



## MATTHEW 13; LUKE 8, 13

### JESUS' PARABLES PAINT HIS PORTRAIT

The Gospel of Matthew has five discourses. Chapter 13 is Matthew's third and central discourse on "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 13:11). It acts as the turning point, or middle, of Matthew's Gospel. Consistent with other ancient chiasmic literature, the messages at the center point are very important to the author's theology. Matthew's organization points to his messages that are central to Jesus' mission, which are the coming of the kingdom of heaven and what it takes to enter. Many of the parables in Matthew's Gospel begin with this phrase: "the kingdom of heaven is like . . ." (which Matthew's Gospel repeats 8 times in Matthew 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 20:1–2). This pattern is unique to Matthew; even when Luke and Mark share the same parables, they do not include this phrase.

Matthew's Gospel places Jesus' sermon directly after several examples of unbelief (Matthew 11–12). Perhaps this is why the sermon is filled with parables—eight in chapter 13 alone! These eight parables come as twins—two about sowing, two about food, two kinds of treasure, two kinds of bringing forth. Joseph Smith saw them as speaking of the gathering of prepared Israel. The other Gospels place the same parables in different locations.

Perhaps Matthew organized the pairs as “two witnesses.” The parables teach the impatient the need for patience. Matthew 13 also draws attention to Jesus’ parables fulfilling Old Testament (OT) prophecy (Matthew 13:14–15, 35).

The Gospel of Luke places many of Jesus’ parables as dialogue along the journey as the Twelve and several noble women traveled with, and financially supported, Jesus’ ministry across Galilee (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Suzanne are specifically mentioned, along with “many others,” Luke 8:2–3). The cost of discipleship rings through these verses.

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## INTRODUCTION TO PARABLES

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The word “parable” is from the Greek “*paraole*,” meaning: “laying one thing beside another for comparative purposes. Metaphor, a comparing, or comparison of one thing with another, likeness, similitude; an example by which a doctrine or precept is illustrated; spec. a narrative, fictitious but agreeable to the laws and usages of human life, by which either the duties of men or the things of God are figuratively portrayed; earthly story with heavenly meaning.”

Most of the New Testament (NT) parables are found in the three Synoptic Gospels. Jesus explained that he taught in parables to unfold the secrets of heaven to those who could not understand yet. Biblical students commonly refer to this as the “Messianic Secret” (Matthew 3:10–17; Mark 4:10–12; Luke 8:9–10; and [Isaiah 6:9–10](#)). One third of Jesus’ NT teachings are found in the parables.<sup>1</sup>

By teaching in parables, Jesus allowed the audience to comprehend his stories in different ways at different times. Parables allow one to learn on different levels within the same story; it was a form of teaching with love or compassion for the learner. Often it is easier for humans to remember and assimilate a story or parable better than didactic teaching. Jesus, the Master Teacher, reached out to teach his audience where they were.

### NEW TESTAMENT PARABLES

Matthew has 23

Mark has 8

Luke has 24

### Book of Mormon and Parables

Interestingly, there are no parables in Jesus’ teachings recorded in 3 Nephi, but we do find parables in the form of allegories elsewhere in the Book of Mormon (e.g. “the tree of life” in 1 Nephi 8–12; “the allegory of the olive tree” in Jacob 5). We can presume that those Nephites who heard Jesus preach a year after His resurrection had ears to hear, so that they did not need Jesus to teach in a hidden manner.<sup>2</sup> In Paul’s words, they were ready for “strong meat” (Hebrews 5:12, 14).

## How to Get the Most out of Parables

Jesus used parables to provide a portrait of himself: “If Jesus had a self-portrait painted of himself while living in Palestine, it would not show us more about him than what we learn through his parables as they describe the daily life in Palestine. He has filled them with details to better understand him and his Father. Parables are described as pictures that leave a deeper impression on the mind than abstractions.”<sup>3</sup>

The parables can draw us into the crowd with those Galileans listening to Jesus. To join those disciples, as you study ask yourselves:

- What did Jesus intend to say to his audience?
- Did his audiences change? When and Why?
- What was the effect on the hearers?
- What are different levels of interpretation?
- “What was the question which drew out the answers?” (This was the Prophet Joseph Smith’s rule for interpretation or understanding scripture.<sup>4</sup>)



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# THE PARABLE OF FOUR SOILS OR THE SOWER

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Matthew 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15

