

Chapter 6

PARABLES OF JESUS



The Sower, c.1907, The Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg, Kansas

PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY WITH JESUS

Now that Jesus has gathered his disciples, you will soon note that his messages and behavior reflect a tenacious determination on his part to make every second an instructional moment with the twelve. If the kingdom on earth was to continue after his departure, he was fully cognizant that the group of men selected must be prepared to carry his message forward. Thus, from now on, we all will quickly realize that he has stepped his teaching up a notch as to the quantity and depth of subject matter.

In addition, it is critical for all of us to be reminded that his audience was almost entirely made up of Jews. Therefore, since Jesus was raised by two devout Jewish parents, it was crucial for the writer to locate sources that would shed light on the impact of his religious background as it related to his teachings.

Thus, as a way of establishing a foundation for offering greater meaning of Jesus' words, the writer will lean heavily upon the books, "Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist," and "Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story," written by Brant Pitre to provide deeper understanding of the teachings of the Jewish people regarding their expectations of the messiah yet to come. The first source Pitre relied on was the Old Testament, followed by:

"The Dead Sea Scrolls: an ancient collection of Jewish manuscripts copied sometime between the second century B.C. and A.D. 70. This collection contains numerous writings from the Second Temple period, during which Jesus lived."

"The Works of Josephus: a Jewish historian and Pharisee who lived in the first century A.D. Josephus" works are extremely important witnesses to Jewish history and culture at the time of Jesus and the early Church."

The Mishnah: an extensive collection of the oral traditions of Jewish rabbis who lived from about 50 B.C. to A.C. 200. Most of these traditions are focused on legal and liturgical matters. For rabbinic Judaism, the Mishnah remains the most authoritative witness to Jewish tradition outside of the Bible itself."

The Targums: ancient Jewish translations and paraphrases of the Bible from Hebrew into Aramaic. These emerged sometime after the Babylonian exile (587 B.C.), when many Jews began speaking Aramaic rather than Hebrew. Scholars disagree about their exact dates."

The Babylonian Talmud: a vast compilation---more than thirty volumes---of the traditions of Jewish rabbis who lived from around A.C. 220 to 500. The Talmud consists of both legal opinions and biblical interpretations, in the form of a massive commentary on the Mishnah."

The Midrashim: ancient Jewish commentaries on various books of the Bible. Although parts of these are later than the Talmud, they contain many interpretations of Scripture attributed to rabbis who lived during the times of the Mishnah and the Talmud."

In addition to the sources above, several Jewish professors were on the faculty of the educational institution Pitre attended. All these factors caused the writer to view this scholar's work, (already assigned 5 star ratings), as a major resource for providing accurate background information regarding Jesus' Jewish roots and their impact on his teachings.

Since the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt had ended when the twelve tribes had entered the land of milk and honey God had promised them, the Old Testament prophets had foretold a new exodus would unfold; a fact taught to all Jews as religious instruction. Of course, the messiah yet to come was the central theme of this promised new exodus; a position Jesus claimed for himself. In the

book, “Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist” by Brant Pitre, the four component parts of the new exodus are summarized as follows:

