

**Matthew 22:1-14**  
***Unchristlike Images of God in Matthean Parables***  
**A Mini-Minyan with Brad Jersak, Brian Zahnd, Derek Flood and  
Andrew Klager**

**Introduction (Brad Jersak)**

I was recently invited to share thoughts and respond to questions about my book, *A More Christlike God: A More Beautiful Gospel*, among a theologically mixed group of very perceptive readers.

Prior to the meeting, the facilitator gave me the consideration of a heads up about a question he was planning to ask. He wanted to me to address the problem of why Jesus' parables sometimes seem to represent God in a rather un-Christlike light—especially as an infuriated and vengeful king who not only destroys, but even tortures those who do not respond to his invitation. Specifically, he asked me to look at the parable of the banquet as told in Matthew 22.

I was aware of the difficulties in that passage and thought to invite three colleagues to weigh in with their collective wisdom, rather than speaking on my own. Namely, Brian Zahnd, Derek Flood and Andrew Klager. I also received behind the scenes input from Pastor Jason Tripp, who I'll reference later as well. The conversation that followed seemed well worth sharing, so the following represents excerpts from it.

We begin with the text:

**Matthew 22** <sup>1</sup>Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, <sup>2</sup>“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. <sup>3</sup>And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. <sup>4</sup>Again he sent out other slaves saying, “Tell those who have been invited, “Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are *all* butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.” <sup>5</sup> But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, <sup>6</sup>and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. <sup>7</sup>But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to his slaves, “The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. <sup>9</sup>Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find *there*, invite to the wedding feast.’ <sup>10</sup>Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.

<sup>11</sup>“But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, <sup>12</sup>and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?’ And the man was speechless. <sup>13</sup>Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ <sup>14</sup>For many are called, but few *are* chosen.”

**Derek Flood:** I note that Luke’s version (Lk 14:25-34) does not include the violent parts that we see in Matthew’s version. This may indicate Matthew’s embellishment, rather than Jesus own words. The question is, why would Matthew add the violence? Perhaps it is for the sake of his audience. When Hollywood does a re-make of a French movie, they add more action scenes (i.e., violence) because American audiences think that’s “awesome.” Perhaps Matthew felt the threats of divine violence made the story more “awesome” for his audience, in that he thought it might serve as cathartic for his persecuted minority audience.

What’s odd is that Matthew’s Gospel does *not* endorse human violence, but just the opposite. Consequently, his message is often, "Be really forgiving and loving ... or God will kick your \*\*\*." Understandably, this makes us ask, "Wait, huh? God is less moral that we are?" Perhaps even Matthew needs a more Christlike God!

And perhaps, too, we can appreciate how this perspective helped Matthew’s audience, who needed to have a revenge fantasy to help them cope with the suffering they were enduring, but we need to press further to find a God who is also loving and forgiving like Jesus.

**Brian Zahnd:** It’s important to remember that Jesus gives this parable during his final week in Jerusalem. Jesus has been talking almost nonstop about the impending disaster that will befall Jerusalem.

Jesus is predicting the end of the Temple age. The end of the age (Temple) will be cataclysmic—with the destruction of the both the Temple and the city. Jesus’ language in this parable about the destruction and burning of the city is eerily similar to how he talks about the impending fate of Jerusalem (see Luke 19:41-44). Jesus is explicit that because Jerusalem misses the visitation of the Prince of Peace, choosing instead the way of war, its end will be in a fiery *Gehenna*. I understand the parable in this light.

**Brad Jersak:** Very helpful. Jason Tripp also just forwarded me an article by Brant Pitre at Duke, [entitled “Jesus, the Messianic Wedding Banquet, and the Restoration of Israel” \(Letter and Spirit 8:2013, 35–54\)](#) on the connection of the parable to the invitation of Hezekiah to the Passover in 2 Chron. 30, which is surely significant. It indicates (again) that Jesus’ parables were frequently drawn from previous stories,

though I hadn't thought about this event as a biblical backstory. Not that it solves the violent image of God in the parable, and indeed, sort of assumes the wrath of God in 2 Chronicles. It's worth reading but I suppose also, it brings me back to the precision of the Apostle Paul's "wrath" as a metaphor that includes God's dire warnings that he will "give over" the defiant to their own self-destructive choices and to the consequences or intrinsic judgment of those choices at the hands of third parties. As always, God's warnings that sin kills do not literally mean that God kills when we sin, but sometimes the parables describe it that way.

