



# STORY TIME

Discovering the Parables of Jesus



- The parables of Jesus make up a crucial part of the Bible. Jesus had the wisdom to simplify profound spiritual truths in the form of relatable stories that are easy to understand. A parable is a tale about a simple, common subject to illustrate a more profound, valuable moral lesson.
- Sometimes the Gospel authors begin a parable with an analogy, as "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard" (Matthew 20:1). Or Jesus may provide an example from everyday life to convey spiritual truth, such as the Parable of the Good Samaritan to emphasize love and mercy.
- A parable utilizes the full story to produce the spiritual lesson, whereas a proverb, metaphor, simile, or figure of speech centers usually on a word, phrase, or sentence.

Parables use rich imagery of language to catch the listener unaware. At first it all seems so familiar, and then a shift develops in the plot of the story. The ordinariness of the parable is transformed by a surprising twist. A consciousness of God and His way of viewing the world enters the commonplace scene to communicate the divine message. The familiar setting of the parable allows each person to understand God's will. The physical reality of the parable reveals the natural affinity between the world in which we live and the spiritual dimension. The drama comes alive in meaning because of the theological significance of the parables.

- Brad H. Young



## Hebrew noun mashal מִשָּׁל

- Definition: a parable, proverb, riddle, anecdote, allegory
- It defines the unknown by using what is known.
- The mashal begins where the listener is, but then pushes beyond into a new realm of discovery.

## Greek noun parabole παραβάλλω

Definition: a comparing, comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude, juxtaposition

# Why is it important to study the Parables?

- One-third of the recorded sayings of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels are in parables.
- If we do not understand the parables, we miss what may be known about the historical Jesus. One must understand parables to know Jesus.
- The parables are designed to portray a reality. In a world of metaphorical redescription, the reality behind the parable is dramatized in word-pictures. (Brad H. Young)
- The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar or sometimes identical wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is largely distinct. (Wikipedia)

# Parables in the Bible

- The first use of the word for parable (mashal מָשָׁל) in the Bible is when “Balaam spoke his mashal.” (Numbers 23:7)
- The parables of Yeshua are metaphorical stories. A story, at minimum, contains a main character (king, owner, shepherd) who has a problem (with a son, field, sheep) that gets resolved.
- In that resolution process we find deeper purpose and meaning of how God wants us to live in this world.
- God tells us He is the author of many parables: “I spoke to the prophets; it was I who multiplied visions, and through the prophets gave parables [literally, likenesses and representations].” (Hosea 12:10)



“Down through the centuries, starting with the Gospel writers themselves, the parables have been allegorized, moralized, and tamed into either platitudes such as “God loves us” or “Be nice” or, worse, assurances that all is right with the world as long as we believe in Jesus. Too often we settle for easy interpretations. If we stop with the easy lessons, we lose the way Jesus’s first followers would have heard the parables, and we lose the genius of Jesus’ teaching. Those followers, like Jesus Himself, were Jews, and Jews knew that parables were more than children’s stories or restatements of common knowledge. They knew that parables and the tellers of parables were there to prompt them to see the world in a different way, to challenge, and at times to indict.

— Amy-Jill Levine

- Jesus is recorded teaching about 40 parables in the Gospels.
- In all of Jewish sacred literature (Tanakh, Midrash, Talmud, Mishnah, etc.) there are about 4,000 parables.
- All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.” Matthew 13:34–35
- I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. Psalm 78:2-4 (by Asaph, Levite musician)



# 39 Parables of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels

PARABLE/LESSON	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
Wheat and tares	13:24-30		
Barren fig tree			13:6-9
Children in market	11:16-19		7:31-35
Budding Fig Tree	24:32-36	13:28-32	21:29-33
Lamp under basket	5:14-16	4:21-23	8:16-18
Dinner guests			14:15-24
Divided Kingdom	12:24-30	3:22-27	11:14-23
Faithful servants			12:35-40
Feast invitations			14:12-14
Friend at midnight			11:5-13
Good Samaritan			10:25-37
Great physician	9:10-13	2:15-17	5:29-32
Groom's attendants	9:14-15	2:18-20	5:33-35
Growing seed		4:26-29	
Hidden treasure	13:44		
Humbled guest			14:7-11
King's war plans			14:31-32
Laborers in vineyard	20:1-16		
Leaven	13:33		13:20-21
Lost coin			15:8-10
Lost sheep			15:4-7

