extreme, possibly for fear of being hit with Jülicher’s allegorical stick, not one detail is given a referent. As with most unexplained parables, it is debatable whether the man, the mustard seed, his field, the smallness of the seed, herbs, the large tree or the birds of the air “stand for”

something else. In considering the details of a parable, knowing which elements within a parable represent something in reality (Snodgrass 2008:6) requires “a grace that is beyond the reach of rules” (Sider 1995:238). To attach no significance to any of its details, however, seems to be in contrast to Jesus’ examples. It may also make it difficult to tie all the elements of a parable to one another within the parable’s framework (Weder cited in Carson 1995:302), because there are no elements to be tied together. Whether details referenced or interpreted by Jesus in Matthew 13 may be used consistently in other parables in this chapter are considered in this thesis. Moreover, if a focus on specific, prophetic referents has merit, this may suggest that many (rather than only a few) of these parables’ details should be connected to referents in line with Jesus’ examples, as mentioned in 2.2.6. What follows is presented as a *possible* way of reading these parables in line with the research questions.

5.3.3.1 Aspects of the parable considered

As the third parable in Matthew 13, its context may be briefly reviewed. In the parable of the sower it was argued (in 5.1.4) that the word of the kingdom is preached only to Israel (15:24; cf. 10:5-7), but in the parable of the tares of the field (5.2.4 above), the sons of the kingdom are sowed into the world, indicating that the great commission has commenced (28:18b-20). Because the eleven disciples who met Jesus at the mountain in Galilee are given the commission (28:16-18a), they must be the sons of the kingdom that the Son of Man (13:37) sowed *first* into the world.

In the parable of the tares of the field, the field is identified as the world (13:24,38), the man that sowed is identified as the Son of Man (13:24,37), and it is “his field” (13:24). Seven verses later, in the parable of the mustard seed, the field is again described as “his field” (13:31), belonging to the man that sowed a mustard seed. He therefore has authority over the field; it is “his field”. It seems likely, or at least possible, that the same man and the same field are in view in the parable of the mustard seed. It is proposed that “the man that sowed good seed in his field” (13:24) and the “man that sowed a mustard seed in his field” (13:31) may be identified as the Son of Man (as is also held by Kingsbury 1977:80; Thomas 1985:198; Nolland 2005:552) and that the field may be identified as the world (Thomas 1985:198). Luz (2001:262) argues *contextually* that readers of Matthew have “just come from the parable of the weeds. Since Jesus will not explain our parable, they will understand it in light of Jesus’ explanation of the parable of the darnel. Therefore, they probably understand the ‘person’ who sows as the Son of Man and the ‘field’ as the world.”

If the Son of Man sowed a single mustard seed into his field which is the world, and since Jesus sent no one outside of Israel prior to the cross (10:5-7; 15:24), it would seem that this particular sowing also took place as part of the great commission, but after it had already started. Moreover, in the parable of the sower, what was sown was a message, a word of the kingdom (13:19). In the parable of the tares of the field, *people* are sent into the world, sons of the kingdom (Carson 1995:316). Although Jesus' other reference in Matthew to a mustard seed is about faith ("if *you* have faith as a grain of mustard seed" — 17:20), it is still people that exercise faith. Therefore, it seems likely that the mustard seed that the Son of Man sowed is a person, a son of the kingdom, just as the good seed are sons of the kingdom (13:37-38).

As highlighted in 5.3.2.2, few commentators²² reviewed attach a referent to the single mustard seed, although some (Kistemaker 1980:52; Luz 2001:261) do mention that the man sowed *a single* mustard seed or notice a specific instance of sowing (Nolland 2005:550-551). However, in general — and in line with the criteria of proportion and indispensability emphasised by Snodgrass (2008:28) and Sider (1995:237-241) (see 2.2.4) — the more prominent or central a feature is, the more likely it is to be symbolic. If an element is required to make the story work, that is, if it is central to the main point of the parable, it may quite possibly have symbolic significance. Blomberg (1990:139) also argues that "it is better to see the unusual features of Jesus' parables as more straightforward pointers to their allegorical nature." If 750 mustard seeds weigh one gram, and this man sowed a single seed, Nolland (2005:550-551) probably makes a valid point when he claims that, since "one would not normally consider sowing a single mustard seed, the singleness of the sowing is already an allegorical feature of the account ... a specific occasion of sowing is in view, a better possibility is that the smallness relates specifically to a particularly chosen seed, not to mustard seeds in general." There seems to be little doubt that this mustard seed meets the criteria of proportion and indispensability.

In keeping with the research focus of this thesis and the guideline identified in 2.2.6, specific, prophetic referents²³ are considered. What follows is not contemplated by any of the commentators that have been consulted, nor can it be proved conclusively. However, it is presented as a *possible* way of reading the parable.

²² For Kistemaker (1980:53), the mustard seed may refer to the "message of salvation". Alternatively, the mustard seed may be analogous to "Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom" (Snodgrass 2008:223).

²³ As noted in 2.2.6, to qualify as a specific, prophetic referent, the person, process or event must be *significant* in God's purpose in history to achieve his kingdom *and* redemption programmes on earth.

If the Son of Man (“the man”) sowed a single person into the world (“his field”) after the great commission had already commenced, who could this be and how can it be motivated exegetically from Matthew? It is suggested that the single mustard seed *may* likely find specific, prophetic reference in the apostle Peter, or much less likely, the apostle Paul.²⁴

Matthew presents Peter as the first of the disciples called (4:18), Jesus heals Peter’s mother in law (8:14-15) and Simon Peter is the first apostle among equals (10:2). After the parabolic discourse in Matthew, Peter rises further in prominence, for he walks (and sinks) on water (14:28-31), acts as spokesman for the disciples (15:15; 18:21; 19:27), witnesses the transfiguration together with James and John (17:1-9), in 17:24-27 Peter is marked by outsiders as possessing knowledge about Jesus (Davies and Allison 1991:649) and Peter is with Jesus in Gethsemane (26:36-46). But of paramount importance is that God the Father reveals to Simon Peter the identity of the Christ (16:13-17; cf. 11:25-27). Although other disciples are also blessed with divine revelation (13:11,16-17), Jesus pronounces a specific blessing on Simon Bar-Jonah (16:17-19).

- Matthew translates the Aramaic *בַּר יוֹנָה* (*bar Yônâ*) as *Βαριωνᾶ* (*Bariōnā*, “son of Jonah”). According to France (2007:620; cf. Powell 2007:158), there is “no obvious reason why Matthew should have changed the name in order to associate Peter or his father with the biblical Jonah; it is Jesus, not Peter, who is ‘greater than Jonah’ (12:40-41), and the ‘sign of Jonah’ (12:39; 16:4) does not relate to Peter”. But perhaps there is a reason. This name may suggest that Jonah’s mission to non-Jews would be repeated later by Peter (Wall 1987:79). A greater than Jonah (12:41), can certainly send a son of Jonah to proclaim justice to the Gentiles, a ministry to continue until He sends forth justice to victory (12:18b,20b).
- Matthew 16:18 has generated controversy and contentious polemic. The rock on which Jesus will build his Church is viewed variously as Peter (Carson 1995:368; Hagner 1995:471; France 2007:621; Turner 2008:404), Jesus (Walvoord 1974:123; Barbieri 1983:57; Thomas 1985:248) or the truth of Peter’s statement (Toussaint 1980:202). Commenting on 16:18, France (2007:622-623) rightly points out that, in the early chapters of Acts, it is Peter who leads the group of disciples in Jerusalem, and he takes the initiative in the key developments which will constitute the Church; “note especially

²⁴ Although an argument can be made that the mustard seed refers to the apostle Paul, it seems impossible to substantiate it from the Gospel of Matthew. It is not Paul that received the keys of the kingdom, but Peter (16:19). Nevertheless, an argument could proceed as follows: After Peter opens the door of the kingdom of heaven to the Gentiles, this specifically chosen vessel of the Lord (Ac 9:15), “the very least of all saints” (Eph 3:8a) and “the least of the apostles” (Ac 26:9-11; 1 Cor 15:8-9), whose name (*Paul*) means “little” in Latin and who is of the smallest tribe of Israel (Rm 10:1), is given a ministry by the Lord that has grown beyond all expectations.

his role in the bringing in of Samaritans (Acts 8:14-25) and Gentiles (Acts 10:1-11:18; 15:7-11).” Regardless of this controversy, Peter’s apostolic role and his first confession that Jesus is the Christ, cannot be denied.

- The authority to bind and loose is given not only to Peter (16:19) but to all the apostles (18:18). It is submitted, however, that Jesus gives the keys of the kingdom of heaven only to Peter (16:19). These keys indicate that Jesus gives Peter the authority to open the door of the kingdom to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles (28:18b-20; cf. 10:5-7; Toussaint 1980:205; Wiersbe 1980:145; Barbieri 1983:58).²⁵
- Even if one views the reference to Simon as the son *of Jonah* and a future role of prophet to the Gentiles with scepticism, even if one should argue that Peter is not the rock on which Jesus will build His Church, and even if one disagrees with the interpretation of the meaning of the keys of the kingdom, it would be difficult to deny the above-mentioned points *jointly* and remain in doubt that, in this unique Matthean passage (16:17-19), God the Father and Jesus Christ intend for Peter to have a unique, special and privileged role.

It is submitted as a distinct possibility that the mustard seed may specifically and prophetically refer to the apostle Peter, particularly in his role as bearer of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to open the door not only to Jews and Samaritans, but specifically also to the Gentiles. As hard as it may have been for Peter and the other apostles initially to understand the parable about what defiles and what not (15:1-20), they were eventually sent to all nations (28:18b-20).

The parable alludes to “the birds of the air”. Except for a few minor differences (for example word order), the final clause of this parable, τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ... κατασκηνοῦν ἐν τοῖς κλάδοις αὐτοῦ (13:32b), agrees with Daniel 4:21 Theodotion (Hagner 2000:386). In Daniel 4:12 and 4:21, the first Gentile power during the Times of the Gentiles, the Babylonian kingdom, provided shelter, or security, for many “birds of the air”, or nations (France 2007:527). Jeremias (1972:147) sees the tree in 13:32 as “an eschatological technical term for the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God.” A ministry to the Gentiles (12:15-21) is mentioned in Matthew immediately after the Pharisees’ plot to destroy Jesus (12:14) and Jesus refers to himself as a greater than Jonah (12:41).

The tree in the parable of the mustard seed seems not to refer to a Gentile *kingdom* or *power* but perhaps to a universal *ministry* (not with political or military power) which includes Gentiles. The

²⁵ See Fruchtenbaum (1996:230) for a detailed discussion of the meaning of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

allusion to the birds of the heavens seems to have Gentiles in view as *part of* the great commission. Hunter (1971:45; cf. Boucher 1981:74) states that the rabbis referred to the Gentiles as “the birds of the air”, and Manson (cited in Bailey 1998d:454-455) points out that “birds of heaven” are a stock symbol for the Gentile nations. This does not mean, however, that a possible allusion to Gentiles in any way reduces or downplays the ministry to the Jews and the Samaritans. It is submitted that, in the parable of the mustard seed, the tree may refer to the great commission to all nations which include Gentiles and Peter’s use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. What the Son of Man sowed has grown into a very large tree.

The above must not be construed as agreement with the traditional Roman Catholic view, namely that Peter was the first in a line of popes existing to the present day. Once Peter exercised the authority to open the door of the kingdom of heaven, his role in this regard ceased. Peter does not provide salvation to anyone. Salvation is only by grace through faith in Christ. Once Peter was forgiven the words that he spoke against the Son of Man (cf. 12:32), he was restored in his worship of the Lord (cf. 28:16-17). The growth from a mustard seed to a tree (13:32) is due to another mighty work of Christ continuing to the present day and perhaps further explained in the parable of the leaven, which is closely paired with the parable of the mustard seed.

5.3.3.2 The occasion or problem that prompts this parable, and its central truth

The following question is proposed as an answer to the problem that prompts this parable (see also Bailey 1998d:458; Toussaint 1980:181): *If many are to come from the east and the west to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (8:11), how will this be achieved?* It is suggested that the central truth of this parable concerns the great commission commanded by the Son of Man and spearheaded by the apostle Peter as he uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven. What the Lord sowed as a single mustard seed has grown into a large tree, an international ministry of the kingdom of heaven which includes even Gentiles.

5.3.4 New and old things in the parable of the mustard seed

According to Bailey (1998b:455), “Ezekiel 17:22-23 is the closest parallel to Jesus’ parable, since the tree there represents the people of God rather than a Gentile power. ... Like the tender cedar twig the restored kingdom will reach international proportions.” This is an OT prophecy about the Messiah and his kingdom, whereby God will take a tender one (twig), plant it on a high and prominent mountain and this tender one will become a majestic cedar, and “under it *will dwell birds of every sort; in the shadow of its branches they will dwell*” (Ezk 17:22b-23 NKJV; cf. Ezk 31:5-6; Dn 4:12,21). Feinberg (2003:98) notes that, in “the mountain of Israel, God will

establish His chosen One (Ps. 2:6); He shall prosper and all nations under His worldwide rule will be blessed". This and other similar "old" OT prophecies (Is 2:2-4; Zch 14:16-17) will be fulfilled when the Messianic kingdom is established on earth.

What is the mystery (something "new") revealed in the parable of the mustard seed? Bailey (1998d:459) relates the mystery to humble beginnings which will have a glorious manifestation in the future, embracing both Jews and Gentiles alike. The mystery is not Gentile salvation *per se* for the centurion (8:10), men of Nineveh (12:41), queen of the South (12:42) and numerous other examples attest to the *fact* of Gentile salvation. The mystery may refer to the fact that in terms of the New covenant, *many* are now saved and will participate when the kingdom of heaven is established (8:11; Toussaint 1980:181-182). This parable *may* find specific, prophetic referents in the Christ, the Son of Man, who sowed a single person, the apostle Peter, to spearhead the great commission as he uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven. This ministry of one greater than Jonah has grown into a tree where believers of *all* nations, like birds of the air, come and nest.

5.3.5 Application and conclusion to the parable of the mustard seed

Believers today, Jewish, Samaritan and Gentile alike, must continue to make disciples (28:18b-20). Jesus' disciples can rest assured and be encouraged that they will inherit not only the full benefits of a salvation effected by God's grace, but also participate in the kingdom of heaven when it is established on earth in terms of the Davidic covenant. In the meantime, God is adding, in terms of the New covenant, to the number of those who will inherit that kingdom. As for the single mustard seed, when the events of Peter's threefold denial of his Lord had sunk in, would he, blessed by receiving the keys of the kingdom, still go even to the birds of the air so that they too should nest where the Son of Man has laid his head (cf. 8:20)?

