

Article of the Month  
November, 2017

— ***Outer Darkness*** —

It might be important at the outset of this article to note quickly a few items. First, this topic is very limited. The term “outer darkness” is found only in Matthew, and only three times. The topic may be of interest only to Bible students who like to specialize in their understandings of “little things.” Secondly, the words themselves sound very ominous and threatening. While they DO represent a condition that is far from comfortable, they DO NOT represent a fatal or terminal condition. Thus as we look at this topic, it is not with foreboding, but with an attempt at understanding why and how and about whom the Lord used this expression.

The only occurrences of “outer darkness” are in Matthew 8:12, 22:13, and 25:30. We will look at each occurrence in its context.

Matthew 8:12

It is always important to consider the context of a verse. The context of this verse begins in Matthew 8:5. We find here the account of the Roman centurion who wished Jesus to heal his servant. The centurion expressed the faith that Jesus need not personally go to the servant, but merely issue the command and the man would be healed. Jesus was impressed with the faith of this man and used it to chastise the nation of Israel which, Jesus points out, did not express such faith.

When we get to verse 11, therefore, Jesus points out that the faithless of Israel (most probably and especially its leaders) would eventually be surprised at the results of the lack of faith. Jesus looks forward to the peaceable kingdom — to which we all yet look forward. He explains that the earthly part of that kingdom will be administered by the FAITHFUL of the Old Testament — people we might well call the “Ancient Worthies.” The Apostle Paul lists some of them in Hebrews 11. The Psalmist (in 45:16) says that these faith-fathers will be made “princes in all the earth.”

With this in mind, we can follow Jesus’ lesson. In verse 11 he sets the stage. He takes us to the time of the peaceable kingdom and shows that “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” will be among those in charge. People from the east and the west of Israel (in other words, the whole world) will come to sit at the feet of these great faith-teachers. Then comes verse 12 — shocking surprise! Jesus turns to the unbelieving Jews and says that they “shall be cast into the outer darkness.” What does this mean?

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First we must remember that the honor of being called to be disciples of Jesus, and thus to end up as rulers over the kingdom, was “to the Jew **first**.” But, sadly, as is described in John 1:11, 12, “He came to his own (the people of Israel), and those who were his own **did not receive him**.” Then Jesus continues: “But as many as did receive him, to them he gave the right to become the sons of God, even to them who believe in his name.” BECAUSE OF THIS, Israel was known (until it abrogated the right) as “the sons of the kingdom.” It is these Jewish “sons of the kingdom” who at the beginning of the peaceable kingdom are “cast out into the outer darkness.”

We are beginning to see the meaning of Jesus’ phrase, “Outer Darkness.” Those who seemed certain that they were the “chosen people” regardless of their lack of faith, will find themselves NOT CHOSEN for the leadership position in the world. Instead of being in the “INNER CIRCLE,” they will find themselves on the OUTSIDE. They will not be the “light of the world,” but they will represent the “darkness” which characterizes a lack of faith. This condition will not be fatal; it will not be perpetual — as long as the lessons will be learned from the experience. The faithless part of Israel will have every opportunity to repent and grow to perfection. They, with all others of the earth who go through the resurrection process successfully, will gain eternal life.

Jesus adds two other expressions to intensify the disappointment that will be experienced by the faithless of Israel when they return to find themselves DISFAVORED. This darkness of being “outsiders” will cause both **weeping** and **gnashing of teeth**. These are wonderful symbols used world-wide of sorrow and disappointment. To weep is to express sorrow for what is lost. This is actually a GOOD sign. Weeping shows the beginnings of repentance. When we clench our teeth together, probably shut our eyes, and let out a moan, we are expressing the great and sudden realization of disappointment. That disappointment IS the realization that they are not in the “inner circle” of the “favored” or “chosen” that they had expected to be in.

In the 13th verse, the centurion was rewarded for his faith by the fulfillment of his request.

Matthew 22:13

In this text, the lesson remains the same. However, those who are here cast into outer darkness are not the first-advent Jews. They are the “tares” which Jesus describes in his parable of “Wheat & Tares” in Matthew 13:24-30 & 36-43.

Matthew 22 begins with a parable which has as its objective to show a brief summary of the entire age between Jesus’ two advents. We call this The Gospel Age or The Christian Age. In the first 7 verses, Jesus details how the Lord invited the Jews to be part of the mystical “body of Christ.” As we see, they kept turning down the invitation — resulting (verse 7) in the destruction of Jerusalem.

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Beginning in verse 8, we see that the “high calling” was extended beyond Israel — to the Gentiles. Verse 10 is very telling. This Christian “call” gathered “BOTH evil and good.” These two classes are the Wheat and the Tares of Jesus parable in Matthew 13. In that parable, Jesus is clear in his teaching that the Christian Age will end in a “harvest” which, among other things, will separate wheat from tares. The Wheat represent true disciples of Jesus. The Tares represent the vast multitudes of people who call themselves “Christian.” But according to Jesus, these are counterfeit Christians — fakes. They have never worn the “robe of righteousness” which was given to all who made sincere and complete consecrations to sacrifice with their Lord. This brings us to 22:11-14.

