

The Unpardonable Sin

Matthew 12:22-42

Understanding the broader context of the Kingdom of God is crucial to properly interpreting the unpardonable sin and make sense of the parables in chapter thirteen. The watershed event in chapter 12 is crucial to understanding the new concept introduced in Matthew chapter 13. The literal Messianic Kingdom of Heaven on Earth was offered and rejected. Jesus immediately began to describe God's work of salvation beyond the now-postponed Kingdom. The disciples needed a new paradigm to understand their new role in this newly revealed spiritual kingdom. The use of parables and this new message was a stark departure from Jesus' offer of the imminent literal Kingdom of God to first-century Jewish multitudes. The parables of Matthew 13 describe the characteristics of the Mystery Kingdom Age. Although it was not a change in the foreordained plan of God, what caused this seeming delay of the plan of a kingdom? Why the change from a literal Kingdom of Israel to a new interim Mystery Kingdom? Jesus said it was the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit by Israel's leaders in rejecting Jesus as Messiah therefore rejecting the Kingdom He offered.

A. Kingdom in Transition

1. Israel began under a Mediatorial Kingdom from Moses to Samuel
2. Israel became a Monarchial Kingdom from Saul to Zedekiah
3. Israel rejected a literal Messianic Kingdom under Jesus (Matthew 12: 24)
4. Israel's theocratic kingdom as they were carried away to Babylon. The Times of the Gentiles prophesied by Daniel began with four sequential kingdoms and continues to this day. These kingdoms dominated Israel up to the time when "the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands" is hurled from heaven (Daniel 2:45) to destroy that final form of the fourth kingdom. That heaven-sent Kingdom becomes global never to be replaced.
5. Currently we are in a dispensation of time called the Mystery-Form of the Kingdom. Israel was scattered from 70 AD – 1948 AD. Between Israel's Monarchial and Messianic Kingdom, Jerusalem/Israel is still trodden under the heel of the Gentile nations (Luke 21:24).
6. That final kingdom is the Millennial Kingdom to be ruled by the Messiah for 1,000 years. (Rev. 24:4).

B. Israel was at a pivotal moment - National Blessing or National Judgment

Deut. 28:15,62-6; Matt. 23:37-39

1. Temporary loss of House of Davidic Dynasty - "your house is left unto you desolate" Matt. 23:38.
The desolation could not be permanent - "house shall be established forever" 2 Sam.7:16
2. Loss of independent self-governing body – The Sanhedrin - "Moses' seat" Matt. 23:2
3. Loss of the stewardship of the Nation - "vineyard" - parable Hosea 3:4,5; Matt. 21:41-45
4. Destruction of the worship house – the Temple – "not one stone left standing" Matt. 24:2
5. Desolation of the land. - Deut. 29:22-28
6. International scattering of the tribes of

C. Reasons for Israel's postponed Kingdom

1. **The Gospel would now be expanded to include Gentiles.** It was initially offered only to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," and was forbidden to be preached to the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5,6). The Apostle James ruled in Peter's defense of the Gentiles in the church by grace through faith alone without the requirement of circumcision. He quoted the Old Testament prophecy of Amos 9:12 that the "heathen

that are called by thy name” are Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation. “all the Gentiles, upon whom my name (Jesus Messiah/Christ) is called, saith the Lord” (Acts 15:13-18).

2. **Mystery of Gentiles inclusion in the Mystery form of the Kingdom** “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” Eph. 2:12,13

D. **Mystery Form of the Kingdom in the greater Kingdom context of Scripture**

At this point in His ministry, Jesus made it clear that they were to stop looking for a literal kingdom in their lifetime. “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” (Luke 17:20,21). The disciples' last question was about the Kingdom in their lifetime. “When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Act 1:6-8). Paul addressing this nonliteral kingdom defined the mystery as a truth that was not revealed in the Old Testament but was revealed in the New Testament. “*Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints,” “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:3-5,9 and Colossians 1:26-27). This mystery form of the kingdom covers the age between the two comings of the Messiah. “More specifically it begins with the rejection of the messiah-ship of Jesus in Matthew 12-13 and continues until the acceptance of the messiah-ship of Jesus by Israel” at the second coming of Jesus. “The parables of Matthew 13:1-53 (Mark 4:1-34; Luke 8:4-18) describe the outworking of the Mystery Kingdom in the present age.” Arnold Fruchtenbaum clarifies “The Mystery Kingdom must be kept distinct from the other facets (of the kingdom).

