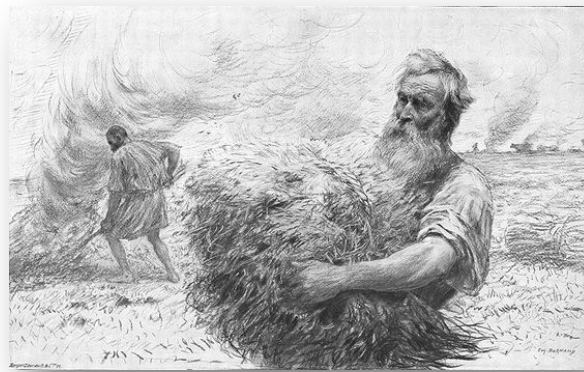


The Parable of the tares

The Church at Smyrna
and its corresponding Church Age¹
Under the Roman Empire

(100 A.D. to 313 A.D.)



Matthew 13:24-30 (NASB), **24** Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. ²⁷ The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ ²⁸ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ ²⁹ But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”

¹ <http://dailyfood.ca/kingdom/kingdom6wed.html>



The second mystery is the parable of the tares and the wheat and is related to the church in Smyrna, which represents the condition of the church under the persecution of the Roman Empire between the end of the first century and the beginning of the fourth (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43; cf. Rev. 2:8-11). Smyrna signifies myrrh, an aromatic spice with a very bitter flavor used in the preparation of the body for burial (John 19:39-40). Myrrh, therefore, is related to suffering.

The church in Smyrna is the continuation of the church in Ephesus, that is, after it became desirable. She passed through much suffering under the persecution of the Roman Empire because she called on the Name and read and prayed the word. This happened because the enemy, being frustrated, came to attack her.

A similar situation happened at the beginning of the church in Jerusalem. As soon as it was raised up, the brothers and sisters were calling on the name of the Lord (Acts. 2:21; 7:59). Then the Jewish religion used people like Saul to persecute those who called on the name of the Lord (9:14, 21). Because of this situation, the church in Jerusalem stopped calling on the Lord. But it was not like this with the church in Smyrna. She was the continuation of the church in Ephesus, and the saints continued to call on the Name and pray-read the Lord's word, even unto death. It doesn't matter how much we are persecuted; we must continue to call on the name of the Lord, because in the spirit we receive life.

According to history, the church in Smyrna passed through ten great persecutions during this time (Rev. 2:10). During this period many saints died, but the church continued to be living and steadfast. Their stand was due to the Name they were calling on and the word they were reading and praying. Because they exercised their spirit by calling and pray-reading, the saints remained faithful and struggled to advance, in spite of the actions of the enemy who "sowed tares in the midst of the wheat."

Revelation 2:13 records the death of Antipas. Even though his name is mentioned in the letter to Pergamos, everything indicates that he was a contemporary of Smyrna because it is dealing with a martyr of the church. The name Antipas means against all. The Bible calls him the faithful witness. The church was calling on the name of the Lord and pray-reading the word while he was living. The Lord encouraged the church in Smyrna to not fear the things that she had to suffer. She should be faithful unto death in order to receive the crown of life (Rev. 2:10).

Comparison: Letter to Smyrna, Parable of the Wheat and the Tares and Church History

Both the parable and the letter seem to point to the period immediately following the apostolic period. There is now orderly sowing as opposed to the scattering of seed along the highways and among stones and thorns. The enemy is working hard to destroy the church both from without (persecution) and from within. The first false teachings are appearing within the Christian church.

Please bear with me as I take this allegory to the next level. Most wheat is harvested and made into bread, which is eaten for nourishment. But the best wheat kernels are reserved for seed. That seed must die and be planted in the ground if it is to multiply.

Death is mentioned three times in the short letter to Smyrna. The first mention is of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The second mentioning admonishes the believers to be faithful **unto** death. The third time, the Lord says that the second death will not harm Smyrna.

The second period in the history of the Christian church is a period of rapid growth in spite of opposition both from without and from within.