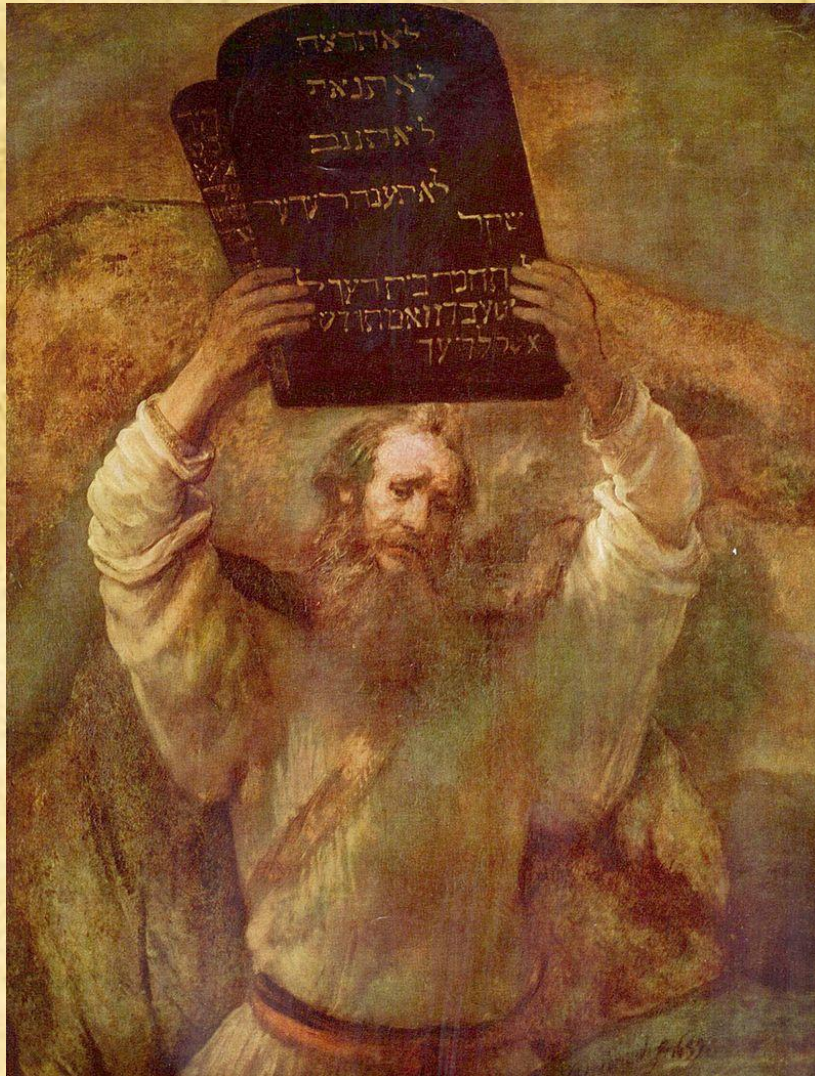
“1) The coming of a new Moses: (God would one day save his people by means of a new deliverer; the Messiah.)

2) The making of a new covenant: (To be fulfilled in “the World to Come”; one entirely different from the Old Testament covenant)

3) The building of a new Temple: (One that would be built at the time of the coming of the Messiah.)

4) The journey to a new promised land: (A world prepared by God where all things would be made new.)”

****As you read the questions Jesus was asked by the Jewish leaders and his replies, being aware of the four points above will hopefully provide insight and greater depth of understanding. The back and forth conversations, that seem by some of us as out of sequence, will perhaps take on new meaning. You will probably want to refer to these 4 points as we move forward. Also, for greater understanding, the writer recommends highly the purchase of these two books for your library.**



“Moses with the ten Commandments” by Rembrandt (1659)

ARE YOU READY?

In a previous chapter, you read about the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus that were ordinary people just like all of us. In the mind of our Lord, he knew they were rough around the edges and in desperate need of training; a task to be completed before his crucifixion. In addition, he recognized that the concepts of God's kingdom would be of a heavenly nature; far beyond the realm of human understanding. However, since nothing is impossible for God, he would use his great wisdom in delivering state of the art parables that would contain the necessary information in a beautiful story form they could grasp. In addition, he made it clear that understanding required ears that were set on listening. If an unwillingness to put forth the energy in doing this existed, the parables would not be understood.

Also, before ascending into heaven, our Savior directed his followers, meaning us, to strap on our sandals and become disciples as well. Therefore, it is the writers hope that as the remaining chapters unfold in this collection that you are ready to walk right along beside your favorite disciple until your cup is full to overflowing with faith and knowledge. Go ye!

TIMELESS STORIES CALLED PARABLES

According to Arland J. Hultgren, the definition of a parable is as follows: "A parable is a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between God's kingdom, or expectations, and something in this world, real or imagined." He also lets us know clearly in his book, "The Parables of Jesus", throughout history people from a vast array of backgrounds used this form of teaching as a way of expressing ideas and concepts.

Thus, the Jewish audience that Jesus addressed would have been very familiar with the technique. However, the big difference would have been the manner in which the Hebrew mind worked in anticipating the outcome. The Jewish mind was intensely practical, thus, expecting concrete lessons, not abstract ideas, whereas, in comparison, the Greek mind would be anticipating a good debate just for the sake of argument. In the Jewish mind, the conditioning process followed was to be told by the parable specifically *what to do*.

