COGMA

Church of God Mission Academy

STUDY GUIDE 22

The Language *of* the Bible

STUDY GUIDE 4 OF 4:

Applying the Language of the Bible

An overview of applying Scripture's own principles to interpretation.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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Throughout this module, we have examined several important forms of language used in the Bible, including parables, symbolism, types, antitypes, visions and dreams. We have also established an essential principle for understanding them correctly: the Bible must interpret itself.

In this final Study Guide, we will put these principles into practice through two detailed examples. The first is Jacob's Ladder, recorded in Genesis chapter 28, and the second is the Parable of the Tares, recorded in Matthew chapter 13. Both verses contain pictures and expressions that cannot be understood correctly by looking only at their natural appearance.

Jacob's dream includes a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, angels ascending and descending, the Lord above the ladder, the house of God and the gate of heaven. As we compare Scripture with Scripture, these pictures direct our attention towards Jesus Christ, His saving work, His Church and the Gospel entrusted to His people.

The Parable of the Tares requires the same careful approach. We must consider the setting in which Jesus spoke, the people He addressed, the meaning He gave to the principal elements and the difference between words such as KOSMOS and AION. Context, timeframe and the harmony of Scripture are essential to understanding the truth Jesus was communicating.

The purpose of this Study Guide is not simply to identify symbols or attach meanings to individual pictures. It is to demonstrate how careful Bible study moves from the picture to the spiritual truth being communicated.

Above all, every interpretation must remain subject to God's Word and centred upon Jesus Christ. The picture serves the truth, and the truth must lead us to a clearer understanding of Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the Bible's own language help you move from a natural picture to its spiritual meaning?

Personal Reflection

Where have you assumed you understood a familiar biblical image before comparing it with the Bible?

Action Step

Choose a biblical picture you have explained too readily. Compare its meaning with the Bible and identify any change you need to make in your understanding.

INTRODUCTION: APPLYING THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE

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Understanding the language of the Bible requires more than knowing the definitions of parables, symbols, types, antitypes, visions and dreams. We must also know how to apply those principles when we come to an actual verse of Scripture.

Throughout this module, we have established several important rules. We must consider the context, the timeframe, the audience, the form of language being used and the harmony of the whole Bible. We must also allow Scripture to explain Scripture rather than forcing our own ideas into a verse.

This final Study Guide brings those principles together through two detailed examples. Each will show how the natural picture must remain under the authority of Scripture as we search for the spiritual truth being communicated.

Jacob's Ladder

The first example is Jacob's Ladder in Genesis chapter 28. Jacob saw a ladder set up on the earth and reaching to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending upon it and the Lord standing above it. He later described the place as *"the house of God"* and *"the gate of heaven."*

These details are not isolated pictures. As we compare them with other Scriptures, we will see how they direct us towards Jesus Christ, access to God through Him, the heavenly position of the born-again believer, the Church of God and the Gospel ministry.

The Parable of the Tares

The second example is the Parable of the Tares in Matthew chapter 13. Jesus gave a natural picture involving a sower, good seed, a field, an enemy, tares, a harvest and reapers. He then explained the spiritual meaning of the principal elements to His disciples.

To understand the parable correctly, we must pay close attention to when Jesus spoke, to whom He was speaking and the words He used. This includes recognising the important distinction between the Greek words KOSMOS, referring to the world, and AION, referring to an age.

These two examples demonstrate why careful Bible study is essential. A symbol, type, vision or parable must never be interpreted by imagination alone because the meaning must be established through Scripture.

The picture must remain under the authority of Scripture. The Bible must interpret itself, and every interpretation must remain in harmony with the truth revealed in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does applying biblical language require context, audience and the Bible's own explanations?

Personal Reflection

Have you carried a meaning from one verse into another without checking its setting?

Action Step

Read a familiar image within its whole chapter. Reconsider any meaning borrowed from another setting and explain how this will change your study habits.

FROM TYPE AND SYMBOL TO SPIRITUAL REALITY

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Before examining Jacob's Ladder and the Parable of the Tares, it is helpful to bring together the principles that will guide our interpretation. These examples contain types, symbols, visions and parabolic language, but the same basic rule governs them all: the Bible must interpret itself.

A type is a real person, object, event or institution that God used to point beyond itself towards a greater spiritual reality. The type belongs to its own historical setting, but God also gave it a wider purpose. The corresponding fulfilment is the antitype, the greater reality towards which the type points.

Several principles are important when studying types and antitypes:

- A type is divinely appointed and is more than an accidental resemblance;
- The type and antitype contain a genuine relationship or similarity;
- The type can represent truth within its own setting while also pointing forward towards fulfilment;
- The antitype is greater than the type;
- The central truth represented in the type must be found in the antitype;
- Not every incidental detail surrounding a type necessarily carries a separate spiritual meaning.

These principles protect us from turning every small detail of an Old Testament account into a symbol. God may use an actual historical event to reveal spiritual truth, but the interpretation must be established through Scripture rather than imagination.

The same principle applies to symbols. A symbol is a picture that represents something beyond its natural appearance. Visions often use this kind of language, where the object or scene seen within the vision communicates a spiritual truth beyond the picture itself.

Scripture also teaches us that the whole Bible has spiritual value. Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:16**:

> *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:"*

This does not mean that biblical history should be treated as though it never literally happened. Abraham, Jacob, Moses and the events recorded concerning them belong to genuine biblical history. However, God can also use those people and events to reveal truths that become clearer in Jesus Christ and the New Covenant.

We must therefore preserve both truths. The historical account remains real, while Scripture may also establish a greater spiritual meaning through that history. Recognising the spiritual truth does not require us to deny the literal event.

When we study a verse containing a type, symbol, vision or parable, we should therefore ask:

- What is the natural or historical picture?
- What does Scripture identify as its spiritual meaning?

- Are there corresponding verses that explain the imagery?
- What was the timeframe and audience?
- How does the interpretation agree with the wider harmony of God's Word?
- How does the verse direct us towards the truth revealed in Jesus Christ?

These questions will guide both examples that follow. They help us begin with what the verse actually says, while allowing the wider Word of God to establish the spiritual truth being communicated.

We begin with the picture, but we do not stop with the picture. Scripture must lead us from the visible form to the spiritual reality God intended to reveal.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What is the difference between a type or symbol and the spiritual reality to which it points?

Personal Reflection

Where might you be giving the picture more attention than the truth the Bible reveals through it?

Action Step

Trace one type or symbol to Jesus Christ. Examine whether you have valued the picture above Him and explain how the revealed truth should change your focus.

JACOB'S LADDER: THE DREAM AND ITS SYMBOLS

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One of the clearest examples of how biblical language can move from a natural picture towards spiritual truth is found in the account commonly known as Jacob's Ladder. The event is recorded in Genesis chapter 28 while Jacob was travelling away from his family home.

Jacob stopped for the night, took stones from the place for his pillows and went to sleep. During the night, God gave him a remarkable dream.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 28:11-13**:

> *"And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;"*

The account begins with a genuine historical setting. Jacob was a real man travelling through a real place, but while he slept, God communicated with him through a dream containing significant imagery.

Several important elements immediately appear:

- A ladder set up on the earth;
- The top of the ladder reaching to heaven;

- The angels of God ascending and descending upon it;
- The LORD standing above it.

When Jacob awoke, he described what he had experienced in striking language.

Moses continued in **Genesis 28:16-17**:

> *"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."*

Two further expressions are therefore added to the picture: *"the house of God"* and *"the gate of heaven."* These expressions become important as the wider Scriptural meaning of the dream is established.

If we read the account only as an interesting dream from Jacob's life, we will miss the wider spiritual truth Scripture later reveals through these images. At the same time, we must not simply invent meanings for them. The Bible itself must show us how the different parts of the dream are to be understood.

This is where the principles learned throughout this module become important. We have a dream containing symbolic imagery, but the meaning must be established by corresponding Scriptures rather than by imagination.

The Ladder Joins Earth and Heaven

The ladder is particularly important. It is *"set up on the earth,"* while its top *"reached to heaven."* It therefore joins two places that would otherwise remain separated and presents a means of access between earth and heaven.

