

What Type of Ground Are You?

The parable of the sower in Matthew 13 is one of the *mysteries of the kingdom* Jesus shared with the multitudes at the Sea of Galilee. It speaks of one who goes about sowing seed, some of which falls on the wayside, some on stony ground, some amongst thorns, and some on good ground. From the interpretation given by Jesus later in the passage, we learn the different types of ground represent various types of hearts (i.e., responses) of men.

Who are these people and what are their responses? Must we conclude that the first three (wayside, stony ground, thorny ground) are actually unsaved folks, and the fourth (good ground) are truly saved people, as some tend to interpret? If that is the case, is this parable intended by Jesus to teach the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints? Is the seed the gospel?

A correct interpretation of the parable of the sower hinges on two considerations. First, what is the seed? Second, what is the purpose for and context of this parable?

Interestingly, Jesus does not identify the seed as the gospel. He says the seed is *the word of the kingdom*. In other words, it is teaching about the future millennial kingdom.

How do we know *the word of the kingdom* is referring to the millennium and not to the gospel?

First, Jesus has been speaking to Jews, and Matthew is writing to Jews. The Jewish understanding of the kingdom was an earthly reign of Messiah. The Old Testament Scriptures prophesied of a literal, visible, Messianic kingdom on earth, with the Son of Man as King ([Dan. 2:44-45](#); [7:13-14](#); [Jer. 23:5](#); [Zech. 14:9](#)). We refer to it as the *Millennium* – though that is not a Bible word – because the kingdom is said to last one thousand years (see [Rev. 20](#)).

An example of the Jews' kingdom expectation is found in [Acts 1:3](#). After Christ's resurrection He spoke with His disciples of *things pertaining to the kingdom of God*. Then He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father, the baptism with the Holy Spirit (v.4). But the eager disciples wanted to know, *wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?* (v.6). To them, talk of the kingdom meant a visible, earthly kingdom. Jesus did not challenge their understanding of the kingdom, only the timing of it (*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons*, v.7).

Likewise, in Matthew 13, when Jesus refers to *the word of the kingdom* in the parable of the sower, the disciples understand that Jesus is talking about a visible, earthly kingdom. Jesus never challenges their thinking to consider otherwise. He apparently wants them to think He is teaching about the kingdom, not the gospel.

Second, the Jews thought that because of their ancestry they would automatically become part of Messiah's kingdom. *We have Abraham to our*

father, they assumed. John the Baptist, in [Matthew 3:1-12](#), set the record straight, preaching that only obedient Jews would be granted entrance to the kingdom. Using two vivid illustrations, he demonstrated that those trees not bearing good fruit would be cut down and cast into the fire, and chaff would be separated from the wheat and burned. The fire and burning are not references to hell-fire in this context, but the fire of Messiah's judgment of His own (*He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire, v.11*).

The point of John the Baptist's preaching (as well as Christ's), in the early stage of Christ's ministry, was to urge Jews to *repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. In other words, the Jews must turn from their disobedience to God or else – despite their inclusion as God's chosen people – they would never inherit the visible, earthly, Messianic kingdom. Indeed, Jesus was offering that very kingdom to the Jews, right then and there, but they rejected it!

The culmination of their rejection came in Matthew 12, which is a most tragic chapter of the New Testament. In that chapter we find the Jewish leaders committing the unpardonable sin, thereby confirming the nation's blindness and hardness of heart, as prophesied in [Isaiah 6:9-10](#), and rejecting the kingdom offer of Jesus.

Nevertheless, the millennial kingdom is still forthcoming! It has merely been postponed, pending Christ's second coming and Israel's national repentance. Until then, Christ is building His church, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles who believe on Him. Upon their salvation, He begins to teach (through His Word) the same kingdom truths that He taught His early disciples, instructing as to the qualifications for inheriting His kingdom.

As a consequence of Israel's national rejection of the kingdom in Matthew 12, Jesus begins to speak to the multitudes in parables, starting in chapter 13. *Why parables?*, His disciples wonder. Jesus explains:

Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. ([Matthew 13:11-13](#))

Jesus says that parables are His special teaching device for revealing truth to those who are willing to receive it, while concealing truth from others who have rejected it. In Matthew 13 He speaks in parables so that His disciples will be able to learn about the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. They are mysteries in the sense that these truths had never been told in the Old Testament. This is new revelation about the visible, earthly kingdom from the lips of Christ, and it is only for those who are ready and willing to receive it.

Third, notice again verse 12 above. *Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.* Who are the “haths” and “hath nots?” In the context, the “haths” are those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that His kingdom is imminent. They will be given more, specifically (v.11), they will be given *the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven* in parables. They will be taught truths about the visible, earthly kingdom. Note: Jesus did not speak in parables so as to conceal the *gospel* from lost people. He spoke in parables so as to conceal the *kingdom* (i.e., the mysteries of the kingdom, new revelation about the kingdom) from His own who should have known better but instead rejected the kingdom offer.

Against that lengthy backdrop, we now understand that Jesus is going to teach His disciples more about His visible, earthly kingdom. In the parable of the sower he illustrates for His disciples the four types of responses, not to the gospel, but rather to kingdom teaching. We could say these are the **four responses of genuine Christians to Christ’s parables about the kingdom**. What are they?

The wayside response. These are those who do not understand the kingdom teaching. They could be theologians who dismiss it as “unbiblical.” Perhaps they mock it or dismiss it. For whatever reason, their spiritual life is too shallow and immature to grasp the truth. So Satan steals away the seed that had been sown.

The stony ground response. The seed sown on stony ground represents those who receive the kingdom teaching with joy and excitement. However, in time they are persecuted for believing it – no doubt, by the wayside responders – perhaps for taking the position that the kingdom parables are not merely for the Jews but for all believers wanting to understand the qualifications for inheriting the millennial kingdom. The pressure is too great. They stumble, capitulate and leave off their embracing of kingdom truth.

The thorny ground response. Undoubtedly, this type of ground represents multitudes of Christians. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word of the kingdom, and they become unfruitful. Oh yes, they are saved, as are all the others, but they care more for the things of the here and now than the things of eternity. They are saved, yet so as by fire.

Some may wonder how kingdom truth could be so confrontational as to provoke the above negative responses. What is seldom taught in dispensational Christianity nowadays, though it was taught by Christ and the apostles, is that not all born-again believers will inherit the millennial kingdom. One must qualify to inherit the kingdom. Inheritance is not automatic. (For clarification, see my article entitled, *Inheriting the Kingdom*).

The good ground response. There are some Christians who hear the word of the kingdom, receive it, embrace it, and get serious about living life for the glory of God. They become the inheritors of the kingdom, for they are fruit-bearing saints, of varying amounts. They will most greatly enjoy the glories of the millennial kingdom and the eternal world to follow.

You will meet Christ at the Judgment Seat and either be rewarded or suffer loss as recompense for how you live your seventy years (plus or minus) on this earth. The recompense will either be *well done, good and faithful servant* or *thou wicked and slothful servant*.

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