I appreciate, “Four Soils,” as an alternative title for the parable, as it is more about the “soils,” than it is the “sower.” On one level, Jesus’ message is to teach us how to prepare our hearts to hear and grow his word. This is one of the few parables that all the Synoptic Gospels share. It is also the longest and possibly the best-known parable. It has a timeless nature, yet, “the story drawn from common life, portrays an uncommon message.”<sup>5</sup>

**Matthew 13:1–2; Mark 4:1–3; Luke 8:4** “**multitude**” Matthew and Mark set the scene with Jesus beside the Sea of Galilee when a multitude gathered. In order for the whole crowd to hear him, Jesus stepped into a boat and sat down to teach those gathered on a beach. (Luke didn’t mention the shoreline or boat.)

Matthew included the detail that the crowd stood as Jesus taught. As I ask myself why would Matthew include this, I wonder if those listening to Jesus' words actually realized they were hearing the word of God, and respectfully stood in his presence.

Mark began the sermon with, "Listen!" (or "Harken" in KJV). This little detail adds to the feeling that the author was present (possibly Peter, or some other original source material<sup>6</sup>). Also, Mark alone included Jesus' chastisement to the disciples for not understanding the meaning of the parable (Mark 4:15).

**Matthew 13:3; Mark 4:3; Luke 8:5 "A farmer went out to scatter seed" (CEV)** The farmer or sower appears to be the storyteller—Jesus. In Matthew, the seed is the "kingdom," in Mark it is the "word," and in Luke, the "word of God." In all three cases, the seed is *fertile* and *fruitful*. These little seedlings represent Christians at different stages of conversion.

Farmers in ancient Palestine (and much of the world) spread their seed first, and then plow the seed into the soil. Without pre-plowing the soil, some seeds fall on hard pack, thorny, and rocky soils. *Scientific American* published the benefits of this ancient farming technique, including a lack of erosion and less water use.<sup>7</sup> Regardless of its advantages, Jesus used this example of farming to describe his listeners as different types of soil. I've organized the parable with Jesus' explanation in parallel columns:

Image by Pexels on Pixabay



## PARABLE

*Matthew 13:4; Mark 4:4; Luke 8:5*

“**fell beside the road**” (NAS), or wayside. Seeds were trodden down, and fowls<sup>10</sup> came and ate the seed off the hard ground.

*Matthew 13:5–6; Mark 4:5; Luke 8:6*

“**fell on rocky ground**” (ESV). Without enough soil, the seedlings had no root and were scorched by the sun and died.

*Matthew 13:7; Mark 4:7; Luke 8:7*

“**thorns . . . choked the seedlings**” (BSB) The seedling cannot take root when thorns, or more established weeds, overpower their roots.

*Matthew 13:8; Mark 4:8; Luke 8:8*

“**fell into good ground**” has great potential allowing the seeds to grow and bear fruit—even thirty, sixty, or an hundred fold.

## JESUS' EXPLANATION

*Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12*

“**The sower**” scatters God’s word everywhere, but it is not understood—in part due to Satan’s efforts to remove it from the listener’s heart.

*Matthew 13:20–21; Mark 4:16–17; Luke 8:13*

“**hear the word . . . with joy**,” but then without roots, when they experience hard times or temptation, they became offended and lost faith.

*Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:18–19; Luke 8:14*

“**they who receive** the word among thorns” (Mark JST) are caught up with the cares of the world, lusts, and riches, which choke the Spirit’s voice.

*Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15 (JST)*

“**...the good ground** are they who receive the word in an honest and good heart . . . keep what they hear and bring forth fruit with patience.”

**Matthew 13:9–11, Mark 4:9–11, Luke 8:8–10 “the mysteries.”** Jesus explained the parable to his disciples because they have “ears to hear” (Matthew 13:9; Mark 4:9; and Luke 8:8). Their hearts were prepared to learn more, even “the mysteries.” The NT uses the Greek word “mystery” (or mysteries) 27 times, but this parable is the only place where it is used in the Gospels (Matthew 13:11, Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10). The basic meaning is a “sacred secret,” dealing with silence. The Bible Dictionary explains that “mystery” as “a spiritual truth that was once hidden but now is revealed, and that, without special revelation, would have remained unknown.”