Although using parables as a form of communicating an idea can be traced back to the Old Testament, scholars have agreed the stories Jesus told using this method were truly timeless; literal masterpieces designed to awaken the mind of the listeners and enlighten them out of their state of blindness or dullness of spirit. One well known example from the Old Testament is when Nathan used a parable as a way of delivering a message from God to David after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and hid it. As you compare the style of this one to those Jesus used, you will easily note how masterful our Lord was in creating parables for the ages; meaning they are still fresh and applicable to everyone.

2 Samuel 12:1-7 New International Version 12

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ² The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. ⁴ "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." ⁵ David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶ He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." ⁷ Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.'"

JESUS THE GREAT TEACHER

Although Jesus did not invent parables, he could tell a story using that form of communication with such expertise and drama that the deep things of God were revealed to the common eye. Literally, he was able to use earthly things to unveil heavenly wisdom not only for people then, but also for today. His beautiful cameo-like pictures were exercised under very harsh conditions on the spur of the moment. Since he was an itinerant teacher, he did not have the privilege of advanced preparation. Also, people at that time were known to follow or gather around itinerant rabbis with the goal of gleaning information about the anticipated messiah that would offer hope for a better life. Due to Roman control, many found themselves as displaced outcasts; wandering around the area in a state of physical discomfort that left them in a bottomless pit of desperation. Thus, since the promised messiah was a part of their religious instruction, they longed for a savior that would rescue them and establish a kingdom of peace and prosperity like the one during the reign of King David. This is one of the reasons Jesus labeled them as "Sheep without a shepherd," and took pity on them. It is thought by many scholars that even the disciples made the decision to join the rank of Jesus because of believing him to be the promised earthly king or messiah that would deliver the Jewish people out of the hands of their oppressors, thus ushering in the new exodus. Unfortunately, over time, if the peoples' expectations were not met in an expeditious manner, they would soon become disenchanting and disillusioned, dropping out. Certainly, the twelve disciples noted this and brought it to the attention of Jesus, prompting him to deliver a parable just for their ears as a way of encouragement that small steps would eventually turn into something big.

INTERPRETATIONS OF PARABLES

Throughout time, an array of interpretations of the parables by religious scholars have caused ordinary people like us to become a bit confused as to the proper meaning. One thing that was pointed out as a potential problem was trying to apply meaning to every word in each

parable. Since Jesus was under pressure to create these beautiful stories in parable form right on the spot, it is recommended by many scholars that trying to apply Christian beliefs, going far beyond what Jesus intended, is over doing it, to say the least. There is even disagreement as to the number of parables and their meanings, as well.



Jesus Teaching by the Seashore by James Tissot

As you make your way through this chapter on parables, it is the writer's hope that you will become so interested in the teaching of Jesus that a desire to go deeper will occur. Thus, the following chart has been provided to offer ease in locating the parables throughout the Gospels:

