



Lesson 5

Chapter 13: Teaching in Parables

In chapter 13 we see Jesus as the Master teacher, using simple ideas to present the wonderful truth of the Gospel. His stories, or parables, are very well known but we need to think about them to understand them fully. In some cases Jesus himself gave the explanation and this is a great help.

Why did Jesus teach in Parables (13:10-17)?

Jesus taught in parables which are easy to remember but not always easy to understand. They are earthly stories with heavenly or spiritual meanings.

It requires effort to search out the true message of a parable and Jesus knew that not everyone is prepared to do this. Parables distinguish those who humbly seek God's truth from those who have no great interest, as well as from those who oppose the message.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah prophesied that the nation of Israel would not want to hear God's message and that they would reject the teaching of Jesus (Isaiah 6:9, 10). This happened as he wrote; many of the Jews of Jesus' day shut their ears and their eyes to Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' close followers wanted to understand his teaching. They were hungry and thirsty for righteousness. The way people respond to the Gospel is one of the great themes of Matthew 13.

The Parable of the Sower (13:1-8)

Jesus helped his disciples and us to understand the first two parables in this chapter. He provided keys to unlock the parable of the Sower. The seed in this parable is the '*Word of the kingdom*' (verses 18-19). Jesus showed that the four types of ground represent four different groups of people, each showing a different response to God's message.

The seed fell on four types of ground.

- The wayside path – quickly devoured by the birds.
- Rocky ground – not enough earth for roots to take hold.
- Thorny ground – seed germinated and produced a good crop.



Jesus explains the Meaning of the Parable (13:18-23)

1. Those who do not respond are represented by the hard ground of the path. They hear the Gospel but it does not take root, it means nothing to them.
2. People who accept God's truth but later leave it because of problems and difficulties are described as ground that is either rocky or full of weeds.
3. Those who embrace the call of the Gospel and then get distracted by the riches and attractions of this life are like ground that is choked with thorns.
4. The only people pleasing to God are those who:
 - hear the word;
 - understand it;
 - and produce a crop (shown in their actions and way of life).

Jesus wanted people to ask themselves which type of ground they were. We must also ask ourselves this question. Unlike the 'ground' in the parable however, we can improve our own kind of 'ground' by getting rid of 'stones' and 'weeds' in our lives (things like habits and attitudes that could prevent the Gospel bringing us to the 'harvest' in the Kingdom of God).



The Parable of the Weeds (13:24-30; 36-43)

It is possible that Jesus was speaking about darnel, the weed that looks no different to wheat while it is growing. It can only be distinguished from the wheat just before harvest time as the crop ripens but by then it is difficult to separate out. So wheat and darnel are harvested together and separated out afterwards. This is essential as darnel seeds taste bitter and can make people ill. Because they are a different colour from wheat seeds they can be separated by hand after the harvest, the darnel is then destroyed by burning and the wheat is stored for eating. Jesus had already spoken about identifying plants and trees by the type of fruit they produced. *“Thus you will recognize them by their fruits”* (Matt. 7:20).

In this parable, Jesus said that these weeds were deliberately sown by an enemy after the wheat crop had been planted; they wanted to destroy the harvest.

The disciples privately asked Jesus the meaning of this parable and the keys he provided to unlock the meaning are summarised in the table:

ITEM IN PARABLE	MEANING
The Sower of good seed	The Son of Man – Jesus
The field	The world
Good seed	Children of the kingdom
Weeds	Children of the evil one
Enemy that sowed the bad seed	The devil (diabolos ‘slanderer’, ‘false accuser’)
Harvest	The end of the world
Reapers (those who gather in the wheat and the weeds)	Angels
Burning of the weeds	Removal of all causes of sin and all law-breakers

What does this mean for us?

The parable teaches us of the Gospel message, the seed or word of God, sown throughout the whole world. Some will accept it and become true disciples of Jesus, represented by the wheat. Others appear to accept the Gospel but gradually are shown to be people who listen to wrong ideas and beliefs about the Bible and accept them. At the return of Jesus, he will send his angels to gather all these people to the Judgement. The true disciples will be welcomed into his kingdom and the false ones will be destroyed. We are told about their reaction to this.

Matthew 13:42 says:

“... and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The weeping shows great sadness. These people have been rejected from the wonderful blessings of God’s righteous kingdom. They are probably angry with themselves when they see what they have missed. This passage does not support the idea that the wicked are thrown into a furnace or kept burning forever. It is a picture of the complete destruction of the unrighteous.

THE DEVIL IN THIS PARABLE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

At first sight this parable seems to support the idea that there is a supernatural devil. However Matthew 13:28 says:

“He (Jesus) said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’”

The New Testament was written in Greek and the Greek word for ‘enemy’ in this verse is ‘a man that is an enemy’. The enemy was a person who had a bad influence.