The Gospels of Mark and Luke refer to the mysteries as the “*kingdom of God*,” while Matthew’s Gospel deviates to say, “*kingdom of heaven*.” This had special meaning for Matthew’s Gospel, as we find it repeated 33 times—and nowhere else in the NT. Possibly Matthew used it for his Jewish readers who were more sensitive to the name “God,” and thus tried to avoid overusing it.

**Matthew 13:14 “fulfilled.”** Much of this parable is shared word for word with all three Synoptic Gospels. Yet, this verse is an interesting change. Matthew’s Gospel intentionally makes a detour to highlight this fulfillment of Isaiah. Matthew adds the tenth of fourteen “fulfillment” verses that he carefully organized throughout his Gospel. This verse is one of the six times Matthew pointed out that Jesus fulfilled prophecy from the prophet Isaiah.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, this is found in Isaiah’s vision of the throne of God and can be read as part of a temple text as well. Eye, ears, and hearts need to be opened for revelation for deepened conversion. Isaiah and Jesus show an interdependency between conversion and complete healing.

### ISAIAH 6:9–10

9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but [they\*] understand not; and see ye indeed, but [they\*] perceive not.

10 Make the **heart** of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

*[\*added in 2 Nephi 16:9]*

### MATTHEW 13:14–15

14 ... By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:

15 For this people’s **heart** is waxed gross and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal.

Matthew’s text accuses individual’s hard-hearted obstinance for not responding to Divine requests—not God as the one who hardened their hearts (KJV is often laced with Calvinistic attitudes). The Sower generously spreads his word to all. Those who do not receive and nourish the seed, or word of God, do not listen for the still small voice. Our generation is also sympathetic to the power that distractions can have to overpower one’s hearing and understanding of God’s word. Sometimes the world is so loud, or our thoughts too crowded, to hear the quiet voice of revelation.

## Modern Apostolic Emphasis

In April 2015 General Conference, Elder Oaks spoke about this parable. He focused on those who have committed to live the Gospel message. He encouraged seeking to find spiritual truths; “Spiritual food is necessary for spiritual survival.” He quoted two colleagues who discussed how they live the Savior’s teachings. First, how they deal with the “rocky” cares of the world, and second, how they prepare their “soil” to live a gospel centered life:<sup>10</sup>

1. Hugh W. Nibley had an interview where he was asked if we should “be accommodating of the world in

what we do in the Church.” Hugh replied: “That’s been the whole story of the Church, hasn’t it? You have to be willing to offend here, you have to be willing to take the risk. That’s where the faith comes in. . . . Our commitment is supposed to be a test, it’s supposed to be hard, it’s supposed to be impractical in the terms of this world.”

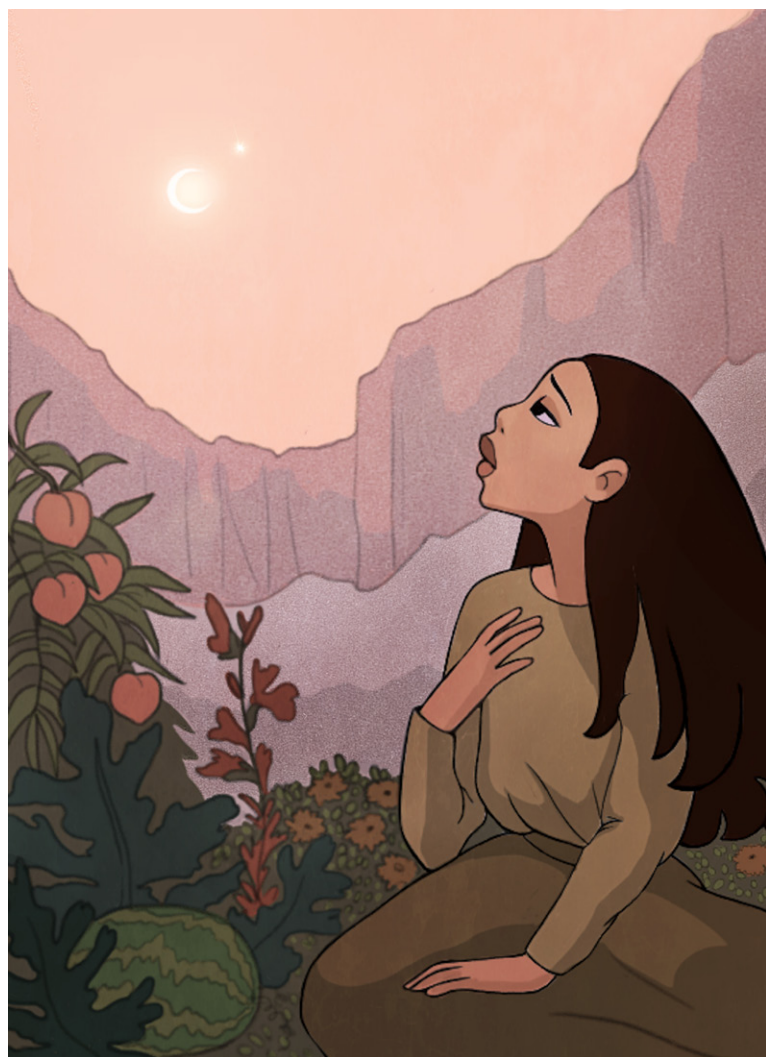
2. “I want to stress again the importance of really living what we claim to believe. That needs to be a priority . . . in everything we do...[We] believe that our vocation is to be leaven in society. But there’s a fine line between being leaven *in* society, and being digested *by* society.”<sup>11</sup>