The movement upon the ladder is also significant. The angels of God are described as *"ascending and descending."* The order should be noticed because they are first pictured ascending and then descending.

Above the ladder stands the LORD. The dream therefore connects the earth, heaven, the ladder, the messengers and God Himself within one symbolic picture.

Jacob then calls the place *"the house of God"* and *"the gate of heaven."* This introduces another important relationship because the imagery is not concerned only with movement between two locations. It is also connected with God's house and with the way of entrance into the heavenly realm.

These symbols will become much clearer as we compare Genesis with the words of Jesus and the teaching of the New Testament. The dream provides the picture, while corresponding Scriptures will help establish the spiritual reality represented by that picture.

Questions the Dream Raises

The principal questions we will therefore consider are:

- What does the ladder represent?
- Why was it set up on the earth?
- Why did it reach to heaven?

- Who are the angels ascending and descending?
- What is represented by the LORD standing above the ladder?
- What is the house of God?
- What is the gate of heaven?

These questions should not be answered by assigning meanings according to what seems possible. Each part of the interpretation must remain under the authority of Scripture and agree with the wider harmony of God's Word.

Jacob's dream gives us the picture. The sections that follow will bring together the corresponding Scriptures that help explain what the picture represents.

We will allow Scripture to lead us from Jacob's dream to the spiritual reality God was revealing, with Jesus Christ at the centre of the interpretation.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Which features of Jacob's ladder dream must be accounted for before its symbols are interpreted?

Personal Reflection

What assumption about the ladder, angels or place did you bring to the dream?

Action Step

Read Genesis 28 and list what Jacob actually saw. Identify one assumption you brought to the dream and set it aside until the Bible establishes its meaning.

JESUS CHRIST: THE LADDER SET UP ON THE EARTH

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The first major symbol to identify in Jacob's dream is the ladder itself. Jacob saw *"a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven."* The picture immediately suggests a connection between earth and heaven, but we must allow Scripture to tell us what that connection represents.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 28:12**:

> *"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."*

The Hebrew word translated *"ladder"* is commonly transliterated SULLAM. The wording of the verse presents the ladder as being set up or raised upon the earth. This becomes especially significant when we compare Jacob's dream with the words of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Identifies the Ladder

Near the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus spoke to Nathanael using language that closely parallels Jacob's dream.

Jesus said in **John 1:51**:

> *"And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."*

Compare the two verses carefully. Jacob saw:

- Heaven connected with earth;
- Angels of God ascending and descending;
- A ladder upon which that movement took place.

Jesus spoke of:

- Heaven being opened;
- Angels of God ascending and descending;
- The Son of man as the One upon whom they ascend and descend.

The parallel is clear. Jesus takes the imagery of Jacob's dream and places the Son of man where Jacob had seen the ladder.

The question therefore becomes, *"Who is the Son of man?"* Jesus repeatedly used this title when referring to Himself.

Jesus said in **John 8:28**:

> *"Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things."*

When Judas came to betray Him, Jesus said in **Luke 22:48**:

> *"But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"*

The Son of man is Jesus Christ. Therefore, when Jesus speaks of angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man, He provides the Scriptural key for understanding the ladder Jacob saw.

Jesus Christ is the spiritual reality towards which Jacob's ladder points.

"Hereafter Ye Shall See"

Jesus also said, *"Hereafter ye shall see heaven open."* The word *"Hereafter"* is important because Jesus was speaking near the beginning of His public ministry. The greater reality represented by Jacob's ladder had not yet reached its fulfilment because something still had to take place.

Later, Jesus said in **John 12:32**:

> *"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."*

Notice the relationship between the pictures. Jacob saw a ladder *"set up on the earth,"* while Jesus spoke of Himself being *"lifted up from the earth."*

The words of Jesus point towards His death and the saving work He would accomplish. Through His sacrifice, resurrection and the establishment of the New Covenant, the way of access to God would be opened through Him.

The ladder was therefore not pointing towards a religious system, an earthly organisation or a ceremony. It was pointing towards Jesus Christ Himself.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What connection does Jesus make between Jacob's ladder and the Son of Man?

Personal Reflection

How does Jesus' own use of the ladder image affect your understanding of access to God?

Action Step

Compare **Genesis 28:12** *with* **John 1:51**. *Consider whether you have looked for access to God apart from Jesus Christ and explain how this truth corrects your confidence.*

God Sent His Word

This picture also agrees with the wider testimony of Scripture concerning Jesus Christ coming into the world. God provided the means of salvation rather than leaving humanity to establish its own way to Him.

The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 107:20**:

> *"He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."*

Jesus Christ is the Word revealed in flesh. He did not originate from the fallen condition of mankind because God provided the One through whom salvation would come.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 1:6**:

> *"And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him."*

John also records the purpose for which God sent the Son into the world.

Jesus said in **John 3:17**:

> *"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."*

The ladder being set up upon the earth therefore gives us a powerful picture. God provided the way by which humanity could be reconciled to Him, and that way is found in Jesus Christ.

The Type Points to the Greater Reality

This is how biblical typology and symbolism should work. We begin with the Old Testament picture, but we allow the New Testament to identify the greater spiritual reality.

Jacob saw the ladder, while Jesus identified the Son of man as the One upon whom the angels ascend and descend. Jacob saw something joining earth and heaven, while Jesus Christ came into the world to accomplish the work of salvation and provide access to God.

The type and the reality correspond, but the reality is greater than the picture. A natural ladder can connect two physical levels, but it cannot reconcile sinful humanity to God. Jesus Christ accomplishes what the picture could only represent.

This is why the purpose of typology is never simply to discover interesting similarities between verses. The type must lead us towards the spiritual truth God intended to reveal.

In Jacob's dream, the ladder is the picture, while Jesus Christ is the greater reality. The way from earth to heaven is not found in human effort, religious ceremony or another mediator because it is found in Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the ladder's natural picture point beyond itself to Christ?

Personal Reflection

Have you enjoyed explaining Jacob's ladder as a picture without considering your own dependence upon Jesus Christ for access to God?

Action Step

Explain the ladder's fulfilment using Jesus' own words. Then identify one way this truth should change how you speak about salvation to someone else.

THE LADDER REACHES HEAVEN: ACCESS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

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Jacob did not simply see a ladder standing upon the earth. He saw that *"the top of it reached to heaven."* The picture therefore presents a connection between earth and heaven, between mankind and God.

A ladder provides access to a place that could not otherwise be reached. In Jacob's dream, the ladder joined the earth with heaven, where the LORD stood above it. As Scripture develops the picture, we see that Jesus Christ is the way through whom mankind receives access to God.

Jesus said in **John 14:6**:

> *"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."*

Jesus does not say that He simply shows us a way. He says, *"I am the way."* This agrees with the picture of the ladder because the ladder provided the connection between earth and heaven, while Jesus Christ is the spiritual reality through whom mankind comes to God.

There is no alternative spiritual ladder, door or pathway. Access to God is found in Jesus Christ.

Access Through Jesus Christ

Paul expressed the same truth when writing to the believers at Ephesus.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:18**:

> *"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."*

Notice the words *"through him."* Access is through Jesus Christ.

Paul was speaking about Jew and Gentile being brought together through Christ. Under the Old Covenant, natural Israel had possessed privileges that separated them from the Gentile nations, but in the New Covenant both Jew and Gentile come to God in the same way.

There is:

- One Saviour;
- One Spirit;
- One access to God;
- One spiritual people in Jesus Christ.

The ladder does not provide one way for the Jew and another way for the Gentile. Jesus Christ is the way for all who come to God.

Calvary Opened the Way

The ladder imagery also directs our attention towards the saving work of Jesus Christ. In the previous section, we saw the words of Jesus concerning being *"lifted up from the earth."* His death at Calvary and His resurrection were essential to the fulfilment of God's saving purpose.

Jesus gave Himself for sin so that mankind could be reconciled to God. The separation caused by sin could not be overcome by human effort, religious ceremony or obedience to the Law of Moses. Salvation required Jesus Christ and the work He accomplished.

Peter described Him as the One chosen by God.

Peter wrote in **1 Peter 2:4**:

> *"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,"*

Notice again the language of movement: *"To whom coming."* We come to God through Jesus Christ because He is the One God provided for salvation.