PARABLE/LESSON	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE
Marriage feast	22:1-14		
Mustard seed	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
Net of fish	13:47-50		
New cloth	9:16	2:21	5:36
New wine	9:17	2:22	5:37-39
Pearl of great price	13:45-46		
Persistent widow			18:1-8
Sower	13:3-23		
Rich man			12:13-21
Talents	25:14-30		
Minas			19:11-27
Prodigal son			15:11-32
Steward and rich man			16:1-8
Ten virgins	25:1-12		
Great Supper			14:15-24
Two sons	21:28-31		
Merciless servant in debt with his master	18:23-35		
Wicked Vinedressers	21:33-46	12:1-11	12:35-48

# Six Components of a Parable

1. Prologue – a prolegomenon, prepares the audience, builds anticipation
2. Introduction of the cast  
Prodigal son story... “a man had two sons”
3. Plot of the story
4. Conflict
5. Conflict resolution
6. Call to decision and/or application



Yeshua often used agricultural images in His parables. He explained that people are known by the "fruits" of their lives (Matthew 7:16-20). He likened the spread of His message in terms of "sowing and reaping" (Matthew 13:3-23) and compared the Kingdom of Heaven to the secret working of a mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32).

Yeshua regarded the world as a "field" for planting with different "types of soil" (Matthew 13:38-43), and warned of the "great harvest" of souls at the end of the age (Luke 10:2; Matthew 13:30). He pointed to signs from a fig tree to indicate the nearness of the prophesied End of Days (Matthew 24:32-33). Yeshua also used the metaphor of a "vine and its branches" to explain how His followers are to be connected to Him (John 15:1-6).

Yeshua taught in parables because they simultaneously conceal and reveal the truth. A parable obscures the truth to those who don't really want it; just as it reveals the truth to those who do (Luke 8:9-10; Psalm 72:8; Matthew 13:34-35). Since Yeshua's whole life was a parable of sorts (Philippians 2:7) it is not surprising that He regularly used "figures of speech" to provoke people to examine their own heart attitude and faith. Note that Yeshua never explained the "mysteries of the kingdom of God" directly to the crowds, nor did He ever pander to the crowd's clamor or interests. His message is always meant for the individual soul who was willing to follow Him -- to the one who had "ears to hear."





