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“Let Them Grow Together” by Jorge Cocco Santángelo

WHAT DOES THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND TARES TEACH ABOUT THE APOSTASY?

“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.”

Matthew 13:24–25

THE KNOW

As Jesus taught His disciples, He often used parables to convey various truths about the kingdom of heaven. In one such parable, Jesus employed the image of wheat and tares to demonstrate the future of the Church until the Second Coming. A man, which can be interpreted as representing Christ Himself, “sowed good seed in his field,” and then “when men slept,” Satan “came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way” (Matthew 13:24–25).

Even though the tares were a blight on the crop, the sower instructed his servants, “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” (Matthew 13:30). Although it might seem odd, this prescribed course of action was in fact beneficial because it ensured that the

young wheat wasn’t disturbed or destroyed before it was ready for harvest.

According to John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, this significant parable reveals the basic truths of the Great Apostasy and the wonderful blessings of the Father’s plan of restoration and eternal salvation. This graphic teaching of Jesus reveals that “trouble would arise soon after Jesus had started His Church” while humans were not paying close enough attention and that these problems would be widespread.¹ In particular, the parable appears to address “the challenges presented by the apostasy in the early Christian church, its communities, and its families.”² At the same time, it becomes clear that Jesus prophetically anticipated all these challenges and offered encouragement to His audience so that they might recognize the tares for what they truly were.³

The prophetic nature of this parable is particularly apparent in light of modern revelation. In a revelation given to Joseph Smith in 1832, we learn that “the field was the world, and the apostles were the sowers of the seed; and after they have fallen asleep the great persecutor of the church, the apostate, the whore, even Babylon, that maketh all nations to drink of her cup, in whose hearts the enemy, even Satan, sitteth to reign—behold he soweth the tares; wherefore, the tares choke the wheat and drive the church into the wilderness” (Doctrine and Covenants 86:2–3).

These tares—a type of weed that in its early stages of growth looks deceptively like wheat—can be interpreted as “false prophets, false doctrines, or competing alternates for the gospel” designed to confuse and deceive the world.⁴ Many of these false teachings could be so carefully constructed so as to be difficult to distinguish initially from the true doctrines, at least until the bad nature of their fruits was made manifest at the time of the harvest.

Some of these tares—the deceits of Satan—that were also instrumental in “chok[ing] the wheat and driv[ing] the church into the wilderness” have been revealed through the Book of Mormon and additional revelations given to Joseph Smith. In the Book of Mormon, Nephi saw three steps toward the Apostasy.

First, people would take “away *from the gospel* of the Lamb *many parts* which are plain and most precious” (1 Nephi 13:26; emphasis added). According to the Welch, “This could have occurred by altering the meaning or understanding of the concepts taught by the Lord.”⁵ As key terms or concepts were redefined, important truths were lost and it became more difficult to fully live the gospel.

Second, Nephi was told by his angelic guide that people would take away “many *covenants* of the Lord” (1 Nephi 13:26; emphasis added). In addition to the loss of truths about these covenants, Nephi indicates that some people would intentionally change or remove these covenants altogether so “that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men” (1 Nephi 13:27).

And third, Nephi saw that “many plain and precious things [were] taken away *from the book*, which is the book of the Lamb of God” (1 Nephi 13:28; emphasis added). The corruption of scripture “could have occurred either by the physical loss of words or as a consequence of still-existing texts no longer being understood.”⁶ Regardless, the outcome was the same: without the guiding light of prophets and continuing revelation, it soon became impossible to find the pure truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁷

An additional type of tare was revealed by the Lord in 1831: “My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened.” Because of this, the Lord has commanded the restored Church: “Ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men” (Doctrine and Covenants 64:8–10).

Fortunately, while the tares of contention over matters of truth and doctrine were initially successful in causing widespread apostasy, that is not the end of this story. The Lord in His infinite wisdom and mercy has restored Christ’s true Church, bringing it back from the wilderness, as it were. Through chosen servants, He has also restored essential priesthood rights, keys, and authority, which had “continued through the lineage of your fathers,” so that the full kernels of wheat may yet be harvested and preserved forever (see Doctrine and Covenants 86:8–11).

THE WHY

The parable of the wheat and the tares climactically ends with the harvest of the wheat and the burning of the tares: “In the time of harvest [the Lord] 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” (Matthew 13:30).

The world will be given ample time to repent and prepare for this event, and everyone will have a chance, in this life or the next, to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and exercise faith in Him. Until that time, there will still be tares growing side by side with the wheat. Problems will continue to arise, and the influences and alluring deceptions of Satan will be seen all around us.

Yet the parable of the wheat and tares assures us that faithful people who can distinguish between wheat and tares will gather the wheat and that eventually Christ will come in righteous judgment. When He does, He will remove all the effects of Satan from the world. “His judgement extends several of His virtues as He extends His infinite love, wisdom, justice, and mercy. His judgement fulfils His determinant plan, His covenantal promises, and His eternal work and glory.”⁸

As Elder Neil L. Anderson has explained, “This will be our world until the Savior returns, with much that is good and much that is evil on every side. You may at times not feel like a strong, mature strand of wheat. Be patient with yourself! The Lord said that the wheat would include

tender blades springing up.”⁹ No matter how strong our faith currently is or how developed our testimonies, Christ in this parable invites all people everywhere to come unto Him and be saved. He wants us all to choose righteously and be prepared for His Second Coming so that we can be safely gathered and preserved for eternity.

FURTHER READING

John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 60–67, 148–151.

Susan Easton Black, “Parable of the Wheat and the Tares – Insight Into D&C 86,” in *Restoration Voices Volume 2: Insights and Stories of the Doctrine and Covenants* (Springville, UT: Book of Mormon Central, 2021).

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NOTES

1. John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 61.
2. Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 62.
3. Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 62.
4. Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 61.
5. Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 63.
6. Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 63.
7. See Book of Mormon Central, “Were Plain and Precious Doctrines Lost? (1 Nephi 13:26),” *KnoWhy* 15 (January 20, 2016).
8. Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 148.
9. Neil L. Anderson, “Drawing Closer to the Savior,” October 2022 general conference.