Parables of Jesus in Chronological Order				
	Parable	Matthew	Mark	Luke
1	New cloth on an old coat	9:16	2:21	5:36
2	New wine in old wineskins	9:17	2:22	5:37-38
3	Lamp on a stand (also see #6)	5:14-15		
4	Wise and foolish builders	7:24-27		6:47-49
5	Moneylender forgives unequal debts			7:41-43
6	Lamp on a stand (2 nd time, see #3)		4:21-22	8:16, 11:33
7	Rich man foolishly builds bigger barns			12:16-21
8	Servants must remain watchful (also see #44)			12:35-40
9	Wise and foolish servants (also see #42)			12:42-48
10	Unfruitful fig tree			13:6-9
11	Sower and four types of soil	13:3-8, 18-23	4:3-8, 14-20	8:5-8, 11-15
12	Weeds among good plants (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:24-30, 36-43		
13	Growing seed (Kingdom of Heaven)		4:26-29	
14	Mustard seed (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:31-32	4:30-32	13:18-19
15	Yeast (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:33		13:20-21
16	Hidden treasure (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:44		
17	Valuable pearl (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:45-46		
18	Fishing net (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:47-50		
19	Owner of a house (Kingdom of Heaven)	13:52		
20	Lost sheep (sheep as children, also see #29)	18:12-14		
21	The sheep, gate, and shepherd	(John 10:1-5, 7-18)		
22	Master and his servant			17:7-10
23	Unmerciful servant (Kingdom of Heaven)	18:23-34		
24	Good Samaritan			10:30-37
25	Friend in need			11:5-8
26	Lowest seat at the feast			14:7-14
27	Invitation to a great banquet			14:16-24
28	Cost of discipleship			14:28-33
29	Lost sheep (sheep as sinners, also see #20)			15:4-7
30	Lost coin			15:8-10
31	Lost (prodigal) son			15:11-32
32	Shrewd manager			16:1-8
33	Rich man and Lazarus			16:19-31
34	Workers in the vineyard, early and late	20:1-16		
35	Persistent widow and crooked judge			18:2-8
36	Pharisee and tax collector			18:10-14
37	King's ten servants given minas (also see #45)			19:12-27
38	Two sons, one obeys one does not	21:28-32		
39	Wicked tenants	21:33-44	12:1-11	20:9-18
40	Invitation to a wedding banquet	22:2-14		
41	Signs of the future from a fig tree	24:32-35	13:28-29	21:29-31
42	Wise and foolish servants (2 nd time, see #9)	24:45-51		
43	Wise and foolish virgins	25:1-13		
44	Servants must remain watchful (2 nd time, see #8)		13:35-37	
45	Three servants given talents (also see #37)	25:14-30		
46	Sheep and goats will be separated	25:31-46		

NIV Narrated Bible in Chronological Order (hardcover) and Daily Bible in Chronological Order (paperback) by Dr. F. LaGard
Smith of Pepperdine University, published by Harvest House.

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

As you view the Parables of Jesus, you will note they have been grouped into categories as follows: **PARABLES OF THE REVELATION OF GOD, PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM, PARABLES OF WISDOM AND FOLLY, PARABLES OF SALVATION, CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP AND JUDGEMENT** so that some semblance of order might occur. In addition, you will note a narrative form of a parable contains the phrase, “once upon a time” when describing stories set in the past, while those labeled as a similitude will include the words, “is like.” Also, you will note the beauty in the design of Jesus’ parables allowed him to directly address his audience with words like, which one of you, what woman, what king, and are known to leave room for interpretation. The sense of freedom in our Lord’s parables went against the grain and allowed his listener, no matter how rudimentary his knowledge of the Jewish religion or culture, promoted ease in understanding the message intended.

I. PARABLES OF THE REVELATION OF GOD (Forgiveness, grace, and love)

A. Unmerciful Servant

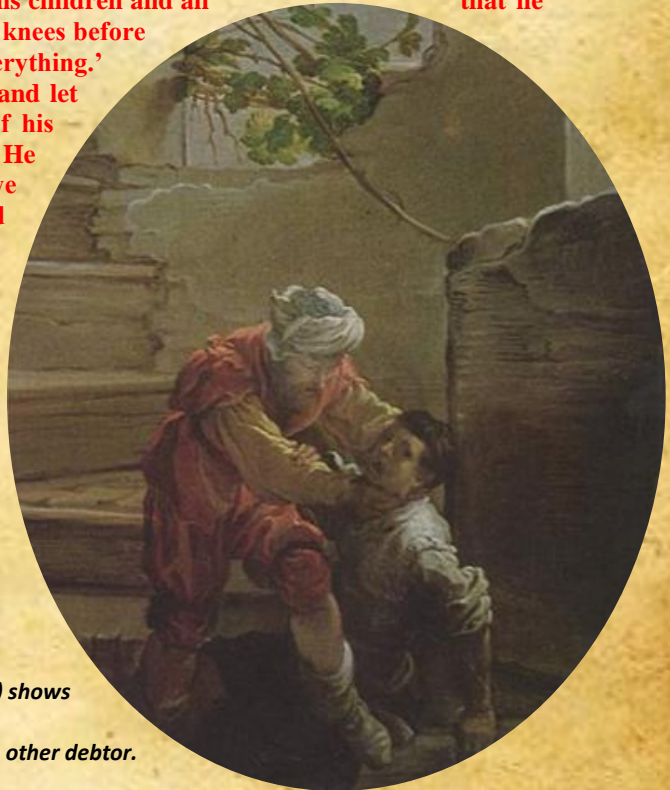
Matthew 18:23-34 New International Version (NIV)