## Joseph Smith’s Contribution

We also find phrases and ideas from this parable scattered throughout the Doctrine and Covenants (including: “sower” D&C 86:2; “an hundred-fold” D&C 78:19; 82:18; etc.). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught specially about this parable to the Elders of the Church:

I shall now proceed to make some remarks from the sayings of the Savior, recorded in the 13th chapter of his Gospel according to St. Matthew, which, in my mind, afford us as clear an understanding upon the important subject of the gathering, as anything recorded in the Bible. . . . Now mark the expression that which was sown in his heart. . . . Men who have no principle of righteousness in themselves, and whose hearts are full of iniquity, and have no desire for the principles of truth, do not understand the word of truth when they hear it. The devil taketh away the word of truth out of their hearts, because there is no *desire* for righteousness in them. . . .

We draw the conclusion, then, that the very reason why the multitude, or the world, as they were designated by the Savior, did not receive an explanation upon his parables, was because of unbelief. To you, he says, (speaking



*Reap Your Reward* by Courtney von Savoyye, First Place winner of the 2018 Book of Mormon Central Art Contest. This digital painting is a reflection on Alma 32 and how the seed of the word of God grows in one’s heart.

to his disciples,) it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. And why? Because of the faith and confidence they had in him. This parable was spoken to demonstrate the effects that are produced by the preaching of the word; and we believe that it has an allusion directly, to the commencement, or the setting up of the Kingdom in that age; therefore we shall continue to trace His sayings concerning this Kingdom from that time forth, even unto the end of the world.<sup>12</sup>

The bottom line is their lack of righteous desire leaves humanity vulnerable to Satan's temptations. But with the help of God's "word" (repeated six times in Matthew's discussion of the parable) we can move from being hard hearted, rocky, or thorny at times in our lives, to becoming good soil to nourish the Spirit—ready to produce the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

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## THE PARABLE OF THE TARES

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Matthew 13:24–30; 36–43

The second of the "twin parables" about sowing is the enemy who came and sowed tares.

**Matthew 13:25 "sowed tares among the wheat"** Tares are a weed called "bearded darnel." It looks the same as wheat until it comes to ear. The roots are often intertwined, so farmers do not want to pull them prematurely or they may lose the crop (Matthew 13:29). Tares are poisonous—they taste bitter and when eaten separately or in bread, can cause dizziness, vomiting, convulsions, or death.<sup>13</sup>

The Prophet Joseph also saw this parable as being about the gathering of Israel, or those who will become God's people. D&C 86:1–7 speaks of the tares sown by Satan after Jesus' and the apostles' deaths. Satan and his angels are the enemies who sewed the tares. The timing is described as the last days: "But behold, in the last days, even now while the Lord is beginning to bring forth the word, and the blade is springing up and is yet tender—the angels are crying unto the Lord day and night, who are ready and waiting to be sent forth to reap down the fields; But the Lord saith unto them, pluck not up the tares while the blade is yet tender (for verily your faith is weak), lest you destroy the wheat also" (D&C 86:4–6).



*The Enemy Who Sows* by James Tissot.