1. The Mystery Kingdom is not the same as the Eternal or Universal Kingdom which is God’s Sovereign control of all. Unlike the eternal Kingdom, the Mystery Kingdom is limited in time between the first and second coming or more specifically, from the Jewish rejection of the Messiah until the Jewish acceptance of the Messiah.
2. It is not the same as the Theocratic kingdom which is previously listed under letter C of this outline. The Mystery Kingdom is not limited to one nation, the nation of Israel, but involves both Jews and Gentiles.
3. It is not the same as the Spiritual Kingdom which includes all people of all time who have been redeemed by faith. The Mystery Kingdom includes both believers and unbelievers as these parables will reveal.
4. It is not the same as the Messianic Kingdom because the Messianic Kingdom was not a mystery; it was the subject of many revelations in the pages of the Old Testament. The Messianic Kingdom will be ruled by the Messiah himself on earth in Israel, on the Throne of David in Jerusalem for 1,000 years. Furthermore, the Messiah is not currently ruling this kingdom physically and visibly on earth. It was postponed until the remaining remnant of Israel recognizes Jesus as Lord Messiah (Zechariah 12:10;13:8,9;

Matthew 23:39 For I say unto you, **Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.**

Luke 19:41,42 If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, **the things which belong unto thy peace!** but now they are hid from thine eyes.

5. The Mystery Kingdom is not the same as the Church. The Church is included within the scope of the Mystery Kingdom, but the Mystery Kingdom is more extensive than the Church itself. Perhaps the best single word to define the Mystery kingdom is ‘Christendom.’ Since the period of the Mystery Kingdom is from the rejection of the King until the acceptance of the King in the closing days of the Great Tribulation, obviously the Mystery Kingdom includes the Church age from Acts two until the Rapture. It includes the period between Matthew 13 and Acts 2. It also includes the Tribulation. The

purpose of the parables in Matthew chapter 13 was to expound the mysteries of this interim Kingdom period during the postponement of Israel's Messianic Kingdom." ⁱ Although the Mystery Kingdom is a continuation of the spiritual kingdom it is not the replacement of Israel's Messianic kingdom as the majority of gentile Christian theology has interpreted it. As the parables will show, Satan has attempted to thwart the expansion of the spiritual kingdom by opposing it through corrupting the Gospel of the death burial and resurrection and by corrupting the institutionalized church thereby morphing it into a false religious system that became both anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic.

E. The Unpardonable Sin

I have called these two chapters the hinge of a door that was closing to the immediate fulfillment of Messianic Kingdom prophecies and then reopening to worldwide evangelistic potential. Paul summarized it in Romans 11:11,15, 25 "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in."

1. Committed by Israel's spiritual leaders

The initial official rejection of Jesus' messiah-ship happened in Matthew 12: 22-37. Jesus had performed all the corroborating Messianic miracles prophesied as signs for Israel to believe and decide that He is the Son of David. Rather than deciding for themselves, the people generally were hesitant to go against their leaders the Pharisees, thereby allowing them to make that decision. It was a cut and dried choice to accept Him or reject Him. The Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes deemed that though he did these authenticating miracles, He did not fit into their traditional, rabbinic, Judaism mold nor meet their expectation to overthrow Rome. Only a first-century Jewish leader or follower of the Pharisees who was present to personally reject Jesus could commit that unpardonable sin.

Matthew 21:9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, **Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord**; Hosanna in the highest.

Matthew 23:37-39 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, **Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.**

Luke 19:44 "And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee, and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because **thou knewest not the time of thy visitation**"

Zechariah 12:10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and **they shall look upon me whom they have pierced**, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for *his* firstborn. 13:8,9 And it shall come to pass, *that* in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off *and* die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: **they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.**

2. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus to do hundreds of miracles

But how were they to explain away His miracles? In verse 24, we see the accusation of demon possession, not just run-of-the-mill dark spirits but by the power of the actual prince of demons - Beelzebub. In verses 25-29 He showed their inconsistent theology. Jesus alluded to their own belief in spiritual exorcism. He pointed out the obvious contradiction in their accusation. Why would Satan cast out Satan? Rabbinic theology had long espoused that demons could be exorcised or cast out by the power of God. His rhetorical question highlighted that they indeed had only a form of godliness, for their disciples were spiritually powerless against demons. "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your

children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges.” Then Jesus summarized His ministry of signs and wonders up to this point as evidence that He was performing them by the power of God and therefore was the Anointed One of God to offer and establish the long-desired kingdom of God on earth in Israel. “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.” (Mat 12:27,28). They chose to attribute His signs to demonism.

What the unpardonable sin is not. It was not intended to be interpreted as a particularly heinous sin that could be committed by an errant sinner who unwittingly crosses an invisible line of God’s deadline. It was intentional, not a sin of ignorance or forgetful negligence or omission.

Jesus ruled out this broad interpretation of the broad risk of unpardonable sin when He said, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men... And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him” The gospels and epistles are full of invitations for sinners to come to God through faith in Jesus and receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life. Therefore, no living breathing human being is in a state of being unforgivable nor unredeemable, nor can any religious leader hold it over the heads of his followers that he or the church can pronounce one as unpardonable.