**Mark 4:1-20**

**Luke 8:4-15**

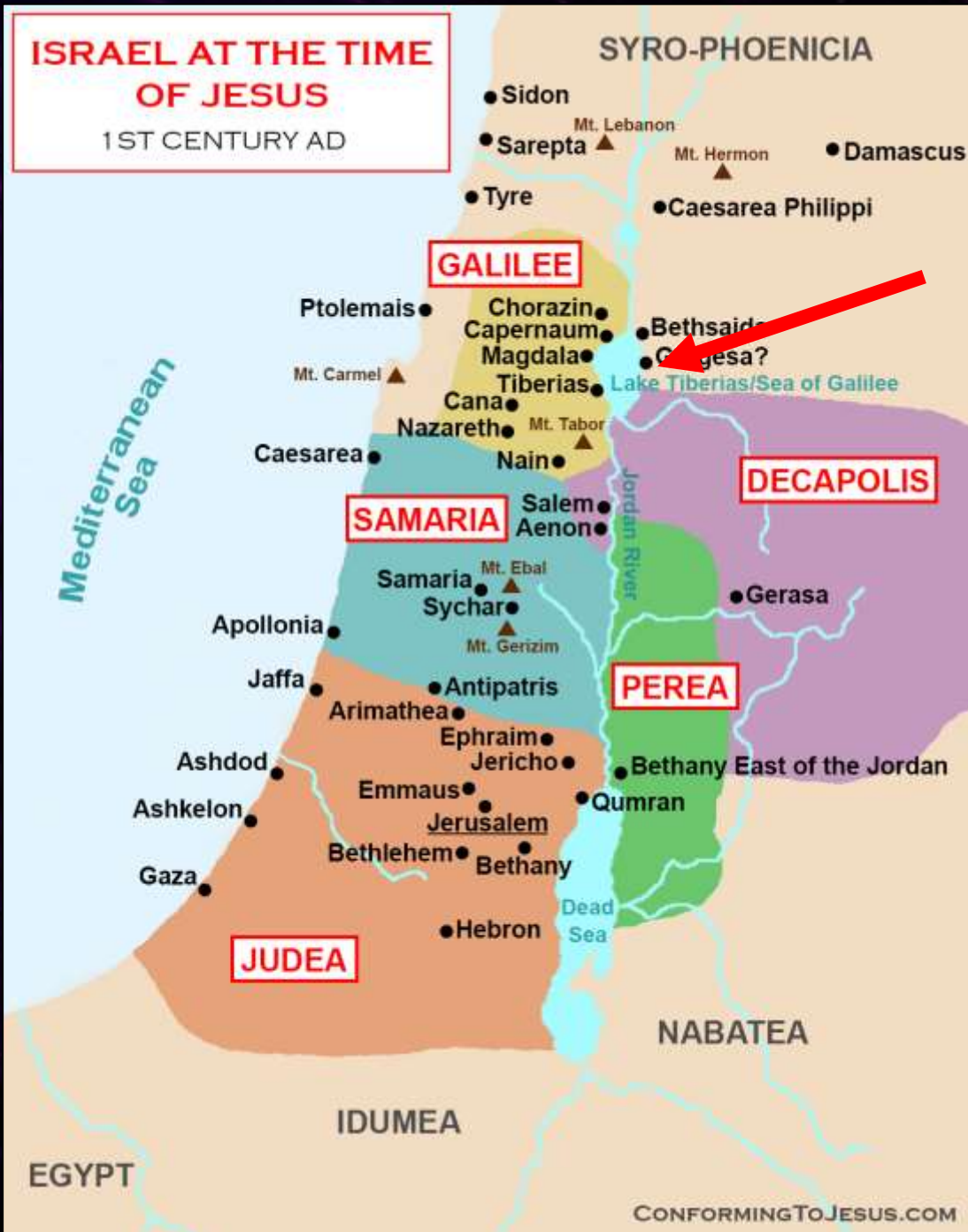
**Matthew 13:1-23**

He [Jesus] began to teach again by the sea [of Galilee]. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. And He was teaching them many things in **parables**, and was saying to them in His teaching,  
Mark 4:1-2



# ISRAEL AT THE TIME OF JESUS

1ST CENTURY AD



When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a **parable**: “The sower went out to sow his seed;” Luke 8:4-5a

\*This was not the first time that Jesus had used parables. This is, however, the first parable told at length and explained in detail.