**Brian Zahnd:** Let's revisit the context in which the parable is given. Jesus has journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem for a wedding feast. Jesus is the bridegroom. He's coming to take Jerusalem/Israel as his bride.

Along the way Jesus and his entourage are proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom (or giving invitations to the wedding feast). Towns and villages are invited to recognize the arrival of the kingdom of God through what Jesus is announcing and enacting. But some pay no attention – they fail to recognize this significant moment. In due time (a generation later) Roman armies will visit these towns with destruction.

In Jerusalem there is a kind of wedding feast – the Triumphal Entry, healings in the Temple, etc. (previous chapter). But not everyone at the wedding feast (in Jerusalem) is celebrating the coming of the bridegroom. Jesus says of them, "you missed the day of your visitation." They don't know the things that make for peace. Immediately following the parable, Matthew says, "Then the Pharisees plotted how to entangle him in his words." The Pharisees are at the wedding feast, but they aren't behaving properly. Their fate is sealed. AD 70 is coming.

**Brad Jersak:** I think that between [Flood's work elsewhere](#), especially on Matt. 18 and the master/king images in the parables, the Duke article on 2 Chron., and Brian's take here, that makes for a well-rounded response to my own concerns. I'd still also like to hear "the word of the Lord" from Dr. Andrew (Silouan) Klager.

However, while I'm comfortable with the use of rhetoric in the parables, it still leaves unanswered (to the skeptic) the problem of Jesus apparently projecting such violent imagery onto the 'God-figure' in the parables. The shortest answer may be, "We get our image of God from the one telling the parable, not from the parable per se," and while that works for me, this basic problem remains: historically, God (in Christ) brings the welcome and the warning, but it's Israel's rebellion and the wrath of Rome that brings destruction – yet the parable conflates all of these actions (welcome, warning and wrath) to God as the primary agent. Thus, Jesus' (or at least Matthew's) image of God includes all three. I suppose said "wrath" is fine in the "giving over" sense, but in the parable, it is escalated to active and direct divine violence only, even if only in the metaphorical/rhetorical sense.

Some readers cannot accept that kind of nuanced reading, so I wonder what we need to see prior to that—something more basic. Evangelicals have historically reverted to an implied *tritheism* of different characters (where the Father is wrathful, and the Son is redemptive, even if they conspire together). One doesn't take such risks there's something else deeper that seems to be at stake. Namely, the Bible itself. Many would rather risk tri-theism than face the danger of 'pick-and-choose' hermeneutics ... which is how it looks to those who are still reading a "flat Bible." In other words, until we see the Bible as a mountain with Christ at the peak, then those who assume flat-text hermeneutics will always perceive Christ-lens hermeneutics as picking-and-choosing.

The problem in Matt. 22 is that unlike Joshua or Judges, Jesus himself seems to be conveying an un-Christlike picture of God. So even within the four Gospels, every revelation (esp. parables) must continue to gather around and bow to the cruciform Incarnation seen most clearly at the Cross. The Cross and Resurrection are therefore the final interpretive lens of Christ's own teachings and (according to Benedict XVI) the necessary punchline of every parable.

In a brief 5 question and answer setting, I might say, "You have to start with your interpretive criteria. Mine is the Cross, through which God revealed fully and finally as self-giving love. If your criteria, such as flat-text inerrancy, we will view such texts differently." It's a non-starter until that's established.

**Brian Zahnd:** "Tritheism of different characters (the Father as wrathful, Son as redemptive)" ... Unfortunately, this is the default position of many Christians, whether they realize it or not.