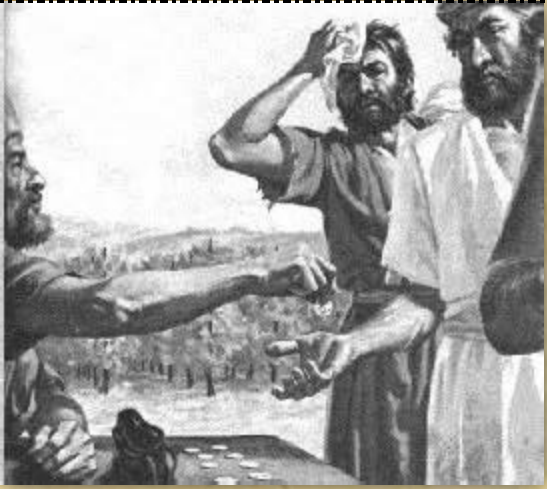
²³ “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold^[a] was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. ²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. ²⁸ “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. ^[b] He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. ²⁹ “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ ³⁰ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. ³² “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Lesson: By his grace learn to forgive as God forgives.

This depiction by [Domenico Fetti](#) (c. 1620) shows

the unforgiving servant choking the other debtor.





B. Workers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16 New American Standard Bible

20 “For the kingdom of heaven is like ^[a]a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²When he had agreed with the laborers for a ^[b]denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³And he went out about the ^[c]third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴and to those he said, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.’ And so they went. ⁵Again he went out about the ^[d]sixth and the ninth hour, and did ^[e]the same thing. ⁶And about the

^[f]eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he *said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here idle all day long?’ ⁷They *said to him, ‘Because no one hired us.’ He *said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ ⁸“When evening came, the ^[g]owner of the vineyard *said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.’ ⁹When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a ^[h]denarius. ¹⁰When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; ^[i]but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘These last men have worked *only* one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.’ ¹³But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. ¹⁵Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye ^[j]envious because I am ^[k]generous?’ ¹⁶So the last shall be first, and the first last.”

Lesson: (Difficult to interpret) could be a message to the Jewish audience addressing their difficulty of accepting the Gentiles as receiving God’s blessing, or, we never deserve God’s blessing and are in danger of losing it if we have a feeling of entitlement.

C. Lost Sheep

Matthew 18:12-14 New Living Translation (NLT)

¹²“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? ¹³And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t wander away! ¹⁴In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father’s will that even one of these little ones should perish.

Lesson: Just as God is concerned with one lost sheep, so he is concerned for his entire creation; meaning you, too.



Painting of the Lost Sheep by James Tissot

D. Lost Coin

Luke 15:8-10 English Standard Version (ESV)

⁸“Or what woman, having ten silver coins,^[a] if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Lesson: Each individual is precious to God and to lose one would be very distressing to him. Thus, when a single sinner repents, rejoicing in heaven occurs. He was lost but now he is found.



E. Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹¹Then Jesus^[a] said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with^[b] the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.’” ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’^[c] ²²But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill



Prodigal son by James Tissot

it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. ²⁵“Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹Then the father^[d] said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

Lesson: How easy it is to resent God’s gracious forgiveness of others; allowing our self righteousness to get in the way. Don’t think your sins are less, but rejoice instead.

II. PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM (Growth and joy of finding the kingdom)

F. *The Seed And The Soil*

Matthew 13:1-23



The Sower by James Tissot

¹³That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!” ¹⁰Then the disciples came and asked him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’ ¹⁴With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: ‘You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. ¹⁵For this people’s heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.’ ¹⁶But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see,

but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. ¹⁸“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a

while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

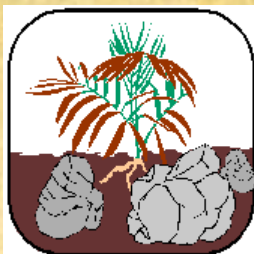
Background: The Sower and the Seed was thought to be the first parable Jesus told. Before the lesson to the parable is highlighted, it is important to first take into consideration the geographical location in ancient Palestine. The example Jesus used describing the four soil types would have been recognized immediately by his Jewish audience because they all existed in any field in Palestine.