**Matthew 13:30 “grow together until the harvest”** God’s kingdom is on the earth again, but the delayed harvest, or eschatological judgment, has to wait until the fruit is ripe. The Saints are not yet ready. When the Savior will return, He will open His Millennial reign, and Satan will be bound. There will also be a final judgment, at the end of the Millennium. Burning is used as an image for judgment. The JST reverses the order so that the wheat is gathered first and the tares are burned second.

**Matthew 13:37–39 “He answers”** Matthew’s text includes the Lord’s interpretation of this parable a few verses after the parable when they left the public setting and the disciples are alone with the Lord. Jesus explains:

PARABLE ELEMENT	INTERPRETATION
Field	World
Good Seed	Children of the kingdom
Tares	Children of the wicked one
Enemy	Devil
Harvest	End of the world
Reapers	Angels

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught this parable is a brief history of the kingdom of God on earth from the days of Jesus to the Millennial Day.<sup>14</sup> He saw the tares as corruption within the church or Christianity:

The wheat and tares must grow together till the harvest; at the harvest the wheat is gathered together into the threshing floor, so with the Saints the stakes are the threshing floor. Here they will be threshed with all sorts of difficulties, trials, afflictions and everything to mar their peace, which they can imagine, and thousands which they cannot imagine, but he that endures the threshing till all the chaff, superstition, folly and unbelief are pounded out of him, and does not suffer himself to be blown away as chaff by the foul blast of slander, but endures faithfully to the end, shall be saved.<sup>15</sup>

Early Church fathers share other interpretations: Irenaeus (c. 180) taught that “The field is the world... The apostate angel who is the enemy for he was envious of God’s workmanship and took in hand to render this workmanship into something at enmity with God. . . . For this reason the Lord commanded his disciples to be on guard.” Clement of Alexander (c. 195) taught “that heresies would be sown among the truth, as ‘tares among the wheat,’ was foretold by the Lord.” Victorinus (c. 280) taught “The Apocalypse shows that these reapers, shepherds, and laborers are the angels.”<sup>16</sup>

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# THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

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Matthew 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19



The Parable of the Mustard Seed. Photograph by Sheila Sund via Flickr.

The next of the “twin parables” is about food—mustard seeds and leaven. Jesus likened the “kingdom of God” (or “kingdom of heaven” in Matthew) to the potential found in a small seed that grows into a tall productive fruitful plant. Along the Sea of Galilee mustard flowers grow up to ten feet high. The flowers become pods filled with seeds that are used as a spice to make mustard, and as food for birds.

This parable has been used to describe Jesus, who was seen by some as insignificant as a seed, but “He abundantly bestows salvation on all humanity.”<sup>17</sup> Also the seed is Jesus’ words or message which grew to beautify and fill the whole earth. The Prophet Joseph applied this parable to aspects of the restoration:

3. **The Book of Mormon:** “[will] spring up in the last days, or in due time; let us behold it coming forth out of the ground, which is indeed accounted the least of all seeds, but behold it branching forth, yea, even towering, with lofty branches, and God-like majesty, until it, like the mustard seed, becomes the greatest of all herbs. And it is truth, and it has sprouted and come forth out of the earth, and righteousness begins to look down from heaven, and God is sending down His powers, gifts and angels, to lodge in the branches thereof. The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a mustard seed.”
4. **The Restored Church:** small initially as “the mustard seed is small, but bring[s] forth a large tree, and the fowls lodge in the branches.”<sup>18</sup>
5. **Angels:** represented as birds in the parable, who “come down, combine together to gather their children, and gather them. We cannot be made perfect without them, nor they without us; when these things are done, the Son of Man will descend, the Ancient of Days sit; we may come to an innumerable company of angels, have communion with and receive instructions from them. . . . We may have the fowls of heaven lodge in the branches.”<sup>19</sup>

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# THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN OR YEAST

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Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20–21