**Derek Flood:** My take is that I want the courage to face the fact that, while I don't like it, at least *some* NT authors (Matthew, Revelation, 2 Thessalonians) seem to take the (earlier?) view of Miroslav Wolf: that we humans should practice non-violence, but take solace in the idea that God will punish those who hurt and do terrible things with divine violence and vengeance. That is, God's violence is something they find good, just, and even comforting.

I don't think we can always find a way to reduce the violent image of God that gets painted at times in the NT. As much as I don't like it, I think that *some* NT authors (like Matthew) are not accidentally saying that God is violent, but very much mean to say that.

The question remains, is that picture of God the highest/best/truest vision we can achieve? I think the fact that we struggle with it is a hint that we all know that this is not the best image of God. There is something wrong with it. It does not fit. It is ... un-Christlike. But before we can even call it "un-Christlike," we all stumble over it, like when you bite into rotten food. That is important.

I do love that idea of the Bible as a mountain with Christ as the summit! But I am also a big fan of pick-and-choose! Pick-and-choose is how we make moral choices. Pick-and-choose separates adults from children. It's a matter of moral development.

I agree that the key here is a "flat Bible." And as you say it is not simply a matter of differentiating the OT from the NT, but also includes finding what is un-Christlike in the NT. That's hard; let's be honest about that. That's why I wrote [Disarming Scripture](#). I cannot respond to that very briefly because it really involves a major paradigm shift.

I think we all know *what* that thing is we are drawn to—what we call "Christlike." Our hearts are drawn to it, we are captive to it. We also know what it *isn't* and thus struggle with things that don't fit. The challenge is how to articulate that so that we can intelligently, purposely, and wisely pursue it together.

**Andrew Klager:** Here's my notoriously verbose response:

We need to first remember that this is a parable: although a parable can reveal more than "giving it straight" can inform us, it also hides difficult truths to give what the audience can handle. So, in this sense, "anything goes" to make a point in a parable, but the mechanisms that arrive at that point can't be taken as "informative" in the concrete sense, but instead as the partially (or ultimately) disposable means by which we arrive at the real point(s) for which the parable was written. I.e., don't confuse the ends with the means.

Now, St. John Chrysostom has written a homily on Matthew 22 and makes some helpful points. I'll just make some quick summary points, and let you read his homily for yourself

(<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/chrysostom/matthew/22.htm>):

1. He contrasts desert monks (who wear hair garments, as the garments of those at the wedding) and soldiers;
2. His focus is on the destruction of Jerusalem under Vespasian and Titus;
3. His focus is on the Son as the bridegroom and the Church as the bride;

In the context of those who are called first but do not listen and those who are called a second time in "the thoroughfares," Chrysostom identifies these as the Jews in Palestine and the Gentiles in the rest of the empire ("Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country."—Luke 4:24). Cp. Matt. 23:37–39: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" After this, he foretells the destruction of Jerusalem.

And here are my own observations:

The king destroys specifically the murders (not those who went to their farms and businesses) and burns their city (i.e., the destruction of Jerusalem), which seems to suggest a self-inflicted equivalent response to their violence (specifically, in this case, of the zealots whose insurrection incited the armies of Rome). That is, “Those who live by the sword, die by the sword”; and “Why do you kick against the goads?”

So, the armies are clearly Rome’s (as the text and Chrysostom suggest), but why does the parable place Rome’s armies under the Father’s command?

1. Note that the second time the servants go out, they gather both the evil and the good who fill the wedding hall; so, the wedding is populated by evil and good people, but not the murders—the focus seems to be on those who incite violence.
2. There seems to be an oscillating play on the few and many, as the few (Jews) reject the servants’ invitation, but the many from the “thoroughfares” (Gentiles) accept the invitation, and yet Jesus concludes, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (v.14)—Why is this? Are the few simply those who reject violence?
3. I can’t help but link the Orthodox (and patristic) view of marriage as martyrdom (self-sacrifice), even wearing the martyr’s wreath on our heads during the wedding service—is there a link between the wedding garment and those who accept martyrdom rather than insurrection?

