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The Parable of the Soils

Matthew 13:3b-23; Mark 4:3-25; Luke 8:5-18

The parable of the soils DIG: What does each type of soil in Jesus' parable represent? What do the farmer and his seed represent? How might the parable help the apostles understand what was happening to their ministry? How does the quotation from Isaiah explain Mark 4:13 below? What had the talmidim seen that the prophets longed to see and hear? Since Yeshua is the lamp, what is He revealing?

REFLECT: How does the story of the seeds parallel our spiritual lives? How will our lives change when we begin to produce a crop - multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times more than was sown? What are some examples of what a believer like this might do? At different times in our lives our "soil type" may change. Which soil type currently represents your response to God and His Word? What tactics does the Adversary use to prevent us from hearing and understanding God's Word? What thorns may be choking your ability to bear spiritual fruit? Are there rocks that need to be dug out? In what ways are you trying to nourish the spiritual "seed" God had planted in your life? What can you do to help the seed grow in others?

The one main point to the parable of the soils is that there will be different responses to the scattering of the gospel throughout the Church Age.

The rabbi from Galilee started from the here and now to get to the there and then. **He** started from a thing that was happening at the moment on earth in order to lead people's thoughts to heaven; **He** started from something that everyone could see to get to the things that were invisible. **He** started from something that everyone knew to get to something that they had never realized. That was the very essence of **Yeshua's** teaching. **He** did not confuse people by starting with things that were strange or difficult or complicated; **He** started with the simplest of things that even a child could understand.⁶⁷⁹



The Lord used a familiar metaphor. Agriculture was the heart of Jewish life and everyone understood **the scattering of seed** and the process of growing crops. It is even likely that from where **Christ** taught, the multitude could see men sowing **seed**. **The farmer** would drape a bag of **seed** over **his** shoulder, and as **he** walked up and down the furrows, **he** would take handfuls of **seed** and **scatter** it. **The seed would fall on four kinds of soil.** **Jesus said: A farmer went out to sow his seed** (Matthew 13:3; Mark 4:3; Luke 8:5a).⁶⁸⁰

The hard soil: As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, it was trampled on, and the birds came and ate it up (Matthew 13:4; Mark 4:4; Luke 8:5b). Galilee was covered with **fields**. No fences or walls surrounded **them**, so the only boundaries were narrow **paths**. **Farmers** used **the paths** to walk between the **fields**, and travelers from all over used **them**. No doubt it was **through** such a **path** that **Yeshua** and **His talmidim** traveled as they **went through the grainfields to pick some heads of grain to eat them** (Mattityahu 12:1). The **scattering** of **the seed** caused some of **it** to **fall** on **the paths**. **The soil along the path** would naturally be packed down and extremely hard from all the walking. As a result, the traffic and the dry climate would make **the soil** so hard that any **seeds** that happen to fall on **it** could not penetrate nor **take root**. What **the birds did not eat was trampled on**. There is no question that **the birds** followed **the farmer** very closely!

The shallow soil: Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no moisture or root (Matthew 13:5-6; Mark 4:5-6; Luke 8:6). **Rocky place** did not refer to **soil** with **rocks** in it. Normally, **farmers** would get rid of most of **the rocks** in **their** fields before planting. But in Palestine, strata of limestone **bedrock** run through the Land. Sometimes **the bedrock**

erupts so close to the surface that it lays only inches beneath the topsoil. When **the seed** is **scattered** on those **shallow** places, **the roots** work **their** way down to **the rock** only to be blocked. With **the roots** having nowhere to go, the fledgling plants produce impressive foliage, making **them** more noticeable than the surrounding foliage. But, when **the sun came up, they** would be the first to wither because **their roots** couldn't go deep enough for any **moisture**. As a result, **they** would shrivel up and die before producing any **fruit**.

The weedy soil: Other seed fell among the weeds, which grew up with it and choked the plants so that they did not bear grain (Mattityahu 13:7; Mark 4:7; Lukk 8:7). This **soil** looked **good**. **It** was deep, rich, prepared, and fertile. When **the farmer** began to **scatter his seed it** looked unblemished and willing. Wherever **the seed** landed **it** began to grow, but, hidden under the topsoil, **the weeds** also sprouted up and eventually **choked out the grain**. Native **weeds** always have an advantage over farmed crops. **The weeds** flourish naturally, while planted **crops** need a lot of tender loving care. If **the weeds** get a foothold, however, **they** will dominate the ground. **They** grow faster and have stronger **roots** that soak up all **the moisture**. In the end, **the good plants** are **choked out**.

The good soil: Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop - multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times more than was sown. Then He called out: Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear (Matthew 13:8-9; Mark 4:8-9; Luke 8:8). This **soil** is soft, not like the hard **soil along the path**. It is deep, not like **the shallow soil**. And it is clean, not like **the weed-infested soil**. Here **the seed** explodes, and makes an incredible **crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times more than was sown**.

