

May 17, 2009

**A SOWER, HIS SEED, AND THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM  
MATTHEW 13.1-23**

*As Israel grows more recalcitrant to the word of kingdom that Jesus preaches, Jesus begins to explain the mysteries of the kingdom through parables in order to conceal the message to unbelievers. The parable of the sower tells the story of Israel and Jesus' place in it as the climax of Israel's history.*

**1. THE SOWER AND HIS SEED (1-9, 18-23)**

**The setting (1-2):** Possibly symbolizing what was alluded to in last chapter; i.e. moving from the house (of Israel) to the sea (Gentiles) and preaching back to the land-dwellers (Israel).

**What is a parable? (3a):** Different opinions: (1) a story with a basic moral; (2) a story with one basic meaning but not much meaning to the details; (3) illustrations; (4) "earthly story with a heavenly meaning"

A parable is a story. More specifically it is an allegory. It is a story that tells another story, emphasizing particular aspects of that story in its characters, situations, etc.

Jesus is telling stories that emphasize God's story; or what we would call history. History is God's big story, and he is masterfully working the story to a particular and destined end. Jesus emphasizes particular aspects of that story in his parables.

**The Sower (3b, 18):** This is "the parable of the sower" (18). Sower in 13.37 = the Son of Man. Possibly the same here since Jesus is the one who spreads the word of the kingdom (= seed).

Sower ultimately concerns God and his work. This is what God has been and is doing in his story.

The soils are not irrelevant. But it means that it is God's work that is emphasized.

A parable about a sower sowing seed in a Jewish 1<sup>st</sup> century context would bring to mind God's promise of bring his people out of exile and planting them in their land, making them fruitful (cf. e.g. Ps 126.6; Isa 37.31-32; 43.5; Jer 24.6; 31.27; 32.41; 46.27; Ezek 17.22; 36.9; Hos 2.23; Amos 9.15; Zech 10.8-9).

Exile goes all the way back to the Garden. This involves more than the Jews returning to their land. It involves the consummation of all of history and God's people inheriting the earth. But a preliminary to this would be the type of the Jews coming back into their land.

Sowing = God finally establishing his kingdom in the earth. Parallels to Dan 2 and the vision of Nebuchadnezzar; vision of the statue that was toppled by a stone cut out of the mountain w/o hands which grew to cover the whole earth. This was a "mystery" that was revealed about the history of the world and the kingdom.

One level of Jesus parable: About what God has done and is doing in these epochs of history. God has sown this seed time and again in history, and time and again Israel has not produced fruit. Now Jesus himself—the seed—will be sown (along with his people) and this seed will be fruitful. This is the culmination of God's work of sowing seed in Israel.

Another level: Jesus' own ministry to Israel in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. The response to Jesus is indicative and the apex of Israel's response throughout history (cf. Mt 23.29-36).

Another level: Since this is *the* story of the world—the controlling story—our lives are vignettes of that story and are a part of that story. Therefore these parables still have relevance for us today.

**The First Soil: the footpath (4, 19):** v. 19, seed = word of the kingdom; parable of the tares seed = sons of the kingdom. These are actually intimately related (esp. in whole theme of being re-planted in the land).

In Jesus Word is made flesh. Word is a Person. People united with the Word are "word-people." Scattering the word and scattering seed emphasize particular aspects of the same reality.

“Seed” commonly refers to people, esp. the son (Gen 3.15). Cf. also Isa 55.10-13.

Word and speaker can never be separated. To reject the words of the kingdom is to reject the Word made flesh.

Footpath is fallow ground. Seed becomes bird food. These are people with no understanding of the word and it is snatched away by the evil one.

Note: in their hearts. These are heart conditions of the people.

**Second Soil: shallow soil (5-6, 20-21):** Jesus says that this person is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. He is glad about this announcement of the kingdom and shows every evidence of wanting to participate. B/c he has little or no root, when tribulation and persecution come *b/c of the word*, he immediately stumbles.

Showed signs of life. There is a certain amount of growth. There is such a thing as temporary faith (by definition this is not saving faith b/c saving faith is persevering faith).

**Third Soil: Thorns (7, 22):** Thorns = crops of the curse (Ge 3.17-19). Man is supposed to fight and overcome to become fruitful. This man is not willing to fight. He is concerned about the present more than he is the future (“the cares of this world”) and he pursues riches as his security (“the deceitfulness of riches”).

He becomes disinterested in the kingdom mission. These are people who forget why they do what they do in relation to the kingdom. They become interested in having things for the sake of having things instead of keeping their life’s focus on the kingdom and its future.

**Fourth Soil: Good ground (8, 23):** This is the person who hears and understands and bears fruit. (Note the three-fold fruitfulness. It may answer the three-fold unfruitfulness in the other 3 soils.)

Fruitfulness involves anything related to productivity in the kingdom; e.g. children, disciples outside of the nuclear family; being productive at work; fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5.22-23).

This soil is productive and persevering. They are not all the same. They produce different quantities of fruit, but they are all fruitful in terms of the kingdom.

Israel has throughout her history been ultimately unproductive (something that is emphasized in Scripture and will be emphasized through other parables). At times she has shown signs of life, but has consistently fallen away. Now, Jesus, the seed is being sown and Israel *in him* will bear fruit.

**He who has ears to hear, let him hear (9):** Hear = obey (cf. Dt 6.4)

## 2. THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM (10-17)

**The disciples’ question (10):** “to them” = the crowds

**What is a mystery? (11):** mystery = hidden plan of God that will be or is revealed for the future.

**The purpose of parables (11-17):** quote from Isaiah 6: Isaiah will preach in order that the people may be hardened so that God can carry out his full purpose of death. But there will be a “holy seed” which will be a remnant (Isa 6.13) This is Jesus’ ministry as well.

Those to whom these mysteries have been given will continue to receive more. Those who to mysteries have not been given, even what they have will be taken away. (Israel has the kingdom, but it will be taken away and given to others bearing its fruit; Mt 21.33-44)

1. Learn to think about the story of Scripture.

2. Understand that God is ultimately in control of who responds positively to the message of the kingdom and who doesn’t.