So the original language of the New Testament is quite clear that the enemy that Jesus calls the devil is human and this passage cannot be used to support the idea of an immortal evil being that makes people do wrong.



More Parables (13:31-50)

The Mustard Seed (verses 31-32)

This is a small and insignificant seed but grows into a large tree. God's kingdom started in a small way, with one man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was despised and rejected. Yet when he returns to this earth, the kingdom will grow to fill the whole earth.

The Treasure Hid in a Field (verse 44)

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure that is hid in a field". When the man finds it, he conceals it and with great joy sets about selling everything he has to buy the field. We must look carefully in the Bible to understand God's plans for the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Jesus promised, *"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."* (Matt. 7:7).

The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price (verses 45-46)

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls". When the pearl of great value was found the merchant sold everything he had in order to purchase it. The pearl is God's plan for our salvation and it must be more precious to us than anything else in our lives.

Jesus' teaching through these parables

The Gospel message is available to everyone who will listen and obey the call of Jesus to repent and be baptised. We must search in order to find and understand Bible teaching. God offers us a priceless treasure, but it will not be for everyone because there will be a time of judgement when Jesus Christ returns. Only those who have tried to serve God in faithfulness will be allowed to enjoy His Kingdom.

Chapter 14: Moved with Compassion

The Death of John the Baptist (14:1-12)

The cruelty of Herod the Tetrarch is shown in his wicked treatment of John the Baptist who was murdered to please Herod's dinner guests. John the Baptist had spoken against Herod for taking Herodias as his wife because she was already the wife of his half-brother Philip.

When news reached Jesus of John's death, he went to a place where he could be alone, probably to mourn and to pray. Yet the crowds followed him, travelling on foot around the Sea of Galilee and meeting Jesus when he arrived by boat. Jesus did not send them away, instead he had compassion on them, preaching the gospel, healing those who were ill and feeding the hungry.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand (14:13-21)

This is the only miracle of Jesus written in all four Gospels, and it is an important one, for it shows:

- Jesus' concern for people's physical needs as well as their spiritual needs.
- His great power, he could feed five thousand men and their families from a few loaves and fish.
- How Jesus showed, in giving thanks to God, that all good things come from his Father.

John's Gospel (John 6:9) tells us that the five loaves and two fish were given by a boy. Jesus was able to satisfy the physical needs to all who were hungry. The important lesson for us is that Jesus can satisfy our eternal needs if we are hungry his teaching because he is *"the bread of life"*.

Temptation (14:22, 23)

In John's Gospel we are told that when the crowd saw this amazing miracle they said:

"This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" (John 6:14)

This was a time of temptation for Jesus, just like the temptation he had experienced in the wilderness before his ministry started. He knew that he was born to be King of the Jews but he had to die first. He realised that this was a time of temptation so he moved away from the people:

"Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself." (John 6:15).





Imagine how important the twelve Apostles would feel because Jesus had involved them in this great miracle by asking them to distribute the food! Jesus knew how unhelpful this would be to their spiritual development and that it was best to remove them from temptation by sending them away from the crowd by sea.

There are lessons for us here! Most of us probably want people to think that we are important, but God requires humble service from those who love Him. When we face temptation we need to quickly remove ourselves from it and pray for help to overcome the temptation.

An Old Testament prophet called Elisha, used God's power to feed a hundred men in a miracle similar to this (2 Kings 4:42-44). Elisha was a type of Jesus – he pointed forward to the Lord Jesus, just as Elijah, the prophet before him, pointed forward to John the Baptist (see the lesson on chapter 11).

HOLY SPIRIT GIFTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Elijah and Elisha could do miracles, but there were very few other people in Old Testament times who could do miracles by God's power.

Great men of God like Abraham and David did not have Holy Spirit gifts to perform miracles, although they were inspired by God to speak His word as prophets. Elijah and Elisha lived at a time when most of the people of Israel were worshipping false gods and the Lord God was showing His people that He was far greater by working miracles through these two prophets.

The demonstration of God's power would support the message that was preached, just as the Apostles were provided with Holy Spirit gifts to help with their preaching (Mark 16:20).

Jesus at Prayer (14:22-23)

After feeding the 5,000 Jesus sent his disciples by boat to Bethsaida (read Mark 6:45) while he dismissed the crowds. He still wanted to be alone in quietness of the mountains as the darkness of the night closed in, to pray for strength from his Heavenly Father for the work and sacrifice that was ahead of him. When we have problems we should remember the example of Jesus and pray to our Father committing ourselves to His tender care.