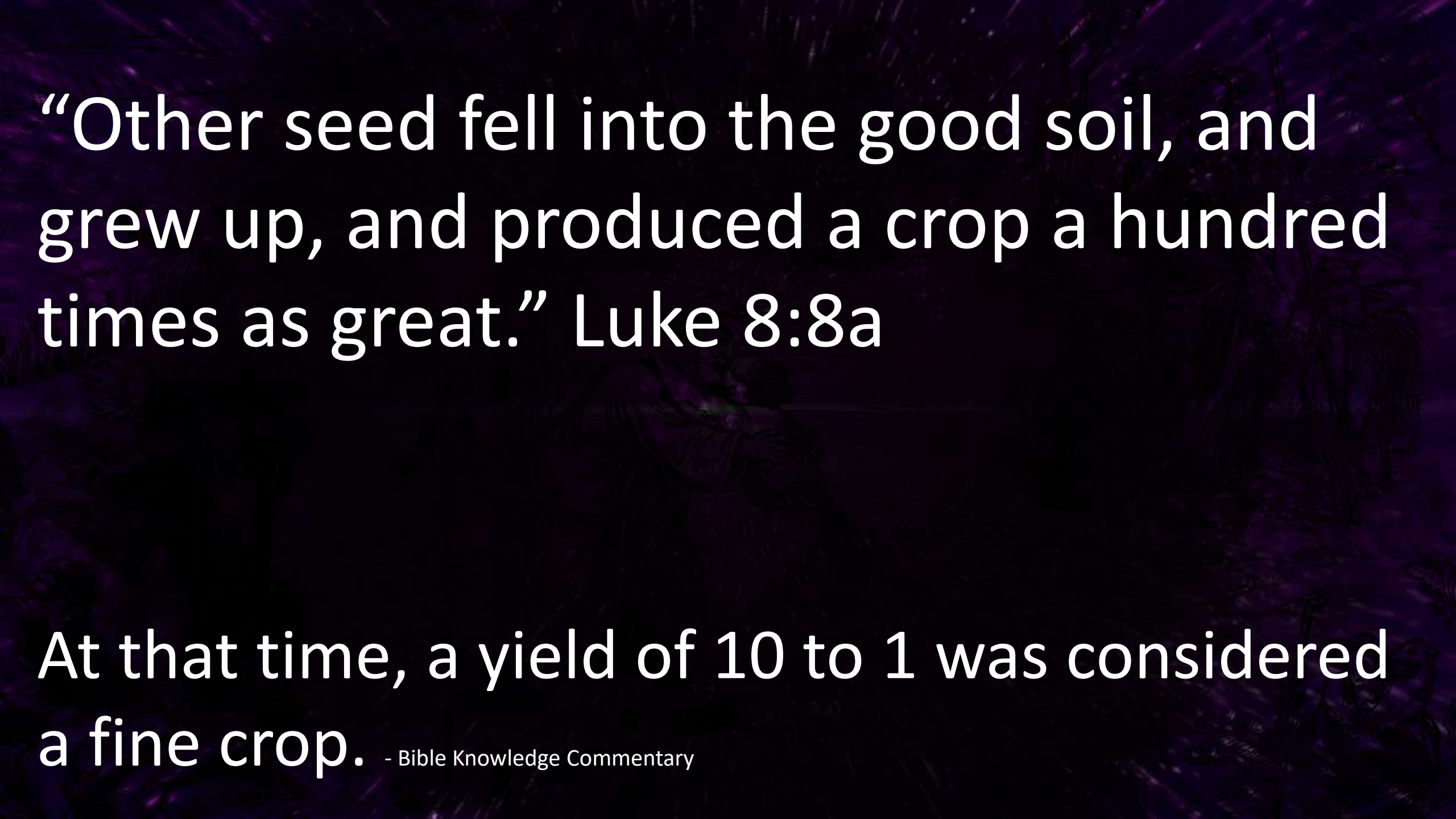
# Ancient Farming in the Land of the Bible

- “You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, or all the produce of the seed which you have sown and the increase of the vineyard will become defiled.” Deuteronomy 22:9
- “The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you. The Lord will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways. So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will be afraid of you. The Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you.” Deuteronomy 28:8-11

“The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out.” Luke 8:5-7

- There may or may not have been a Galilean farmer actually sowing on the hillside above at the time: if there was, then it would have made the illustration even more vivid. – New Bible Commentary





“Other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as great.” Luke 8:8a

At that time, a yield of 10 to 1 was considered a fine crop. - Bible Knowledge Commentary

“Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; as he was sowing, some seed fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it did not have much soil; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of soil. And after the sun had risen, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. Other seeds fell into the good soil, and as they grew up and increased, they yielded a crop and produced thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold.” Mark 4:3-8



