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Parables: The Great Divide

By Bryan Hodge

“As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be... Noah entered the ark... the flood came and took them all away (destroyed them all – Luke 17:27).” – Matthew 24:38-39

“Two men will be in the field, one will be taken and the other left.” - Matthew 24:40

“Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.” – Matthew 24:41

Note: The Left Behind book series has it completely backwards. In context, the taken are the lost, and the left are the saved.

Let us consider two parables that set forth “the great divide.”

The Wheat and The Tares (Matthew 13:24-30)

The setting (Matthew 13:1-2): Jesus is publicly teaching a great multitude at the Sea of Galilee. He presents eight parables concerning the coming kingdom (Note: one is recorded only by Mark – the growing seed, Mark 4:26-29).

The parable (Matthew 13:24-30): A farmer sows wheat seed in his field. However, an enemy, by night, sows tare seed in the farmer’s wheat field. The result is that both wheat and tares are growing together in the same field. Neil Lightfoot explains, “There were several varieties of tares or darnel, the one most probably referred to in the parable is called ‘bearded darnel.’ This darnel looked very much like wheat, and in its early stages of growth were practically impossible to distinguish from wheat, but as soon as the grain began to head, anyone could tell the difference” (Parables of Jesus, Part 1, p. 37).

The French call this plant ‘darnel’ (meaning ‘stupefied’) due to its intoxicating properties. It causes trembling, inability to walk, hindered speech, and vomiting.

What to do? The farmer decides that his best option is to allow the wheat and the tares to continue to grow together in the same field, and then to carefully separate the two at the harvest.

The application: (1) God allows the righteous and the wicked, the saints and the sinners, to live side by side in this world. However, at times, it appears that He does not distinguish. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). (2) There will be a day of separation. The angels will perform this separation.

Note: This has nothing to do with church discipline. In context - “the field is the world” (Matthew 13:38).

The Dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50)

The setting (Matthew 13:1-2): It is the same as the previous parable.

The parable (Matthew 13:47-50): A dragnet is cast into the sea. This was not a small net. Neil Lightfoot comments, “The dragnet was a seine – net used often by fishermen on the lake of Galilee. It was a large net, with weights on the bottom and floats on the top” (The Parable of Jesus, Part 1, p. 40). Wayne Jackson indicates that such nets could be up to a half a mile long (The Parables in Profile, p. 27). The net is indiscriminate. It catches all. The sorting follows the catch. Remember, not all fish were clean to Israel (Leviticus 11:9-12).

The application: (1) The just and the unjust, the righteous and the wicked, swim together in this same sea of life. (2) Separation will come. The angels will perform the separation. Will you be “a keeper,” or will you be thrown back?