5.4 The parable of the leaven

Matthew 13:33 (NJKV)

³³Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened".

Other than a question added in Luke 13:20-21 ("To what shall I liken the kingdom of *God*?") and the reference to the kingdom of "*heaven*" in Matthew 13:33, the parable of the leaven is identical in these two Synoptic accounts. Both Synoptic writers place this parable immediately after the parable of the mustard seed. For Matthew, this is the fourth parable in this series and the last one

of a triad presented publically to the crowd at the sea (13:24-13:33). Although this parable is told in only nineteen words by Matthew in the Greek text (Toussaint 1980:182), it is a hotly debated verse of Scripture.

5.4.1 Literary structure, details and words

In Matthew 13:33, the verse starts in familiar fashion (“another parable He spoke to them”), followed by the statement of analogy: It is the case with the kingdom of heaven as with leaven which a woman took (Jeremias 1972:147). What follows is the parable narrated in the aorist tense and it reaches its climax in the characterisation of the large quantity of leavened bread (Kingsbury 1977:86). The scene is a home, the agent is a woman who acts by placing leaven into three measures of flour, and her purpose is to make dough (Kim 1996:199).

The woman took leaven and hid it. The verb “hide” (ἐγκρύπτω) means to “put something into something” (Carson 1995:319). Ellisen (2001:103) rightly points out that it does not mean something evil: “What woman surreptitiously sneaks the yeast into the dough? She ‘hides’ or encloses it within the dough to enable its penetration and permeation.” The picture is simply of a woman baking bread, a picture well known at that time and place, where bread was the staple food. Although Wenham (1989:55) states that bread was leavened, “not with fresh yeast, but by keeping a piece of fermented dough from the previous baking and mixing it with the new batch”, perhaps more relevant to this parable is that the “fermentation process could be begun from scratch in various ways, e.g. by letting barley and water ferment or by mixing bran and wine.”

Wheat is ground into flour, and the leaven is placed into it to permeate and expand it and then the work of kneading the dough and forcing the leaven into all parts starts (Ellisen 2001:99-100) — in the case of the parable, into three measures of meal until all of it is leavened. This is doubtless a large amount of flour. Bailey (1999a:65), however, mentions that three measures of flour was not unique, since this amount was used by Sarah (Gn 18:6), Gideon (Jdg 6:19) and Hannah (1 Sm 1:24). It is thus enough to feed a crowd, but it is not an unrealistic exaggeration, as is sometimes proposed. Nevertheless, this is the work of no “ordinary housewife” (Hunter 1971:44), since the dough is too much for the daily use of a small family. Jeremias (1972:147; cf. Wenham 1989:56) explains that this woman is preparing a meal for about a 100 people; Luz (2001:262) estimates that more can eat of this bread: “Especially unusual is the equivalent of almost 40 litres, enough for a meal for more than 150 persons or for about 110 pounds of bread”. Snodgrass (2008:226) convincingly argues that an interval is implied for the transition from the beginning to the result, for what else would the words “until” (ἕως οὗ) mean?

5.4.2 Literature review

A brief literature review about the parable of the leaven will be undertaken from 5.4.2.1 to 5.4.2.3.

5.4.2.1 The occasion or problem that prompts this parable

Regarding the need that prompts the parable of the leaven, three main views can be identified:

- Kistemaker (1980:55) views the point of this parable *optimistically*, since “the yeast, once added to the flour, permeates the entire batch of dough until every particle is affected. ... That is how the kingdom of God demonstrates its power and presence in today’s world. ... Jesus focuses attention on the internal power of the kingdom that leaves nothing unaffected.” Luz (2001:263), who equates the leaven with “hidden truth”, is also optimistic, arguing that “the church has the task of uncovering the hidden truth by word and deed ... [and] in so doing it leavens the world”;
- Many dispensationalists say the parable of the leaven presents a *pessimistic* scenario: Thomas (1985:201; cf. Wilson 1994:77; Long 1997:45-52) argues that this parable warns about a degenerating mixture of good and evil;
- Ellisen (2001:100) links the problem addressed in this parable to the lesson just taught in the mustard seed: “If this new kingdom was to attain such immense proportions against gigantic odds, how will this growth take place?” Nolland (2005:554; cf. Kingsbury 1977:86) says that the “quantity of the woman’s flour corresponds to the size of the ‘tree’ that grew from the mustard seed”. After noting that leaven is found in all three sections of the narrative, the beginning, the permeation stage and the completed whole, Bailey (1999a:62) identifies this question as being answered by the parable: “What is the nature of the power that will expand the kingdom of heaven in the present age?”

5.4.2.2 Aspects of this parable considered

When considering the details of this parable, the following views are encountered:

- In line with a pessimistic view of this leaven, some commentators view the leaven negatively (Walvoord 1974:102-104; Toussaint 1980:182). Others, however, argue that, although leaven is normally associated with evil, this is *not always* so (Carson 1995:319);
- Identifying the woman is usually not attempted. Davies and Allison (1991:423) hold that the woman in the parable is “no more symbolic than ‘the man’ of v. 31”, and Carson (1995:319; cf. Blomberg 1990:284) posits that there “seems little merit in trying to identify the woman, any more than the man in v. 31.” Some commentators, however, do

attempt to identify the woman: Fruchtenbaum (2004:667; cf. Strauss 1980:88) states that, when used symbolically, a woman often symbolises a spiritual or religious entity and, since he views leaven in this parable negatively, suggests that the woman refers to a false religious system. By contrast, Ellisen (2001:102; cf. Bailey 1999a:70) makes a positive connection: the leavening process stresses the “inner source of power and growth ... as energized by the Holy Spirit”;

- Referents for the three measures of flour are usually not considered (Kistemaker 1980:55).

5.4.2.3 Central truths of the parable of the leaven

Kistemaker (1980:51; cf. Carson 1995:319) argues that the “parable of the mustard seed portrays the extensive growth of the kingdom, and that of the yeast describes the intensive growth of the kingdom.” Hagner (2000:389-390) views the main point of the parable similarly: “The kingdom of God is like leaven in this way. Although at the beginning it looks unimpressive, it will have an effect that is out of all proportion with that beginning.” For Pentecost (1982:55), Christ teaches that when the new form of the theocracy begins, it will work pervasively, persistently, and irreversibly. For dispensationalists such as Walvoord (1974:102-104; cf. Thomas 1985:201), the leaven is interpreted negatively, and the parable is a warning about a professing church permeated with evil doctrine, externalism, unbelief, and worldliness.

5.4.3 Discussion of the parable, including possible specific, prophetic referents

The discussion and interpretation which follow below are in line with the research questions and present a possible way of reading this parable.

5.4.3.1 Aspects of this parable considered

Although it is usually not given a referent, the interpretation of this parable depends on how the leaven is viewed. Scripture clearly uses leaven to depict forms of sin. In Matthew, leaven refers to the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:6-12), often levelled against the Person and work of Jesus (9:34; 10:25; 12:24). In the OT, leaven was forbidden in food eaten on certain feasts (Ex 23:18; 34:25) and in certain offerings (Lv 2:11) but it was, however, allowed in some sacrifices (Lv 7:11-15) and prescribed for the baking of two loaves (Lv 23:15-22). Leaven is, therefore, often connected with sin or evil, but *not always* so (Carson 1995:319). Bailey and Constable (1999:27-28) rightly note that the “leavening process speaks of permeation, which may be bad or good” and convincingly argue that, if leaven is understood negatively in this parable, and if the kingdom will continue “till it was all leavened”, then the kingdom would be completely

corrupted by evil.²⁶ Since no *divine* kingdom can be completely corrupted by evil, Pentecost (1982:55) seems justified in stating that the focus here is not on the nature of leaven that could represent evil, but rather on the way that leaven works once it is introduced into the mixture.

5.4.3.2 Specific, prophetic referents considered

If the leaven is used here of good permeation, does it refer to a specific, prophetic referent? A prescribed use of leaven in Scripture *may* be in view.²⁷ In the Feast of the Harvest (Lv 23:15-22; Nm 28:26-31; Dt 16:9-12),²⁸ a new meal (or grain) offering of two loaves of fine flour are baked together with leaven (Lv 23:17). The question thus arises if Matthew presupposes a link between the leavening of flour and a harvest. The concept of a harvest is not foreign to Matthew or to the context of its parabolic third discourse. The nearest antecedent of “harvest” is in the parable of the tares of the field (13:30,39) and, before that, in the introduction to the mission discourse (9:37-38). A harvest presupposes sowing. In Matthew’s presentation of the parable of the sower (see 5.1), the word of the kingdom was sown by Jesus, only in Israel during his first advent (10:5-7; 13:15; 15:24). In the parables of the tares of the field and the mustard seed (see 5.2 and 5.3), it was proposed that the Son of Man sowed seed in terms of the great commission to all nations (28:16-20). Despite the previously mentioned references to a harvest and sowing in chapter 13, although Matthew does not explicitly link the parable of the leaven to any religious feast, an implied link could exist as the amount of flour used could presuppose a communal meal rather than a private one.

For Davies and Allison (1991:423; cf. Jeremias 1972:147), the woman is not symbolic, as Jesus could have “broken the bounds of actuality in order to make a point about God’s supernatural kingdom”. Moreover, as Nolland (2005:554) rightly points out, “the woman’s action with the leaven must correspond to what is happening in Jesus’ ministry.” It is possible that the criterion of indispensability (Snodgrass 2008:28; Sider 1995:237-241) is met. In the context of a harvest where wheat is taken into a barn (3:12; 13:30), John the Baptist prophesies that the Coming One (3:11; 11:3) will baptise his followers with the Holy Spirit. In this regard Ellisen (2001:102) states the leavening process stresses the “inner source of power and growth ... as energized by

²⁶ If parables are characterised by analogies, and if these analogies must at least be intrinsic, if not also proportional, then an interpretation of a parable that requires the use of extrinsic analogy may be doubted, if not rejected.

²⁷ If the peace offering of Leviticus 7:11-13 is not compulsory, then the only *prescribed* use of leaven in all of Scripture is found in the Feast of the Harvest (Lv 23:15-22).

²⁸ The harvest related to the Feast of the Harvest (or Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost) is referred to as the *Summer Harvest*, distinguishing it from the *Barley Harvest*, related to the Feast of First Fruits before it, and the *Late Harvest*, depicted in the Fall feasts after it.

the Holy Spirit” while Bailey (1999a:70; cf. Pentecost 1995:223) argues that the focus of “the parable seems to be on how the leaven works inside the dough, picturing the Holy Spirit’s work in the present age.. If Jesus is the householder (13:27; cf. 13:24,37), and this woman is busy in the house, the woman in the parable of the leaven may depict the Holy Spirit.

What is the woman doing when she puts leaven into three measures of meal until it is all leavened? In Matthew, the Holy Spirit is involved in Jesus’ conception (1:18,20), anointing as the Christ (3:16; cf. 12:18), leading (4:1) and empowerment for service (12:24,28; cf. 12:31-32). The Holy Spirit assists evangelists in their testimony (10:20) and He inspired Scripture (22:43-44). If the woman’s action with the leaven “must correspond” to what is happening in Jesus’ ministry as stated by Nolland (2005:554), another ministry specifically mentioned in Matthew may be in view. Connected to the harvest and the barn (3:12; cf. 13:30), this ministry was future when John prophesied it and still future when the Gospel ends with Jesus’ command to make disciples of *all nations* (28:18b-20). Since this is a universal mission, the earlier restriction of the scope only to Israel is dropped (10:5-6; 15:24). The prophecy that Christ will baptise his followers with the Holy Spirit (3:11) finds prophetic fulfilment during the time of the great commission when Jewish, Samaritan and Gentile believers are baptised by Christ through the Holy Spirit until the Summer Harvest ends.

5.4.3.3 The occasion or problem that prompts the parable of the leaven

The reason for the telling of this parable may be the one proposed by Bailey (1999a:62): “What is the nature of the power that will expand the kingdom of heaven in the present age?”

5.4.4 New and old things in the parable of the leaven

As already mentioned and discussed in the parable of the tares of the field (see 5.2), various OT prophecies (Is 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Ezk 39:25-29; Jl 2:28-3:1; Zch 12:8-13:1) connect an *outpouring* of the Holy Spirit with the national salvation (Jr 31:33-34) and restoration of Israel immediately prior to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth (Penney 1996:215-216; Ger 2004:24). These prophecies will be fulfilled when the kingdom of heaven is established on earth. During the present age, the mystery (something “new”) that the parable of the leaven reveals is related to the unique baptising work of the Holy Spirit during the Church age in terms of the New covenant.

5.4.5 Application of the parable of the leaven and conclusion

For Kingsbury (1977:86-87), the parable encourages because God is operative in a special way, working in power through the Church. The parable also encourages because not only Jewish and Samaritan but also Gentile believers are part of the body of Christ. Ellisen (2001:103) emphasises that the true dynamic of Jesus' new kingdom programme is by the Spirit, not by shrewd manipulations; believers should trust Christ that He is building his Church by the power of the Spirit. This mighty work of Christ is hidden and, when finished, the world will still remain ignorant of what happened.

5.5 The change of setting

Matthew writes "all these things" twice in this parabolic discourse (13:34,51), thereby connecting Jesus' four parables spoken in public (13:1-33) to his four parables spoken in private (13:36-53). Jesus does not speak parables to the multitudes except in parables, and He fulfils prophecy (13:34-35). He then sends the multitudes away and goes into the house (13:36a). Although the geographical setting changes, the remaining parables of Matthew 13 are given to the disciples in private (13:36) on the same day (13:1,36,53).

5.6 The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl

Matthew 13:44-46 (NJKV)

⁴⁴"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. ⁴⁵"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, ⁴⁶who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

These unique parables of the hidden treasure (13:44) and the pearl (13:45-46) are given only to the disciples. The four parables spoken to the multitudes contain a triad (13:24-33) — as do the next four parables to the disciples (13:44-50). Nolland (2005:563) sees a minor structural chiasmus in the sequencing of the respective sets of three parables:

[I]n the first set the closely paralleled pair (mustard seed, leaven) comes after the less closely linked parable (*zizania* in the field), which is the one provided with an interpretation; in the second set the closely paralleled pair (treasure, pearl) comes before the less closely linked parable (fishnet), which is the one provided with an explanation.

Concerning these pairs, Hagner (2000:396) states that the hidden treasure corresponds to the hidden leaven, and the smallness of the pearl with that of the mustard seed. It is widely agreed (Kingsbury 1977:111; Barbieri 1983:51) that the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl are somehow related to each other — and thus form a pair — and that the interpretation of one to some extent influences the other. For this reason, these two parables are considered together.