- The parable's description of scattering seed by hand and of the physical limitations of paths, stones, and thorns composes a visual image familiar to farmers in the land of Israel and well known to the common folk.
- The farmer's greatest concern is the condition of the soil. The soil's fertility determines how productive each seed will be. In the parable, the sower is doing his job well and the seed is of high quality, capable of an excellent return. But what captures the attention of the farmer – and is the central focus of the story – is the condition of the soil. Farmers in every culture are very concerned about their soil. They till it, water it, fertilize it, and do all in their power to increase its potential for productivity. Soil preparation is essential for a bountiful harvest. – Brad H. Young

# Who is the Sower?

- Farmers sowed seed by scattering it by hand over plowed soil.
- The farmer/sower is Jesus, the One planting the spiritual seeds in our lives.
- Jesus (Yeshua) takes the initiative, reaching out to us, calling us to a relationship with Him.
- “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity” 2 Timothy 1:8-9



# What is the seed?

- The seed is the gospel message as taught in the Word of God.
- The word “gospel” in Greek (εὐαγγέλιον euaggelion) means “good news.”
- The greatest news in the world is that a sinful person who has been separated from God can be reconciled to Him by faith in God’s Son.

# As He [Jesus] said these things, He would call out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.” Luke 8:8b

- Jesus used “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” on several occasions when telling parables (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; Luke 8:8; 14:35). The expression describes the fact that spiritual people can discern the intended spiritual meaning of a parable. The implication is that unspiritual people would understand no more than the parable’s surface meaning.

– Bible Knowledge Commentary

- Those who obey God grasp the divine mysteries while those who refuse to follow the teachings of Torah hear the message in easy-to-understand parabolic stories. They see but do not see, and hear but do not understand, in the sense that no one sees and understands unless without obeying fully the demands of the Torah. – Brad H. Young



His disciples began questioning Him as to what this parable meant. And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in **parables**, so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. [quoting Isaiah 6:9-10]

Luke 8:9-10

As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, began asking Him about the parables. And He was saying to them, “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing, they may see and not perceive, and while hearing, they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven.” Mark 4:10-12 (quoting Isaiah 6:9-10)



- He said, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.’ Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed.” Isaiah 6:9-10
- “A closer look at the wording of Isaiah shows that the people did understand but they did not want to obey. They listened to the words and comprehended the message, but they were not willing to repent. Jesus wanted everyone to accept His message concerning God’s reign. The people heard and understood Jesus, but not all were willing to accept His message concerning God’s kingship. Many followed Jesus. He raised up many disciples from beyond the inner circle, as one sees clearly from the Book of Acts and the history of His early band of followers. Nonetheless, not all received the word with a good heart.” – Brad H. Young

Jesus taught the disciples...

“Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. Those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away.” Luke 8:11-13



Jesus taught the disciples...

“The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.” Luke 8:14-15

# What is the soil?

- The soil is the spiritual heart of every person.
- Our hearts were created by God to seek after spiritual fulfillment.
- Some hearts are receptive to the seed and others are resistant.
- “The preparation of the soil for planting often is considered the major determining factor in the success of the harvest.” – Brad H. Young



# 4 Types of Soil

- Beside the road – along the well-trodden foot path
- Rocky places - no depth of soil because limestone was close to the surface
- Thorns - ground containing unearthed thorn plant roots that interfere with seeds
- Good soil - ground ready to receive the seeds and allow them to grow to be healthy

# The use of “4 Types” ... Jewish Heritage

- Avot R. Nat, a rabbinical writing in the Talmud tells a story...
- **Rabban Gamaliel the Elder compared the disciples in the academy to four different types of fish:** the unclean fish, the clean fish, the Jordan River fish, and the Mediterranean Sea fish.
- Unclean fish: a poor youth who studies Scripture and is without understanding
- Clean fish: a rich young who studies and has understanding
- Jordan River fish: a scholar who studies and is without talent for using it in argument
- Mediterranean (Great) Sea fish: a scholar who studies and has the talent for using it for argument



# The use of “4 Types” ... Jewish Heritage

- Pirkei Avot (rabbinical writings) 5:18 tells this story...
- “There are four qualities among those who sit at the feet of the sages: they are like a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, or a sieve.”
- “A sponge soaks up everything; a funnel takes it in at one end and lets it out at the other; a strainer lets the wine pass through but retains the lees; a sieve lets out the bran and retains the flour.”
- The worst characteristic is the disciple who lets the teaching go in one ear and out the other. He is like a funnel. The most desirable type of disciple is like a sieve who retains only the best of the teaching.