The picture of the ladder therefore directs us towards more than the possibility of access. It directs us towards the Person through whom that access has been provided.

The New Covenant Access

Jacob saw the ladder centuries before Jesus Christ came in genuine human flesh. The dream therefore pointed beyond Jacob's own time towards a greater spiritual reality.

The Law could reveal sin and point towards Christ, but the Law itself could not give spiritual life. Jesus Christ accomplished the work necessary for salvation and established the New Covenant reality.

Through Him, the born-again believer now has access to God *"by one Spirit."* This is not simply an external religious relationship because Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believer by His Spirit, bringing the person into a living relationship with God.

The ladder therefore presents more than a picture of movement between two locations. It directs us towards Jesus Christ as the One who brings mankind into relationship with God.

Jacob saw a ladder reaching heaven, while Jesus said, *"I am the way."* Paul then explains that *"through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father."* The picture and the New Testament truth agree.

Jesus Christ is the way. Through His completed work, mankind receives access to God, and through His Spirit the born-again believer is brought into the New Covenant reality to which Jacob's ladder pointed.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does the ladder reaching heaven teach about access through Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Where have you looked for access to God apart from the way this section presents Christ?

Action Step

Read **John 14:6** *and* **Ephesians 2:18***. Examine whether you still depend upon outward religion for access to God and reaffirm where your trust belongs.*

THE ANGELS OF GOD: MESSENGERS ASCENDING AND DESCENDING

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Another important part of Jacob's dream concerns *"the angels of God ascending and descending"* upon the ladder. To understand this picture correctly, we must consider how Scripture uses the word angel.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 28:12**:

> *"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."*

The Hebrew word translated angel is MALAK, meaning a messenger or one who is sent. In the New Testament, the Greek word ANGELOS also carries the meaning of a messenger.

The word can refer to heavenly beings, but it can also be used of human messengers. We must therefore allow the context and other Scriptures to determine who is being represented.

Ascending and Descending

The order in Jacob's dream is important. The angels are described as *"ascending and descending."* They ascend first and then descend.

Jesus used the same order when He applied the picture to Himself.

Jesus said in **John 1:51**:

> *"And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."*

Again, the order is ascending and descending. Within this symbolic picture, the messengers are shown going upward upon the One represented by the ladder and then returning.

This directs our attention towards God's servants who come to Him through Jesus Christ, receive from Him and then carry His message to others. Their access and their ministry both depend upon Christ.

Ambassadors for Christ

Paul describes born-again believers as people who have been given a ministry and sent with a message of reconciliation.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:17-18, 20**:

> *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."*

Notice the order. A person is first *"in Christ"* and becomes *"a new creature."* That person is then given *"the ministry of reconciliation."*

God's servants do not carry their own message because they are *"ambassadors for Christ."* They receive the truth through Jesus Christ and are then sent to proclaim that truth to others.

This agrees with the picture of ascending and descending upon the ladder. The believer first comes to God through Christ and then becomes useful in carrying the message of Christ to others.

An Angel Identified as a Fellow Servant

The book of Revelation provides an important example of the word angel being used for a messenger who identifies himself with God's servants.

John wrote in **Revelation 22:8-9**:

> *"And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God."*

The angel tells John, *"I am thy fellowservant,"* and also identifies himself with *"thy brethren the prophets."* The language connects the messenger with those who serve God and keep His Word.

This shows why we cannot assume that every use of the word angel must describe a celestial being. The word itself means messenger, and the context must establish how it is being used.

Paul Received as an Angel of God

Paul gives another clear example of this language.

Paul wrote in **Galatians 4:13-14**:

> *"Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus."*

Paul was a human messenger preaching the Gospel, yet he says that the Galatians received him *"as an angel of God."* This again demonstrates the connection between an angel and a messenger sent with God's Word.

The important point is not simply the identity of the messenger. The emphasis is upon someone who has been sent with a message from God.

The New Covenant Picture

Jacob's dream therefore presents a powerful picture. Jesus Christ is the ladder and the way of access to God, while those who are born again become His messengers in the world.

They do not ascend through their own righteousness, religious effort or ceremonies because their access is through Jesus Christ. Neither do they descend carrying their own ideas because they are ambassadors entrusted with the Gospel.

The picture therefore moves from salvation to service. We first come to God through Jesus Christ, receive spiritual life in Him and then become useful in carrying His truth to others.

Jesus Christ is the ladder. His born-again people are His messengers, receiving from Him and carrying His Gospel into the world.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does this teaching interpret the angels ascending and descending without inventing details beyond the Bible?

Personal Reflection

Have you explained the messengers in Jacob's dream with more confidence than the Bible's words allow?

Action Step

Study the verses about the messengers in Jacob's dream. Admit what remains unexplained and practise distinguishing biblical statements from your own assumptions.

THE LORD ABOVE THE LADDER: HEAVENLY PLACES AND THE CHURCH

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Jacob's dream contains another important detail. The ladder reached to heaven, and the LORD stood above it.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 28:13**:

> *"And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;"*

To understand this part of the picture, we need to recognise that Scripture uses the word heaven in different ways. The context must determine which meaning is intended.

Three Uses of Heaven

The first heaven is the physical sky or firmament. Moses wrote in **Genesis 1:8**:

> *"And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day."*

The second heaven refers to the dwelling of God, distinct from the earth. Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 5:2**:

> *"Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few."*

Scripture also speaks of a third heaven, associated with visions, revelation and the heavenly spiritual realm.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 12:1-2**:

> *"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven."*

This third heaven helps us understand the spiritual position into which the born-again believer is brought in Jesus Christ. The New Testament describes that position as being in *"heavenly places in Christ Jesus."*

Raised Up in Christ

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:5-6**:

> *"Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"*

Notice that Paul does not describe this only as something believers will experience in the future. He says God *"hath raised us up together"* and *"made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."*

This is a present spiritual reality of the new birth. Those who were dead in sins are quickened and made spiritually alive through Jesus Christ. The believer's heavenly position is therefore found *"in Christ Jesus."*

The ladder reaches from earth to heaven, and the New Testament shows that through Jesus Christ the believer is brought from spiritual death into spiritual life. The heavenly position is not produced by natural birth, religious membership or human effort because it is found in Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does being raised up in Christ add to the ladder's picture of heavenly places?

Personal Reflection

Have you thought of your place in Christ as something still to be gained rather than the present reality Paul describes?

Action Step

Read **Ephesians 2:5-6**. *Consider whether you speak as though a born-again believer is still outside Christ and explain how the verse corrects that view.*

God Dwells in Zion

The Old Testament also connects God's dwelling with Zion. The Psalmist wrote in **Psalm 132:13-14**:

> *"For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."*

The Psalmist also wrote in **Psalm 87:5**:

> *"And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her."*

In the New Covenant, Zion points towards God's spiritual people, the Church. The born-again believer is not brought into an earthly religious system but into the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.

The picture of the LORD standing above the ladder therefore directs our attention towards God's dwelling among His people in the heavenly spiritual realm. Those people belong to Him because they have received spiritual life through Jesus Christ.

The Heavenly Jerusalem and the Church

The New Testament brings these pictures together by connecting Mount Sion, the heavenly Jerusalem and the Church.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 12:22-23**:

> *"But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"*

Notice the present language, *"ye are come."* The heavenly Jerusalem is therefore not presented as a future earthly city that believers are still waiting to enter. Scripture connects Mount Sion and the heavenly Jerusalem with *"the general assembly and church of the firstborn."*

John uses the related picture of the New Jerusalem.

John wrote in **Revelation 21:2**:

> *"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*

The New Jerusalem represents the born-again Church of God. Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem and the New Jerusalem therefore direct us towards God's present spiritual people rather than towards a future physical city.

This further develops Jacob's picture of the ladder reaching heaven. Through Jesus Christ, those who are born again are brought into the heavenly spiritual reality of His Kingdom and Church. The ladder points towards the One through whom that access is possible, while Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem help us understand the spiritual people into whom the believer is brought.