In Palestine the common ground (*wayside ground*) was divided into long narrow strips which each man could cultivate as he desired. In between these strips of cultivated land was a narrow three foot path in width that was considered as right of way. Over time, peoples' footsteps would pack the soil, making it as hard as concrete. When seed fell on the surface, it would simply be eaten by birds or become hard and dry.

Packed Soil

Lesson: A heart hardened by sin does not receive the Word of God.



In Palestine, a field could also have a thin, shallow layer of soil with rock beneath that was usually located over a shelf of limestone. Although the seed would quickly sprout, the roots could not go deep enough to provide the nourishment necessary for the plant to withstand the hot sun; thus shortly wilting and dying.

Rocky Soil

Lesson: A heart for Christ that is not deeply rooted will turn away.



By simply turning over the soil, it would take on the appearance of being ready to receive the seed. Unfortunately, if during the last planting season, thorny weeds had been allowed to go to seed they would become problematic for the newly planted seeds by sprouting right along beside them; thus choking out the farmers crop.

Thorny Soil

Lesson: Things of this world choke out a heart for Christ.



Good Soil

Good soil is fertile and rich, “yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.” It receives seeds allowing roots to grow deep, thus, providing nourishment to the entire plant.

Lesson: An open heart receives God’s Word, producing much fruit.

G. Weeds Among Good Plants (The Enemy’s Work)



Matthew 13:24-34 New International Version (NIV)

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. ²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. “The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’ ²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Background:

Once again, the people gathered around Jesus would have known exactly the weed he was talking about in this parable. The weed, or tare, was called bearded darnel which in its early

stages so closely resembled wheat that it was impossible to distinguish the difference; thus, trying to pull it out would have meant removing the wheat, as well. The roots were so inextricably intertwined that it simply could not be accomplished. The process for harvesting the wheat could have been completed in the following manner:

1) Since the darnel was shorter than the wheat, the crop was harvested over the top of the offending plant and then the entire field was set on fire. Alternatively, another choice as the reaper reaped, would be to separate the two, dropping the darnel in bundles to be burned.

2) If there was not very much darnel amongst a field of wheat, the crop was picked and the women would separate the grain of wheat from the darnel.



Since the darnel was gray in color, and easily distinguishable, the possibility of a mistake was very small. However, since the darnel was semi-poisonous, it was critical to be vigilant. (So serious that even the Roman laws had included a penalty for failing to remove the darnel.)

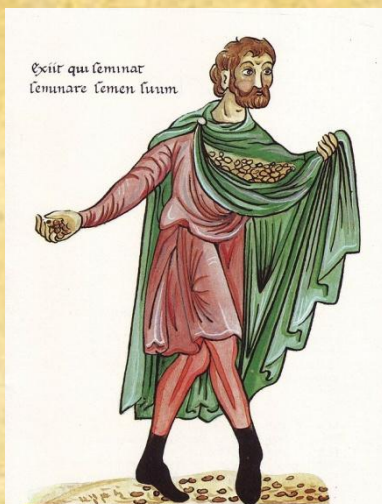
****(This parable was also directed at the disciples as well as the Pharisees because of their disapproval of the kind of people whom the world considered as unsatisfactory that had gathered around Jesus. They were simply unclean and untouchable subjects. SO, ONCE AGAIN, THE ACTIONS OF JESUS WAS TO GO DIRECTLY IN THE FACE OF INTOLERANCE.*

Lesson: Leave the judgment of others to God; who knows all the facts. In addition, the weeds were symbolic of the enemy of God, Satan, whose goal is to assault mankind.

Background: The next two parables Jesus told of the growing seed and mustard seed have similar lessons. One thing the Bible states is how much discouragement the disciples were feeling and would experience in spreading the message of the kingdom. As the masses gathered around Jesus, it would become obvious to them that a large number of the listeners were rejecting the words of Jesus and simply dropping by the wayside. Our Lord also knew that this would be just the beginning of the obstacles they would face in launching his church.