5.6.1 Literary structure, details and words

5.6.1.1 The parable of the hidden treasure

It is the case with the kingdom of heaven as with a *treasure hidden* in a field (Jeremias 1972:147). Bailey (1999b:176-180) highlights the subsequent actions of the man: the re-hiding of the treasure, the selling of everything he possesses and the acquisition. Unlike the parable of the pearl, the parable of the hidden treasure mentions the joy of the man acting. The end stress of this parable is on the man selling all and buying the field (Stein 1981:103). The parable twice mentions that the treasure is hidden as the man who buys the field restores the treasure to its original state (Nolland 2005:564). For Kim (1996:202), the scene is the field where the hidden treasure is found, the agent is the man who acts by finding the treasure and selling his possessions (these are also the agencies), and the purpose is to possess the treasure.

5.6.1.2 The parable of the pearl

And again it is the case with the kingdom of heaven as with a *merchant* seeking beautiful pearls. Stein (1981:101) notes that this merchant (ἔμπορος) is no shopkeeper but a wholesale trader — perhaps even a travelling wholesaler on a journey (Bailey 1999b:186). “We do not know how far he has travelled, but on a given day he finds one particular pearl of great value” (Kistemaker 1980:59). “Pearls were highly prized throughout the whole period of antiquity. They were fished for especially in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean, by divers, and used for adornment, especially as necklaces” (Jeremias 1972:199). A pearl is a unique, organically formed gem because of an irritation (or injury) in the tender side of an oyster (Walvoord 1974:105). It is the only precious gem that is a product of a living organism (Thomas 1985:204), grows gradually and remains hidden in the shell of the oyster under the water (Wiersbe 1980:113). When the merchant found one pearl of great price (πολύτιμος μαργαρίτης), he went and sold all he had and bought it (13:46). For Jeremias (1972:200), this is a “specially valuable pearl”. In summary, the scene is the marketplace for pearls, the agent is a wealthy, professional merchant who acted by selling all he possessed and purchasing the pearl (the agency), and the purpose is to possess the pearl (Kim 1996:204-205).

5.6.1.3 Comparing these two parables

When comparing these two parables, one finds that they are not the same, although similar. In addition to the exactly parallel words “the kingdom of heaven is like”, Hagner (2000:396) notes the same five elements in the same order: “(1) the reference to something very valuable (the treasure; the pearl); (2) finding it (εὐρών); (3) going; (4) selling everything the person has ... and (5) buying it...” But whereas the parable of the hidden treasure uses the historic-present tenses (ὕπάγει “goes”, πωλεῖ “buys” and ἀγοράζει “sells”), the parable of the pearl uses verbs in the past tense, such as “went” (ἀπελθὼν aorist), “sold” (πέπρακεν perfect) and “bought” (ἠγόρασεν aorist) (cf. Stein 1981:99). A further difference is that in the first parable the discovery seems accidental, while in the second the person was in the business of looking for beautiful pearls (Hagner 2000:396). Bailey (1999b:188) remarks that, “whereas the man with the treasure could sell part of it and still be wealthy, the man with the pearl must retain it; his delight was in possessing it, not in the profit he could make from it.” Gibbs (1987:20) shows how these parables are divergent:

Hidden treasure	Pearl of great price
Datival introduction with the object acted upon	Datival introduction with the actor in the parable
The themes of “hiddenness” and “joy”	No themes of “hiddenness” and “joy”
No emphasis on “seeking”	Strong emphasis on “seeking”
Use of the historical present	Use of the aorist throughout

5.6.2 Literature review

A brief literature review about the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl will be undertaken from 5.6.2.1 to 5.6.2.2.

5.6.2.1 The occasion or problem that prompt these two parables, and the central truths they contain

Various main points have been advanced for these parables and, consequently, various views about the occasions and problems which prompt them. Four groups of commentators are classified according to their views of these parables.

The first group, often quoting Irenaeus and Augustine for support, views the central truth of these parables to be the same. Hunter (1971:78) writes, “How precious is a place in God’s kingdom! Is not such blessedness worth any sacrifice?” After emphasising that Jesus demands the believer’s heart, Kistemaker (1980:60) admits that “salvation is full and free and cannot be purchased”; he identifies the treasure and the pearl with Christ and notes that the recent convert to Christianity often says, “I found Christ” and then, with joy, gives up a previous lifestyle and devotes him- or

herself completely to the Lord. This group identifies the need that prompts these parables as the importance and preciousness of salvation and a place in the kingdom. But this view has its detractors: “The facts are, of course, that a believer in Christ has nothing to offer and the treasure is not for sale. The believer does not buy a field ... in order to gain Christ. Further, upon discovery of the treasure, a believer shares it with others rather than hides it” (Walvoord 1974:104; cf. Snodgrass 2008:246).

A second group of commentators provide a sundry list of needs prompting these parables. Jeremias (1972:201) emphasises joy: “The effect of the joyful news is overpowering; it fills the heart with gladness; it makes life’s whole aim the consummation of the divine community and produces the most whole-hearted self-sacrifice.” For Luz (2001:279-280), the parable of the hidden treasure is a warning against riches. Stein (1981:102) summarises two more views: a focus on the hiddenness of the kingdom of God and the need to search for it. It is submitted that these views contain little new, little that could be called a mystery of the kingdom of heaven as Jesus openly commands all to seek first the kingdom (6:33), and the OT explicitly warns against riches. Salvation and its accompanying joys are also well known from the OT.

A third group focuses either on the value of the kingdom, the cost of discipleship, or both. Blomberg (1990:279) stresses the value of the kingdom: “The kingdom of God is so valuable that it is worth sacrificing anything to gain it.” For Davies and Allison (1991:435), these parables have to do with “finding the kingdom and giving all one has to obtain it.” Nolland (2005:565; cf. Stein 1981:103) stresses sacrifice, for “only those who take up their cross and follow Jesus are to be counted worthy ... the challenge in 19:21 is to ‘sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven’.” What is the need which prompts these parables? Ellisen (2001:111) identifies this question: “Is Jesus’ new kingdom program, so despised by the religious leaders, really worth pursuing, especially in light of its immense cost for both them and their families? Are its sacrifices really worth it?” Carson (1995:328) states it thus: “The kingdom of heaven is worth infinitely more than the cost of discipleship, and those who know where the treasure lies joyfully abandon everything else to secure it.”

A fourth group focuses on what benefit will accrue to God and what will be accomplished through the new form of the kingdom in this present age (Pentecost 1982:56). Long (1997:52,54) elaborates: the parable of the hidden treasure is not only about the Saviour’s joy in the work of redemption and his readiness to gain possession, but also about what Christ did for God.

According to the view of the fourth group, Jesus is both the man who purchases the field and the merchant who buys one pearl.

5.6.2.2 Aspects of these parables considered

Matthew refers to treasure in 6:19-21; 12:35; 13:44,52 and in 19:21. Outside of the parable of the pearl, Matthew refers to a pearl only once (7:6).

According to both the first and third groups, the man acting is either the sinner finding salvation (first group) or the committed disciple (third group). It appears that the view of the first group comes close to teaching salvation by works.²⁹ For Blomberg (1990:279), likely a representative of the third group, the “man who discovers the treasure, like the merchant who purchases the pearl, stands for anyone who becomes a ‘child of the kingdom’, that is, a disciple of Jesus.” This implies that the treasure and the pearl represent the kingdom (Snodgrass 2008:240; Blomberg 1990:279; Davies and Allison 1991:439).

Returning to the concept of a kingdom, how are the kingdom’s rulership (a right to rule and a rule), its realm (subjects and area), the actual exercise of authority or combinations thereof found, hidden and, after the field is purchased, kept hidden? Why, after its purchase, does the treasure remain hidden, and what is the field that is purchased? Blomberg (1990:279-280) admits that “we do not purchase the kingdom; quite the contrary, God rules entirely by grace”, and then reasons that “for many individuals financial sacrifice is required before other commitments can give way to the priorities of God ... and for some this may require selling all”. If the treasure refers to the “kingdom”, how can any disciple hide it and, even after the purchase, keep it hidden? Regarding the re-hiding of the treasure, Blomberg (1990:281) states that it “seems dubious to derive any allegorical meaning from it.” Bailey (1999b:179) interprets the re-hiding as a “part of the finder’s desperate effort to own the treasure. Thus the parable seems to state that individuals should let nothing stand in the way of possessing the kingdom as their highest priority.” If these two parables are given privately to those who are already disciples and who have already left all to follow Him (4:18-22; 9:9; cf. 19:27), why is Jesus teaching them a parable about things that they already know about? Absent from this discussion is the field, which is what the man actually purchases. Snodgrass (2008:244-245) holds that “the field in this parable has no specific

²⁹ Wiersbe (1980:112) says that Jesus is perhaps the best-known Person in history, and therefore is not a hidden treasure, and adds that the sinner cannot “find Christ”, for the sinner is blind and stubborn. It is Christ who finds the lost sinner (18:11). Pentecost (1982:56-57) points out that the view of the first group seems to indicate that people enter the kingdom through their own sacrifice and by their own efforts, instead of entering the kingdom by the new birth.

reference. ... Neither the man, the finding, nor the field requires or should receive specific identification.” He also (2008:245) claims that similitudes “do not focus on correspondences. The analogy is not about Jesus; it is about the value of the kingdom and the joy in finding the kingdom”. If correspondences are not the focus of similitudes, can the treasure or the pearl “correspond” to the “value of the kingdom”? Regardless of how we classify it, Scripture calls them “parables”. If the man and the field are identified in correspondence with earlier references in this parabolic discourse, does this amount to allegorising?

According to the fourth group, Jesus is both the man who purchases the field and the merchant who buys one pearl. Views about what the treasure and the pearl may refer to, however, differ. For example, Gibbs (1987:40) views the treasure *and* the pearl as Jesus’ disciples. For others such as Pentecost (1982:57) or Thomas (1985:202), the treasure refers to the remnant from among Israel, and the pearl refers to Gentiles who will have a part in this new form of the kingdom. But when, during the time period covered by these parables, is the remnant of Israel hidden again? And why should the pearl focus on Gentiles to the exclusion of Jews and Samaritans? Toussaint (1980:183-184) argues similarly that the treasure is an allusion to the kingdom viewed from the standpoint of Israel; that is, looking at Israel’s kingdom programme, the hidden state refers to the dark hours of Israel from Rehoboam to Christ, the uncovering of the treasure is the coming near of the kingdom in the person of the King, the re-hiding of the treasure refers to the removal of the kingdom from Israel, and the purchase of the field is the condescension and death of Jesus Christ. Arguing against Toussaint’s view, Bailey (1999b:181) emphasises that the period under consideration in Matthew 13 does not reach back from the days of Rehoboam. Still, the view proposed in this thesis is somewhat aligned with Toussaint’s interpretation. As argued in this thesis, the time period under consideration in Matthew 13 stretches from the days of John the Baptist until Jesus’ second coming at the end of this present age.

5.6.3 Discussion of these parables, including possible specific, prophetic referents

The discussion that follows presents and argues for a possible interpretation in line with the research questions.

5.6.3.1 Aspects of these parables considered

As discussed in 5.3.3.1, in the parable of the tares of the field, the field is identified as the world (13:24,38), the sower is identified as the Son of Man (13:24,37), and it is “his field” (τῷ ἄγρῳ

αὐτοῦ 13:24). Seven verses later, in the parable of the mustard seed, the field is again described as “his field” (ἐν τῷ ἀγρῷ αὐτοῦ 13:31), belonging to the man that sowed the mustard seed. Jesus has authority over the field; it is “his field”. It seems likely, then, that the same man (the Son of Man) and the same field (the world) are in view in the parable of the mustard seed. This view is contextually consistent (Luz 2001:262). In the parable of the hidden treasure, however, the field does not belong to the man, who must still go and purchase it. Nolland (2005:564-565) rightly points out that, contextually, the reference “‘in the field’ provides a link back to vv. 24 and 31. In both those cases the field already belonged to the key figure in the parable, but by the end of the brief narrative the same will be true in the present parable.” Even if this contextual link can be demonstrated, can it be argued that the man buying the field in the parable of the hidden treasure must be the Son of Man?

Matthew teaches that all things have been delivered (παρεδόθη) by the Lord of heaven and earth to God *the Son* in his divinity (11:25,27).³⁰ The ministry of Jesus *in his humanity* prior to the cross was, however, restricted to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (15:24). Satan offered the kingdoms of the world and their glory (4:8-9) — somehow part of his own kingdom (12:26) — to Jesus. Carson (1995:114) calls this offer “a shortcut to fullest messianic authority”. After the cross, however, the resurrected Lord received all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18).³¹ Since the way to providing redemption and receiving all authority in heaven and on earth was through the cross, at some stage the field had to have been purchased by Jesus in his humanity. And Jesus — *only* Jesus — could make that purchase.

It is proposed that the *man* who purchases the field and hides the treasure is Jesus Christ *in his humanity* (cf. 13:37), and the *field* is again the *world* (13:38) — views shared by Toussaint (1980:184) and others (Walvoord 1974:105; Strauss 1980:91; Wiersbe 1980:112; Pentecost 1982:57; Thomas 1985:202-203; Long 1997:53). Moreover, *Christ* is also viewed as the *merchant* who purchases the pearl which is viewed by some as the Church (Walvoord 1974:105-106; Toussaint 1980:184; Wiersbe 1980:112-113; Pentecost 1982:57).

³⁰ According to France (2007:445), “Jesus, the Son, is the one and only plenipotentiary of the one and true God, his Father.” Ladd (cited by Carson 1995:277) notes that “Sonship precedes messiahship and is in fact the ground for the messianic mission”.

³¹ Not that one can already see all things under the authority of Jesus in this age (13:40). In a passage speaking about the divine and human nature of the Son of David (22:41-46), the Spirit through David notes that God the Father tells the Lord to sit at his right hand until He (the Father) makes the enemies of the Lord his footstool (22:44). At the end of this age (13:40), all things that offend and all who practise lawlessness will be gathered out of the kingdom of the Son of Man (13:41).

5.6.3.2 The parable of the hidden treasure and possible specific, prophetic referents

God delegated the authority to rule over the Mediatorial Kingdom on earth to Adam. When Adam disobeyed God, in effect he worshipped Satan. In 12:26, Satan has his own kingdom and can offer the kingdoms of this world and their glory to Jesus (4:8-9; France 2007:135). What is at stake in this temptation, concerns both redemption and rulership. Unless atonement is made by the blood of a sinless kinsman-redeemer (1:21; 4:10; cf. Lv 17:11), even if the Messianic kingdom were established, Jesus' most faithful and loyal followers would still eventually die one by one as a result of their sinful nature. A redeemer like Boaz (1:5) is required: willing to redeem (18:11; 26:42,53-56; cf. Ruth 4:4,6), able to do so (20:28; cf. Lv 25:26) and a kinsman (1:1-17, 21) in terms of the Law of Moses (5:17; cf. Lv 25:25; Gl 4:4). To achieve this, God promised that the Christ, that is, the seed of the woman (1:23), would bruise Satan's head. Further, although Satan would bruise his heel at the cross (Gn 3:15), through his death Christ would vicariously atone for sin (1:21; 20:28). As Creator and Lord of heaven and earth (11:25), God the Father can sovereignly appoint other human representatives over the earth.