Jesus Christ Is the Head of the Church

The relationship between Christ and His Church is described as the relationship between a head and a body.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:18**:

> *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*

Jesus Christ is the Head, and the Church is His body. The Church possesses no spiritual life independently of Jesus Christ because all spiritual life comes from Him.

A person enters this spiritual body by being born again and receiving the Spirit of Christ. Paul explains that by one Spirit believers are baptised into one body. The Church therefore consists of those who possess the life of Jesus Christ within.

The picture in Jacob's dream now becomes clearer. The ladder points towards Jesus Christ, and through Him the believer is raised from spiritual death into life and brought into heavenly places in Christ. The LORD stands above the ladder, while the New Testament reveals Jesus Christ as the Head of His spiritual body, the Church.

The heavenly place is not reached through ceremony, human effort or religious membership. It is entered through the new birth, when Jesus Christ gives spiritual life and brings the believer into His body by His Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is Jesus Christ, rather than the ladder image, the Head of the Church?

Personal Reflection

Does your view of the Church give Christ the place this teaching gives Him?

Action Step

Read **Colossians 1:18***. Examine whether a human leader or institution has received the place belonging to Jesus Christ and identify how you will honour Him as Head.*

THE HOUSE OF GOD, THE GATE OF HEAVEN AND THE DOOR

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When Jacob awoke from his dream, he connected the ladder with two further expressions: the house of God and the gate of heaven.

Moses wrote in **Genesis 28:16-17**:

> *"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."*

The ladder, the house of God and the gate of heaven therefore belong together within the imagery. As we compare Scripture with Scripture, these pictures continue to direct us towards Jesus Christ and the New Covenant reality established through Him.

Christ Came to Bring Salvation

Jesus Christ came in genuine human flesh and offered Himself for sin. Having completed that work through His death and resurrection, He fulfilled His promise to come again to His disciples as the Holy Spirit.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:28**:

> *"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."*

Jesus did not return at Pentecost in another physical body. He came as the Holy Spirit to dwell within those who are born again. This is the New Covenant reality of Christ within His people.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:27**:

> *"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"*

The Person of Jesus Christ dwelling within His people is therefore central to understanding the house of God. The New Covenant dwelling place of God is found among those who possess His life within.

The House of God Is the Church

The New Testament identifies the house of God with the Church.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 3:15**:

> *"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."*

Jacob said, *"this is none other but the house of God,"* while Paul identifies *"the house of God, which is the church of the living God."* Scripture therefore moves us from the earlier picture towards the New Covenant spiritual reality.

The Church is not simply a religious organisation or physical building. It is the spiritual body composed of those who are born again, within whom Jesus Christ dwells by His Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does this teaching connect the house of God with the Church?

Personal Reflection

What assumption about a physical place of worship might this connection challenge?

Action Step

Compare **Genesis 28:16-17** *with* **1 Timothy 3:15**. *Reconsider any belief that a building is God's spiritual house and explain how you will regard His people.*

Jesus Christ Is the Door

Jacob also called the place *"the gate of heaven."* The Hebrew word translated gate carries the thought of an opening or entrance, and Jesus uses similar imagery when describing Himself.

Jesus said in **John 10:9**:

> *"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."*

Jesus Christ is the Door. The Church does not replace Him as the way of salvation because a person is not saved by joining an organisation, belonging to a denomination or becoming associated with a congregation.

Salvation is found in Jesus Christ. However, Jesus Christ dwells within His spiritual body, and through that body the Gospel is carried into the world.

Christ Dwells Within His Body

Revelation pictures Jesus Christ among the candlesticks.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:13**:

> *"And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle."*

The picture directs our attention towards Jesus Christ dwelling within His people by His Spirit. His Church possesses no independent saving power because Jesus Christ remains the Head, the Door and the source of spiritual life.

He personally dwells within His born-again body and works through His people to make the Gospel known.

Paul wrote in **Romans 10:14-15**:

> *"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"*

This connects with the messengers ascending and descending in Jacob's dream. Those who have received life in Jesus Christ are sent to proclaim Him to others. They do not become the source of salvation, but they carry the Gospel of the One who saves.

The Gate of Heaven and the Gospel

The Gospel ministry does not make believers the source of salvation. Born-again believers carry the message that directs people towards Jesus Christ, the Door.

The house of God is His Church, and Jesus Christ dwells within that Church by His Spirit. Through His people, His Word is proclaimed so that others may hear, believe and come to Him.

Jacob saw:

- A ladder joining earth and heaven;
- The house of God;
- The gate of heaven.

The New Testament reveals the spiritual reality:

- Jesus Christ is the way and the Door;
- His born-again people are the house of God;
- Christ dwells within His Church by His Spirit;
- His people carry the Gospel that directs others to Him.

The gate does not lead to a religious institution as the source of salvation. The Church carries the message, but Jesus Christ remains the One to whom that message directs the sinner.

The Gospel preached through Christ's body directs lost humanity to Jesus Christ Himself, the only Door through whom a person enters into life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How are the gate of heaven, the door and the Gospel connected in this teaching?

Personal Reflection

What does this teaching ask you to reconsider about the way people come to God?

Action Step

Read **John 10:9***. Examine anything you have treated as another doorway to salvation and explain how you will direct yourself and others towards Jesus Christ alone.*

PARABLES: APPLYING THE SAME INTERPRETIVE PRINCIPLES

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The same principles we have used to understand Jacob's Ladder must also be applied when interpreting the parables of Jesus. We must recognise the form of language being used, examine the context, identify the symbols from Scripture and allow the Bible to interpret itself.

The Greek word translated parable is PARABOLE. It carries the idea of placing one thing beside another for comparison. Jesus used familiar natural pictures to communicate spiritual truths, so the natural story provides the picture while the spiritual truth is the message being revealed.

This means that we should not assume that every part of a parable must be understood literally. Neither should we assign meanings to its details according to imagination. Wherever Jesus explains a symbol, His explanation must govern our interpretation, and where further understanding is required, we compare Scripture with Scripture.

Context Must Govern Interpretation

When studying a parable, several questions should be considered:

- Who was speaking?
- To whom was He speaking?
- What subject was being discussed?
- What timeframe was in view?
- What do the surrounding verses reveal?
- Does Jesus explain any of the symbols Himself?

- How does the rest of Scripture use the same language or imagery?

These questions prevent us from removing a parable from its setting and making it teach something Jesus was not addressing. The meaning must remain connected to the subject, audience and timeframe established by the verse itself.

This becomes especially important in Matthew chapter 13, where Jesus gave a connected group of seven parables concerning the Kingdom.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 13:10-11**:

> *"And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given."*

Jesus tells us directly that these parables concern *"the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven."* We therefore begin with the subject Jesus Himself identifies rather than imposing another subject upon the chapter.

The seven parables are the Sower, the Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl and the Net. Although each has its own emphasis, they belong within the same body of Kingdom teaching and should be understood within that setting.

We will now concentrate particularly upon the Parable of the Tares. Jesus gives both the parable and its explanation, making it an excellent example of how biblical language should be interpreted.

By carefully observing the context, audience, timeframe and meanings Jesus assigns to the symbols, we can allow Scripture itself to establish what the parable teaches.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must context still govern a parable when its imagery seems easy to recognise?

Personal Reflection

Have you accepted an interpretation of a parable because its images sounded familiar?

Action Step

Before explaining the Tares, read Matthew 13 in context. Identify an interpretation you have accepted too quickly and correct your approach using Jesus' explanation.

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES: CONTEXT, TIMEFRAME AND AUDIENCE

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The Parable of the Tares is the second of the seven parables recorded in Matthew chapter 13. Before attempting to interpret the individual symbols, we must first establish the context, timeframe and audience. A correct understanding of the symbols placed within the wrong setting can still produce an incorrect interpretation.

Jesus introduced the parable by identifying its subject.

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 13:24-30**:

> *"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."*

The opening words establish the subject immediately: the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus is therefore not teaching primarily about agriculture. The field, wheat, tares, enemy, servants and harvest form a natural picture through which He reveals spiritual truth concerning the Kingdom.

The Context of Matthew 13

The Parable of the Tares should not be separated from the other parables surrounding it. Matthew chapter 13 contains seven connected parables dealing with the Kingdom and the course of the Gospel Day.

