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DOES MAN HAVE A HIDDEN PAST?

Does man have a hidden past that extends beyond this world into the eternal past? Such a question is rarely asked today, even in Christian circles it is not discussed. The question may still be important for understanding who we humans ultimately are.

Who am I? Where did I come from? What am I here for? What is the purpose of my life? Where am I going when it ends? These are the fundamental questions of existence and life that we all would like answers to. Man is not naturally able to answer them, and science does not provide answers that would satisfy us. But does the Bible provide answers to them?

The Bible provides answers. The answers may be explicit, implicit or hidden in the parables. Jesus used parables primarily when teaching about mysteries of the past. Let us now consider His teaching about the field of grain. The field had both true grain and weeds growing in it.

Christ's field of grain

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who 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 grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn." ' ' (Matthew 13:24-30)¹

Later, Jesus explained this parable to his disciples:

He answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 13:37-43)

¹ The Bible quotations are from the New King James Version if not otherwise noted.



Figure 1. True grain and weed.

According to Jesus' explanation, the field is the world. The man who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man, that is, He Himself. (Note: not God the Father) His enemy who sowed the weed seed is the devil, Satan. The seeds mean human seeds. Some of the seeds were sown by Christ, others by the devil.

What on earth did Jesus mean by this parable? What does the seed stage in a person's life mean? When had the sowing of the seeds taken place? And why some of these seeds were of Christ some of Satan?

What are the seeds in the parable that were sown in the field of the world? "The good seed are the sons of the kingdom", so clearly the seeds mean some past stage of a person. In another parable, Jesus spoke about Himself and His own death: "Truly, truly, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just one grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:24) Here the seed refers to Jesus Himself, who dies and is raised to life again. So, do the seeds in the parable of the grainfield mean dead people? If so, then the people of this world must first have lived and then died before being sown in the field of the present world. This applies to all people, both those who belong to Christ and those who belong to the Devil.

When were the seeds sown? Christ clearly did not sow the seeds one by one, but all at once. If all men are born from these seeds, then the sowing must have taken place before the foundation of this world. On the other hand, in the beginning of all things, when God created the invisible creation, He could create nothing but good and perfect. So some of the seeds must have turned into weeds after the original creation. So the sowing must have taken place after the original creation (the invisible creation) but before the creation of the visible creation.

Why were there both Christ's and Satan's seeds in the field? If Satan had caused the seeds to turn into weeds, does it not mean that even before the foundation of this world, Satan had become God's enemy

and that man had already fallen into sin? From the parable we cannot know exactly how some of the seeds became Satan's and some Christ's. However, from the fact that all people appear in the parable as dead seeds, we can conclude at least that all people—both Christ's and Satan's—eventually fell into Satan's trap and died in the eternal past. The final reconciliation of all people was thus transferred to this world, through which Christ wanted to give people a new chance.

However, Christ still considered the human seeds that belonged to Him as His own. Christ also allowed the seeds of the devil to grow into people in this world, because only at the end of the world will the grain of Christ and the grain of the devil be separated from each other. So Christ created this visible world on the one hand to show love to some who already belonged to Him, on the other hand to give an opportunity also to those who originally belonged to the devil, but ultimately in this world want to join Christ.

