

## Understanding Parables

There are very few genres whereby the LORD Himself will provide the readers of God's Word with an interpretation. Parables are one of them. After the LORD spoke in parables, the disciples came and asked Him for an explanation. They could not understand the parable of the Sower. From the explanation of Christ we can glean the steps on how to interpret parables.

**CONTENT of the Parable** -- The parable of the Sower portrays a Sower who sowed seeds which fell on four different kinds of ground. They are – by the wayside and the fowls came and devoured the seeds; stony places without much earth and the sun scorched the plant because it had no root; thorny places which choked the plant; and good ground which brought forth fruit a hundredfold, sixtyfold and thirtyfold. The end of the parable has the words – “who hath ears to hear let him hear”.

**EXPLANATION of the Parable** – The four kinds of ground describe the four ways of hearing the Word of the Kingdom. The wayside refers to those who hear the Word of God but have no understanding and the wicked one takes away the Word of God that was sown in his heart. The stony places refer to those who hear the same Word that was preached and immediately receives the Word with gladness. But there is no root at the point of receiving the Word, i.e. there is mental acceptance without heartfelt conviction. It lasts for a while. When there is tribulation or persecution because of the Word of God, these hearers are offended and reject the Word of God. The thorny places refer to those hearers who are like the “stony places hearers”. These receive the Word with joy immediately and feel good about it. But the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word and there is no fruit. The lives of these hearers are not transformed by the Word of God. The good ground refers to those who hear, understand and who “bear fruit” in their lives. Their lives are transformed by the Word of God. The Word of God becomes their light in the pathway of life.

### **OBSERVATIONS of Christ's Explanation –**

- a) The main thrust of each parable is found at the end. Do not be too quick to apply in parables. Patience is needed to first establish the teaching in the Parable. In the case of the Parable of the Sower, the thrust is on godly and acceptable hearing before God;
- b) The interpreter must distinguish between the embellishments and the key elements in the parable. Once that is accomplished he must then ascribe the correct interpretation to these key elements. He must refrain from ascribing meaning to the embellishments. Some of the embellishments are there to make the storyline complete whereas the key elements possess spiritual significance, the embellishments do not. The seed represents the Word of the Kingdom; the fowls

represent the wicked one. The seed that springs up represents immediate acceptance of the Word with joy. The sun represents persecution and tribulation because of the Word; “withered away” represents the offended reaction; thorns refer to the cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches; the choking of the plant refers to the choking of the Word; the good ground refers to the right kind of hearing; and the fruitfulness of the ground refers to the fruitful life of the Christian. The examples of embellishments in this parable are not as obvious as in other parables. Some of them would include “fowls” [plural] but refers only to “wicked one” [singular]; “not much earth,” and “no deepness of earth,” have no special significance.

**APPLICATION of the Parable** – If the “seed” refers to the “gospel of salvation”, then the hearers would refer to the four different groups of people who receive the gospel or the four different ways the gospel would be received. One group would reject it immediately; another would say yes to the gospel but when persecution for the faith comes, they would give up their faith; the third group would say yes but allow the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches to draw them away and to reject Christ; and the final group, which responds rightly to the gospel, say yes and allow their lives to be transformed and they will not allow persecution, neither the cares of the world nor deceitfulness of riches to lure them away from Christ!

But if the seed refers to the general teaching of God’s Word pertaining to sanctification such as the doctrines of prayer or tithing or fasting, then the Parable of the Sower would refer to Christians who hear God’s Word preached. Some would show no interest; there are those who would give mental and verbal acceptance but then persecution, the cares of the world and deceitfulness of riches would discourage them and they will not obey. The only way to receive God’s Word that is accepted by the LORD is to obey the Word whereby the believer’s life is transformed and is become more like Christ’s.

The Parable of the Sower teaches one single truth and that is the right way to hear God’s Word!