As soon as they were **alone, the Twelve apostles** wasted no time in asking **Jesus** two questions. First, **what** did **this parable** mean (**Luke 8:9**), and secondly, **why** did **He** **speak to the people in parables** (**Mattityahu 13:10; Mark 4:10**)? In answer to the first question **He said to them: Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable (Mark 4:13)?** A clear understanding of this **parable** would help **them** (and us) to **understand** how the other **parables** are to be interpreted.

Answering the second question **He said: The mystery** (Greek: *musterion*) **of the kingdom of God has been given to you (Mark 4:11a GWT).** A **mystery** in the Bible means *something that was once hidden, but now is revealed*. The verb, **has been given to you**, is in the perfect tense, speaking of a completed act with continuing results. Consequently, **the talmidim had been given**, as a permanent possession, **the mystery of the kingdom of**

God. They were the first ones who possessed **the mystery**. **It** was for **them** to gradually come to a clear understanding of that truth. And unbeknownst to **them** at the time, it would take **them** until after the resurrection to fully understand **it**.

But to those on the outside of the faith, **I speak in parables in order that, though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand** (Matthew 13:11; Mark 4:11b; Luke 8:10). This is the same principle as **God** hardening Pharaoh's heart (see my commentary on [Exodus Bu - I Will Bring One More Plague on Pharaoh](#)), by forcing a decision that the king of Egypt did not want to make (**Romans 9:14-18**). **Light** that is resisted, blinds. At that time, the Pharisees were attempting to show that **Yeshua** was in league with **Satan** (to see [link click El - Every Kingdom Divided Against Itself Will Be Ruined](#)). In so doing, and by rejecting **the Truth**, they effectively blinded themselves. **The parables** blinded the ones who wickedly rejected **the Messiah**, and enlightened the ones who believed in **Him**.

This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. Otherwise they might turn and be forgiven (Matthew 13:13; Mark 4:12). **Jesus'** audiences were not denied the opportunity to believe in **Him**. But, after persistently closing **their** minds to **His** message, **they** were excluded from any further understanding **it** by **His** use of **parables**. Yet, even **the parables** which veiled the truth, were meant to provoke thought, enlighten and potentially reveal **it**. **The parables** uniquely preserved **people's** freedom to believe while demonstrating that, if such a decision is made, it **is the gift of God** (Ephesians 2:8-9).⁶⁸¹ But, because **the people** looked to the Sanhedrin to make a decision about the validity of **Christ's** messiahship and the Jewish Supreme Court having rejected **Him**, the majority of **the people** started to turn against **the Son of God**.

Isaiah perfectly described the faithless Jews of **Yeshua's** day. **The parables fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them** (Mattityahu 13:14-15). **Isaiah** wrote during a time of devastating judgment against the southern kingdom of Judah. While **Isaiah** was preaching **his** message of doom, King Uzziah died and the nation was plunged into some of its darkest days it had ever seen (see my commentary on [Isaiah Bo - In the Year King Uzziah Died](#)).

The first fulfillment of **Isaiah's** warning came in the judgment of the Babylonian Captivity,

just as **Isaiah** had prophesied. The second fulfillment would be the destruction of Yerushalayim and the dispersion of the Jews throughout the world for more than twenty centuries. **The Messiah's parables** were a similar form of judgment on unbelief. Those who would not accept **His** clear and simple teaching - such as those in the Sermon on the Mount - would not be able to understand **His** deeper teachings.

The spiritual gift of languages in the early messianic community was still another form of judgment on unbelievers (see my commentary on **Isaiah Fm - Foreign Lips and Strange Tongues God Will Speak to This People**). Tongues were revealed in a surprising and dramatic way at Shavu'ot and continued to be demonstrated from time to time by **the Twelve apostles** as a witness against those who refused to believe. **Yeshua** first taught Israel in straightforward, clear teaching. Then, when **Christ** was rejected, **He** spoke to them **in parables**, which, without explanation, were no more than meaningless babbling riddles. Ultimately, **the Good Shepherd** spoke to them in unintelligible languages that could not be understood at all without translation.⁶⁸²

Speaking to **His talmidim**, **Jesus** said: **But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.** Not even **the righteous** of the TaNaKh were given the insights that **the apostles** and every believer since has been given the privilege of having. **For truly 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 (Matthew 13:16-17, also see First Peter 1:10-12).** Even for believers there divine illumination must be given, and that is promised to us if we search **the Scriptures** and rely upon **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** within us (**First Corinthians 2:9-16; First John 2:20-27**). We not only have **God's** completed revelation in **Scripture**, but we also have the very **Author** of that **Scripture** living within us to explain, interpret, and apply its wonderful truths.

