

"WHILE MEN SLEPT"

“Another parable set he before them, saying, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away...” (Matthew 13:24-25).

This parable is explained in vss. 36-42. The focus of this article is v. 25. It concerns those who slept. While the explanation of the article defines the sower, the field, the enemy, the wheat, the tares, the harvest, and the reapers, it does not identify who these were that slept. Therefore, we must rely on the expanded context in the chapter, and remote contexts which will identify them. This will also identify for us the pattern of Satan’s work amidst the Lord’s work.

The explanation of the parable indicates that the men who slept were among the owner’s own servants. They are identified in v. 38 as the ‘sons of the kingdom’ (i.e., God’s own people). The Son of man had sown good seed which would produce wheat (good seed). Isaiah and Jeremiah pictured Israel as a choice vine planted by God in His vineyard (cf. Isaiah 5:1-4). Yet this vine turned degenerate. “I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate branches of a foreign vine unto me?” (Jeremiah 2:21). This picture of the nation of Israel gives us a bigger picture of how to interpret the many parables of the kingdom of heaven taught by Jesus. This concept of planting a seed is used in connection with the word of God (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6; James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:23).

That those who slept in v. 25 were those among God’s own people is seen from Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question (cf. vss. 10-15). For example, in v. 15, Isaiah’s prophecy was of those among the nation of Israel (God’s people) who had become dull in their understanding. We know that the majority of God’s people Israel in the O. T. fell because of unbelief. The majority hardened their hearts against God and His statutes (cf. Romans 11:25). In essence, they ‘went to sleep’. Paul was referring to them in 1 Corinthians 10. Satan did his damage while Israel lusted, played, committed fornication, made trial of Jehovah, and murmured. By the time they awoke from their spiritual sleep, there was no remedy (cf. 2 Chronicles

36:15-16). Only a remnant took heed to their ways, remaining awake. As the apostle Paul noted, ‘only a remnant was spared’ (cf. Isaiah 1:9; Romans 9:27).

The story has been played out again and again. Those who know that their Lord could return at any time and day, know to, “...awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed” (Romans 13:11). They redeem the time, knowing the days are evil (Ephesians 5:16).

This sleep is manifest in marital responsibilities, as spouses endure/tolerate one another in the relationship, but don’t cultivate their love for each another. They sleep in their pursuit of satisfaction of the flesh (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). The children will also suffer. They experience the absence of a warm and loving environment. The children are being trained nonetheless; trained in self-centeredness. When they come of age, God and His word is no longer sought, but endured/tolerated. By the time parents realize this (awake), there is no remedy. The elders may be called in; the preacher may be called in; panic will set in...only to realize too late, that while they slept, the enemy already came in.

Today, as in Malachi’s day, worship has become a weariness to the majority of God’s people (Malachi 1:13). They render to God an offering, but it is a lame offering. Personal study of God’s will is absent from their daily routine, their prayers are amiss, and they murmur in their tents. There is no joy in their life. Consequently, they long for a ‘return to their Egypt’ for their old life of sin was more pleasurable (cf. Numbers 14:3-4; Hebrews 11:26). While they sleep, the enemy is planting tares.

We must realize that Satan’s success at sowing tares among the wheat is due to spiritual sleep: i.e., indecision (1 Kings 18:21); procrastination (Proverbs 26:14), and lukewarmness (Revelation 3:16). Those who are presently “limping between two masters” (Luke 16:13) are asleep (cf. Romans 11:8). Satan’s work will never be known until the tares have taken root. They will grow alongside the wheat until the harvest.

As has always been the case, the number of those 'awake' are in the minority. "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." (Romans 11:5). They are the wheat, who must grow amidst the tares. They plant, water, but they must also hoe weeds (Romans 16:17-18) because the laborers are too few (Luke 10:2). Few will enter the gate to eternal life because it is 'straitened'. It requires seeking, not sleeping (Matthew 7:13-14). For this same reason, "many are called, but few chosen" (Matthew 22:14). rdb