It is proposed that the treasure in the parable of the hidden treasure refers to the *authority and power granted to the Christ to rule the Mediatorial Kingdom of God in terms of the Davidic covenant*. From the days of John the Baptist, the gospel of the kingdom is preached *only* to Jews (15:24; cf. 10:7). At Jesus' baptism (3:16-17), God the Father publically and officially reveals, confers and confirms the *authority and power* He bestows on the Person of the *Messiah*, destined not only to rule as the Son of David in the Mediatorial Kingdom of God in terms of the Davidic covenant, but also as Son of Abraham to provide salvation for his kinsmen, the Jews (1:21), as well as for Gentiles (12:15-21,41; 28:18b-20) in terms of the New covenant. Immediately after Jesus' baptism, Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world and their glory. This offer is made to Jesus Christ in his humanity (4:8), but He worships the Father only (4:10).

Jesus then discloses the *treasure* by the Spirit of God by *authenticating* his Messianic claims to *Israel* through his words (5:1-7:29) and deeds (8:1-12:28) and presents the Messianic kingdom to Israel as being at hand. The authority of Jesus' teaching astonishes the people (7:28b-29a). When Jesus casts out demons, the multitudes not only marvel but also ask: "Could this be the Son of David?" (12:23). Although some Jews believed in Christ (12:46-50), his authoritative and mighty works are rejected by this generation in Israel (11:2-6,16-24; 12:24-32). As already anticipated in 11:25, the Lord of heaven and earth hid these things from the wise and prudent but reveals them

to children (11:25).³² From a dispensational perspective, when the unpardonable sin is committed (12:24,31-32), it is clear that *this generation* (12:39-45) in Israel will not accept Christ. In Matthew's presentation, Jesus does not authenticate his Messianic claims from this point forward (Fruchtenbaum 1989:625-626). Only one more sign will be given an evil and adulterous generation: the sign of Jonah (12:39-40). The Son of David (12:23) will yet rule over Israel and all the nations in the Mediatorial Kingdom of God in terms of the Davidic covenant. But until then, believers should continue to pray that God's kingdom may come and His will may be done on earth as it is in heaven (6:9-13). Meanwhile, the *treasure*, that is, the *authority and power granted to the Christ to establish and rule the Messianic kingdom on earth in terms of the Davidic covenant*, is hidden. Obviously still anointed with the Spirit (12:28), Jesus occasionally performs miracles to crowds such as the feeding of five thousand (14:15-21) or the four thousand (15:32-39), but the motivation is compassion (14:14; 15:32), not the authentication of his Messiahship. Regarding individuals, after "Matthew 12, he performed miracles only in response to needs of individuals and began requiring them to have faith first" (Fruchtenbaum 1989:625). Although previously parables are used to illustrate truth, from that time on, He teaches the multitudes *only* in parables³³ (13:34; cf. 13:11). Although previously various signs of the kingdom are given, now the *only sign* given to an evil and adulterous generation is the sign of Jonah (12:39-40). Through this sign, Jesus provides atonement and redemption — and more.³⁴ At the end of Matthew 12, the treasure has been hidden.

Although many will see it, the sign of Jonah, another mighty work of Christ (11:2,20), is not done to be seen by people. Commenting on 11:26, Carson (1995:275) notes that far "from bemoaning or finding fault with his Father's revealing and concealing, Jesus delighted in it ... Whatever pleases his Father pleases him." For Christ, it is a joy to glorify the Father in heaven, who will reward openly what is done in secret for Him (6:4). By purchasing the field through his death, burial and resurrection, Jesus has provided atonement and God the Father gives the resurrected Lord all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18). Redemption has been provided by Christ and

³² Commenting on 11:27, Nolland (2005:472) points out that the note of exclusivity is "carried not by any sense that such knowledge is too lofty, but rather by something much closer to an image of the privacy of an intimate family relationship." This relational aspect is firstly between the Father and the Son (11:27), and, through Jesus, also between little children (France 2007:445). This family relationship is not based on blood ties but on doing God's will (12:46-50).

³³ Matthew 13:34 is, in terms of the proposed structure for this parabolic discourse, part of the chiasmic centre. In other words, the re-hiding of the treasure may be emphasised by the chiasmic structure.

³⁴ The structure of Matthew may have been crafted to take this re-hiding of the treasure into account. For example, Matthew presents the mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel in chapter 10, but a harmony of the Gospels reveals that, from a chronological perspective, the sending of the twelve (10:2-4) occurred *after* the unpardonable sin was committed by this generation of Israel.

the claims that Satan may have in the world (or field) has been annulled.³⁵ Not that Christ Jesus already exercises all authority on earth in a mediatorial sense as King in terms of the Davidic covenant.³⁶ From Pentecost until her departure to her Bridegroom (cf. 9:15), the Church is ruled by Christ Jesus as Head in terms of the New covenant, but He does not yet rule as king on earth over the inhabited world in a mediatorial sense. At his second coming, the Lord Jesus Christ will unveil to all the earth the *authority and power granted to him to rule the kingdom of heaven over the earth* (24:29-30; 25:31-34; 26:64; cf. Dn 7:13-14,22). When the Messianic kingdom is established on earth, believers (and believers only) will enter this kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (25:34; cf. 5:5b); good servants will enter into the joy of their Lord (25:21,23).

The view proposed from a dispensational perspective is thus that on the day that Jesus presents this parable (13:1,44), the treasure is hidden again. Later, when Matthew writes the Gospel, much of this parable has already been fulfilled prophetically. A foretaste of what is still to come, “that which comes after” or “dessert”, namely the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (16:28), is privately and briefly revealed to three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration (17:1-9), but the glory of the treasure will be revealed to all at Christ’s second coming (24:30). Prophetic on the day he presents this parable, Jesus announces the sign of Jonah (12:39-40) and goes to the cross. After his resurrection, the resurrected Lord receives all authority in heaven and on earth.

5.6.3.3 The parable of the pearl and specific, prophetic referents

Except for this parable, the only other reference to a pearl in Matthew appears as part of a chiasmic saying³⁷. It is submitted that in this parable, the pearl refers to Christ’s inheritance as a result of *his ministry as High Priest in terms of the New covenant* (cf. Ps. 110; 20:28, 22:44; 26:28).³⁸ Having provided the sign of Jonah, having been to the cross (‘went and sold’) and having ratified the New covenant by his blood, Jesus starts to function in his office as High Priest. According to Saucy, in the present session,

³⁵ Never can Satan again offer the kingdoms of this world and their glory to Jesus in his humanity.

³⁶ From Pentecost until her departure to her bridegroom, the Church is ruled by Christ Jesus as Head in terms of the New covenant, but He does not rule as king on earth over the inhabited world in a mediatorial sense.

³⁷ A Do not give what is holy to dogs; B and do not throw your pearls before swine; B' lest they trample them under their feet; A' and turn and tear you to pieces.

³⁸ Jesus warns that one should not throw your pearls before swine lest they trample them under their feet (7:6). If, in Matthew, deeds are as important as words, what Jesus does may be as revealing as what He says (7:21; 23:2-3). When Jesus casts demons out of two men, he permits the demons (definitely *not* pearls!) to go into a herd of swine (8:31). Since Christ came *not* to save the devil and his fallen angels (25:41; cf. Heb 2:16), but took on flesh to be a human kinsman-redeemer, He does not mind throwing what is *not* his pearls into unclean swine (8:28-34).

Christ's focus appears to be most directly concerned with the calling out (plundering the strongman's house – Matt 12:44ff.) and building up his elect ones in the church for life in the present age. Toward his enemies, Christ operates presently only to contain their activities insofar as they concern the primary objectives he has toward his saints. The enemies are still allowed to retain their kingdom (Col 1:13) and to have their work over the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2) whose eyes are blinded to the truth of Christ (2 Cor 4:4), not to mention the schemes they are permitted to enact against believers (1 Pet 5:8; 2 Cor 2:11).

In the present session, the first beneficiary of Christ's High Priestly office is the Church or, in other words, the first fruits of Christ's inheritance in terms of the New covenant is the Church. From a pre-millennial perspective, after the Church age Christ will save more people in terms of his High Priestly office.³⁹ An allusion to a time when the Bridegroom will be taken away from his disciples (9:15) when He provides the sign of Jonah (12:39-40), becomes, in the context of his impending death and resurrection (16:18-21), a clear prophecy that Jesus will build his Church (16:18). And this He will do in terms of the New covenant when He, as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, dispenses spiritual blessings to his wife to be. With Jesus' pearl ministry, He redeems many in terms of the New covenant (cf. 20:28, 26:28), the first of which during the Church age is his bride.

5.6.3.4 Proposed central truths and reasons for the parables of the hidden treasure and pearl

The central truth proposed for the parable of the hidden treasure is that the treasure is the authority and power granted to Jesus to rule the Messianic kingdom in terms of the Davidic covenant. After his baptism, Jesus reveals and authenticates that authority and power to Israel — but that generation in Israel rejects the Messiahship of Jesus, and the establishment on earth of the Messianic kingdom in terms of the Davidic covenant is postponed. The treasure is thus hidden again. For the joy set before him, Jesus obeys the Father by going to the cross, providing not only atonement but also purchasing the field. God the Father gives the resurrected Lord all authority in heaven and on earth (28:18), even though we do not yet see his enemies made his footstool (22:44; cf. Heb 2:5a,8b). At his second coming (24:30), Christ will actually exercise his authority as King in terms of the Davidic covenant over the kingdoms of this world and reign for ever and

³⁹ Jesus warns that one should not throw your pearls before swine lest they trample them under their feet (7:6). If, in Matthew, deeds are as important as words, what Jesus does may be as revealing as what He says (7:21; 23:2-3). When Jesus casts demons out of two men, he permits the demons (definitely *not* pearls!) to go into a herd of swine (8:31). Since Christ came *not* to save the devil and his fallen angels (25:41; cf. Heb 2:16), but took on flesh to be a human kinsman-redeemer, He does not mind throwing what is *not* his pearls into unclean swine (8:28-34).

ever (Rv 11:15; Long 1997:55). He will reveal to Israel and all the nations this treasure, this power and authority. The Messianic kingdom will gloriously manifest God's rule on earth for one thousand years, after which it will merge into the Eternal kingdom of God.

This view is aligned, to some extent, with the fourth group of commentators (cf. 5.6.2.1) and, by way of *application*, to the third. If the interpretation presented here has merit, then what was prophetic on the day this parable was uttered, namely the purchase the field, would have been fulfilled by the time Matthew penned the Gospel. The field is now "his field".⁴⁰

Some commentators (Walvoord 1974:104; Wiersbe 1980:112) argue that the treasure refers to the nation of Israel which is not currently recognised as a treasure, remains a hidden entity in the world only to emerge at the end of the age as a major factor in the prophetic fulfilment leading up to the second coming of Christ.⁴¹ Israel is indeed a *peculiar* (Ex 19:5; Ps 135:4) and special treasure chosen above all the peoples on the face of the earth to be the LORD's people (Dt 7:6). When the Messianic kingdom is established on earth, the King of the Jews (27:11) will reign from the city of the great King (5:35) over Israel, the head nation (Dt 15:6; 28:1,13), as well as over all the nations of the world (Ps 2:6-8; 72:8-11; Zch 14:9). A *peculiar* treasure Israel certainly is, but it is submitted that the treasure *purchased* in the parable of the *hidden* treasure concerns the authority and power to rule the kingdom of heaven in terms of the Davidic covenant not only over the land of Israel but all the earth.

It is proposed that the problem which prompts the parable of the hidden treasure may be stated in this question: *How will Jesus Christ in his humanity, as the Son of Abraham, provide redemption and, as Son of David, also obtain the right to rule over all the kingdoms of the world and their glory* (4:8; cf. 1:1)?

Regarding the parable of the pearl, it is proposed that after sealing and ratifying the New covenant with his blood, from Pentecost until the end of the Church age, something new is that Christ is not ruling the kingdom of heaven as King, but in terms of the New covenant as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek He is dispensing spiritual blessings to His followers

⁴⁰ If it is accepted that the field is the world, Jesus warns that it is possible to gain the world (16:26a) but at the expense of losing one's soul (16:26b), presumably by yielding to Satan (4:8-9). The committed disciple must deny self, take up his cross and follow Jesus (16:24); disciples can and should lay up for themselves treasures in heaven (6:20), not on earth (6:19), and so die to the world, not try to buy it.

⁴¹ For these commentators, the pearl refers to the Church (Walvoord 1974:105; Wiersbe 1980:112; Toussaint 1980:184; Thomas 1985:204).

by the Holy Spirit.⁴² The pearl is viewed as Christ's High Priestly office in terms of the New covenant and the first fruits of this ministry is the Church, espoused to the Bridegroom (9:15; 19:6; cf. 2 Cor. 11:2). The problem which prompts the parable of the pearl may be presented by means of this question: *Having sealed and ratified the New covenant by his own blood at the cross, what will be the ministry of the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek during the present session?*

It is worth mentioning that, although the verbs describing them are different, the *actions* of the woman in the fourth parable of the series (taken to refer to the Holy Spirit) that hides (ἐγκρύπτω) the leaven in 13:33, of Jesus who utters things kept secret (κεκρυμμένα 13:35) and of the man (proposed to be the Son of Man) who hides (κρύπτω) the treasure, are viewed as consistently being connected to the Godhead, Persons who have a divine nature. Earlier in Matthew, God the Father also hides (κρύπτω 11:25) things.

5.6.4 New and old things in these parables

The prophesied destruction of the fourth Gentile kingdom by the stone that was cut out of the mountain, but not by human hands (Dn 2:44-45), has not yet been fulfilled.⁴³ OT prophecies about the Son of Man coming *in glory* (Dn 7:13-14; cf. 24:30; 25:31; 26:64) have not yet been fulfilled either. When that happens, all kings will fall down before Christ, and all nations will serve Him (Ps 72:11; cf. Ps 2).

