
Matthew 13 Parables

Session 3 - Interpreting the
Parable of the Sower

Matthew 13:18-23



Steve Lewis

www.SpiritAndTruth.org

Background review

- Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower to the multitude.
- The disciples ask Him why He is teaching this way.
- Jesus privately answered their question:
 - The word of the kingdom was proclaimed to the nation of Israel.
 - They must respond with understanding and repentance, believing in Jesus as the Messiah and King.
 - The majority of the nation of Israel rejected Jesus.
 - Like their forefathers, their hearts were insensitive, their ears barely hear, and they had deliberately closed their eyes (Isaiah 6:9-10)
- Jesus told the *Parable of the Sower* to illustrate several reasons why the multitude in Israel were not responding to the word of the kingdom.

Matthew 13:18

- **“You, therefore, hear”** ~ connects to what Jesus just said: “Blessed are *your* eyes, because they see; and *your* ears, because they hear” (13:16).
- This parable is a transition into the “kingdom parables” to come. It does not say, “*The kingdom of heaven is like...*” because it is introductory.
- Jesus told the Parable of the Sower to illustrate to His disciples why He began to teach the multitude in parables.

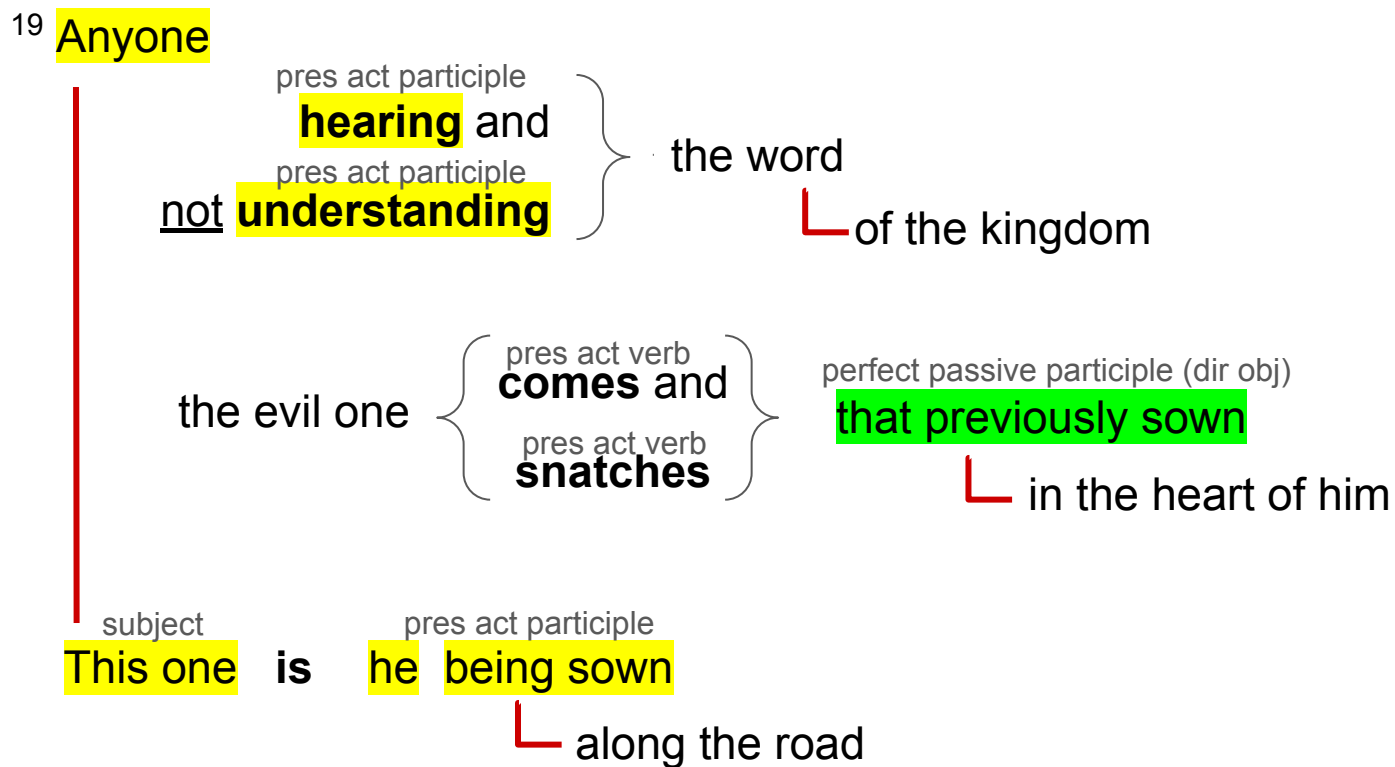


Matthew 13:19

- “Anyone hearing the word of the kingdom and **not understanding**” (*sunīēmi*) ~ his heart was insensitive, his ears barely heard, he deliberately closed his eyes, and refused to understand.
- This person’s heart was closed to the word of the kingdom, so the message was easily snatched away by his adversary, the devil.
- Those who bitterly opposed Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees, are a biblical example of this type of person.
- **“This is he that was sown by the wayside”** (ASV) ~ the Greek pronouns and participles are all in the masculine gender.

Matthew 13:19 ~ sentence diagram

masculine, neuter



Jesus: “there are differences in the seed, too”

- The original parable mentions only the variations in the soil, but there are differences in the seed, too.
- The quality of the seed itself can vary widely even within the same batch.
- Whenever possible we should simply say what the original text says.
- Given our own interpretation of a parable versus Jesus’ interpretation of that same parable, the interpretation of Jesus is always definitive.



Matthew 13:20-21

“And this one is he being sown on the rocky places”

- He heard the message and **received** (*lambanō*) it with joy ~ a broad term meaning “to take something that is given.” The response is described as an emotional response.
- “**no root** (*rhiza*) **in himself**” ~ this would make sense only if a person is represented by a seed, rather than by the soil. Soil does not generate roots, but seeds do generate roots from within themselves.
- **External pressures** neutralize the word of the kingdom:
 - **Affliction** (*thlipsis*) ~ “pressure or oppression.”
 - **Persecution** (*diōgmos*) ~ “intimidation or harassment, especially for religious reasons.”

Matthew 13:22

“And he being sown among the thorns”

- **Internal pressures** make the word of the kingdom ineffective.
- “**worry** (*merimna*) **of the world**” ~ from a root word that means “divided or distracted.”
- “**deceitfulness** (*apatē*) **of wealth**” ~ to cheat or to seduce into error.
- “**choke**” (*sumpnigō*) ~ to press around or crowd a person so as to suffocate him.
- This person is focused on the *present* life, rather than the life to come, and *present* treasure, rather than future treasure.

Matthew 13:23

“And he being sown on the good ground”

- This person's heart is responsive and he **understands** the word of the kingdom, which results in believing in Jesus as the Messiah and turning to God in repentance.
- Jesus explained that the result is due to differences in the quality of the seed rather than solely on differences in soil conditions.
- All of the seed falls side-by-side into the same plowed soil, but the results vary based on the characteristics of the seed itself ~ some produce a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

Summary

- The Parable of the Sower is about the reasons why Jesus began to speak to the multitude in parables.
- Rather than giving new revelation about events during the time when the kingdom is postponed, it serves as a transition to the next group of six “kingdom parables” which do share these “mysteries.”
- Many Bible commentaries limit this parable only to discussing people’s responses to the gospel for salvation during the Church Age, but the context of this parable does not support such interpretations.
- This parable is about the nation of Israel’s response to the word of the kingdom which was proclaimed by John the Baptist, Jesus, and the disciples: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"