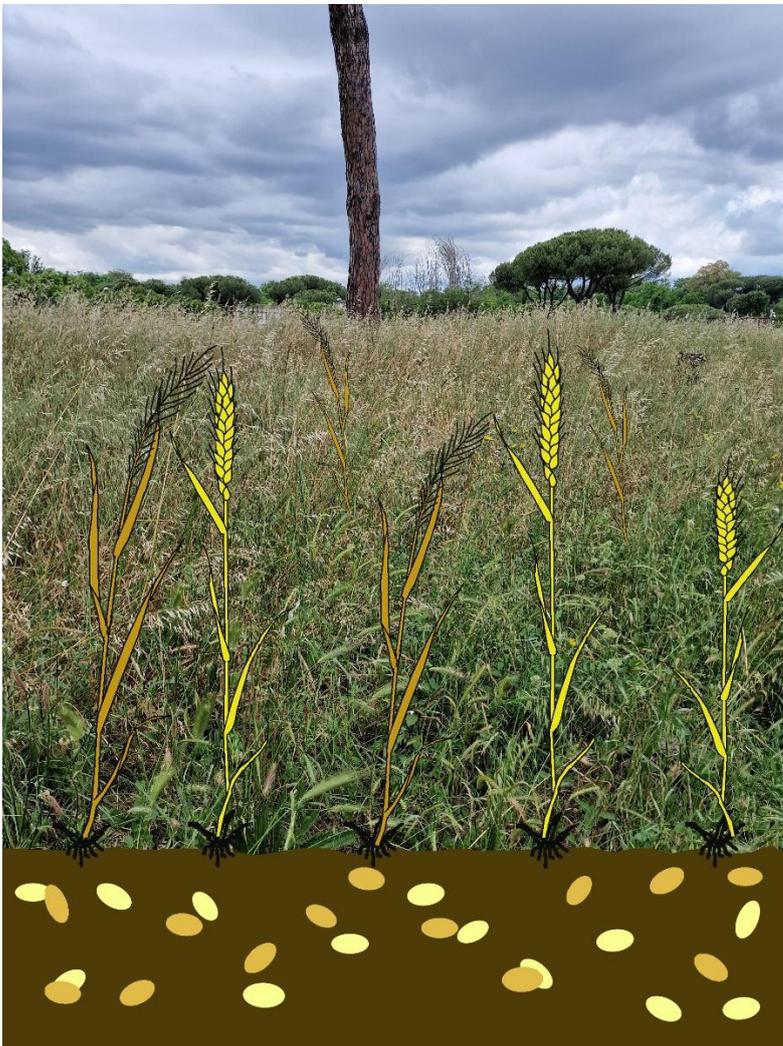


Figure 2. Christ's grainfield

Are we going too far with this interpretation? Not necessarily. Let's look at Jesus' prayer for his disciples on the last evening. That too highlights the division of people into two groups—even before the foundation of this world. Let's look at how Jesus prayed for His disciples on His last evening.

And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (John 17:5-6)

"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours." (John 17:9)

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:22-23)

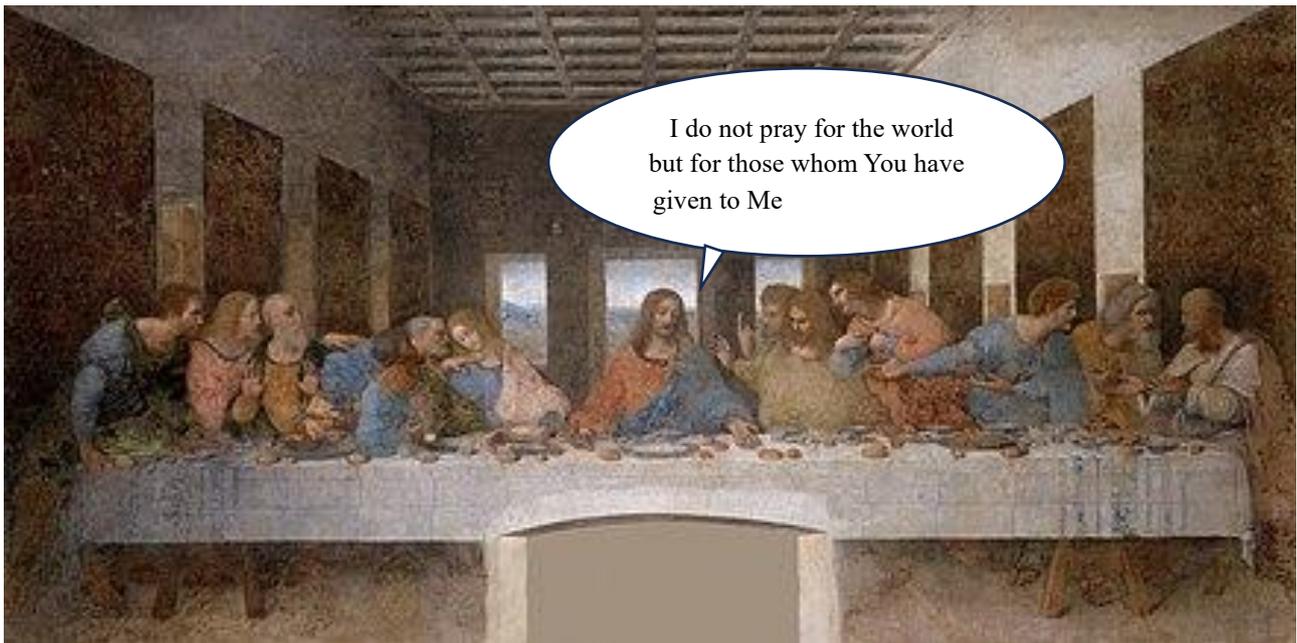


Figure 3. Jesus praying at the Last Supper. In the background is the famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci.