What new things do the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl then reveal? It is proposed that the mystery revealed in the parable of the hidden treasure is that, when the Messiahship of Jesus is rejected by this generation in Israel, the authority and power granted to Christ to establish the Messianic kingdom on earth in terms of the Davidic covenant is hidden, to be revealed at his second coming. After hiding the treasure, Jesus Christ provides redemption at the cross, seals and ratifies the New covenant with his blood and gains authority over heaven and the earth (28:18). For Thomas (1985:203), the mystery includes Christ's surprising estimate of the value and hidden potentialities of lives that He has purchased with his own blood (20:28). During this age, Christ's

⁴² Boaz (1:5) is an Old Testament type of a willing and able kinsman-redeemer pointing to Christ, for just as Boaz redeems the land of Elimelech and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's from Naomi (Ruth 4:9), so too does Jesus provide atonement and redemption and purchases the field, which is the world. When he redeems the land, Boaz receives a bride and wife not of pure Jewish stock, but a Moabitess with whom Boaz shares his treasure (Ruth 4:4-6; 1:5-17). Likewise, when the Son of Man provides redemption and purchases the field, He commences a new ministry as High Priest and as a result hereof, he receives an inheritance, the first of which is his bride with whom He will also share his treasure.

⁴³ See the Inter-testamental literature on this subject in 4.1.3.

pearl ministry in terms of the New covenant builds His Church (16:18; 28:18-20), one new body comprising Jew, Samaritan and Gentile believers (cf. 10:5-6), forming the bride of Christ (cf. 9:15).

5.6.5 Application of the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl

If the interpretations advanced here have merit, by way of *application*, disciples glorify their Lord by listening, yielding to and building on the chief cornerstone (17:5; 21:42), laying up treasures in heaven (6:20). The disciple can expect to follow in the sufferings of the Lord (cf. 10:24-25). Jesus promises rewards (10:40-42) for some in the Messianic kingdom (19:28-29a), in addition to inheriting eternal life (19:29b). The treasure that belongs to Christ can and will be shared with some of his disciples, as some will receive authority to rule during the Messianic kingdom: good and faithful servants will be rulers over many things (25:21,23). As an espoused bride, believers in Christ must live holy lives, for Christ's inheritance is not to be thrown before swine (7:6).

5.6.6 Conclusion

The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl describe a great switch. On that day when Jesus presents the parables of Matthew 13, He prophesies something new, namely that his office as mediatorial King will remain hidden until his return to earth but during the present session (something new) He will function as High Priest based on the sign of Jonah, that is, his work on the cross. From Pentecost onwards, the kingdom of heaven *exists* as our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek is dispensing spiritual blessings to His followers by the Holy Spirit in terms of the New covenant. When the culminating events of this age have been completed and the Jews living at the end of the Tribulation have said, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD" (23:39), not only will the pearl ministry accompany Him, but the Son of David will return to unveil the treasure in the field which he has purchased.

5.7 The parable of the dragnet

Matthew 13:47-50 (NJKV)

⁴⁷"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸"which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰"and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth".

Another unique Matthean parable is presented in 13:47-50, the third in Matthew 13 that receives an explanation (13:49-50; cf. 13:18-23; 13:36-43). In terms of the chiasmic structure of Matthew 13, this parable and the parable of the tares of the field are parallel. The interpretation in 13:49-50 is similar to the interpretation of the parable of the tares of the field in 13:40-43: verse 49 is similar to verse 41, and verse 42 is identical with verse 50. The parable of the dragnet is the last of a triad (13:44-50). In “contrast to the two parables before it, the parable of the dragnet is concerned with securing many items (fish) rather than just one item of value” (Bailey 1999c:282).

5.7.1 Literary structure, details and words

The parable can be outlined as (1) a comparison (13:47), together with descriptive material (13:48), (2) a transitional statement (13:49a) followed in 13:49b-50 by (3) the interpretation (Kingsbury 1977:119). Blomberg (1990:201) identifies three episodes: the action of the dragnet, the fate of the good and thirdly, the fate of those discarded as worthless. The scene is the sea where catching of all kinds of fish takes place as well as the shore where the fish is sorted, the agent is the one acting to catch and separate the good from the bad, the agencies are the dragnet and all kinds of fish, and the purpose is to keep the good (Kim 1996:206).

This parable starts with a formula similar to the other parables in the series: it is the case with the kingdom of heaven as with a dragnet that was cast into the sea (Jeremias 1972:225). Instead of the agricultural scenes depicted earlier (13:3b-9,24-30,31), the scene portrayed here is of a dragnet being pulled through the sea. According to Stein (1981:140), a dragnet can be employed in several ways:

The net could be stretched out between two boats which then headed for shore. Then the net, buoyed up at the top by floats and weighted at the bottom, would be dragged ashore. Sometimes a single boat could also be used and could either stretch out the net, which would then be dragged to the shore by men standing on the shore, or else one end of the net could be tied to the shore and the boat would make a large semicircle sweeping all in its path to shore.

Obviously, using a dragnet results in an indiscriminate and mixed catch of *all* kinds (ἐκ παντὸς γένους) and sizes, edible and inedible, saleable and useless (Kistemaker 1980:62). Dragnets are too large to be emptied in a boat and must therefore be drawn to shore (Walvoord 1974:106). Once on shore, the different kinds are sorted into only two categories: the good are gathered into

vessels but the bad are thrown away. Carson (1995:330) notes that the word “bad” (σαπρός) can mean “decayed”, but here it means “worthless”.

Kingsbury (1977:121; cf. Hagner 2000:399) interprets the verb “it was full” eschatologically as the “end of the age” and the transitional statement in 13:49a confirms this. Whether the picture used refers to agriculture (13:24-30,36-43) or fishing (13:47-50), both parables of the tares of the field and the dragnet depict the same judgment at the end of this age. Angels will separate the wicked from the just (13:49; cf. 13:41) and cast the wicked into the furnace of fire (13:50; cf. 13:42). The conclusion in 13:49-50 develops only the fate of the unredeemed that are discarded (Blomberg 1990:201).

5.7.2 The occasion or problem that prompts this parable

Several main points have been advanced for the parable of the dragnet,⁴⁴ and, therefore, several views about the occasion or problem that prompts this parable exist. Bailey (1999c:286) classifies these views as placing the significance either in the actions related to the dragnet or in the sorting on the shore — or both.

Illustrative of finding the significance of the parable with the dragnet is Ellisen (2001:116-117; cf. Kistemaker 1980:64), who relates the main point of the parable to the disciples’ personal responsibilities and states that Jesus anticipates their question about how a group of unlettered fishermen can invest or get personally involved in this new venture and whether the disciples should assume the responsibility of judging or not.

Carson (1995:330-331; cf. Stein 1981:142) posits that the chief concern of this parable is “the situation that exists at the End”, that is, “the state of the kingdom when the Judgment occurs”. Because the interpretation given in 13:49-50 focuses on the judgment of the wicked, Blomberg (1990:201,203) argues that emphasis must be placed on it.

Not a few commentators (e.g. France 2007:542; Luz 2001:283; Wenham 1989:67) focus on the mixture of good and evil until the judgment, when the wicked are removed from the righteous. For Kingsbury (1977:121; cf. Hagner 2000:400), the mixture relates to good and bad persons in the Church, which will be judged. However, as Carson (1995:330) points out, the kingdom and the Church must not be equated. Bailey (1999c:288) focuses on addressing both the responsibility

⁴⁴ Various views about the central truth taught in the parable of the dragnet are not repeated in 5.7.5 below.

of disciples and the certainty of judgment, which separation is “the prerogative of the Son of Man and His angelic messengers”.

5.7.3 Details that are explained

In the parable of the dragnet, angels will come forth, separate the bad from the good fish, that is, the wicked and the just will be separated. The wicked will be cast into the furnace of fire (13:49-50).

5.7.4 Discussion of the parable, including possible specific, prophetic referents

According to Blomberg (1990:201), the unifying figure of the parable is either the dragnet or the unnamed people doing the sorting, but, since “the latter seem to correspond to the angels as God’s helpers, the former seems preferable. The net becomes a symbol for God’s ingathering of all people at the end of the age.” Who will oversee or authorise this mission? Given that the transitional statement (13:49a) is identical to 13:40b, both of which refer to the end of the age (*this* age, 13:40), it seems reasonable and consistent to ascribe the authoritative sending of the angels in 13:41 and that of 13:49-50 to the Son of Man. Bailey (1999c:285; cf. Kingsbury 1977:121) points out that the action of the verb “cast” (13:47) is best linked to that of the parable of the tares, where the role of sowing is assigned to Jesus as the Son of Man (13:37): “He is likewise supervising the entire ‘fishing’ process now and will personally send His angels to do the separating at the end of the age (vv. 41-42,49-50).”

Carson (1995:330) says that the parable “cannot easily be made to refer to the missionary activity of the church; for it describes a separation *when the net is full*, not a continuous separation.” Moreover, the catching of “every kind” is an unusual feature of the text, especially since the word for “kind” (γένος) is more commonly used for a “race” or “tribe” of people: “An allegorical meaning for these details is thereby confirmed; the different kinds of fish stand for different nationalities of human beings” (Blomberg 1990:202). For Kingsbury (1977:120) and Thomas (1985:204-205), the “sea” refers to the nations of the world; for that reason, they also identify an international dimension to this expedition. If the parable cannot easily be made to refer to the missionary activities of the Church, yet another international mission — supervised by the Son of Man — to all races or tribes in the sea of nations of the world is in view,⁴⁵ when will this occur, and what will be the content of the gospel?

⁴⁵ A pre-millennial dispensational perspective is that the parable of the dragnet covers the seven year Tribulation period, that is, Daniel’s 70th week. According to Bailey (1999c:285), that the “Church is not in view is evident

Although both parables of the tares of the field and the dragnet envisage an international mission, in the second parable of the series an agricultural sowing of wheat requires a period of time before the harvest (13:30a) and the end of the age (13:39). In the parable of the dragnet, however, the situation at the end of the age seems to be the casting of the dragnet which is *shortly* thereafter followed by the sorting of the catch on the shore (13:48-49a) and the judgment of the wicked (13:50). It is proposed that this international mission will occur *shortly* before the end of the age.

As argued in 5.1.4, the gospel of the kingdom is preached during two time periods: during the first, it is preached *only* to Israel during Christ's first advent, and during the second it is preached to *all the world* at the end of the age, when the end will come (24:14). In between these two periods of preaching the gospel of the kingdom, that is, during the Church age, the content of the gospel emphasises the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (12:39-40; 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-20; cf. 1 Cor 15:1-4). In Matthew, the mission discourse (9:36-10:42) is presented *prior* to the unpardonable sin committed by this generation in Israel and the content of the gospel in that chapter focuses on the kingdom. Parts of this mission discourse look forward to the time immediately prior to the return of Christ at the end of this age and envisages the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom *then* to all (10:22; cf. 10:5,18; 24:14). The parable of the dragnet covers the eschatological time preceding the judgement at the end of this age (13:49-50).⁴⁶ In this regard, Bailey (1999c:288) states:

That there will be a judgment of the nations before the Messiah's kingdom can be set up on earth is seen in Joel 3:2, 11-12; Zephaniah 3:8; and Zechariah 14:2-3. The parable of the dragnet has significant parallels with the judgment of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46. Both speak of angelic agents (13:49; 25:31); in both the subjects are gathered to one place (13:47; 25:32); both involve a separation of the good from the bad (13:48; 25:33); and in both the wicked are cast into the furnace of fire (13:50; 25:41).

It is proposed that the reason which prompts this parable (discussed in 5.7.4 below) may be presented by this question: *What will happen at the end of this age?*

from the fact that at the rapture the church will be taken from the world of the wicked, whereas at the Second Coming of Christ to earth, the wicked will be removed, leaving the righteous to enter the earthly kingdom." The righteous in the parable of the dragnet (the good) will be those who are saved during the Tribulation (Bailey 1999c:289). Moreover, the judgment at the end of the Tribulation is not viewed as the "last judgment" at the great white throne (Rv 20:11-15) as some hold (Carson 1995:330-331; Blomberg 1990:202-203), but the judgment described in Matthew 25:31-46. According to Pentecost (1982:58), the wicked will be detained in Hades until they are resurrected for judgment before the great white throne, after which they will be consigned to the lake of fire eternally. When Daniel's 70th week ends at the end of the Tribulation, the Times of the Gentiles will also end.

⁴⁶ The Inter-testamental literature related to this period is discussed in 4.1.4.2.

5.7.5 Central truths of the parable of the dragnet

Focusing on both the dragnet and sorting activities depicted in the parable, it is proposed that the parable of the dragnet teaches prophetically and eschatologically that, once the dragnet is drawn in and the culminating events of this age are almost fully completed (Bailey 1999c:288), the judgment of all the nations will follow (25:31-46) and the wicked (13:49-50; cf. 13:40-43) will be excluded from the kingdom. Only the just (the good) will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (25:33-34).

5.7.6 New and old things in the parable of the dragnet

As noted also in 5.2.6, the OT prophecies about the establishment of the Messianic kingdom which is preceded by the judgment of the nations at the end of this age (Jl 3:2-12, Zph 3:8; Zch 14:2-3; 25:31-46) will be fulfilled. What is new in this parable is that, at the end of this age, the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the nations and not only to Israel.

5.7.7 Application and conclusion of the parable of the dragnet

The first application addresses the bad (fish): accept the gospel of grace now and look forward to meeting the Lord, instead of awaiting the wrath of God which is certainly coming on an increasingly evil world (Stein 1981:142). Bailey (1999c:290) mentions that the “fear motive is often condemned by modern Christians, but the Book of Matthew shows Jesus was not opposed to using it properly”. According to Wenham (1989:67), this parable encourages realism, patience and hope. As long as the Lord tarries and opportunity exists, believers should serve Him and obey the great commission while watching and being ready, for they do not know at what hour the Lord is coming.

5.8 The parable of the householder

Matthew 13:51-52 (NJKV)

⁵¹ Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord."

⁵² Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure [things] new and old".

This “unwanted orphan parable”⁴⁷ (Lockyer 1963:208) is often neglected, but, as argued in 3.2, the parable of the householder (13:51-52) is another parable unique to Matthew. It is chiasmically

⁴⁷ Davies and Allison (1991:444) consider it not a parable but a “comparative proverb”.

connected to the first parable in the series. However, it is also connected to all of the parables of Matthew 13, for the understanding required concerns “all these things” (13:51). Bailey (1999c:290-291) rightly points out:

In their literary setting the parables of the dragnet and the householder are similar in structure and terminology. Both parables use a form of the root βάλλω (“cast”, 13:50; “brings out”, 13:52) for the major activity of the parable. The dragnet parable presents a contrast between the good and the bad, and the householder compares the old and the new. In the dragnet parable the good and the bad are separate; in the householder parable related yet different elements of the kingdom are joined.

