

Symbolic Scripture

April 7, 2022

Parables

Early in the series of lessons on our Lord Jesus Christ we saw that it was prophesied that Jesus would speak in parables (Psalm 78:1-2; Matthew 13:34-35). Why did He speak in parables?

- A parable is a simple story illustrating a moral or religious lesson. It has a literal meaning, but is meant to signify another deeper meaning.
- Jesus used veiled language with metaphors to describe how it will be during His kingdom—the promised kingdom that Israel was waiting for (Matthew 13:19, 24, 31, 41-45, 47). He always spoke in parables to the general population (Matthew 13:33-35).
- He explained some (perhaps all) of them to His disciples—they could not figure them out on their own (e.g., the sower—Matthew 13:18-23).
- Jesus spoke in parables so that the unrepentant people of Israel would not understand what He was talking about. This was in fulfillment of prophecy (Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 4:10-12). God only allowed, by opening their eyes to understanding, His chosen ones to understand them (Matthew 13:10-12, 16-17). This is still true today. Only the children of God are able to understand the things of God, and we only understand what God has opened our eyes to understand (Ephesians 1:15-21; I Corinthians 2:14-16; Acts 16:14).

Prophetic Last Days

There are many passages in Scripture that refer to *the last days*, including the entire book of Revelation.¹ As with parables, they are described in veiled language. Why did God use symbolism to describe those events?

- Time references often are not literal; for example, a *week* apparently means 7 years, and *time, times, and half a time* apparently means 3 ½ years (Daniel 7:23-25; 9:24-27; 12:7; Revelation 11:2-3; 13:5).
- Kings and kingdoms are described as beasts (and types or characteristics of animals) and consisting of horns, heads, and various metals (Daniel 7:1-8, 19-20; 8:1-14; Revelation 13:1-3).
- Sometimes references are made to known names of kingdoms. However, are they actual kingdoms or are they also symbolic names representing unknown kingdoms of the future? For example, last day prophecies refer to Media, Persia, Greece, Ethiopia, Libya, Babylon (or, the Hebrew names that have since been translated to mean these kingdoms—Daniel 8:20-21; 12:40-43; Revelation 17:1-5; 18:1-3, 9-10, 21). After all, we know that the prophecies about David ruling over the kingdom forever were actually talking about Christ (Ezekiel 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Matthew 1:1; Mark 12:35-37; Acts 2:22-36), and the prophecies about Elijah preparing the people for the coming of their Lord were referring to John the Baptist (Malachi 3:1; 4:4-6; Matthew 11:7-14; 17:9-13; Mark 1:2-4).

I believe that God used veiled language to prevent us from actually figuring out all of His plans—His ways are beyond our ways or comprehension (Proverbs 21:30; Isaiah 40:13-14; 55:8-9; Romans

¹ The King James Version mentions *the end of the world* in Matthew 24:3. However, the context of this and similar passages do not refer to the destruction of the earth but to the end of a specific age.

11:33-36). We are warned against thinking too highly of ourselves, but we often do anyway (Proverbs 16:18-19; Romans 12:3, 16). I also believe that when the prophetic events unfold, God will open the eyes of His people (redeemed Israel) to understand that the prophecies are being fulfilled, just as He did with His disciples (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; Acts 2:14-36; 3:17-26).