So for my main contribution, I would note that here v.13 says “outer darkness” and in Matthew 13, he says “furnace of fire.” Why the difference? Whenever I see anything to do with light or darkness, I think of the *Unapproachable Light* as judgment in John 3:19–21 and the “light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round me” (Acts 26:13). This same light both blinded Saul (darkness) and revealed his actions (essentially, murdering the servants from the parable in Matt. 22) as “kicking against the spikes” (Acts 26:14)—i.e., self-condemnation, or violence begetting violence.

This *Unapproachable Light* has become a hermeneutical lens of sorts for me, and a potential addition (though by no means solution) to models that wrestle with the problem of evil. The pain and suffering in the world is a preview of our eschatological encounter with Christ as judge, i.e., as *Unapproachable Light*—*immutably* mercy, love, compassion—experienced multifariously, depending on the extent to which we have been transfigured. As God “is everywhere and fills all things” (as the Divine Liturgy says), this encounter with the immutable *Unapproachable Light* (“And this is judgment: light has come into the world...” — John 3:19) is ongoing even today, where suffering and pain in a postlapsarian arena

is the contrast of our collective fallenness and distortion—within and without—with this *Unapproachable Light*—perfect love and goodness.

So, eschatologically speaking (and what isn't?), Fr. Tom Hopko can remark, "It is precisely the presence of God's mercy and love which cause the torment of the wicked. God does not punish; he forgives. ... In a word, God has mercy on all, whether all like it or not. If we like it, it is paradise; if we do not, it is hell." Can we say the same thing in an already / not-yet world too? I liken this (although trying to avoid the pitfalls of Deism and an impersonal "god") to a chemical reaction, today and in the hereafter. If the *Unapproachable Light* is immutable love, we avoid the problems of anthropomorphic "intervention" here but not over there. Diverse reactions are not because of a supposed volatility of the divine will and whim.

Rather, immutable love is "mixed" with a fallen and distorted world; the "chemical reaction" produces pain and suffering. Or, as Fr. Tom words it, "If we like it, it is paradise; if we do not, it is hell"—or, as Jesus says, "For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God" (John 3:20–21).

The evil, disasters, and tragedies we see in the world could then be the "natural" / unsurprising / inevitable / intrinsic violent reaction of the *Unapproachable Light* that "is everywhere and fills all things" infusing a distorted and fallen cosmos. There is, after all, nothing that the Divine doesn't sustain—it *must* encounter and fill all things for them to have being and existence. If the infusion of the cosmos by the divine—as immutable love, mercy, and compassion—is unavoidable (for to separate the two would result in non-being), how can this infusion and therefore encounter with fallenness and distortion result in anything but turbulence and upheaval—a cosmic "shakeup"?

So, how does this relate to the parable in Matt. 22? The "outer darkness" in v.13 (as part of the conclusion—or point—of this parable) seems to invoke a contrast with Light. Saul's blindness (or darkness) is a result of his encounter with the *Unapproachable Light*, because of his persecution (i.e., because he too "seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them"—Matt. 22:6). So too, St. Gregory of Nyssa observes how the plague of darkness for the Egyptians was for the Hebrews nevertheless experienced as light: "It was not some constraining power from above that caused the one to be found in darkness and the other in light, but we men have in ourselves, in our own nature and by our own choice, the causes of light or darkness, since we place ourselves in whichever sphere we wish to be" (*Life of Moses 2.80*)—i.e., "chemical reaction."

When Matthew wrote on the launch of Jesus' ministry, he invoked the prophecy of Isaiah: "'The land of Zeb'ulun and the land of Naph'tali, toward the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has

dawned.' From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:15–17).

So, here we have the revelation of the kingdom of heaven, the Jew / Gentile dichotomy, and the darkness / Light dichotomy—all of which appear in Matt. 22. Similarly, Matthew uses the salt and light metaphors in Matt. 5 and remarks (reminiscent of John and Nyssen above), "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (Matt. 6:22–23).