5.8.1 Literary structure, details and words

The following outline of 13:51-52 is proposed: (1) Jesus’ question to the disciples and their affirmative answer; (2) a summarising parabolic analogy consisting of (a) the comparison (13:52a) and (b) further information defining the comparison (13:52b) (Hagner 2000:401; Kingsbury 1977:125).

By asking the disciples if they have understood “all these things” (Συνήκατε ταῦτα πάντα 13:51), Jesus connects the first, introductory parable with its focus on understanding (13:19; cf. 13:13-15) and fruit bearing (13:23) to the eighth and concluding parable in the series. Given that Matthew writes “all these things” twice in this chapter (13:34,51), at the end of the public parables and near the conclusion of the private parables, it seems reasonable to assume that “all these things” refer to the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven that are revealed in the parables of Matthew 13 (Hagner 2000:401). It is unclear to what extent the disciples actually did understand “all these things”.⁴⁸ According to Barbieri (1983:52), the disciples’ subsequent questions and actions proved that they did not really comprehend the parables, and Thomas (1985:207; cf. Lockyer 1963:210) states that the disciples could not comprehend these parables until after Pentecost. Carson (1995:331) summarises the situation aptly: “Like another positive response in this Gospel (see on 20:22-23), this one cannot be simply dismissed as presumptuous enthusiasm (as if they think they know everything when in fact they know nothing) nor taken at face value (as if their understanding were in fact mature).”

⁴⁸ France (2007:544) notes that, in Mark 8:17-21, Jesus rebukes the disciples for not yet understanding and even applies to them language reserved for “those outside”, whereas “Matthew’s equivalent to that passage, 16:5-12, while still expressing Jesus’ frustration at their lack of faith, will avoid the offensive language from Isa 6:9-10, and will end up with them again ‘understanding’ in 16:12 (cf. also 17:13).”

Jesus uses the disciples' affirmative answer to cast another parable. Carson (1995:332) stresses that the scribe has not "been instructed *about* the kingdom and therefore understands, but that he has become a disciple *of* the kingdom and therefore his allegiance has been transformed." The prerequisite for bearing fruit (13:23) is understanding but one cannot understand unless one has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven. To become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven implies being committed to the Person and teachings of Jesus (11:27; Bailey 1999c:292). Carson (1995:333) convincingly argues that discipleship to Jesus is therefore a prerequisite (*inter alia*) to understanding and bringing forth things new and old:

The parable shows that a disciplined scribe has this understanding, *not* that understanding generates discipleship. This conforms perfectly to the chapter's structure: the disciples are not defined as having understanding but are described as having been given revelation and understanding (vv. 11-12). When disciples ask for an explanation, they are given it (vv. 36-43) and thus claim some measure of understanding (v. 51). 'Therefore' (v. 52) a *disciplined* scribe is like, etc.

In Matthew, scribes are often viewed negatively (5:20; 9:3; 12:38), probably because some did not follow Jesus or because they elevated human traditions above God's commandments (15:3-8). In this parable, however, every scribe who meets the aforementioned prerequisites is viewed positively and granted the privilege of understanding the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven (13:11,52).⁴⁹

5.8.2 The occasion or problem that prompts this parable

The question answered by the parable of the householder is proposed to be the following (cf. Bailey 1999c:291; Ellisen 2001:119): *If all these things have been given you to understand, what is the responsibility of every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven?* Every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven, will discharge his or her responsibilities if, like a householder (οἰκοδεσπότης), he or she brings forth out of his or her treasure things new and old (13:52). "The "mysteries" progressively communicated throughout Matthew 13 are the truths that disciples of the kingdom must understand in order to have an effective ministry for Jesus Christ" (Bailey 1999c:291).

⁴⁹ "Ezra is the outstanding example of a good 'scribe', who from a raised pulpit of wood read the Law correctly and with clear articulation, and then gave the sense or explained and expounded what he read" (Lockyer 1963:210; Neh 8:1-8).

5.8.3 Discussion of the parable, including possible specific, prophetic referents

Carson (1995:332) notes that the householder is “a frequent figure in Jesus’ parables and can stand for God (21:33), Jesus (10:25), or disciples (24:43).” Kingsbury (1977:127) holds that the Christian is the master of the house, but Lockyer (1963:210; cf. Barbieri 1983:52) argues that “Christ was, and is, the Chief Scribe ... Out of the divine treasure He brought forth ‘things new and old’.” In the context of Matthew 13, a householder was active in the parable of the tares of the field (13:27) and is, in that parable, the Son of Man (13:37). As Lockyer points out, “all things have been delivered unto Me by My Father” (11:27a). Because one is your Teacher, the Christ (23:8,10), and because these mysteries are *given* to disciples (“divine passives” focusing on God who reveals — France 2007:511), for that reason, it is submitted that the householder in this parable refers to Jesus.

Some commentators (Carson 1995:332; Nolland 2005:571) hold that the treasure represents a person’s heart, in line with 12:35: a good person brings forth out of her heart good things. But can she bring forth mysteries of the kingdom of heaven out of her heart? Since the prophets and the righteous of the OT desired to see and hear these things (13:17), even a good person cannot bring all these things forth out of his heart. Discipled scribes during Christ’s first advent and thereafter are *given* the ability to understand these mysteries of the kingdom (13:11) — and more (13:12-13; cf. 13:8,23). It is from *these* discipled hearts that it is possible to bring forth things new and old. Bailey (1999c:292) notes that “the word for treasure (θησαυροῦ) may refer to the treasure itself (as in 13:44) or as in verse 51 to the storage room in which valuables are kept.” Similarly, therefore, to the interpretation of the treasure in 13:44 (see 5.6.3 above), it is submitted that the treasure refers to the authority and power which belongs to the householder (Jesus) but which here is given (13:11) to the scribal disciples to be stored in their hearts and to be displayed for the benefit of others.

What are the “things new and old” that are brought out of the treasure? Davies and Allison (1991:447) provide a list of probable suggestions, with the most likely “old” referring to the Torah and the OT and the most likely “new” referring to the new revelation in Jesus. For Wenham (1989:33), the old refers to Moses and the prophets and the new to Jesus and his message of the kingdom. Carson (1995:333) holds that “the gospel of the kingdom, though new, takes precedence over the old revelation and its fulfillment (cf. 5:17-20)” — and then states:

The new is not added to the old; there is but one revelation, and its focus is the ‘new’ that has fulfilled and thereby renewed the old, which has thereby become new... Thus the OT

promises of Messiah and kingdom, as well as OT law and piety, have found fulfillment in Jesus' person, teaching and kingdom...

However, as Bailey (1999c:294) convincingly argues:

If any of the 'old' is not yet fulfilled, there cannot be a wholesale setting aside of the old in favour of the new. Also the new cannot be a partial fulfilment of the promises of the old, because both, not just the new, is (sic) brought out of the treasure. Further, if the new simply fulfils the old, then it is really not new. ... But, while there is an emphasis on the new, it is not the new *instead* of the old; both new and old are brought forth. Therefore a combination of the new and the old is to be preferred.

It is submitted that the scribe in question has become a disciple of *the kingdom of heaven*, but, as France (2007:543) points out, "the object of comparison is not simply 'the kingdom of heaven' but the scribe who has become its disciple." Jesus uses the disciples' answer to bring forth the eighth and last parable of the series, where "all these things" (13:51) refer to the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven as revealed in the parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13. Hagner (2000:402; emphasis added) argues that the "key here — indeed the key to the parables themselves — is the combination of new and old. The parables, like Jesus' other *teaching about the kingdom*, involve old and familiar things but newly juxtaposed with new elements." Although the establishment of the Messianic kingdom on earth in terms of the Davidic covenant has been postponed, the new phase of God's kingdom programme does not replace or abrogate the old promises made to Israel. According to Toussaint (1980:176), because of the Jewish rejection of the Messiah, these parables reveal new truths regarding the kingdom of heaven which were not predicted in any OT prophecies. Bailey (1999c:295) proposes that "things new and old" can be described as follows:

Israel's expectation of the coming earthly kingdom, as revealed in the Old Testament, needs to be taught along with the truths of the present interadvent age, the mystery element unknown in the Old Testament. The mysteries (the new element) of the kingdom present what God will do with His kingdom in the world apart from the nation of Israel. Later of course He will fulfil what He said He will do in the future through Israel.

By referring to his disciples as scribes, Christ rejects the ministry of the scribes of the day (2:4; 5:20) and appoints his own (Toussaint 1980:185). France (2007:546) favours a description of these scribes as "authorized teachers for the kingdom of heaven, in contrast with the Pharisaic scribes who have failed to grasp its message." At the time Jesus presents the parable, he prepares his disciples to be his new representatives in the present phase of his kingdom programme: "This responsibility was necessary because of the transfer of leadership authority from the religious

leaders of Israel to the disciples” (Bailey 1999c:295; cf. Turner 2002:59; 21:43). “In Matthew’s story the disciples are being established as repositories of Jesus’ teaching in order to prepare them for the teaching role of 28:19” (Nolland 2005:571). Prior to the great commission, the disciples are not authorised to teach *in Israel*. They preached (10:7) and authenticated the authority granted to them by certain miraculous actions (10:1,8). After the crucifixion, however, Christ sends out the eleven disciples (28:16-18a) with his authority to make disciples and to teach not only in Israel but in *all the world* (28:19-20) — *these disciples* can reasonably be viewed as the first scribes of the kingdom of heaven. The things new and old to be taught include OT revelation concerning the Messianic kingdom as well as the mysteries of the kingdom newly revealed by Jesus (13:11).

5.8.4 Central truth and application of the parable of the householder

Understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven is given to disciples who are committed to the Person and teachings of Jesus Christ (13:11; cf. 11:27-30). Like Jesus Christ (householder), who teaches (brings forth) from His authority and power (treasure) new and old things concerning the kingdom of heaven, scribal disciples who are given understanding of all these things must likewise store in their hearts (treasure) and teach, for the benefit and edification of others, these mysteries with the authority and understanding which they have been given (Jesus’ treasure). If they do so, giving food in due season, they are faithful and wise fruit-bearing stewards of these mysteries, whom their Master appoints as rulers over his household (24:45).

5.9 Conclusion

The eight parables of Matthew 13 have been considered individually. The next chapter focuses on the parables of Matthew 13 from a collective perspective.

6 The parables of Matthew 13 viewed collectively

Since Matthew presents “all these things” (13:34,51) on the same day (13:1,36,53), these parables apparently form a collective unit. The question thus arises: What do these parables mean collectively? This chapter considers how referents have been used, including their repetition and consistent use, the time period covered by the parables and what they could mean jointly.

6.1 How have referents been used?

A hermeneutical principle to be kept in mind is that a term may not have the same symbolic significance every time it is mentioned (Bailey 1999a:64). When considering how referents for the parables of Matthew 13 have been used, it seems that three options exist:

- *Option 1:* Detail 1 may “stand for” (or reference) A and also B. Carson (1995:319) aptly points out: “metaphors may have diverse uses: the lion at different times symbolizes both Satan and Jesus”;
- *Option 2:* Detail 2 has a consistent one-to-one reference to C;
- *Option 3:* Details 3 and 4 both refer to D. In Matthew 13, Jesus references the wicked one or the devil (13:19,39) either as birds (13:4) or as an enemy (13:25).

In the discussion that follows, the interpretations proposed in this study are used to analyse how references have been identified in the parables of Matthew 13.

The sower in the first parable is identified as Jesus. In the parable of the tares of the field, the man sowing good seed is identified as the Son of Man (13:37), and, because it occurs in “his field” (13:31), the Son of Man is viewed as the one who sows the mustard seed. Moreover, Christ baptises with the Holy Spirit (13:33; cf. 3:11) until all has been leavened; it is argued that Jesus buys the field (13:44) and the pearl (13:45-46), oversees the dragnet-expedition (13:47-50) and pre-authenticates a teaching ministry of scribal disciples (13:52). Although the “man” (13:24,31,44) has been referenced consistently as the Son of Man (Option 2), the sower (13:3), the merchant (13:45-46) and the householder (13:27,52) have also been referenced as the Son of Man (Option 3).

In the parable of the sower, what is sown is identified in the text as ‘the word of the kingdom’ (13:19). In the parable of the tares of the field, however, the good seed is referenced by the text as the sons of the kingdom (13:38). In the next parable in the series, the mustard seed was also referenced as a son of the kingdom. Regarding *seed* in 13:24,31,38, the use of referents identified correspond to Option 2. It must be noted, however, even though in the parable of the sower the word “seed” is not used, the idea of seed is incorporated in the verb. Therefore, it appears as if the parable of the sower and the parable of the tares in the field reference “seed”, or its semantic equivalent, differently in line with Option 1. This understanding, however, is derived from the text itself.

In the parable of the sower, the birds (τὰ πετεινά, 13:4) are identified as the evil one (13:19), but in the parable of the mustard seed, birds *of the air* (τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) come and lodge in the branches of the tree (13:32). Because the descriptions of the birds are not exactly the same in the Greek text, they have been viewed as different details and referenced differently in this thesis in line with Option 2. If, despite the fact that the birds are not described in exactly the same way in the Greek text, they nevertheless should be seen as the same detail to be referenced the same (that is, as referring to evil), it would still be an example of Option 2. If they are to be seen as the same detail but reference something different (evil and then Gentiles believers), it is an example of Option 1.

In this thesis, the field (13:24,31,38,44) is consistently viewed as the world (Option 2).

In the parable of the hidden treasure (13:44), the “treasure” was taken to refer to the authority and power granted to Jesus to rule the Messianic kingdom. In the parable of the householder, the treasure still belongs to the householder (taken to refer to Jesus), but it is given (13:11) to scribal disciples to be displayed for the benefit of other believers (13:52). As “treasure” relates to Jesus (the householder), it is submitted that the treasure-referents have been used in line with Option 2. But how has “treasure” been used in relation to the scribal disciple? When the scribal disciple exercises the authority he has been granted, the treasure is again used in line with Option 2, for like Jesus (the householder), the scribal disciple brings forth things new and old. But the word for treasure (θησαυρός) may refer both to the treasure itself (as in 13:44) and, as in verse 52, to the storage room in which valuables are kept. If the storage room in which the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven are kept is a human being’s heart (12:35), the scribal disciple is viewed as *storing* these mysteries in his or her heart, and the use of treasure is in line with Option 1.

Pearls are formed in oysters under water, either in the sea or in fresh water. It was argued that the pearl refers to Christ’s ministry as High Priest in terms of the New covenant, the first fruit inheritance of which is his bride, the Church comprising of believers out of all the nations. In the parable of the dragnet, some commentators (Kingsbury 1977:120; Thomas 1985:204-205) hold that the sea refers to the nations of the world. In Psalm 2, for example, the Son will be given the nations (“sea”) for His inheritance and the ends of the earth for His possession. An implied reference to the sea in which Christ’s pearl ministry has been operative may be in line with “sea” in the parable of the dragnet (Option 2). It should be noted that, in the parable of the mustard seed, the birds of the air are understood as believers from all nations, not nations *per se*.