He said: Listen then to what the parable of the farmer means (Matthew 13:18). The seed is an appropriate metaphor for **the Good News**. It cannot be created - only reproduced. **The parable** does not imply that there is something wrong with **the farmer** or **his** method. Nor is anything wrong with **the seed**. The problem is the condition of **the soil** that exemplifies **the** human **heart (Matthew 13:19)**. In other words, **the heart** is the spiritual equivalent of **the soil** receiving **the farmer's seed**. All **the soils** in **the parable** are basically the same, whether hard, shallow, weedy or soft. And as such, each could **produce a good crop** if they were properly prepared. It's the same with human **hearts**. We are all basically the same and capable of receiving **the gospel** if our **hearts** are properly prepared.

The unresponsive heart: The farmer scatters the seed along the path, which is the Word of God. Some people are like seed along the path, where the Word is scattered. As soon as they hear it, Satan, the evil one, comes and snatches away the Word that was planted in their heart so that they may not believe and be saved (Matthew 13:19; Mark 4:14-15; Luke 8:11-12). Those who fell along the path are those who never believed the gospel in the first place. The verb that was scattered is a perfect participle. The tense speaks of a completed work having continuous results. The act of scattering the seed of the Word had been completed, having a certain result. That being said, the Word of God was planted in their hearts and was starting, like seed, to germinate. But the Destroyer of souls takes it by deception before it has time to grow into a plant. The tempter's greatest joy is to snatch away from God unbelievers whom we love and pray for.

The superficial heart: The second patch of soil covers unseen rocky ground and has no depth. Others, like seed sown on rocky ground refer to someone who hears the Word and at once receives it with joy. Superficial converts seem to accept the gospel with open arms and are overcome with enthusiasm. They can hardly wait to tell everyone about their newfound happiness. They are zealous in their Bible study and prayer. But since the soil of their heart is shallow they have no root. They seem to believe for a while but last only a short time because their feelings change but not their soul. The Savior's life-giving Word cannot take root because just below the surface of their heart is bedrock that is even more difficult to penetrate than the hard soil along the path. There is no repentance, nor sorrow over sin, no recognition of their true spiritual condition, no brokenness and no humility, which is the first sign of true faith in Christ. When they hear the Good News it brings a religious experience but not salvation. Consequently, when affliction or persecution comes because of the Word, they quickly fall away (Mattityahu 13:20-21; Mark 4:16-17; Luke 8:13). They come as wolves in sheep's clothing, and when threatened with the high cost of carrying their cross they are unwilling to pay the price. They build their religious houses on the sand of emotional experience and when the storms of affliction or persecution come, they collapse and wash away.⁶⁸³

The worldly heart: The third bit of soil is overrun with thorns and characterizes those who hear the Word, but are too worldly for it to take root and grow as they go on their way. They hear the Good News and make an empty profession of faith. But their first love is for the things of the world, and the worries about worldly things prevents them from seeing the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They love riches and bow down to the altar of wealth. They become blinded by it and do not even realize that the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for possessions, prestige,

position and **other things** has **come in and choked** out **the Word, making it unfruitful** (Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:18-19; Luke 8:14). There are very few obstacles to salvation greater than **the love of money**. Rabbi Sha'ul warns us that **the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs** (First Timothy 6:10). And Yochanan also warns: **Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - comes not from the Father but from the world** (First John 2:15-16).

The enemies: The birds, the sun, and the weeds of this **parable** signify our enemies. **The Adversary** does everything **he** can to steal **the seed of the Good News** even before it can grow. Here's an important lesson for any soul-winner. You will face resistance and hostility. There will be shallow, short-lived converts, and you will face double-minded people who want **King Messiah** but won't let go of **the world**. The hardness of **the path**, the shallowness of **the soil** and the destructive nature of **the weeds** will frustrate your efforts to **produce a good crop. But do not let your hearts be troubled** (John 14:1a), **the Lord of the harvest** (Mattityahu 9:38) can break up even the hardest **soil** and get rid of the most stubborn **weeds**. Hard **soil, shallow soil**, or **weedy soil** may not always stay that way. **ADONAI** can till **the soil** of the most stubborn **heart**. One ancient Palestinian method of farming was to **scatter the seed** first, then plow it under. Sometimes that happens in evangelism. We **scatter the seed**, and just as it seems like the hovering **birds** are about to **snatch it away**, **the Holy Spirit** plows it under, so **it** can **produce a huge harvest**.⁶⁸⁴