Jesus' mission was to save from the world primarily those whom God had chosen in advance. On the other hand, He had not completely lost hope for other people either. God wants to show His grace and mercy to others as well, if they will only accept the salvation prepared for them in Christ.

Of course, from our perspective, all people are in the same position. We cannot differentiate between people and cannot say anything about any person's past. From our perspective, all people are equally beloved to God. On the other hand, God, who sees things against the background of the eternal past, may see differences in people. In any case, there is a possibility of salvation reserved for everyone.

Paul's teachings

Let us then examine Paul's letters. One of Paul's teachings, which is repeated in almost all of his letters, is the doctrine of God's eternal plan of salvation through the atonement of Jesus Christ:

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began. (Rom. 16:25)

Here the definition of time is in Greek *chronon aionon* which means eternal time, i.e. the time before the creation of the present world.



Figure 4. Portrait of Paul on the wall of the Ephesus cave.

But, if God has prepared a plan of salvation for mankind in the eternal past, then man must have been enslaved to sin even before the foundation of this world. The sin of Adam and Eve certainly has its place in this plan, but it cannot be the original sin into which man fell, if God has prepared his plan of salvation for man in the eternal past.

Another teaching of Paul that “hints” at the eternal past is the doctrine of human predestination and election. The Epistle to the Ephesians says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (Ephesians 1:3-5)

If God had chosen us to be saved in Christ before the foundation of the world, then we must have belonged to Christ before the foundation of the world. The letter to the Ephesians continues:

In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

This would seem to explain the reason for God's choices. The fact that God had chosen the people of this world for salvation even before the foundation of the world is because these people had already put their hope in Christ, in other words, they had already belonged to His church before the foundation of the world.

Again, I would like to emphasize that from our perspective, all people are in the same position. We cannot classify people into the chosen and the non-chosen. God does not give us such permission. We must see all people as beloved to God. But on the other hand, we must understand that God can see things more broadly based on what has happened before the foundation of this world.



Figure 5. Portrait of Paul in a fresco in the Vatican.

Final sentence

Thus, the New Testament is full of indirect or implicit teachings about the eternal past, where man already was, and about how that past has had an impact on our lives in this world. The Bible also contains much direct teaching about the eternal past. For example, in God's answer to Job, who asks why he had to be born in this world of suffering, God begins by telling him about the eternal past, where the devil's works began. He also states that Job was there when it all happened. The Book of Revelation also speaks of both the eternal past and the future. The books of the Old Testament prophets speak much about the events of the invisible creation. Thus, on the basis of the Bible, we can build a unified story about the eternal past, present, and future of Christ and man. Our present life in this world is part of that great story.

If you have no interest in the eternal past, you may continue living without believing in it. However, I would like to plant a small seed of faith in you that according to the Bible this is also a possible way of thinking.

I personally believe that Christianity needs mystical dimensions, that is, an account of the invisible creation that includes the eternal past, present, and future. At the beginning of the Christian era, Christianity did have these dimensions in its teachings, but it later lost them. The Catholic Church even banned all teaching about the past of the soul in 553 AD, although before that many church fathers belonging to the Catholic Church taught about it and other things related to Christian mysticism.

The story of the invisible creation does not have to be the center of Christian doctrine. The simple gospel of Jesus' atonement and acceptance of it should still be the center. But it should be in the background. It should be the answer and explanation to the fundamental questions of our existence and life: Who are we? Where did we come from? What is the purpose of our life? And where are we going after this life? The eternal story of Christ and man provides the answer to all these questions.

I have studied these things a lot and have written about them. I believe that the eternal story of Christ and man that I have found in the Bible could be of help to many others besides me. For it has given my Christianity a lot of depth, clarity, security, intellectual satisfaction and the joy of discovery.²

² Here I refer to my book "The forgotten story of Christ and man. A study of the shared past and future of Christ and man in the visible and invisible realities".