Although the verbs describing them are different, the actions of the woman (taken to refer to the Holy Spirit) that hides (ἐνέκρυψεν) the leaven (13:33), of Jesus who utters things kept secret (κεκρυμμένα 13:35) and of the man (taken to refer to the Son of Man) who hides (ἐκρύψεν) the treasure, are viewed as consistently being connected to the Godhead, Persons who have a divine nature (Option 2). Earlier in Matthew, God the Father also hides (ἐκρύψας 11:25) things. Except for the different tenses, the actions of the man that goes and sells all that he has and buys the field are considered to be the same *actions* as the merchant who went and sold all that he had and bought the pearl (13:44-46) — in line with Option 2.

It appears that, in this thesis, referents identified are used in line with Options 2 and 3. Except for a possible (and qualified) case of the use of “treasure”, references have not been used in line with Option 1. This thesis can be compared with twenty-five commentators’ understanding of referents in the parables of Matthew 13, as shown in the table below¹.

<u>Author</u>	<u>Sower</u>	<u>Tares</u>	<u>Mustard</u>	<u>Leaven</u>	<u>Treasure & Pearl</u>	<u>Dragnet</u>	<u>Householder</u>
Bailey	God sows through John and Jesus. Word of the kingdom includes gospel of the kingdom.	Field is never called the Church.	Mustard seed proverbial for great growth of kingdom. In OT trees are an image of great kingdoms with worldwide impact. Birds of air may symbolise Gentiles. No referent for man or field.	Woman refers to Holy Spirit; leavening process is a good effect of permeation. No referent for three measures of flour.	Man is disciple acting; treasure and pearl are value of the kingdom; buying and selling are personal sacrifice of disciple.	Different kinds of fish suggest different nationalities. Son of Man supervising “fishing” process. Church not in view, has been raptured. “Good” are those saved during the Tribulation.	All these things refer to the previous parables of the kingdom. Treasure is truth entrusted to scribal disciple. “New” refers to present mysterious phase of kingdom; “old” is OT prophecies to Israel. Scribal disciples are householders.
Barbieri	Word of the kingdom is gospel of the kingdom preached by John, Jesus and disciples.	Field is world.	Sphere of professing followers would grow into a large entity. No referent for man, tree or field.	No referent for woman, leaven or three measures of meal.	Man is Christ, Israel is God’s treasured possession and Church is the pearl. Christ redeems at cross.	Timing at the end of the age.	Jesus performs function of householder.
Blomberg	God is primary sower;	Field is world, not	No referent for man, mustard seed or field.	No referent for woman, leaven or	Man stands for anyone who	Net a symbol for God’s ingathering of	Continuity between old and new covenants.

¹ The table contains summary-style language. The Harvard style of referencing is not used in the table as these commentators have been referenced elsewhere in this thesis as well as in the bibliography.

	derivatively, Jesus and disciples are also. Preaching of God's reign.	Church. Servants are props for the story.	Birds of the air may refer to predominantly Gentile peoples of the earth.	three measures of flour.	becomes child of the kingdom. Treasure and pearl refer to kingdom of God which is so valuable that it is worth sacrificing anything to gain it. No referent for "joy" or hiding treasure.	all people at end of age. "Every kind" of fish stands for different nationalities. All actions at time of final sorting; "final judgment".	
Carson	Word of kingdom compared with gospel of the kingdom.	Good seed cannot be a message, must be people. Field is the world, not the Church, and this confirms a mission beyond Israel.	No referent for man, mustard seed or field. Mustard seed a metaphor for small beginning.	No referent for woman, leaven or three measures of flour. Mustard seed/plant suggests extensive growth, yeast suggests intensive transformation.	Treasure and pearl are supreme worth of the kingdom for which disciple makes sacrifices.	Situation at end when Last Judgment takes place. Not about missionary activities of Church.	"All these things" include parables and mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Treasure is the heart. "Old" is OT promises about Messiah and kingdom plus OT law and piety. "New" is fulfilment in Jesus' Person, teaching and kingdom. Scribes likened to householders.
Davies and Allison	Broader Matthean context, as well as 13:37, encourages one to think Jesus is the sower. Word of the kingdom seems to mean "the preaching of the kingdom".	Field is the world, not the Church.	No referent for man, mustard seed or field. Did Matthew think of the birds of the air as standing for Gentiles? One guesses that he did.	No referent for the woman, leaven or three measures of flour. Three measures suggest a feast, a banquet.	Believers are to find the kingdom and give all to obtain it, with the treasure and the pearl to be identified with the kingdom.	"Of all kinds" underlines universality of judgment.	Comparative proverb, not a parable; v. 51 looks back on entire chapter; scribes may be entrusted with eschatological secrets.
Dodd	Any Christian preacher is a sower.	Good and bad members of the Church (the Kingdom of the Son of Man).	Tree is a symbol for a great empire offering political protection to its subject-states. Process of obscure development is at an end. The Kingdom of God is here: birds are flocking to find shelter in shade of tree.	Completion of process of fermentation; ministry of Jesus is compared to wholesome influence of leaven.	Believer must throw caution to the wind and possess Kingdom of God, that is, the treasure and the pearl, are the highest good.	Fishing a metaphor for work of Jesus and his disciples. Indiscriminate catch	Dodd does not deal with this parable.
Ellisen	Jesus is the sower.	Implicitly links parable to great commission.	No referent for man, mustard seed, field, tree or birds. Focus on growth.	Woman implicitly identified as the Holy Spirit. Leavening process during Church age. No referent for three measures of flour.	No sacrifice or effort too great to obtain the kingdom (treasure and pearl) because its value is so great. No referent to field or hiding of treasure.	The net is the gospel which should reach all races.	Things new refer to the new kingdom programme as much as the religious leaders, whom the new scribes of the kingdom are replacing.
France	Sower probably in the first instance Jesus. Word of the kingdom is the message Jesus has been proclaiming since 4:17.	Field is the world, not Church.	No referent for man, mustard seed, field. Tree may refer to great empire. Birds of heaven may be symbolic of all the nations.	No referent for woman, leaven or flour.	Disciples' enthusiastic and wholehearted commitment to the kingdom of heaven, even sacrificing for it.	Angels are the fishermen.	Scribes are authorised teachers of the kingdom of heaven. "New" things refer to secrets of the kingdom and the "old" refers to 5:17.
Hagner	Sower is probably Jesus and word of the kingdom is the equivalent of the gospel of the kingdom.	Servants may be disciples. Field as the world points to the worldwide mission of the Church in the spread of the gospel.	No referents given.	No referents given.	For the disciple, the kingdom is worth everything (treasure and pearl the equivalent of the kingdom).	Universal invitation. Church involved in mission.	"All these things" concern the preceding parables of the kingdom. Scribe likened to householder and is trained in the mysteries of the kingdom. New and old are about relation of Torah to genuine new reality of the kingdom of God, the mysteries concerning the purposes of God.
Hunter	The parable reflects Jesus' own experience of preaching the gospel of the kingdom.	If the Kingdom of God is really here, why has there not been a separating of sinners from saints in Israel?	Tree a symbol for world-wide empire embracing all peoples. Birds of the air a rabbinic name for the Gentiles. No referent for man, mustard seed or his field.	Vastness of dough shows what the sovereign power of God in action can do. No referents for man, leaven or three measures of flour	Treasure and pearl are the kingdom, if not also Christ, for to follow Christ is to be in the kingdom.	Emphasises fish of <i>every kind</i> . Fishers of men not be selective in where they go.	Scribe will be able to wed the wisdoms of the Old Order to the truths of the New.
Jeremias	Yield of the harvest symbolises eschatological	Concerned with final judgment. Patience	Tree symbolises world power. "Birds of the air" is an eschatological technical term for the	Since no housewife would bake bread using so vast a quantity	Not about complete self-surrender, but rather an experience of the splendour of	Eschatologically concerned with final judgment.	"Old" are the things he had previously learnt, and the "new" his newly acquired knowledge.

	overflowing of divine fullness. God brings forth triumphant end.	required until the harvest.	incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God.	of flour, we have to do with divine realities.	the discovery that all else seems valueless compared to surpassing worth of joyful news of the kingdom.		
Lockyer	God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and all Christians are sowers. The full Gospel is seed and in a sense the seed is Christ.	Christ claims ownership over the field.	The man is the Son of Man, the field is the world and the seed is that sown on Pentecost. Tree refers to ecclesiastical and religious-political systems and birds, of the air symbolise Satan and his evil forces.	When used figuratively, leaven always refers to sin or evil. The woman is the apostate church and the flour concerns fellowship.	The field is the world; the man is the Son of Man who not only is Creator but also Redeemer. Treasure may be the redeemed. Pearl is the Church.	The net is the gospel cast into the sea of all nations by disciples of Christ acting as missionaries.	“All these things” refer to previous seven parables as a whole in their interrelationship. Scribes receive authority from Christ to teach divine truth about the kingdom during this age. Christ is Chief Scribe; treasure is the heart of the scribe. Old and new is the Law and the Gospel. Mysteries of the kingdom include prophecies of the old with added new significance.
Luz	Word of the kingdom corresponds to the gospel of the kingdom and means the earthly Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom.	Field is the world, not the Church. Jesus announces a universal claim for his message. The already existing reign of Christ over heaven and earth made visible through his disciples (28:16-20)	In light of previous parable, the person who sows is understood as the Son of Man and the field as the world. Birds of the air may conceivably be Gentiles.	Implicitly identifies the woman as the Church which is to leaven the world by uncovering the hiddenness of truth. The Church has something to do with the mustard seed sown by the Son of Man and with the leaven that is leavening.	Human action underscored in view of the opportunity presented by the kingdom of heaven. Warning against riches.	Connects the mission with the Church. No time factor in this parable as there is in tares of the field. Last judgment scene.	Understanding is part of bearing fruit. New is the gospel of the kingdom and old the traditional task of the scribe. Continuity between old and new.
Kingsbury	Sower is Jesus and the word of the kingdom is the (Church’s) total message regarding Jesus.	Field is the people of Israel and yet a universal field of operations is in view. Seed alludes to the Word.	Field alludes to Israel. Man that sowed refers to Jesus. Tree a picture of a mighty empire and birds of the air is a veiled reference to Gentiles.	Leaven viewed positively, no referent for woman, leaven or three measures of flour.	The disciple totally commits to God’s kingly rule.	Parable restricted to the righteous as opposed to evil in the Church. Sea symbolises the world or the nations of the world. Every kind of fish refers to all nations; “it was full” interpreted as End of the age.	Christian is master of the house. Treasure is the heart. New and old a circumlocution for totality of revelation that God has given disciples through Jesus.
Kistemaker	Sow could mean teach.	Field belongs to Jesus.	Mustard seed is effectively the message of salvation. Christianity has become a tree that provides shelter for people everywhere.	Kingdom reveals its power and presence like yeast in the world. No referent for woman, leaven or three measures of flour.	Treasure and pearl refer to Christ, and the man is the recent convert to Christianity.	Dragnet portrays separation of fish in terms of the present.	Apparently not viewed as a parable.
Nolland	Word of the kingdom refers to gospel of the kingdom and Jesus is the sower.	Field is the world.	Jesus must be the sower. No other referents.	Woman’s action must correspond to what is happening in Jesus’ ministry. No specific referents.	Value to the individual of discovering the kingdom of heaven.	Filling of net plays somewhat analogous role to maturing of the crop.	Solid possession and proper use of the old are tied up with the gaining of the new in the treasure of the kingdom of heaven.
Pentecost	Jesus is the sower.	Counter-sowing of Satan.	Insignificant beginning of the kingdom with eleven men in Upper Room with Christ.	Yeast about positive permeation. The woman refers to the Holy Spirit.	Man is Jesus Christ who goes to the cross. Field is the world, treasure is the remnant of Israel and the pearl those Gentiles saved during the inter-advent period.	Dispensation ends with judgment, only righteous will enter the kingdom.	New truths about new form of the kingdom.
Snodgrass	Eschatological significance of Jesus’ preaching.	Field is the world, evidencing a universal perspective similar to the Church.	Mustard seed analogous to Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom. Seems to prefer no other referents.	No specific referents.	The value and joy of finding the kingdom. No specific referent for the field, man etc.	Division takes place immediately. Net, sea, shore, fisherman, vessels do not stand for anything.	Snodgrass does not deal with this parable.
Stein	Stein does not deal with this parable.	Field is the world.	No specific referents.	No specific referents.	Disciple decides possessing the kingdom is a joyous sacrifice.	Final judgment in view.	Stein does not deal with this parable.
Thomas	Jesus is the sower and the	Field is the world and	Man is the Son of Man, field is the world and	Leaven taken as evil.	Field is the world, treasure is Hebrew	Time is Daniel’s 70 th week, i.e. the	Treasure is storehouse of Scripture and experience.

	Word of God is the seed.	belongs to God.	the birds refer to evil.		Christians, man is Christ going to the cross and pearl is the Church.	Tribulation. Sea is all the nations.	
Toussaint	Word of the kingdom received yields more revelation and understanding.	Sons of the kingdom sown into the world (13:38; 28:19-20)	Tree and birds can be connected to growth in number of those who will be heirs of the kingdom.	Leaven viewed as evil, no specific referents.	Treasure is Israel's kingdom programme, and pearl is the Church. Man is Jesus Christ going to the cross.	Tribulation, with judgment of Israel and the nations in view.	New and old truths about the kingdom.
Turner	Jesus is the sower, and the word of the kingdom is the kingdom message (4:23; 9:35).	That field is the world implies the eventual global mission of the Church.	No specific referents.	No specific referents.	Sacrifice made by disciple when kingdom values are taken seriously.	Time of eschatological judgment.	"All these things" refer to growth of the kingdom despite mixed reception. New things are Jesus' definitive teachings and "old" are Israel's Scriptures.
Walvoord	Introductory parable. Not all accept gospel.	Period before the return of Christ.	Number of true Christians and professing Christians will increase.	Leaven taken negatively as evil.	Jesus is the man who goes to the cross. Treasure is Israel and the pearl is the Church.	Time is the end of the age.	Treasure is house of truth.
Wenham	Jesus' preaching of the kingdom.	Good and evil co-exist in the present and separated in the future. Field is the world.	No specific referents.	No specific referents.	Disciple gives all for the kingdom (treasure, pearl).	Mission is international in scope and views Church as containing good and bad fish.	Old refers to the fulfilment of Moses and the prophets. The new is Jesus and his message of the kingdom.
Wiersbe	Seed is God's Word.	Field is the world.	Tree is a symbol of world power. Birds taken as negative.	Leaven taken as negative, as false doctrine and false living.	Treasure is the nation of Israel. Pearl is the Church. The man is Christ going to the cross.	Separation at end of the age during Great Tribulation.	Scribe emphasises learning; disciple focuses on living.