COGMA understands these seven parables as corresponding to the seven prophetic periods of the Gospel Day. The Parable of the Sower begins the picture with the Word being sown and received in different ways. The Parable of the Tares then develops the picture further and is particularly associated with the second period of the Gospel Day, when false religious conditions developed alongside the truth.

At the same time, the spiritual condition revealed in the Parable of the Tares is not confined only to that one period. Similar conditions of truth and error, genuine and false ministry, can be recognised more broadly throughout the Gospel Day.

This sequence matters because Jesus is presenting more than isolated stories. The parables together reveal the development of spiritual conditions connected with His Kingdom.

We must therefore resist taking one expression from the Parable of the Tares and building an interpretation without considering the larger teaching of Matthew chapter 13. The immediate parable must remain within the Kingdom setting Jesus has already established.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What part of Matthew 13 frames the Parable of the Tares?

Personal Reflection

What changes when you read the Tares beside the other parables rather than alone?

Action Step

Read the Tares alongside its surrounding parables. Examine whether you have isolated an image from its setting and explain how the wider chapter affects your understanding.

Who Heard the Parable?

The original parable was spoken publicly to the multitude. Jesus was sitting in a ship while the people stood upon the shore, and He taught them through parables.

However, an important change takes place before Jesus explains the Tares.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 13:34-36**:

> *"All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field."*

Notice the change of audience. Jesus first spoke the parable to the multitude, but He then sent the multitude away, entered the house and explained the parable to His disciples.

This distinction is important because Jesus Himself provides the interpretation. We do not need to guess what the principal elements represent.

The disciples asked, *"Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field,"* and Jesus answered them. His explanation must therefore govern everything that follows.

The Timeframe of the Parable

The parable also contains a developing timeframe. It begins with good seed being sown, an enemy later introduces tares, and both are then allowed to grow until the harvest.

The picture therefore describes a process, not one event occurring at a single moment. The sequence is important:

- Good seed is sown;
- The enemy introduces tares;
- The wheat and tares grow;
- The harvest comes.

This agrees with the larger setting of the seven parables. They concern the Gospel Day, beginning with the ministry of Jesus Christ and continuing through the age in which the Gospel goes throughout the world. The Parable of the Tares describes conditions that develop within that timeframe.

This prevents us from forcing the whole parable entirely into the earthly ministry of Jesus or moving everything into a distant future. We must allow the sequence Jesus gives to establish the timeframe: sowing, enemy activity, growth and harvest.

Later sections will examine each of these elements carefully, including the meaning of the field, the tares, the enemy, the harvest and the reapers. For now, the interpretive foundation is clear.

The subject is the Kingdom, the public audience was the multitude, the explanation was given to the disciples, and the timeframe follows the developing course of the Gospel Day. With these boundaries established, we can now begin examining the symbols according to the meanings Jesus Himself provides.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the timeframe of the Tares matter to its interpretation?

Personal Reflection

Have you placed the harvest into a timeframe without considering the sequence given by Jesus?

Action Step

List the sequence Jesus gives in the Tares. Reconsider any fixed expectation about its timeframe and explain which verses must govern your conclusion.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE CHURCH

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Jesus introduced the Parable of the Tares by identifying its subject as the Kingdom of Heaven. To interpret the parable correctly, we must understand what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of Heaven and how this relates to the Kingdom of God and the Church.

These expressions must be understood from Scripture rather than from ideas of an earthly political kingdom or a future physical reign. The Bible itself provides the meaning and establishes the spiritual setting in which the parable must be understood.

The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God

Some have tried to make a distinction between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God, as though they describe two different kingdoms. However, parallel Gospel accounts show that the expressions can describe the same spiritual reality.

Matthew recorded the words of Jesus concerning children in **Matthew 19:14**:

> *"But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."*

Luke records the same teaching using another expression.

Luke wrote in **Luke 18:16**:

> *"But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."*

Matthew says *"the kingdom of heaven,"* while Luke says *"the kingdom of God."* The subject has not changed because these are two expressions describing the Kingdom that belongs to God.

This is important when approaching Matthew chapter 13. When Jesus speaks about *"the kingdom of heaven,"* we are dealing with the same spiritual Kingdom elsewhere described as *"the kingdom of God."*

A Spiritual Kingdom

Jesus clearly taught that His Kingdom is not an earthly political government.

John recorded the words of Jesus in **John 18:36**:

> *"Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."*

Jesus said plainly, *"My kingdom is not of this world."* His Kingdom does not depend upon geographical borders, earthly armies, political control or natural nationality.

Jesus also explained that the Kingdom would not arrive through outward observation.

Luke wrote in **Luke 17:20-21**:

> *"And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you."*

Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees. He was not saying that the Kingdom already dwelt within them. The King was standing among them, yet they failed to recognise Him.

The Kingdom is therefore not an earthly political state established through outward observation. In the New Covenant, Jesus Christ reigns within those who are born again and possess His Spirit.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does this teaching mean by the Kingdom of Heaven as a spiritual Kingdom?

Personal Reflection

How might an earthly or simply visible picture of the Kingdom distort this teaching?

Action Step

Compare **Matthew 19:14** *and* **Luke 18:16**. *Consider whether you have imagined separate kingdoms and explain how their shared teaching should change your understanding.*

The Kingdom Is a Present Reality

The Kingdom should not be postponed entirely into the future. Jesus proclaimed during His earthly ministry that the Kingdom was approaching.

Matthew wrote in **Matthew 4:17**:

> *"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

The Kingdom came into its New Covenant reality as the work of Jesus Christ was completed and He came to dwell within His people by His Spirit. Paul therefore speaks of believers as people who have already been translated into the Kingdom.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:13-14**:

> *"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:"*

Notice the language *"hath delivered us"* and *"hath translated us."* Paul is describing something already experienced by those who belong to Jesus Christ.

The Kingdom of God is therefore a present spiritual reality in the Gospel Day. Those who are born again already live under the spiritual reign of Jesus Christ.

Entering the Kingdom Through the New Birth

Jesus explained to Nicodemus how a person enters this spiritual Kingdom.

John recorded in **John 3:3-7**:

> *"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."*

Jesus places entrance into the Kingdom within the spiritual reality of the new birth. Natural birth cannot produce spiritual life, and neither can outward religious membership or ceremony produce it.

The person must be born of the Spirit. At the new birth, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believer by His Spirit, and the believer is brought under His spiritual reign.

Entrance into the Kingdom is therefore the work of God. It is not produced by natural ancestry, human organisation or an outward ordinance.

The Kingdom and the Church

This brings us to the relationship between the Kingdom and the Church. The Kingdom emphasises the reign of Jesus Christ, while the Church emphasises the spiritual body of people in whom Christ dwells and reigns.

Paul identifies that body clearly.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 1:18**:

> *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."*

The Church is *"the body,"* and Jesus Christ is its Head. It is not primarily an organisation, denomination, building or membership list because it consists of those who have been born again and possess the Spirit of Christ.

Paul explains how believers are brought into this one body.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

> *"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."*

This baptism is spiritual. By the one Spirit of Christ, those who are born again are brought into the one body of Christ.

The same inward work of God that brings the believer into the Kingdom also brings the believer into the one spiritual body of Christ. Since Pentecost, the Kingdom and the Church describe the same New Covenant people from different viewpoints.

The Kingdom emphasises the reign of Jesus Christ within His people, while the Church emphasises those same born-again believers as His spiritual body. They are not two separate saving entities or peoples.

This understanding is essential for the Parable of the Tares. Jesus is describing spiritual conditions connected with His present Kingdom during the Gospel Day. We must therefore interpret the wheat, tares, field, enemy and harvest within that spiritual setting rather than moving the parable into an earthly political kingdom or an unrelated future age.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does this teaching relate the Kingdom to the Church without confusing them?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated the Church chiefly as an organisation, or the Kingdom as a separate group, rather than recognising the life and rule of Jesus Christ?

Action Step

Read **John 3:3-7** *and* **Colossians 1:18***. Examine whether you have confused the Kingdom or Church with an outward organisation and explain what the new birth establishes.*

THE SOWER, THE SEED AND THE FIELD

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Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Tares gives us an important advantage. We do not have to decide for ourselves what the principal symbols represent because Jesus identifies them.