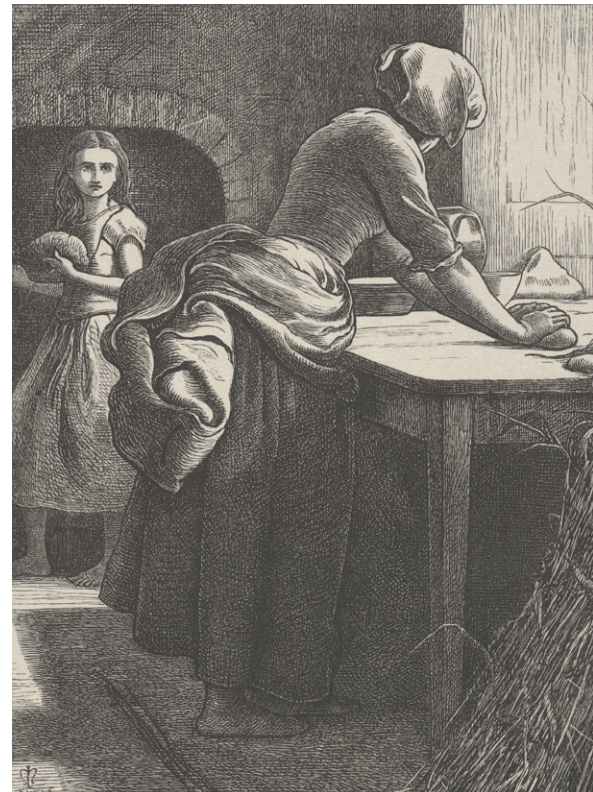
**Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20–21 “leaven”** Looking for “twin” relationships in the parables, note how Jesus in the last parable had a man planting, and now has a woman baking. The early church writers wanted to include this balance of both genders working to build the kingdom of God.

In the OT, leaven is often the symbol of corruptibility, but here it is used as a contrast and for its dynamic power. The message is that the kingdom of God is “hidden” in the flour and will permeate everything. Jesus taught it with numbers that produced a great shock value. We need to look beyond the Greek measurements to appreciate Jesus’ hyperbole in his story telling. A container big enough to hold “three measures” also held 432 eggs, or 9 to 10 gallons. It was an enormous size. This woman put in a little yeast, but then added “three measures” of meal/flour or 110 pounds/50 kg, making bread to easily feed 150 people or more.<sup>20</sup>

Joseph Smith used this parable to highlight the role of the “three witnesses” as the “three measures” as well as the priesthood as the leavening that multiplied into plenty of bread:

It may be understood that the Church of the Latter-day Saints has taken its rise from a little leaven that was put into three witnesses. Behold how much this is like the parable: it is fast leavening the lump and will soon leaven the whole. . . . Three measures of meal, undergoing the purifying touch by a revelation of Jesus Christ and the ministering of angels, who have already commenced this work in the last days which will answer to the leaven which leavened the whole lump. It alludes expressly to the last days, when there should be little faith on the earth and it [will] leaven the whole world. There shall be safety in Zion and Jerusalem and [among] the remnants whom the Lord shall call. It refers to the priesthood.<sup>21</sup>

The yeast can have many interpretations, including how the Spirit touches a life by contact with truth, which can then grow. Missionaries share God’s word, one convert at a time—which grows into the



Parable of the Leaven by John Everett Millais. Wood engraving cut and printed by Dalziel Brothers, 1864. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

righteous leavening of the world. The Gospel has an expansive force within itself and will spread by transforming one grain at a time.

## Setting Change and Fulfillment Passage

*Matthew 13:34b-36*

Matthew stopped his string of public parables when Jesus sent the multitude away and entered into “the house” (which house? Peter’s mother-in-law’s perhaps?). Jesus’ disciples followed him and then Matthew included several shorter parables given in this private setting. But first, Matthew paused to share another fulfillment passage (his 11<sup>th</sup> out of 14), which precedes Psalms 78:2. The private setting opens the way for the disciples to ask the Lord for the interpretation of the tares (which is included above). Following this, Matthew returned to recording four more parables of the kingdom of heaven.

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# THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

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Matthew 13:44



*Parable of the Hidden Treasure* by Rembrandt, ca. 1630. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Each of these parables continues to offer Jesus' descriptions or analogies of the kingdom of heaven. In addition to these next two parables lining up as the hidden treasure and hidden pearl, Matthew also has an interplay between the hidden treasure and the hidden leaven, and masterfully correlates the smallness of the pearl with the mustard seed.

**Matthew 13:44 “treasure hid”** Jesus speaks of a poor day-laborer or traveler finding a great hidden treasure. His morality is not in question because he bought the field. The point is that the kingdom can be present and yet not perceived by many travelers. During the centuries of invasions that swept over Palestine, we learn that people hid their treasures in the ground (Proverbs 2:4; Sirach 20:30; etc.). At the time of the NT, we see this in Qumran with the threat of Roman destruction in AD 68–70, the Essenes hid their treasured parchment and copper scroll in caves.