6.2 Is there repetition and consistency in the use of referents?

The Gospel of Matthew is well structured and there is a thematic unity in Matthew 13 in which the literary genre of parables is frequently used, arguing for a possible contextually consistent use of referenced details. Viewed from a narrative perspective, Luz (2001:295) sees Matthew 13 as an interruption in the narrative: "It condenses and anticipates the story of the entire Gospel of Matthew in a concentrated form. What will happen in the story of Jesus as a whole is anticipated here and taught to disciples. In this sense — and not for formal reasons — the parables discourse is the center of the entire gospel." If these parables contain content of a prophetic and sometimes also eschatological nature, and if prophecy should be interpreted by comparing prophecy with prophecy, this too may argue for a contextually consistent reading of Matthew 13. If so, the interpretation of one parable may harmonise with the others, and such a series may contain repetition or overlap in terms of main characters and main events. Is this found in the parables of Matthew 13?

When Matthew 13 is read for the first time, the verbal continuity surrounding sowing, seed, the man, a harvest, his field, various forms of the word "hide", buying and selling (bought and sold), the furnace of fire etc. is noticeable. With this first reading of the text, the reader does not realise, however, to what extent these parables are interwoven (if at all). Further readings of the text reveal that Matthew 13 is carefully structured and, as Davies and Allison (1991:449) affirm,

contains a thematic unity. No parable is thus unnecessary or out of place, and the text has to be read as a collective unit.

As mentioned in 6.1, the central authority figure and main character may be viewed as Jesus Christ, according to the interpretations presented in this study. As sower, He sows the word of the kingdom, the good seed and a mustard seed, and will be in charge of the dragnet-expedition. He baptises with the Holy Spirit, buys the field and the pearl, and gives authority to scribal disciples. Other important characters include the good seed, the first of which is identified as the eleven disciples, as well as the mustard seed, which may be the apostle Peter. The first scribal disciples must include the eventual twelve apostles as they are given authority to bind and loose in the Church (16:19; 18:18). At the end of this age, the Son of Man will command angels to remove the wicked from his kingdom.

Initially, in the parable of the sower, the sphere of operation is restricted to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. In the parable of the tares in the field, the activity moves to the world. The parable of the dragnet confirms a universal mission at the end of this age. It may be noted that these three parables each receives an explanation in Matthew 13.

It appears as if the main characters, events and activities depicted in the parables of Matthew 13 may indeed have been used consistently, and there appears to be harmonious overlaps between these eight parables.

6.3 What is the time period covered by these parables?

It was mentioned in 1.1.1 and 2.2.6 that the time period covered by the parables of Matthew 13 collectively is from the days of John the Baptist (11:12a) until Jesus' second coming (24:29-30). In the parable of the sower (in 5.1.4), it was argued that Jesus presents the word (or gospel) of the kingdom from 4:17 to 13:53. However, the parables of the tares in the field and the leaven make use of John the Baptist's prophecy that Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit (3:11-12). In the parable of the hidden treasure, one of Satan's temptations of Jesus was highlighted (4:8-10). All the prophets and the law prophesied until John, comprising all the "old" of the OT regarding the Coming One and the kingdom. From the days of John the Baptist (11:12a), the new is in view. Since the parables of the tares in the field and the dragnet describes a time period that includes the end of this age (13:40,49), the time period that the parables of Matthew 13 collectively cover seems to be from the days of John the Baptist until Jesus' second coming.

6.4 What do these parables teach collectively?

What do the parables of Matthew 13 teach collectively? Moreover, if these parables contain material of a prophetic nature, and if prophecies should be interpreted in the light of possible time intervals between prophetic fulfilments (see 2.2.6), can the parables of Matthew 13 be ordered chronologically within the time period identified above?

The first four parables to the crowds may develop chronologically in time. Once the chiasmic turn in Matthew 13 has been made, the next four parables spoken to the disciples may also develop chronologically in time. Both sets of four parables may also have a similar starting position in time.

As was argued in 5.1.4, in Matthew's presentation, the parable of the sower covers the period that Jesus preaches the gospel of the kingdom (4:17) until this generation commits the unpardonable sin (12:24-32). In Matthew's presentation, the kingdom of heaven is not said to be "near" or "at hand" after this occurs, and the gospel of the kingdom is not again preached until just before the return of Christ (24:14).²

Chronologically, the parable of the hidden treasure overlaps to some extent with the parable of the sower. From the time that Jesus presents the gospel of the kingdom to Israel (4:17; 10:7; 15:24) and authenticates his Messianic claims to them, He displays the treasure to Israel. But when He is rejected, the authority and power bestowed on the Messiah to rule in terms of the Davidic covenant are hidden, and, by going to the cross to provide the sign of Jonah and ratifying the New covenant with his blood, He purchases the field even as the treasure remains hidden to the world until his second coming.

There may be a considerable chronological overlap in what happens next. After going to the cross and receiving all authority in heaven and on earth, Christ commences his pearl ministry as High Priest in terms of the New covenant: the parables of the tares of the field, mustard seed, leaven, pearl and householder commence simultaneously. Having purchased the field, the Son of Man sends good seed with all authority into "his field", which is the world, not with the gospel of the kingdom to Israel only, but in terms of the great commission to all the nations. Christ gives the eleven disciples (28:16-18a) the great commission, Peter has the keys of the kingdom of heaven (16:19) and opens the door of the kingdom to Jews and Samaritans, even as the Holy Spirit

² The structure of Matthew may have been crafted to take this re-hiding of the treasure into account.

commences a unique ministry of baptism as Christ builds the first fruits of his inheritance, his Church (3:11; 16:18). In addition, according to Matthew, Jesus' disciples are not initially given a teaching ministry, but rather the twelve are sent to preach (10:6-7) and to authenticate their delegated authority to Israel (10:1,8). However, Christ pre-authenticates a teaching ministry for the eleven (28:16-18a) as scribal disciples (13:52; cf. 23:34), as part of the great commission (28:18b-20), and thereafter every scribe who understands "all these things" should likewise discharge the responsibility by teaching the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. Although the great commission has already commenced, in the parable of the mustard seed it is extended, possibly through the apostle Peter when he uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven, to include even Gentiles. The parable of the dragnet focuses attention on the judgment at the end of this age (13:49-50; cf. 13:40-42).

6.4.1 Comparison with views of other dispensationalists

How do the proposed interpretations of the parables of Matthew 13 compare with that of other dispensationalists? Before answering these questions, keep in mind that using referents possibly in a consistent way for the parables of Matthew 13 may make it easier to understanding each *individual* parable, but it simultaneously makes it *more difficult* to force any preconceived ideas onto these parables as a group. Moreover, interpretations must also adhere to Jesus' instruction to combine "things new and old" (however one defines this). These are built-in checks *against* forcing something onto the text.

In general, this thesis' identification of specific, prophetic referents for each of the parables of Matthew 13 and – joined at the hip – juxtaposing new and old *prophecies* for *each* parable of Matthew 13, may be viewed as novel. Given the view that these parables may contain prophetic content, this thesis reads these parables as having more specific and detailed contact with reality than most other commentators do. More decoding of referents takes place in this thesis. But if Jesus decoded many of the details of the parables of the sower, the tares in the field and of the dragnet, is it inadmissible to follow his lead when interpreting the five remaining, unexplained parables of Matthew 13? As for the attempt to use details already referenced in a contextually consistent manner, this is not original as some dispensationalists follow this approach.

Regarding specific comparisons, the proposed time period to which the parable of the sower in Matthew refers to is different from all dispensationalists known to this writer. Instead, agreement in this regard was found with a-millennial France. Further, in this thesis the view advanced for

this parable may have a more Jewish flavour to it than the interpretation of most other dispensationalists.

Regarding the parable of the tares in the field, the proposed view is somewhat different to that of other dispensationalists, because of the identification of specific, prophetic referents and because of the identification of the start of the period to which this parable may prophetically refer to.

For the majority of dispensationalists, the developments in the parables of the mustard seed and leaven are generally viewed as *negative*, the very *opposite* of what is advanced in this thesis. Further, the interpretations proposed for the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl differ from that of the majority of dispensationalists, as most identify the hidden treasure as Israel and the pearl as the Church whereas here it is proposed that the treasure refers to the authority and power of Christ to rule the kingdom of heaven in terms of the Davidic covenant and the pearl to Christ's ministry as High Priest in terms of the New covenant.

There is much alignment of views regarding the parable of the dragnet, as the Tribulation period seems to be in view. As for the parable of the householder, here too there is some agreement.

Regarding the parables of Matthew 13, it is submitted that the views proposed in this thesis neither overlap materially with those of most dispensationalists nor was a consensus dispensational perspective forced onto the parables of Matthew 13.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter considered the case for a collective understanding of the parables of Matthew 13. The way referents have been used was first reviewed (6.1), focusing on repetition and consistency (6.2) and the time period covered by these parables (6.3). Then, the question as to the collective meaning of these parables was addressed (6.4). It was also submitted that this thesis does not force a consensus dispensational perspective onto these parables (6.4.1).

7 Conclusion

The working hypothesis of this thesis is: *The parables of Matthew 13 can be understood, both individually and collectively, when they are connected to specific, prophetic referents.* Guidelines were identified in chapter 2 in order to interpret the parables of Matthew 13, and a chiasmic structure for Matthew 13 was proposed in chapter 3. In chapter 4, an OT concept of the kingdom of heaven, the setting of Matthew 13 and the occasion or problem that prompted these eight parables were reviewed, before discussing the concept of mysteries. Subsequently, each parable was examined individually (chapter 5) before focusing on them collectively (chapter 6).

The parables of Matthew 13, other than the parable of the sower, may contain prophetic matter. In Matthew's presentation, at the time Jesus utters these parables, and according to the proposed interpretations, the parable of the sower reflects back to the time Jesus presents the gospel of the kingdom until the unpardonable sin is committed and, in effect, Jesus is rejected by this generation in Israel (France 2007:518). During that time, Jesus authenticates to Israel the authority and power (the "treasure") He has received. When this generation commits the unpardonable sin, the treasure is hidden. The remaining parables of the series cover the time until Jesus will again reveal the treasure, not only to Israel but to the entire world. Thus, Jesus presents prophecies and even eschatological secrets on the same day the unpardonable sin was committed.

According to Matthew, there is no universal mission to the world (10:5-7; 15:24) until after Jesus has received all authority in heaven and on earth. The parable of the tares of the field specifically identifies the field as the world, implying that the great commission is in view (as well as judgment at the end of the age). Since the great commission could not have started without the eleven disciples (28:16-18a) nor without Peter (16:17-19), the sons of the kingdom first sown by the Son of Man must be the eventual twelve apostles. The fact that the disciples did not know of the great commission on the day the parable was uttered, or perhaps even until the Christ's ascension, does not render the interpretation anachronistic. It recognises that Jesus presented a mystery of the kingdom, a prophecy in the form of a parable. This is a strong argument for viewing at least some of the parables of Matthew 13 as being prophetic on the day they were uttered.

The approach of many commentators is to find few correspondences for the four parables following the parable of the tares of the field. Even if a future mission that will include Gentiles is mentioned in 12:15-21 and Jesus refers to himself as a greater than Jonah (12:41); even if the

Holy Spirit's prophesied ministry of baptism is mentioned early in Matthew and connected to the harvest (3:11-12; cf. 13:30); Christ's death is referred to as the sign of Jonah on the day these parables are given (12:39-40), and even though an allusion to a bride is made in 9:15, some would view the search for possible references in these remaining parables to a mission that includes the Gentiles, the baptising ministry of the Holy Spirit, Christ's work on the cross and as High Priest as anachronistic.

It is submitted, first, that the Gospel of Matthew can be used to exegetically support the interpretations proposed. Second, if the parables of Matthew 13 contain prophetic matter that foresees specific fulfilment, one may expect to find *not a few* "allegorical details" or references, in line with the examples of the three explained parables where many details receive one-to-one equivalents. Third, contrary to the opinion traditionally held, goodness of fit of many details of these parables actually *reduces* the risk of unbridled allegorising, as does the consistent use of details already explained in the parables of the sower, the tares of the field and the dragnet. *Nevertheless, regarding the four parables in the middle of the series, one cannot be dogmatic about the referents that have been identified, even if it is accepted that these parables contain prophetic matter, requiring specific, prophetic references to be interpreted.* What can be done, from a collective, contextual and structural perspective, however, is to point to possible links in the text between the explanation of the parable of the tares of the field, which is included in the chiasmic centre of Matthew 13, and the remaining parables in the series. Further, since the parable of the mustard seed seems to indeed be prophetic on the day Jesus utters it (13:1), and since the Son of Man seems to sow a single person as a mustard seed as part of the great commission, how many options are available? Is it not possible that one of the apostles (for example Peter) could be referenced here? In a similar vein, if the woman's action in the house in the parable of the leaven must correspond (Nolland 2005:554) to what was happening in the ministry of the householder (13:27), how many options are available as specific, prophetic referents?

It seems that the largest split between proponents of realised eschatology and those of consistent eschatology appears in the interpretation of the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl. Proponents of realised eschatology hold that Christ already "rules dynamically", hence, in these parables, the value of the kingdom or a disciple's sacrifice for it is emphasised. Consistent eschatology proponents, on the other hand, often identify the Son of Man as the man that sacrifices all at the cross and, as this thesis proposes, thereby as the resurrected Lord receives all authority in heaven and on earth.

Can the parables of Matthew 13 be viewed collectively and, if so, will a collective approach assist in understanding them, both individually and collectively? As discussed in chapter 6.1, with one possible exception, the interpretations proposed in this thesis have used referents consistently. It can be affirmed that such an approach assists in understanding all these parables, for it may provide already-explained referents that can help in identifying others. What the parables of Matthew 13 may mean collectively was discussed in 6.4.

Do the parables of Matthew 13 have specific, prophetic referents and, if so, what may these be? Specific, prophetic referents were identified for the parables of Matthew 13 (see chapter 5), where relevant. In the light of the foregoing, the working hypothesis can be affirmed and be stated positively: The parables of Matthew 13 can indeed be understood, both individually and collectively, when they are connected to specific, prophetic referents. Whether these conclusions make the parabolic discourse in Matthew 13 less contentious is another matter altogether. Then again, that is not what Jesus asks. He is asking if we understand “all these things” (13:51).

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