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 13:36-39**:

> *"Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels."*

Jesus gives us the principal elements. We can therefore begin with what He has established and then compare His explanation with the other parables in Matthew chapter 13.

Jesus Christ Is the Sower

Jesus says, *"He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man."* The Sower is therefore Jesus Christ.

This agrees with the first parable in Matthew chapter 13. Jesus begins there with a sower going forth to sow, and Mark records the central action very simply.

Mark wrote in **Mark 4:14**:

> *"The sower soweth the word."*

Although Jesus uses His servants in Gospel ministry, the truth does not originate with the preacher, teacher or minister. Jesus Christ remains the source of the message. His servants carry His Word, but Christ is the true Sower.

This keeps the attention where it belongs. Gospel ministry is not about producing followers of a human teacher, but bringing people to Jesus Christ through His Word.

The Seed

The imagery of seed appears in both the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Tares, but Jesus uses the picture in slightly different ways.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus identifies the seed with *"the word of the kingdom."*

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 13:19**:

> *"When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side."*

The Word is sown into the heart, and the different kinds of ground show different responses to that Word. The emphasis is upon the message being received and what happens after it is heard.

In the Parable of the Tares, however, Jesus develops the picture and says, *"the good seed are the children of the kingdom."* We should not confuse these two statements or make them contradict one another.

In the first parable, attention is upon the Word being sown. In the second, attention has moved to the people associated with the Kingdom.

The imagery has therefore developed from the proclamation of the Word to the resulting spiritual conditions within the world. This is one reason the order of the seven parables is important. The Sower begins with the Word going forth, while the Tares shows what develops after the good seed has been sown.

Personal Response

Key Truth

According to Jesus' explanation, what do the sower and seed represent?

Personal Reflection

Where have you used a familiar meaning for the seed without checking the words of this parable?

Action Step

Compare Jesus' descriptions of seed in the Sower and the Tares. Correct any habit of giving the same symbol an identical meaning without checking its context.

The Field Is the World

Jesus next gives one of the clearest definitions in the parable: *"The field is the world."* The field must therefore not automatically be interpreted as the Church because Jesus Himself tells us what it represents.

The Greek word translated world in **Matthew 13:38** is KOSMOS. KOSMOS commonly refers to the created world or the ordered world of humanity.

This is different from another Greek word that the King James Version also sometimes translates as world: AION. The distinction is important:

- KOSMOS refers to the world;
- AION refers to an age or period of time.

Jesus says that the field is the KOSMOS. The picture therefore reaches beyond one congregation, denomination or religious organisation. The field is the wider world in which the Gospel operates and in which different spiritual conditions become visible.

This agrees with the worldwide scope of the Gospel.

Jesus said in **Mark 16:15**:

> *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."*

The Gospel was never intended to remain within one nation or one geographical location. Jesus Christ sends His Word throughout the world.

Do Not Confuse the Field With the Church

This distinction becomes especially important when interpreting the wheat and tares. If we begin by assuming that the field represents the Church, we may conclude that Jesus intended His spiritual body to consist permanently of saved and unsaved people growing together.

But that interpretation changes the definition Jesus Himself gives. Jesus did not say that the field is the Church because He said plainly, *"The field is the world."*

The Church remains the spiritual body of Jesus Christ, composed of those who are born again. Jesus Christ is its Head, while the parable describes what takes place in the wider field of the world during the Gospel Day.

The difference between KOSMOS and AION will become even more important when we reach Jesus' statement concerning the harvest. In the same explanation, the King James Version uses the English word world again, but there the underlying Greek word is AION, referring to an age.

For now, the foundation is clear. Jesus Christ is the Sower. His Word goes forth into the world. The field is the KOSMOS, the world of humanity, and the good seed are identified by Jesus as the children of the Kingdom.

With these symbols established by Jesus Himself, we are ready to consider how another kind of seed entered the field and why the tares appeared among the wheat.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the field not be confused with the Church in the Tares?

Personal Reflection

What earlier assumption about the field does Jesus' explanation correct for you?

Action Step

Read Jesus' words, 'The field is the world.' Consider whether you have confused the world with Christ's Church and explain how that changes your understanding of its membership.

THE ENEMY, SLEEP AND THE TARES

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After the good seed had been sown, Jesus introduced another action into the parable. Something entered the field that had not come from the original Sower.

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 13:25-30**:

> *"But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."*

Jesus later explains two of these symbols directly.

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 13:38-39**:

> *"The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels."*

We therefore do not need to guess the identity of the enemy or the tares. Jesus says plainly that the enemy is the devil and that the tares are the children of the wicked one.

The Enemy Sows a Counterfeit

Notice the method of the enemy. He does not destroy the field or remove the good seed. Instead, he sows something else among what Christ has sown.

This provides an important picture of spiritual deception. Falsehood often operates alongside truth and may use religious language while opposing the truth of Jesus Christ.

Paul warned about this danger in **2 Corinthians 11:13-15**:

> *"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."*

Paul describes false apostles and deceitful workers who present themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their outward appearance does not immediately reveal what they truly are.

This agrees closely with the picture of tares among wheat. False ministry does not always announce itself as false because it may carry religious language, quote Scripture and claim spiritual authority while introducing teaching that draws people away from Jesus Christ and His truth.

Paul gave another warning in **Colossians 2:8**:

> *"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."*

The final words provide an important test: *"and not after Christ."* Whatever removes Jesus Christ from His rightful place, replaces His Word with human tradition or turns people towards a religion of human making belongs to another spiritual influence.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Who sows the counterfeit in the Tares, and what does that distinction teach?

Personal Reflection

Where might you mistake the presence of a counterfeit for evidence against the true seed?

Action Step

Identify what Jesus assigns to the enemy and the tares. Examine where you have blamed Christ for falsehood and correct that judgement in the light of His words.

While Men Slept

Jesus says that the enemy sowed the tares *"while men slept."* Jesus does not directly identify these sleeping men when He explains the parable, so we should be careful not to assign them an identity that He Himself did not give.

However, Scripture does use sleep symbolically when describing spiritual carelessness and a lack of watchfulness.

Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians 5:6**:

> *"Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."*

Paul is clearly not commanding believers never to sleep physically. The contrast is between sleeping and being spiritually watchful and sober.

Paul used similar language in **Ephesians 5:14**:

> *"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."*

These verses help us understand the principle contained in the parable without forcing an identity upon the sleeping men. When spiritual watchfulness is lost, error can enter and develop without immediately being recognised.

This is particularly serious in ministry. Those entrusted with teaching God's Word must remain awake to truth because false teaching can influence many people.

The Tares Become Visible

Jesus says that the difference became apparent as growth continued: *"But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also."* The picture shows that deception may not always be recognised immediately because time and fruit reveal what has been sown.

Jesus taught the same principle concerning false prophets.

Matthew recorded His words in **Matthew 7:15-16**:

> *"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?"*

Again, outward appearance may deceive. Jesus therefore directs attention towards fruit, because what has been sown eventually becomes visible through what it produces.

The presence of false religion in the world does not mean that Christ sowed corruption. When the servants asked where the tares came from, the householder answered, *"An enemy hath done this."*

Jesus Christ sows good seed. Truth, spiritual life and righteousness have their source in Him, while the enemy works through deception, false teaching and those who carry it.

The parable therefore presents two opposing spiritual operations within the field of the world during the Gospel Day. Christ sows what is good. The enemy introduces what is false. Spiritual sleep allows deception to develop, while spiritual watchfulness and the fruit produced reveal what has truly been sown.

The next question concerns what Jesus means when He says that both must remain *"until the harvest."* To understand that statement, we must carefully examine the meaning of the harvest and the expression *"the end of the world."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do the tares become visible only as the crop develops?

Personal Reflection

How does that timing affect the judgments you are tempted to make too early?

Action Step

Read what the householder tells the servants. Examine a judgement you have wanted to make too quickly and explain how you will practise greater care and discernment.