3. To whom is this judgment pronounced?

In verses 30 – 37, Jesus pronounces judgment on this generation of Jewish leaders and their adherents, but this is not a judgment on all Israelites or Jews. The sin for that generation was unpardonable and the judgment would be visited on their generation in Jerusalem (Matthew 23:35). He emphasized the term “this generation” in the remainder of the chapter (12:39, 41, 42, 45). Understanding the curse Jesus had just pronounced, “certain” Pharisees appealed for another opportunity to see a sign that He was the Messiah. Possibly this is an identification of saving faith among some Pharisees who were described as “Pharisees which believed” (Acts 15:5). Nicodemus could have been among those asking for another sign as was later evidenced by his questioning the justice of the investigation of Jesus (John 7:50,51). Jesus refused to give another sign which they would reject and be held accountable for. He said that even the Assyrians, who were their worst enemies, repented at the preaching of Jonah, “no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here” (Matthew 12:39-41). Jesus did not stop performing the miracles, but from that point forward used them to create and encourage the faith and training of His disciples to carry out and authenticate the gospel after His death and resurrection.

4. What is the point of the sign of Jonah?

The focus among Christian theologians over the Jonah sign has been on the time frame – three days, three nights, 72 hours, and the whole Good Friday issue. The focus of Jesus using the sign of Jonah to this generation of Jewish leaders was the sign of **resurrection**. He was building on the anecdote of Nineveh repenting at the preaching of a “resurrected” Jewish prophet. Jonah said of his condition “I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried” (Jonah 2:2). Jesus used this as an example of resurrection. Nineveh saw a prophet who had been considered a goner. It was just as miraculous to survive being swallowed by a whale as it was to come back from the dead. In other words, the only sign left after the Pharisees had rejected all of His signs would be His resurrection. But it would be too late for the ones who would have participated in the final decision to arrest to try and demand Roman execution. Jesus would then resurrect Lazarus (John 12:17). Then He Himself would rise from the grave. Paul made it clear that the entire credibility of Jesus rests on His resurrection. “declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1:4).

5. Nineveh had a different soil than Jerusalem

It is most interesting as Jesus begins the parable discourse in chapter 13 that the leading parable challenges those on the

fence of indecision “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” It was possibly the last wake-up call for any Pharisee or common Jewish listener. Jesus was asking which kind of soil was in their heart upon which He was sowing the seed of truth for salvation.

Jesus closed this discourse with the illustration of the cleansing of a demon-possessed man who was reformed but not regenerated. Just like the Holy Spirit of God did not take up residence in place of the evil spirits, the Jewish leaders had not received the Holy Spirit but blasphemed against Him. John the Baptist demanded repentance to clean Israel’s house in preparation for the king to reside on David’s throne. The cleaned house was vacant of spiritual leadership and He the King was not welcomed in much less enthroned. A spiritual void existed in the House of Israel into which a legion of evil spirits flowed. The nation of Israel would end up in worse condition than when He was born to them. When Jesus arrived Israel was under Roman domination but as a client state was afforded much liberty to self-govern. Rome had allowed the Herodian embellishment of the Temple which came to rival the glory of Solomon’s temple. From this height, they would fall, be destroyed, and be dispersed globally for almost two millennia.

6. Resurrection as the sign and the raising of Lazarus from the dead was exhibit #1

The resurrection of Lazarus in John chapter 11 became the first fulfillment of the sign of Jonas. Jesus prayed at Lazarus’ tomb in 11:42 for the disciples to believe. He didn’t perform it at the request of the Pharisees. Jesus gave the common people the privilege of seeing and believing the resurrection sign of Jonah and they reported it to the Pharisees “Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done” (John 11: 47-53). The verdict of the Sanhedrin was now complete and official. They gave the actual order for an “all-points bulletin.” He must be arrested at all costs (John 11:56,57). They had asked for another sign. Jesus raised Lazarus. They were hardened in unbelief. This undeniable miracle was just another proof to substantiate to them that His power was supernatural but demonic. His resurrection soon thereafter would be too late to produce faith for those who would demand “Crucify him.”

Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus must die rather than allow Rome to get involved and chance losing everything. Joseph Caiaphas was the fourth High Priest appointed by the Roman Procurator Valerius Gratus who preceded Pilate. He was politically and financially corrupt and falling way short of the spiritual requirements of the High Priest, to say the least. His own words in the text reveal that he was obsessed with maintaining power and his position. “The Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” Later the same leadership of Jerusalem would reject and pay for propaganda disavowing His resurrection (Matthew 28:11-15). That wicked generation rejected the King and forfeited His kingdom. Jesus promised to take it away from them and give it to another generation of Jews in Israel’s future who would recognize Him, receive Him, and be redeemed by Him (Matthew 21:43).

7. A New Broader Paradigm

God’s eternal Kingdom was still sovereignly on track. God’s spiritual kingdom including Abraham by faith would expand until all the families of the earth would be blessed through his descendant Jesus. Understanding the old paradigm had been set aside would take a few years. Even 40 days after Jesus’ resurrection they were asking if He would restore the Kingdom again to Israel at this time. Not until Acts 15 were they beginning to grasp how this new paradigm worked, that Jew and Gentile comprised “one new man” in Christ, in His body the Church. Jesus had told them that the timing of Israel’s Kingdom was in the Father’s hands. In the meantime, they were promised to be empowered by His Spirit to take the Gospel of His death, burial, and resurrection global.

ⁱ Israelology, The Missing Link in Systematic Theology, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, 1989, Ariel Ministries, P 588-590