When the “harvest” begins, the inspection begins. God casts out of His presence all who are not genuine Christians. In the end He DESTROYS Christendom! (This is all suggested in numerous prophecies such as Revelation 14:8; 18:2-5, etc.) In the Matthew 13 parable, this is pictured by the bundling and burning of the tares. In this Matthew 22 parable, it is pictured by the King’s wrath at finding those who CLAIM to belong, but who have no robe of justification to demonstrate it. We see (verse 12) that this man is “speechless” — he has NO explanation for his inadequacies. He would conceivably say something like: “Well, my father was a Christian; so I am too. I was born that way!” This poor man THOUGHT he was in the “inner circle” — the favored position of being a “Christian” while all the rest of the world were merely duped heathens! Clearly, he was in for a surprise.

Just as the “tares” were “bound” in order to be burned (destroyed as a class — not as individuals!), so we see in verse 13 that this robe-less individual is bound and cast “into outer darkness.” The expression and its meaning have not changed from the Matthew 8 usage. We here have a class of individuals who were CONVINCED that they were, due to their Christianity, in the “inner circle” of God’s graces. They were convinced that they were among the “saved.” But their hopes are dashed. They find themselves on the OUTSIDE in DARKNESS instead of on the INSIDE in the LIGHT. These “Christians” never were “The Light of the World.” Now they will realize that fact. Please note Jesus’ own explanation of this parable in verse 14. He says that while “MANY ARE CALLED” only a few will be among the “CHOSEN.” These two words (called & chosen) are key words in Scripture in defining those who were INVITED but didn’t truly accept (the “called”), versus those who were INVITED and DID ACCEPT the call by a complete and unreserved consecration (the “chosen”). “Chosen” doesn’t necessarily mean SUCCESSFUL. It merely means accepted into the running. Thus this robe-less man may have been “called,” but he never went through the required step to be among the “chosen” — the authorized participants.

As with the Jews of Matthew 8, these tares, too, will weep and gnash their teeth — NOT an eternal condemnation, but a sudden realization that they were mistaken and in sorrow for what they COULD have had but have MISSED. Like the Jews of Matthew 8, these also will go through the resurrection process and gain eternal life *on the earth* — NOT in heaven where their expectations were. Once again, “outer darkness” represents the condition of not having the expected standing.

Matthew 25:30

The third and final use of “outer darkness” is also found in a parable. The second parable of Matthew 25 is the parable of the “Talents.” It shows how some who are, indeed, legitimate Christians, can fool themselves into *misusing* what the Lord has given them as their stewardship.

To understand this parable, it is necessary to understand that those who have been accepted into the call of “the high calling” will ultimately be found in one of three classes. Some (hopefully a very few) will be among those who eternally lose their lives, going into what the Scriptures call “the second death.” These are described in Hebrews 6:4-8 and 10:26-29. They are not shown in this parable.

Some (144,000) will become the “bride” of Christ — those who will reign with him over the kingdom. (Revelation 14:1) These are the five and the two-talented people of this parable.

A third class is named a “great multitude.” This group is made up of all of those true Christian people who have made sincere and legitimate consecrations, and who have not denied the Lord, but have fallen short of the “mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). These are represented in the one-talented man of this parable. This group is described in Revelation 7:9-17. They are an honorable group. They have just fallen short of the necessary zeal to make their callings and elections sure — or as the NAS translation puts it (using both the “called” and “chosen” words we have seen), “Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you.” (II Peter 1:10) This group will, indeed, have given up its inheritance in an earthly resurrection. They will become spiritual beings. But they will not share the Divine nature which will be the inheritance of the 144,000 faithful.

It is this “Great Multitude” which is pictured by the one-talented man of this parable. His fate is described in verse 30. And it is exactly the same as the fate of the others we have seen whose expectations are not met — the first-advent Jews, and the hordes of professing Christian peoples who have never really been the Lord’s.

This “servant” is “worthless” as far as fulfilling the mission for which he was called is concerned. Consequently, he will find himself in “outer darkness.” He will NOT be a part of the bride of Christ that he expected to be. He will find himself on the OUTSIDE — again in that darkness which represents the condition of not having that expected splendor. He will find himself on the OUTSIDE knocking at the door as was predicted in the parable just before this one (Matthew 25:10-12). As with the other two groups, this one weeps (although he will have his tears wiped away) — Revelation 7:17.

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Summary

When we carefully compare ALL usages of certain words or expressions in the Bible, we are much more able to find the correct interpretations. This is called exhaustive topical study. Sometimes it requires (in large subjects) much patience and diligence. But it is always worth the struggle if we want the Lord's Word to interpret itself.

**OUTER DARKNESS** is a frightening phrase! And to those who will experience it, it will not be a pleasant experience. But it is not a fatal experience. It is an experience born out of too much self-confidence and too little inquiry of the Lord. It results in finding ourselves in a condition which we did not anticipate. It is fitting that our Father dash to pieces all improper expectations. This will be a necessary process before any progress can be made by those who need the experience. We are so thankful for the mercies of our God who will give to all everything they need for ultimate success and eternal life.