THE HARVEST: UNDERSTANDING THE END OF THE AGE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Jesus brings the Parable of the Tares towards its conclusion with the harvest. Because He explains what the harvest represents, we must allow His words to establish the meaning rather than assuming that the expression refers to the destruction of the physical world.

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 13:38-40**:

> *"The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world."*

The King James Version uses the English word *"world"* several times in these verses. However, an examination of the Greek shows that the same Greek word is not being used in each place.

KOSMOS and AION

In verse 38 Jesus says, *"The field is the world."* The Greek word translated world here is KOSMOS. It refers to the world of humanity in which the Gospel is proclaimed and the spiritual conditions represented by the wheat and tares develop.

However, when Jesus says, *"the harvest is the end of the world,"* the Greek word translated world is AION. AION does not mean the physical earth. It refers to an age or period of time.

This distinction is essential. The field is the KOSMOS, but the harvest concerns the completion of the AION. The English translation uses the same word world, but the Greek words communicate two different thoughts.

Scripture Confirms the Difference

The same distinction appears clearly in Hebrews.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:26**:

> *"For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."*

Again, the King James Version uses world twice, but two different Greek words stand behind the English translation. The first expression, *"foundation of the world,"* uses KOSMOS, while the second expression, *"end of the world,"* uses AION.

Jesus Christ did not appear at the destruction of the physical earth to offer Himself for sin. He appeared at the end of an age. His sacrifice therefore demonstrates clearly that the expression *"the end of the world"* can refer to the completion of an age rather than the destruction of the planet.

This is why individual words must be studied carefully. The English wording must be considered together with the context and, where necessary, the original word behind the translation.

Which Age Is in View?

We must now return to the context of Matthew chapter 13. The seven parables describe the course and operation of the Kingdom throughout the Gospel Day.

The Gospel Day began in A.D. 31 at Pentecost, when Jesus Christ returned as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people, and it continues to the end of time. The Parable of the Tares describes a process developing within that age:

- Christ sows the good seed;
- The enemy introduces tares;
- Both become visible as they grow;
- The servants recognise the difference;
- The growth continues until the harvest;
- The harvest brings the process towards its conclusion.

The Gospel Day began at Pentecost in A.D. 31, when Jesus Christ returned as the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people. Within that Gospel Day, the Parable of the Tares presents a clear sequence. Christ sows the good seed, the enemy introduces the tares, and both develop before the harvest takes place. The harvest represents the separating work appointed by Jesus Christ, through which the true nature of the wheat and tares is revealed. Through His Word and Spirit working through His people, Jesus Christ continues to expose error and establish truth, and His work continues until the end of time.

Harvest Is a Time of Separation

A natural harvest does not create the wheat or the tares. It reveals what has grown and brings each to its appointed outcome.

The same principle operates in the parable. The good seed was sown earlier, the enemy's work also took place earlier, and both then developed over time. At the harvest, what has been growing is gathered and separated.

This is important because the harvest does not mean that people suddenly become wheat or tares at that moment. The harvest reveals and separates what has already developed.

Jesus therefore told the servants not to attempt a premature separation.

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 13:29-30**:

> *"But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."*

The words *"until the harvest"* show that God Himself determines when the separation takes place. Human judgement cannot replace God's discernment because the servants recognised that tares were present, but they were not authorised to uproot them according to their own judgement.

The End of the Age, Not the End of the KOSMOS

This brings us back to the importance of biblical language. Jesus did not say that the harvest was the destruction of the KOSMOS. He said that the harvest was the completion of the AION.

That distinction prevents us from turning the parable into a description of a future physical destruction of the earth or a future bodily return of Jesus Christ. The parable concerns the spiritual Kingdom and the development of spiritual conditions throughout the Gospel Day.

The harvest brings those conditions to their appointed separation and conclusion. Having established what the harvest represents, we can now examine the reapers whom Jesus sends to carry out that separating work.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does this teaching distinguish the end of the age from the end of the KOSMOS?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated those two expressions as interchangeable without checking the word and context?

Action Step

Compare KOSMOS and AION in Matthew 13. Reconsider an assumption based only on the English word 'world' and explain how you will check context in future.

THE REAPERS AND THE FURNACE OF FIRE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Having identified the harvest as the completion of the AION, Jesus next explains who performs the work of gathering and separation.

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 13:39-42**:

> *"The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."*

Jesus says plainly that *"the reapers are the angels."* However, as we have already learned, the English word angel does not always require a celestial being. We must examine the word within its context and allow Scripture to establish how it is being used.

Angels Are Messengers

The Greek word translated angels is AGGELOS, meaning a messenger. Scripture itself shows that this word can describe those who are sent with a message.

John gives us an important example in Revelation.

Jesus said in **Revelation 1:20**:

> *"The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."*

The angels are connected with the seven churches and are represented by stars. In this setting, they function as messengers associated with the ministry of the Church.

Daniel uses similar imagery concerning those who turn others towards righteousness.

Daniel wrote in **Daniel 12:3**:

> *"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."*

This provides an important connection. Those who carry God's truth and turn people towards righteousness are pictured as stars, while Revelation connects stars with the messengers of the churches.

The reaping work therefore involves messengers carrying the truth of God. The emphasis remains upon those who are sent with His message.

The Son of Man Sends the Reapers

The authority behind the harvest remains Jesus Christ. Jesus says, *"The Son of man shall send forth his angels."*

The messengers do not act according to their own authority because they are sent by Christ. This agrees with the pattern already established in the parable. Christ is the Sower, Christ determines the harvest, and Christ sends those who participate in the reaping work.

The true ministry therefore does not create its own message. It proclaims the Word entrusted to it by Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:20**:

> *"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."*

An ambassador carries another's message. In the same way, Gospel ministers are not sent to establish their own doctrines, organisations or authority. They are sent to proclaim Jesus Christ and His Word.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Who sends the reapers in Jesus' explanation of the Tares?

Personal Reflection

Have you allowed the importance of human preachers to obscure that Jesus Christ sends His messengers and remains the authority?

Action Step

Read **Matthew 13:39-42***. Examine whether you have given human messengers independent authority and explain how Christ's direction must govern all proclamation of His Word.*

The Work of Separation

Jesus says that the reapers *"shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity."* The harvest therefore involves separation.

Earlier, wheat and tares had developed together in the field. During the harvest, the difference becomes exposed and the separating work takes place.

This agrees with the power of God's Word to distinguish what human observation cannot always distinguish.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 4:12**:

> *"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*

God's Word divides and exposes. It brings hidden conditions into the light and reveals whether something stands in truth or error.

The separating work is therefore not based upon human preference or personal judgement. The authority remains with Jesus Christ and the truth of His Word.

The Furnace of Fire

Jesus then says that those gathered out are cast into *"a furnace of fire."* Because we are studying a parable, we must remain consistent with the interpretive method already established.

We should not suddenly literalise one element while treating the surrounding field, seed, tares, harvest and angels symbolically. Neither should we invent a meaning that Scripture does not support.

The Bible itself uses fire as a picture of God's Word.

Jeremiah wrote in **Jeremiah 23:29**:

> *"Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"*

God directly compares His Word with fire. The picture communicates the power of truth to expose, test and break what cannot stand before the Word of God.

The furnace imagery therefore carries the thought of judgement and exposure under the truth of God. What has grown from falsehood cannot stand when brought fully into the light of His Word.

The emphasis of the parable is not upon describing a literal furnace somewhere upon the earth. Jesus is showing the outcome of the separating work within the harvest picture.

Wailing and Gnashing of Teeth

Jesus adds that *"there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."* These words show the seriousness of divine judgement because separation from truth is not presented as a small matter.

Those who have resisted the reign of God and continued in iniquity face the consequences of that condition. The parable therefore moves from sowing, to growth, to exposure, and finally to separation.

Christ sends His messengers with His truth, and the Word exposes what belongs to Him and what does not. Falsehood is gathered out, while what belongs to Jesus Christ remains.

The contrast is then completed by the final picture in the parable. After describing the removal of everything that offends, Jesus turns our attention towards those who belong to Him with the words: *"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does the furnace of fire imagery communicate in Jesus' explanation?

Personal Reflection

Does the seriousness of this warning change how carefully you read and respond to the parable?