Walking on the Water (14:24-36)

Jesus always cared for his disciples. He knew they were in difficulty in the boat facing high winds on the Sea of Galilee. In the fourth watch (that is between 3am and 6am in the morning) Jesus came walking on the sea to save them from the storm.

John 6:22 tells us that on the previous day, when Jesus sent the disciples away, they had used the only boat available, so Jesus had no transport to reach his disciples. This was not a problem for the Son of God, even though it was stormy! But Jesus did not walk on the water to impress people. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water they were terrified but Peter had the faith to get out of the boat and go to meet his Master, though when he took his eyes off Jesus he began to sink.

Disciples of the Lord need to keep trusting their Master so they do not 'sink' when they think about all the troubles around them. The writer of Psalm 18:16 says: "*He sent from on high, he took me; he drew me out of many waters.*"

When Jesus saved Peter from drowning and when they both got into the boat the wind immediately stopped and they came safely to land at Gennesaret. Jesus then went on to heal all who came to him from the whole region.

Jesus describes the troubled nations as being like "*the roaring of the sea and the waves*" (read Luke 21:25) When he returns to set up "*the Kingdom of Heaven*" on earth he will subdue and calm the nations and his followers will be safe from all the storms of life. What a wonderful comfort it is to know Jesus cares for those who follow him in sincerity and truth.





Chapter 15: Clean and Unclean

Traditions of Men or Laws of God? (15:1-9)

The Pharisees added their own traditions to God's laws. They insisted that hand washing had to be done according to a ritual tradition. *"For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands, holding to the tradition of the elders"* (Mark 7:3).

However the Pharisees were hypocrites and constantly looked for ways to escape personally from laws they did not like, even though they told other people to keep them.

One example of this is found in the law that God gave to Moses about honouring our father and mother (read Exodus 20:12). The Pharisees' tradition allowed them to escape looking after their parents by pretending to dedicate their wealth and money to God and so escaping their duty to them. However, the priests in the Temple then allowed them to have the use of the money they had offered to God so their lives were just the same. This was called 'Corban'. This practice, and others like it, were completely against the spirit of God's teaching.

Jesus (verses 8-9) again quotes the prophet Isaiah. The Scribes and Pharisees were hypocrites. *"And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,"* (Isaiah 29:13).

Jesus showed the scribes and Pharisees that this behaviour came from minds that God considered unclean and this was much worse than the dirty hands of the disciples.

Evil Thoughts (15:10-20)

Words which express the godless thoughts that are inside a person's mind defile a person (show he is evil). Some people wrongly believe that such thinking comes from a devil or satan, but the Lord Jesus made it clear that we are responsible for our own wicked thoughts.

"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds **from the heart**, and this defiles a person. For **out of the heart come evil thoughts**, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."
(Matt. 15:18-19)

This is what we are told in James 1:13-15:

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. **But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.** Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

The Bible consistently teaches us that we cannot blame anyone or anything else for our own evil thoughts! We need to be aware that our own wrong thinking is not pleasing to God, and we should try to improve.

The Canaanite Woman's Daughter (15:21-28)

Jesus and his disciples went to Tyre and Sidon. Jews in the time of Jesus would not normally visit these places as they are not in the land of Israel and belonged to Gentiles (non-Jews) called Canaanites. In Old Testament times Canaanite wicked influence spread into Israel when King Ahab married Jezebel from Sidon who was a worshipper of the Canaanite God, Baal. (1 Kings 16:30, 31).

Mark 7:24 suggests that Jesus went to this area to escape the crowds:

"And from there he (*Jesus*) arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden."

Perhaps he wanted time to teach quietly the twelve disciples.