Lesson: Do not be discouraged by small beginnings for, with God behind them, they will turn into mighty acts and make the intended mark our Father has in mind. Move forward one small step at a time and keep focused on God.

H. Growing Seed



Mark 4: 26-29, [World English Bible](#)

He said, "The Kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed on the earth, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he doesn't know how. For the earth bears fruit: first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, immediately he puts forth the sickle, because the harvest has come."

"Hortus Deliciarum, Der Sämman" by Herrad von Landsberg - Hortus Deliciarum.

I. Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31 - 13:32 ([World English Bible](#))

³¹ Another parable he put forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:³² Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.



Mustard seeds are the small round seeds of various mustard plants. The seeds are usually about 1 or 2 mm in diameter. Mustard seeds may be colored from yellowish white to black. They are important herbs in many regional foods. The seeds can come from three different plants: black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), brown Indian mustard (*B. juncea*), and white mustard (*B. hirta/Sinapis alba*).

Lesson: The kingdom of God which initially starts small grows to be the biggest of all garden plants. It was used later on as Jesus taught about faith.

J. Hidden Treasure (Joy of finding the kingdom)



Matthew 13:44, World English Bible

"Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and hid. In his joy, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field."

Parable of the Hidden Treasure by Rembrandt (c. 1630).

Background: The idea of a finding a hidden treasure in a field may seem farfetched to many of us. However, since Jesus lived in the land where many wars occurred, hiding valuables in the earth was thought to be the safest place. Thus, this parable was well understood.

Lesson: The kingdom of heaven is more valuable than anything else we can have, and a person must be willing to give up everything to obtain it. (Footnotes—Life Application Study Bible)

K. Valuable Pearl ("Pearl of Great Price") Joy of finding the kingdom



Matthew 13: 45-46

...45"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, 46and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Lesson: Like the merchant, we should earnestly seek the kingdom, be totally committed to it, keeping our focus always on God.

(PARABLES CONTINUED IN CHAPTER 6)

Sources:

"The Parables of Jesus" by William Barclay

"The Challenge of Jesus' Parables" edited by Richard N. Longenecker

"The Parables of Jesus" by James Montgomery Boice

"The Parables of Jesus" by Arland J. Hultgren

"Studying the Parables of Jesus" by Peter Rhea Jones

"Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist," by Brant Pitre

"Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story," by Brant Pitre



GROWING IN THE WORD



- 1) Suggested Hymn: "What A Friend We Have In Jesus" from devotionalembers.com hymnal as played by Brad Jent. Remember that playing a hymn prior to beginning your time together allows clarity of mind to take place.
- 2) It is important to focus on the four component parts the "New Exodus" as described at the beginning of this chapter. Read each one out loud and spend time discussing it as a group. As you study Scripture, the fact that Jesus had to address these religious beliefs will promote greater understanding of the approach and words he used.
- 3) Now move to the definition of parables and compare the example listed that related to King David against the style Jesus used for teaching the people.
- 4) Spend time going over the Sowing Seeds Parable and discuss the types of soil in Bible lands as compared to ours today. Using the parables, apply the meaning of each to the here and now.
- 5) Which one of the parables in this section helped you the most? Discuss if willing.
- 6) Compare the audience gathered around Jesus to your congregational members today. (Likeness and differences)
- 7) Which disciple did you choose to sit and walk beside on the journey with Jesus? Will you remain with that particular one or select another as time passes?

Prayer

Dear Lord,

We realize the importance of walking beside your disciples in this your final three years on earth. Help us understand that you were in the process of creating the Bible history that we are now privileged to study at will. Although your audience was hearing your concepts for the first time, we have the opportunity of deeply studying the written form of what occurred within just a few precious years.

Father, please help us to realize that having access to the written document of your teaching does not give us an advantage without the commitment to study, pray, and grow while humbly listening to the Holy Spirit on a daily basis for guidance.

As we walk with you down the dusty highways and byways surrounded by the downtrodden, open our eyes to your vision, give us ears to hear distinctly the meaning you desire, and create within each heart the thirst for even greater knowledge.

We close this prayer in a time of gratitude for the patience, mercy, and love you extend to us each and every day of our lives. May your name be praised forever and ever! Amen!