Action Step

Read the warning about the furnace within the whole parable. Consider whether you have treated God's judgement lightly and identify a more faithful response to His truth.

THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL SHINE AS THE SUN

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Jesus concludes the explanation of the Parable of the Tares with a powerful contrast. After describing the gathering away of everything that offends, He turns our attention towards those who belong to Him.

Matthew recorded in **Matthew 13:43**:

> *"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."*

The parable began with Jesus Christ sowing good seed and the enemy introducing tares. It concludes with the false being exposed and the righteous shining openly in the Kingdom.

Jesus Christ Is the True Light

To understand this picture, we must remember where spiritual light comes from.

Jesus said in **John 8:12**:

> *"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."*

Jesus does not simply point towards the light. He declares, *"I am the light of the world."* Therefore, when the righteous shine, they do not produce spiritual light independently of Him.

Jesus Christ is the source of the light. At the new birth, Jesus Christ comes to dwell within the believer by His Spirit. His life within becomes the source of righteousness, truth and spiritual light.

His Light Shines Through His People

Jesus also said to His disciples in **Matthew 5:14-16**:

> *"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

There is no contradiction between Jesus saying *"I am the light of the world"* and telling His people *"Ye are the light of the world."* He is the source, while His light is expressed through those in whom He dwells.

The Christian life is therefore not an attempt to produce righteousness by copying Jesus outwardly. It is the life of Jesus Christ within the born-again believer being expressed openly.

This completes the picture of the parable. Error may develop for a time, and falsehood may appear alongside truth, but it cannot remain hidden forever. The harvest exposes the difference and brings what has developed into the light.

The final emphasis is therefore not upon the tares, the enemy or the darkness. It is upon the righteous shining in the Kingdom because the light and life of Jesus Christ are within them. Jesus closes the parable with the call, *"Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."*

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does the promise that the righteous shall shine as the sun add to the account of the harvest?

Personal Reflection

Have you looked towards your own goodness to produce spiritual light rather than recognising the life of Christ within?

Action Step

Read **Matthew 13:43** *alongside* **John 8:12***. Examine whether you look to yourself for spiritual light and explain how the life of Jesus Christ within should be visible.*

CONCLUSION: SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Throughout this Study Guide, we have applied the principles of biblical interpretation to two major examples: Jacob's Ladder and the Parable of the Tares.

Jacob's dream showed how a literal historical event can also contain typology and symbolism pointing towards a greater spiritual reality. The ladder, the angels, the house of God and the gate of heaven were not interpreted through imagination. Their meaning became clearer as Scripture was compared with Scripture and our attention was directed towards Jesus Christ and His Church.

The Parable of the Tares demonstrated the same principle through parabolic language. Jesus Himself identified many of the principal symbols, including the Sower, the field, the good seed, the tares, the enemy, the harvest and the reapers. His explanation therefore governed our interpretation, while other Scriptures helped us understand the wider spiritual picture.

We also saw why individual words matter. The King James Version uses the English word world for both KOSMOS and AION, yet these Greek words communicate different meanings. Recognising that distinction helped establish both the setting and timeframe of the parable.

These examples reinforce several important principles:

- Recognise the form of biblical language being used;
- Establish the context, speaker, audience and timeframe;
- Examine important words where necessary;
- Allow Jesus to explain what He explains;
- Compare Scripture with Scripture;
- Test every interpretation against the harmony of God's Word;
- Keep Jesus Christ central.

The Bible is not interpreted correctly by imagination, religious tradition or personal preference. Scripture must interpret Scripture. The meaning must come from the Word itself and remain in harmony with the truth God has already revealed.

The Spirit of Christ dwelling within the born-again believer does not remove the need for careful study. He guides us as we search the Word honestly, compare the relevant Scriptures and allow its truth to govern our understanding.

When these principles are followed, the pictures, symbols, parables and types of Scripture do not leave us occupied with the pictures themselves. They direct us towards the greater spiritual truth God intended to communicate.

The picture serves the truth. Scripture establishes the meaning. And the truth revealed through God's Word directs us towards Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must the Bible interpret the Bible when a type, symbol or parable is difficult?

Personal Reflection

Which interpretation in this teaching became clearer when you compared the related verses?

Action Step

Apply the interpretive method to an image you previously misunderstood. Record which assumption changed and explain what you will do differently the next time you study.

MODULE CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE

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Throughout this module, we have seen that God communicates truth in many different ways. The Bible contains literal history and direct statements, but it also uses parables, symbols, types, antitypes, dreams, visions, metaphors and other forms of language. Understanding these forms helps us rightly divide the Word of truth.

In Parables and Symbolism, we learned that a natural picture can communicate a spiritual truth. The picture must not control the interpretation because Scripture must establish what the picture means. We must recognise the form of language being used and allow the Bible to explain its own imagery.

In Types and Antitypes, we saw that real people, events, objects and institutions can point towards greater spiritual realities. Adam, Noah, Isaac and the Old Covenant shadows were real, but Scripture also uses them to reveal truths fulfilled more completely in Jesus Christ. The type must never become greater than the reality to which it points.

In Visions and Dreams, we learned that unusual images must be understood according to the language of revelation in which they appear. We do not interpret beasts, stars, hail, animals or other visionary pictures according to imagination. We search the Scriptures for the meaning God has provided and test the interpretation against the harmony of His Word.

Finally, in Applying the Language of the Bible, we brought these principles together through two detailed examples. Jacob's Ladder demonstrated how history, typology and symbolism can work together, while the Parable of the Tares showed the importance of context, audience, timeframe, individual words and the explanation given by Jesus Himself.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

That instruction remains central to everything we have studied. We should approach Scripture with humility, patience and a genuine desire to understand what God has written.

We must not force the Bible to agree with tradition, imagination or a conclusion we have already chosen. The Bible must interpret the Bible. Context, words, audience, timeframe and the harmony of Scripture must remain under the authority of God's Word.

The born-again believer also possesses the Spirit of Christ, who guides us into truth as we prayerfully search His Word. Careful study and dependence upon His indwelling Spirit belong together because spiritual dependence does not remove our responsibility to study faithfully.

Above all, the language of Scripture continually directs us towards Jesus Christ. The symbols, types, parables and visions are not the destination because they serve the greater truth God intends to reveal.

The picture serves the truth. Scripture establishes the meaning. Jesus Christ is the reality to whom the Word continually directs us.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What shared interpretive rule connects the four Guides in The Language of the Bible module?

Personal Reflection

Which habit of interpretation has this module most clearly corrected for you?

Action Step

Choose a biblical image for further study. Commit to checking its context and the Bible's explanation, and identify how you will receive and live the truth it reveals.

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

How do Jacob's dream and Jesus' words about the Son of Man point to Jesus Christ as the way to heaven? Explain what this means for access to God.

2. Understanding

How do the angels ascending and descending, the Lord above the ladder, and the house and gate of heaven relate to Christ and His Church? Use the Bible to explain the connections.

3. Personal Reflection

Which detail in Jacob's dream or its interpretation most challenged a picture you had formed about approaching God, and why?

4. Response to Truth

How should context, timeframe, and audience guide your understanding of Jacob's ladder and the Parable of the Tares? Explain what could go wrong if either account is read without its setting.

5. Action Step

Choose one interpretation of the Tares you have accepted or heard. Which words of Jesus will you use to test it, and what will you correct if it conflicts with His explanation? State when you will begin.

6. Early Response

Have you begun testing the interpretation identified in Question 5 against Jesus' explanation? If so, describe what you found or changed. If not, explain what prevented you from beginning.

7. Ongoing Practice

What ongoing reading practice will help you keep the seed, field, enemy, tares and harvest distinct as you study Matthew 13 and compare the Bible with the Bible?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

Why must the end of the age be distinguished from the end of the KOSMOS when explaining the harvest? Explain how the reapers, furnace of fire, and shining of the righteous fit that timeframe.

9. Living the Truth

How should the truth that Jesus Christ is the Door and Head of the Church change your confidence in Him and your treatment of His people? Give one personal example.

10. Final Response

How will you use the Bible to understand types, symbols, visions, and parables? Bring together what Jacob's ladder and the Tares have taught you, and explain how this will change your Bible study.