The receptive heart: The fourth patch of ground **on** which **seed has fallen** is **good soil**. **It is good** not because it has a different basic composition than the other kinds of **soil**, but because it is suitably prepared. The receptive **heart** has been prepared by **the Ruach** and receptive to **ADONAI** (Yochanan 16:8-11). **But others, like the seed falling on good soil refers to those with a noble and good heart, who hears the Word, understands it, accepts it and retains it** because **the Lord** honors **their** faith and opens **their** spiritual minds and hearts. **Yeshua** told this to encourage **His talmidim** and all other disciples who witness in **His** name. Despite the hardness, shallowness and worldliness of most human **hearts**, there will always be **those** who are **good soil**, in which **the gospel** can **take root** and flourish. There will always be **those** whom **the Holy Spirit** has prepared to receive **the Word** with sincere, surrendered **hearts**. Ultimately, **fruit-bearing** is the characteristic of all true believers (Galatians 5:22-23; Philippians 1:11; Colossians 1:6). The psalmist rejoiced that the believer who delights in **God's Word** and meditates on it day and night is **like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers** (Psalm 1:2-3). We are not saved

because of **fruit-bearing** or by any other **good work** because we cannot bear *any* spiritual **fruit** until we are saved. But, we are saved *for* **fruit-bearing**. For we are God's workmanship, Paul writes to us, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). This is the one who patiently produces a huge harvest, yielding thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was sown (Mattityahu 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15; also see John 15:2-5).**⁶⁸⁵

The fruit: Just as **fruit-bearing** is the whole point of agriculture, **fruit-bearing** is the ultimate test of salvation. **Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every fruit tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them (Mt 7:17-20).** If there is no spiritual **fruit**, or if the **fruit** is bad, it must be rotten. Or, looking at it from the metaphor of the field, if **the soil** doesn't produce a crop, it is worthless, symbolic of an unredeemed **heart**. **The good soil** pictures the believer. **The weedy soil** and **the shallow soil** are pretenders. And **the soil along the path** makes no pretense and rejects **the Good News**.

Observe that not all **the good soil** is equally productive. Some **bears** quantities of **thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was sown**. In other words, believers will not always **bear** as much **fruit** as they ought to or could. But, every believer is **fruitful** to some degree. We are sometimes disobedient and of course we still sin. Yet in the final analysis, **Jesus** says: **by their fruit you will recognize them (Matthew 7:16).** Whether it is **thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was sown, their** spiritual **fruit** sets **them** apart from the hard packed **soil along the path**, the superficial growth from **the shallow soil**, and the uselessness of **the weedy soil**. **The fruit** of a true believer is clearly evident - not something you have to hunt for. **It** stands out clearly from the **rocky, weed** infested, barren earth.⁶⁸⁶

Our Savior said to them: No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light. For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open (Mk 4:21-22; Lk 8:16-17). These verses consist of a common similitude from everyday life. An oil **lamp** is not lit in order to be **hidden in a clay jar or placed under a bed**. Rather, it is lit to be placed **on a stand** for everyone to see. **The talmidim**, to those who **the mystery of the kingdom of God** had been revealed, were given the responsibility of proclaiming **the light, the gospel**, to the world after **the Son** returned to **the Father** (see **Mr - The Ascension of Jesus**). And when they do, **God's Kingdom**, which is hidden to unbelievers, will become known.

Therefore, if anyone has ears to hear, let them hear. The word **if** here is not the conditional particle *ean* which introduces a hypothetical condition (like he might **hear** or he might not), but *ei*, the particle of fulfilled condition. The point is, they had **ears** with which **to hear**. Therefore, they ought to use them. **Consider carefully what you hear, He continued, with the measure you use, it will be measured to you - and even more (Mark 4:23-24; Luke 8:18a).**

Expanding on the truth that **Jesus' parables** were given to reveal truth to believers and conceal the truth from unresponsive, superficial and worldly **hearts**, **He** continued: **Whoever has** the gift of eternal life, received by trust in **the Messiah**, **more will be given**. Believers who live up to **the light** given them in **Christ**, **will receive more and more light given in abundance**. **But** the fate of unbelievers is just the opposite. **Whoever does not have** eternal life is lost **and even** the little speck of **light** that **they think they have will be taken from them (Mattityahu 13:12; Mark 4:25; Luke 8:18b)**. So, it is not enough **to** merely **hear the Word**. It is not enough **to hear** correct doctrine or theology. One must pay careful attention to *how* one **hears God's** message. **The Word** must be heard with **a noble and good heart**, so that a faith results that will endure and **produce a huge harvest, yielding thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times what was planted**. Consequently, spiritually speaking, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.⁶⁸⁷

We are going to look at nine parables that develop a basic flow of thought: (1) **The Parable of the Soils (Et)** teaches us that there will be different responses to the scattering of the gospel throughout the Church Age.

***Jesus, You are the patient Farmer** in my life. Thank **You**. **You've** used others to place certain **seeds** in my path and sometimes I know I haven't appreciated their work as I should have. Help me express gratitude when I sense that **You** are placing others in my life to serve **You** on my "farm." **Lord**, do what you need to do to make my fields productive for **You**. I'm **the farmer** of my "farm," but I belong to **You**.*⁶⁸⁸