# The Seed Beside the Road

“it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up”

**Birds** = Satan’s distractions and temptations

False teachers

Fear of what others think

Pride

Stubbornness

Ego

Procrastination

Love of the world

Love of sin

Doubt

Prejudice

\* “hardhearted indifference”



# The Seeds Sown on the Rocky Ground

“as soon as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture”

- **Sun** = Affliction or persecution that result from spiritual trials; the cost of discipleship
- This person is the superficial hearer of the gospel with no true faith
- “He has come to Christ for what he thought he would get in the way of personal benefit, but when confronted with the high cost of salvation, he will not pay the price.” – John MacArthur
- Even in the case of those ready to listen, shallow response is a danger. – New Bible Commentary

# The Seeds Sown in the Thorns

“the thorns grew up with it and choked it out”

**Thorns** – In Luke 8/Mark 4, Jesus called them:

- Worries of the world
- Deceitfulness of riches (wealth)
- Desires for other things (pleasures of this life)



# The Seeds Sown in the Thorns

Apostle John writes, “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.” 1 John 2:15-17

# The Seeds Sown in the Good Soil

“the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance”

The person in whose life the seed grows:

- Hears the Word of God and accepts the call to salvation
- Commits to a life of godly choices
- Commits to spiritual growth
- Commits to a life of faithful obedience
- Helps others understand the call to salvation



“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:10-11

And He said to them, “Do you not understand this **parable**? How will you understand all the **parables**?” Mark 4:13

If Jesus’ disciples did not understand (Greek verb *oidate*, “intuitively comprehend”) its meaning, then they would not understand (Greek verb *gnōsesthe*, “comprehend by experience”) any of the kingdom parables.



With many such **parables** He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a **parable**; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples. Mark 4:33-34

Reading the parables can help us take inventory of our lives. When we hear the “parable of the sower” we are reminded that God is like a farmer who sows seed upon the soil of human hearts (the quality of which may be hard, shallow, choked, or good). If we are honest with ourselves, we will see our own hardness, shallowness, and selfishness in contrast to the fruitfulness marked by the good soil, and this may prompt us to seek God for help. Only the new heart created by the power of God’s Spirit can possibly yield the fruit of the Spirit. - Hebrew for Christians



# Which types of soil represent true believers in Jesus?

- **Beside the road**- NO, they refuse to surrender to Jesus
- **Rocky ground**- NO, theirs was not “true faith”
- **Thorns**- ????, they are distracted by other things, but did they ever truly believe in Jesus as Savior?
- **Good soil**- YES, with evidence of spiritual fruit

**How can the seed of my spiritual life begin to grow?**

Paul writes, “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation”

Romans 10:9-10



**How can the seed of my spiritual life continue to grow?**

Paul writes, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” Philippians 4:8

- Jesus taught about a lifestyle that seeks the divine reign in all aspects of personal relationships. A good heart is all that is needed for a miraculous harvest. The miracle develops from a tiny seed, which is planted in productive soil. The kingdom of heaven means that people can acknowledge his reign and receive the power to dedicate their lives to God. If the people receive the teaching of Jesus with a good heart, they receive God's kingdom with joy and do not allow anything to discourage them. They hear the words of Jesus and put them into operation.
- The determining factor is the condition of the soil. Everyone is able to receive the teaching of Jesus in the same way that fertile soil provides the necessary nutrients for a seed to grow. The love of Jesus the master teacher emerges from His challenge for each person to receive the word with a good heart. Surely each person who hears and acts upon the word of His teaching with a good heart will produce much fruit.





We each must ask,

**“Which type of soil best describes me?”**

- Beside the road (hard)
- Rocky ground (shallow)
- Thorns (choked)
- Good soil (faithful, obedient)