

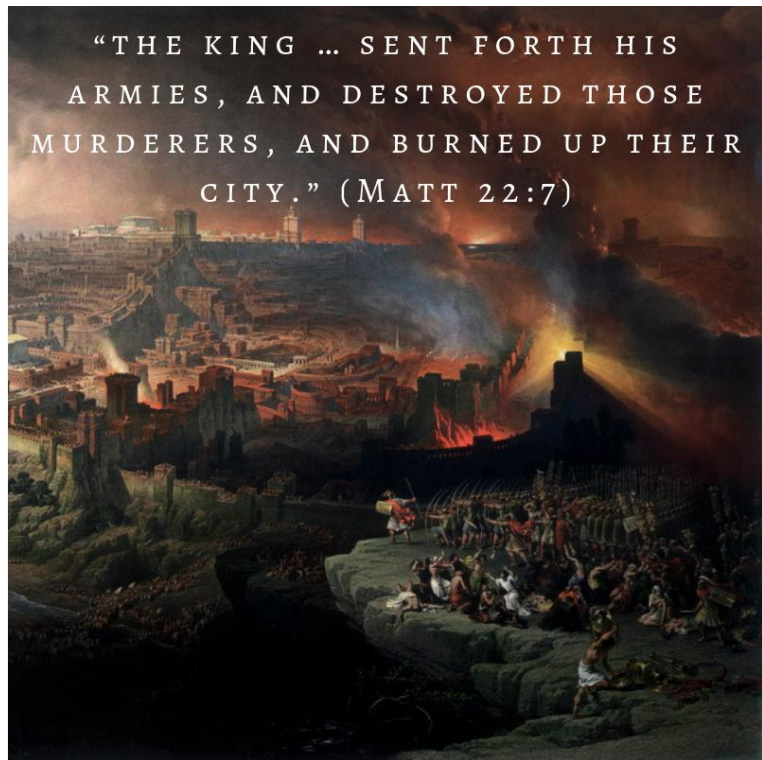
## MEDITATIONS IN MATTHEW TWENTY-TWO: THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST

written by Mike Rogers April 9, 2019

[Matthew 22](#) continues showing what Jesus did on the Tuesday of Passion Week.<sup>1</sup> Here, the Lord again teaches about the kingdom of heaven. He uses a story about a wedding feast to do so. Here is his parable:

And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the

marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and *he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city*. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but *few are chosen*. ([Matt 22:1–14](#); emphasis added)



Jesus and his disciples had preached the kingdom of heaven for more than three years. Let's take a quick survey of Matthew to establish the context for this parable of the wedding feast.

### Matthew's Context for the Parable

God was about to change the way he governed his people. The messianic-age kingdom of heaven would soon replace the Mosaic-age kingdom ([Matt 3:2](#); [4:17](#)).

Jesus had shown how his people were to live in the new age ([Matt 5–7](#)). To enter the new kingdom, a person’s righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees ([Matt 5:20](#)). He must seek first the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness ([Matt 6:33](#)). Only those who would do the Father’s will would enter the kingdom ([Matt 7:21](#)).

The coming kingdom would welcome those who did not enter it during the Mosaic age. Meanwhile, God would cast the children of the Mosaic-age kingdom—the apostate Jews—“into outer darkness” ([Matt 8:11–12](#)).

Jesus gave the parable of the wedding feast the week of his crucifixion and resurrection. For the next forty years, his disciples would preach the kingdom to their Jewish countrymen. Jesus had said, “Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come” ([Matt 10:23](#)). They would preach knowing that “he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than” the greatest Mosaic-age prophet ([Matt 11:11](#)).

Jesus ensured his disciples understood their place in history. They ministered during the last days of one age and at the beginning of another. The Lord, through the Holy Spirit, was binding Satan to spoil him of his goods ([Matt 12:29](#)). God would forgive those who spoke against the work of the Holy Spirit “neither in this [Mosaic] age nor in the [messianic] one about to come.”<sup>2</sup> The Lord gave a series of parables to describe the kingdom of heaven. He told about a sower ([Matt 13:1–9](#), [18–23](#)) and weeds mixed with good seed ([Matt 13:24–30](#), [36–43](#)). The small mustard seed and leaven ([Matt 13:31–33](#)), a treasure buried in a field ([Matt 13:44](#)), a pearl of great price ([Matt 13:45–46](#)), and fish caught in a net ([Matt 13:47–50](#)) all served his purposes. Through them, Jesus warned about “the anxiety of this [Mosaic] age” ([Matt 13:22 YLT](#)). These parables were about “the end of the [Mosaic] age” ([Matt 13:39 ESV](#)).

Jesus had established the authority structure for the new age. It would exist in his church(es) ([Matt 16:18–19](#); [18:17](#)). Jesus would return to end the Mosaic age and establish the messianic kingdom-age in that generation ([Matt 16:27–28](#)).

Only those whom God converted could enter the kingdom of heaven ([Matt 18:1–3](#)). When two or more such persons gathered in Jesus’s name, he would be in their midst ([Matt 18:20](#)). Life in the kingdom would be worth the greatest sacrifices. Some would make themselves eunuchs for it. They would exercise rigid self-control over their sexuality ([Matt 19:12](#)). They would also give up riches for the kingdom’s sake ([Matt 19:23–30](#)).