We may also have a parallel in Matt 10:26–28: "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Both Matt 10 and 22 warn of darkness and feature those who kill the body and him who can destroy both soul and body. The same word is used: "kill" as the action of the murders and "destroy" as the action of the king. (The Greek for "destroyed"—*apōlesen*—would play into the hands of annihilationists). This time, it refers specifically to *Gehenna* (the valley outside of Jerusalem).

We can now apply this to the king who "sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." This points to the destruction of Jerusalem as incited by the insurrection of the Zealots, which resulted in bodies piled high in the Valley of Hinnom (as Brad exegetes in *Her Gates*, re: prophetic acts from Jeremiah, etc.).

Further, Matthew gives an account of the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor: "And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light" (Matt. 17:1–13).

So, due to the inclusion of garments / light / darkness, the one in Matt. 22 who didn't have on a wedding garment and was cast into outer darkness as a result may represent those who are not yet transfigured as are Moses and Elijah, who can stand with Christ on Mt. Tabor rather than recoil in fear like the disciples (I've written on this before, as you know).

This seems to, again, play into the effects of the infusion of the cosmos with the *Unapproachable Light*—union with Christ for those who are transfigured like Moses and Elijah (posthumously, in the vein of *epektasis*, one assumes) and darkness / suffering / pain / weeping / sorrow for those who are not yet transfigured, or have not yet awakened the kingdom of God from within.

But does any of this resolve the association of the Father with violence in the parable? I think without a long tradition of cruciform hermeneutics to draw from intuitively, readers will have a difficult time accepting *any* explanation. But, having said that, I think that the Light / darkness motif that I see in Matthew (and the other Gospels, esp. John) suggests that Rome's armies are under the control of the Father as the infusion of the cosmos with *Unapproachable Light*—immutable love, mercy, and compassion producing a disruptive, turbulent “chemical reaction”—in a distorted world and a distorted specific situation, i.e., violence (the Zealot's insurrection) begetting violence (the Roman armies' response) resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem that Jesus foretold.

I really doubt this will convince anyone, but that's my take on this as I continue my ongoing exploration into a hermeneutic of *Unapproachable Light*, esp. as a response—however inevitably unsatisfying—to the problem of evil.

**Derek Flood:** Another thought: In Matthew's telling of the parable there is a king who has someone publicly tortured. The audience at the time likely would have thought that the one being tortured was bad and deserved it. It said, "This is justice." Why do we stumble over this story? Because we have now had that story unmasked by the Gospels. They (including Matthew) tell the story of a king (Caesar) who has someone publicly tortured. But there it is revealed that one being tortured was not bad and did not deserve it. The story has been unmasked for us.

So when we see the crucifixion that way, the same story in this parable no longer looks like justice; it looks horrific. We see the face of the scapegoat.

Girard, I think, would even say that we see it today, generally as Westerners, as the result of the Jesus story. It has influenced the stories we tell (the novel or the movie that tells the story of the outsider, the little guy), as opposed to the stories of old that told the stories of kings and heroes. So to his audience at the time, it was clear that the story was one where that torture was good and just. It was not on their radar that it should be questioned. It was pre-Cross.

Today we still have stories where violence is cheered as good. Take *Star Wars*. The movie ends with little farm boy Luke blowing up the Death Star. This is followed by scenes of people cheering. But that "Death Star" was filled with humans. So why are we all cheering that? One reason is because all the "Storm-troopers" wear masks covering their faces. So this is a story that is masked. Thus, we see the violence as just and good.

**Brian Zahnd:** "The executioner's face is always well hidden." – Bob Dylan

I do think we have to leave room for story. I don't want a Christianity that banishes *The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars* stories. (Or the Exodus and David and Goliath.)

But that doesn't mean we actually think we should go about killing Darth and Saruman in Jesus' name.

**Andrew Klager:** I'll make an attempt here to pull together all the strands I see—including from Brian and Derek—and coalesce them into a coherent whole.

