
Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

D&C 86:1–7

On December 6, 1832, while engaged in revising the New Testament, Joseph Smith received an additional interpretation of the parable of the wheat and the tares. In the Gospel of Matthew, we read,

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.

But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?

He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

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 13:24–30)

Jesus taught his apostles the meaning of the parable: (1) the man sowing seed is the Son of Man, (2) the field is the world, (3) the good seed are the children of the kingdom, and

(4) the tares are those who follow the enticements of Satan. He further taught that (1) the enemy is the devil, (2) the harvest is the end of the world, (3) the reapers are angels, and (4) the wheat gathered into the barn represents the righteous.

Not all lessons to be learned from the parable were taught by Jesus in the meridian of time. For example, there is no record of the Savior interpreting (1) the wheat springing forth and bearing fruit, (2) the men sleeping, (3) the wheat and tares being allowed to grow together until harvest, and (4) the wheat being uprooted to weed out the tares.

In the revelation contained in D&C 86, the Lord gives additional information about the parable. For instance, (1) the apostles are the sowers of the seed (D&C 86:2), (2) falling asleep implies the death of the Savior's apostles (D&C 86:3), (3) the tares represent evil doctrines and those who spread them (D&C 86:4), and (4) the tenderness of the wheat represents the new converts to the faith (D&C 86:6).

The Prophet Joseph Smith in a letter to the elders of the Church on November 30–December 1, 1835, told of events that would happen when the tares were gathered:

The tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world; that is, as the servants of God go forth warning the nations, both priests and people, and as they harden their hearts and reject the light of truth—these first being delivered over to the buffetings of Satan, and the law and the testimony being closed up, as it was in the case of the Jews—they are left in darkness, and delivered over unto the day of burning; thus, being bound up by their creeds, and their bands being made strong by their priests, [they] are prepared for the fulfillment of the saying of the Savior—“The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” We understand that the work of gathering together of the wheat into barns, or garners, is to take place while the tares are being bound over, [in preparation] for the day of burning, that after the day of burnings, the righteous shall shine forth like the sun, in the Kingdom of their Father.¹

As to when this will take place, in 1894 President Woodruff said,

God has held the angels of destruction for many years, lest they should reap down the wheat with the tares. But I want to tell you now, that

¹ Letter to the Elders of the Church, 30 November–1 December 1835, 229. Joseph Smith Papers.

those angels have left the portals of heaven, and they stand over this people and this nation now, and are hovering over the earth waiting to pour out the judgments. And from this very day they shall be poured out. Calamities and troubles are increasing in the earth, and there is a meaning to these things. Remember this, and reflect upon these matters. If you do your duty, and I do my duty, we'll have protection, and shall pass through the afflictions in peace and in safety.²

² *Improvement Era*, October 1914, 1165.