Jesus’s first-last parable ([Matt 20:1–16](#)) established an important principle. Those who had been first in the Mosaic age would be last in the messianic age and vice versa ([Matt 20:16](#)). This brings us back to Passion Week. Jesus continues to show the age transition. He does so through three symbolic actions—he *contemplates* the city ([Matt 21:1–11](#)), *cleanses* the Temple ([Matt 21:12–17](#)), and *curses* the nation ([Matt 21:18–22](#)).<sup>3</sup> He also uses two more parables, one about two sons and the other about wicked tenants ([Matt 21:23–32](#)) to teach the same lesson.<sup>4</sup> These actions and parables showed God was about to take the kingdom from apostate Israel and give it to the Israel defined by Christ ([Matt 21:43](#)). This has been Jesus’s message throughout Matthew.

## The Parable's Advance of the Story

Jesus uses the parable of the wedding feast to advance this kingdom-message. Matthew links it to what Jesus had just done (i.e., the symbolic actions and parables of [Matt 21](#)). He says, "Jesus answered and spake *unto them again*" ([Matt 22:1](#); emphasis added). So, we should interpret this parable considering the context that reaches back to the start of Jesus's ministry.

We will be brief on the elements of the parable about which there is general agreement. "A certain king" refers to God the Father. "His son" refers to Jesus. The king sends messengers with invitations to the wedding feast. These represent "the ministers of the Gospel ... and may intend John the Baptist, and the twelve apostles of Christ."<sup>5</sup>

The invitees, "by whom are meant the Jews,"<sup>6</sup> refused to come ([Matt 22:3](#); cp. [John 1:11](#)). So, the king sent other messengers. These represent

the seventy disciples, and other ministers of the Gospel, as Barnabas and Saul, and others that were joined to, and were helpers of the apostles, who were sent, and preached to the Jews, any time before the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

Let us take a small step toward more controversial symbolism. This parable shows the *means* God would use to complete the transition between the two ages. The king (God) would send his (Roman) armies to destroy the murderers (apostate Israel) and burn up their city (Jerusalem).<sup>8</sup>

This is ancient imagery. When God judged the Egyptians he said, "I shall put my sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt" ([Ezek 30:25](#)). God used the armies of pagan Babylon to execute his will against the Egyptians.

He would do the same again in the Jewish wars of AD 66–70. Later on this Tuesday of Passion week, Jesus called this judgment the "great tribulation" ([Matt 24:21](#)). It occurred in Jesus's generation ([Matt 24:34](#)).

Now for the more controversial element. Most prophetic models place "the marriage supper of the Lamb" ([Rev 19:9](#)) in our future.<sup>9</sup> Jesus's parable of the wedding feast suggests this is a mistake. Jesus is saying the marriage would occur at Jerusalem's destruction.

John Gill makes an important point. "The Jews used to make feasts both at espousals, and at marriage: hence we read of *a feast of espousals*, and of *a marriage-feast*: the reference here is to the latter."<sup>10</sup>

There *was* a time of espousal. During the period between Passion Week and AD 70, Paul could say he had *espoused* the Corinthian church to Christ ([2 Cor 11:2](#)). But Jesus in our parable and John in Revelation both put the *wedding* feast in Jesus's generation. John placed it among the things that would "shortly come to pass" ([Rev 1:1](#); cp. [Rev 1:3](#); [22:6](#)). Jesus linked it to God's judgment of apostate Israel ([Matt 22:2, 7](#)). [Inmillennialism](#) accepts this placement.

God had a wife during the Mosaic age. He had married Israel after the flesh ([1 Cor 10:18](#); [Jer 3:14](#)). But, God divorced this wife and stoned her for adultery. Now, God would give spiritual

Israel ([Gal 6:16](#)) to Christ in marriage. The wedding feast began in the first century and will continue until the resurrection ([1 Cor 15:25–26](#)). It comprises the entire messianic age.

We will touch on one other element in this parable—wedding garments. This is also ancient imagery. Speaking of the messianic age, Isaiah said:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. ([Isa 61:10](#))

The garments in the parable of the wedding feast represent the righteousness of Christ (e.g., [1 Cor 1:30](#)). God (the king) has given garments to the church (the guests) to celebrate the wedding feast. She is “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” ([Rev 19:8](#)). This is a present reality, not just a future expectation.

But some guests came to the wedding feast without “a wedding garment” ([Matt 22:11](#)). We grant that this imagery can apply to the entire messianic age. But, in Matthew’s context, it probably represents first-century Jews who only claimed to follow Christ. In reality, they were strangers to the way of salvation. They wanted to add things like circumcision to the righteousness of Christ. Speaking of them, Paul said, “I would they were even cut off which trouble you” ([Gal 5:12](#)).

## Conclusion

Jesus linked his parable of the wedding feast to God’s judgment of Israel in AD 66–70. This connection agrees with the immediate context, including things he had done and said that day. It also agrees with Matthew’s storyline about the kingdom of heaven. God was about to divorce apostate Israel, his wife during the Mosaic age. He would marry a new, faithful, bride—the church of the messianic age. The marriage feast would then begin.

## Footnotes

1. We plan to publish this post on April 10, 2019, the week before Passion Week. This coincides with the 1,989th anniversary of this week. It begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Easter Sunday.
2. Kenneth S. Wuest, *Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 30.
3. We saw this in a previous post [here](#).
4. We saw this in our most recent previous post [here](#).
5. John Gill, *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, 9 vols. (1809–1810; repr., Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, 1989), 7:251.
6. Gill, “Exposition,” 7:251.

7. Gill, "Exposition," 7:251.
8. The image in this post is *The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans Under the Command of Titus, A.D. 70* by David Roberts (1796–1864). This file ([here](#)) is in the public domain (PD-US).
9. We have summarized these models [here](#).
10. Gill, "Exposition," 7:251. I omitted Gill's Hebrew.