First, although the portrayal of the Father in the parable is disturbing, we needn't take this at face value. If Jesus began this statement with, "I'm going to tell you what the Father is like," I would have more trouble with this. Instead, he is describing what the kingdom of God is like. Yes, the kingdom has a king, and he's part of the parable. But it's a parable, and the author is focused specifically on revealing something else about the kingdom of God. In this case, that non-participation in this kingdom (or clash of the two kingdoms) is evidenced by the human violence (i.e., murderers, not those who reject the invitation) that will create their own hell. That is, violence (of the Zealots) begets violence (of the Roman armies)—the storyteller will use, or manipulate, the means to ultimately project these ends, which is fair game in a parable.

I think Derek's observation that Matthew may have genuinely still thought that God is violent is also fair, not as something that Matthew has deliberately thought through in any sophisticated manner, but as residue from his previous (or ongoing) understanding of God that made its way into the telling of the parable subconsciously, which we can determine better because this violence was indeed omitted in Luke.

So, the context is clearly the destruction of Jerusalem (that Jesus predicts in the next couple chapters), as Brian notes, and the violence against the murderers is from the Roman armies under Titus' command. The context is also that the Jews in Palestine didn't accept the Messiah, but the Gentiles will and did. So, instead of accepting the Messiah whose peaceable kingdom transcends the boundaries and polity of the Roman Empire, the Jews as represented by the Zealots tried to overthrow the Roman Empire militarily themselves—which Jesus warns against—whereas the Gentiles (both good and bad, though not murderous) did and will accept Jesus as the Messiah. Or at worst, they simply ignored his invitation and were therefore not the targets of violence.

Although the parable places the Roman armies under the Father's control (even though on the physical level, we know they were under Vespasian and Titus' command), it reads as a "those who live by the sword, die by the sword" natural or inevitable exchange.

Only those who wear the wedding garment—the garment of martyrdom and asceticism rather than the soldier's military girdle, as Chrysostom contrasts, or the garment of Transfiguration that are "white as light" from Matt. 17—will cooperate rather than clash with the divinely infused cosmos, or the divine *Unapproachable Light* that is "everywhere present and fills all things." That same Light sustains

(without commending or directly acting on behalf of) even the lives of violent actors who nevertheless bear “the true light that enlightens every man” (John 1:9) and the events or episodes they carry. Indeed, that this light infuses not only a fully or “nearly” transfigured person but also a distorted person (which, if we're honest, is most of us)—as complex, multi-layered, interconnected, localized in some areas and not in others, possibly even generational as this distortion may be—is precisely what engenders the turbulence that can result in this distorted person's violence and its aftermath.

I fully realize this may appear to be stretching it or filling gaps with something that isn't obvious at first glance, but I think the light / darkness motif is strong enough in the gospels to warrant its consideration—specifically given that the one who wasn't wearing the wedding garment was thrown into “outer darkness” (v.13).

**Brad Jersak:** Thanks for your input, dear friends. I'll wrap up this mini-minyan by noting the importance of “de-actualizing” (thanks, Spencer Boersma) certain genres of scripture as an essential part of the interpretive process. That is, whether exegeting parables, mythologies, poetry, rhetoric or (especially) apocalyptic texts, the great error of so many interpreters has been literalizing rather than de-actualizing the text. Nowhere is this more critical than in anthropomorphisms of God—most of all, his “wrath.” Indeed, to miss this point—to literalize anthropomorphic wrath and assign it to God—was, according to John Cassian, to utter blasphemy.

Is God *actually* a vengeful king who tortures and kills his opponents? No! Thus, the parable in question has not been finally interpreted until that imagery is de-actualized. And this de-actualization happens primarily and most clearly in the actualization of Christ's enthronement as King on the Cross. And secondarily, the re-actualization of ‘the wrath’ is manifest in the fall of Jerusalem, when God “gives over” Jerusalem and her zealot-insurgents to the intrinsic judgment or inevitable consequences of their own rebellion against the Prince of Peace and rejection of His eschatological banquet.