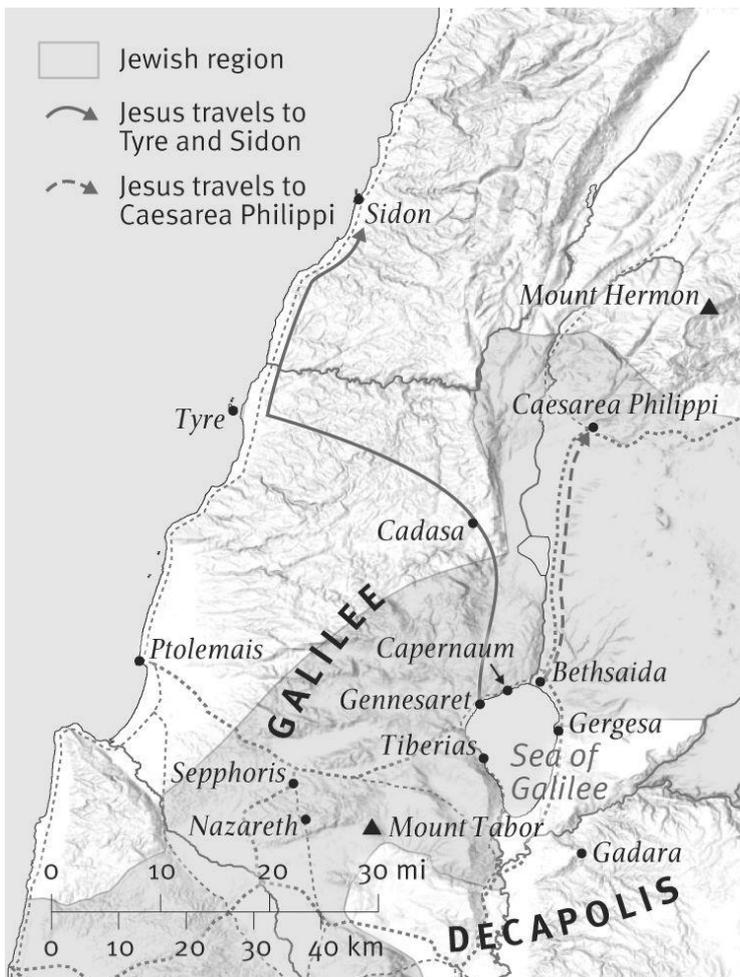
But Jesus did not help the woman at first; he waited so that she could show her faith. She knew that she was a Gentile and that Jesus had come to preach to the 'lost sheep of Israel'. Jesus tested her faith when he told her of his mission, *"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."* (verse 24). Jesus tested her faith further, when he said, *"It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."*





There was a time when a defeated Canaanite king ate discarded scraps of food under the table of the victorious leaders of the tribes of Judah and Simeon (read Judges 1:3-7). The Canaanitish women knew of this incident and replied "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." (verse 27). She believed that Jesus was the "Son of David" spoken of by the prophets. She threw herself on the mercy of the Lord. 'Do you have any scraps left for me, a Gentile' is what she meant. Jesus recognised her great faith and her sick daughter was healed immediately.

Once again Jesus teaches us that it is faith that really matters and that he came to save faithful people from every nation.



The Feeding of the Four Thousand (15:29-39)

Jesus moved south to the Sea of Galilee, probably to the Gentile side. The people who saw the miraculous healing of the dumb, the crippled, the lame and the blind were in no doubt that it was the work of the God of Israel. Notice that Jesus did not take the glory for himself.

Jesus had compassion on this Gentile crowd of people that he had probably never met before. He was concerned that they had not eaten for three days, yet he himself had fasted for forty days in preparation for his great work. This shows that Jesus really cared about people. He cared so much that throughout his whole life he resisted the temptation to sin in order to be the perfect sacrifice to save us.

The miracle of the feeding of the four thousand is like the feeding of the five thousand in chapter 14. On both occasions the number given just refers to the number of men – there were also women and children that were fed.

The miracle of the feeding the five thousand had taken near Bethsaida (read

Luke 9:10-17.). The multitudes of people fed there were mainly Jews.

However, when this multitude witnessed the healing powers of Jesus they "glorified the God of Israel". This suggests that they were probably Gentiles. We are not told the location where Jesus fed the four thousand, simply that Jesus showed great compassion on the people and fed them.

So we have seen how Jesus fed both Jew and Gentile, caring for all those who came to him.

"Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall thirst" (John 6:35).

Name	
Address	
Reference Number	
Tutor	

Answers to most questions can be found in the lessons or Bible passages given. Please write your answers on this question paper and return them in the envelope provided:

Questions on Chapter 13

1a Fill in the gaps in the table below about the Parable of the Sower				
	Place 1	Place 2	Place 3	Place 4
Describe each place where the seed fell	Path (the wayside)			
What happened to the seed in each place?			Seed was choked by thorns.	
What is the meaning of each part of the parable?		The stony places represent people who start to believe God's truth, but reject it as soon as they are persecuted or in trouble because of it.		

1b What does the seed represent?

In the parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds) in verses 24-30 and 36-43:

- 2a What does the harvest represent?

- 2b What does the burning of the tares mean?

- 3 Which other parable shows that the good and the wicked will be judged at the end of the age?

- 4 What is the main lesson of verses 44-46?

Questions on Chapter 14

- 1 What did Jesus do just before he gave the food to the disciples for the crowd to eat?

- 2 Why do you think we are told that there was a large amount of bread collected up after every one had been fed?

- 3 What lessons for our life can we learn from Jesus walking on the water and calming the storm?

- 4 What did the Twelve say when Jesus calmed the storm?

Questions on Chapter 15

- 1 What command were the Pharisees breaking by their traditions?

- 2 Why did Jesus call the Pharisees hypocrites?

- 2 What practical lessons can we learn from verses 8-9, for our lives?