**“Joy”:** The word “joy” is important—the kingdom of heaven is about finding eternal joy. It is also a story about sacrificing everything for the treasure of the kingdom or a testimony. The Prophet Joseph Smith used this parable to illustrate the gathering: “Nothing but [the] Kingdom being restored can save the world. Like unto a treasure hidden in a field. This figure is a representation of the [Kingdom] in the last days.”<sup>22</sup> The Prophet saw the purchasing of the treasure as the sacrifices required of the Saints, “selling all that they have, and gathering themselves together unto a place that they may purchase for an inheritance.”<sup>23</sup> Membership in God's kingdom requires the sacrifice of everything God asks for.

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## THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

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Matthew 13:45–46

**Matthew 13:45–46 “A pearl”** was a rare treasure and in great demand in the ancient world. Pearls were a sign of wealth and often valued more highly than gold. As a comparison, from the time of the NT, Cleopatra supposedly had a pearl worth 6 million sesterces (the equivalent of 1.5 million days-of-labor at minimum wage, or billions of dollars).<sup>24</sup> From the OT, Job used pearls as a comparison to what he valued the most: “the price of wisdom is above pearls” (Job 28:18, ESV).



When we look at the two treasure parables together, it is the find that is most important. Both discoveries are a surprise. They also contrast the rich and poor. Both parables speak of the need for a total self-surrender to receive the kingdom of heaven. Jesus' hyperbole sets the stage to teach the cost of discipleship to his apostles.

## Christian Fathers

Two early Christian fathers had interesting observations about this parable. Clement of Alexandria (~AD 195) wrote, "Jesus is a pearl of translucent and purest radiance." Origen (~AD 245) wrote, "There are many merchants engaged in many forms of merchandise. However, the kingdom of heaven is not likened to any of these except the one who is seeking beautiful pearls. And he has found one pearl equal in value to many—a very costly pearl that he has bought in place of many pearls. I consider it reasonable, then, to make some inquiry into the nature of the pearl. Please note that Christ did not say, 'He sold all the *pearls* he had.' For he had not only sold those pearls he had bought . . . but also sold everything that he had."<sup>25</sup>

## Joseph Smith

The parable was also used by Joseph Smith equating it to sacrifice for Zion. He quoted the parable and then added, "The Saints again work after this example. See men traveling to find places for Zion and her stakes or remnants, who, when they find the place for Zion, or the pearl of great price, straightway sell that they have, and buy it."<sup>26</sup>



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# THE PARABLE OF THE FISH NET

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Matthew 13:47-50

This parable about fishing was especially meaningful to half the apostles who were fishermen, with at least four who were professional fishermen. (John 21:2 records Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, Nathaniel, and two unnamed).

**Matthew 13:47 “net”:** In Greek the net is “*sagene/seine-net*’ with floats on the top edge and weights at the bottom. When the net was thrown into the water it encircled the fish and then was dragged up on the shore. The net naturally gathered fish indiscriminately.”<sup>27</sup> Fishermen often set their nets out at night because the fish swam closer to the surface for warmth. In Matthew, Jesus referred to “every kind” of fish included in the net, probably referring to missionary work, as this is the group he has called as fishers of men” A normal catch would have large and small fish. Of the fish, the small and “unclean” fish were thrown back in, and the large “clean” fish were kept. (For the Mosaic dietary code, see Leviticus 11.)

**Matthew 13:48 “when it was full”:** Jesus described waiting until the net is “full/*eplērōthē*” meaning: “complete; consummate: a number; to make complete in every particular, to render perfect; to carry through to the end, to accomplish, carry out.” It speaks of spiritual readiness as well as physical completion.

Joseph Smith recited this parable when speaking on the Last Days:

For the work of this pattern, behold the seed of Joseph, spreading forth the Gospel net upon the face of the earth, gathering of every kind, that the good may be saved in vessels prepared for that purpose, and the angels will take care of the bad. So shall it be at the end of the world-the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire, and there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth”<sup>28</sup>

**Matthew 13:49-50 “at the end of the world”** Jesus offered an eschatological interpretation of judgment with angels separating the just and unjust. Matthew’s text records the theme of God’s judgment of the unrighteous again, word for word, “cast them into the furnace of fire. . .” (13:42; 50). JST changed it a bit as we see in the footnotes.

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# THE PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLDER

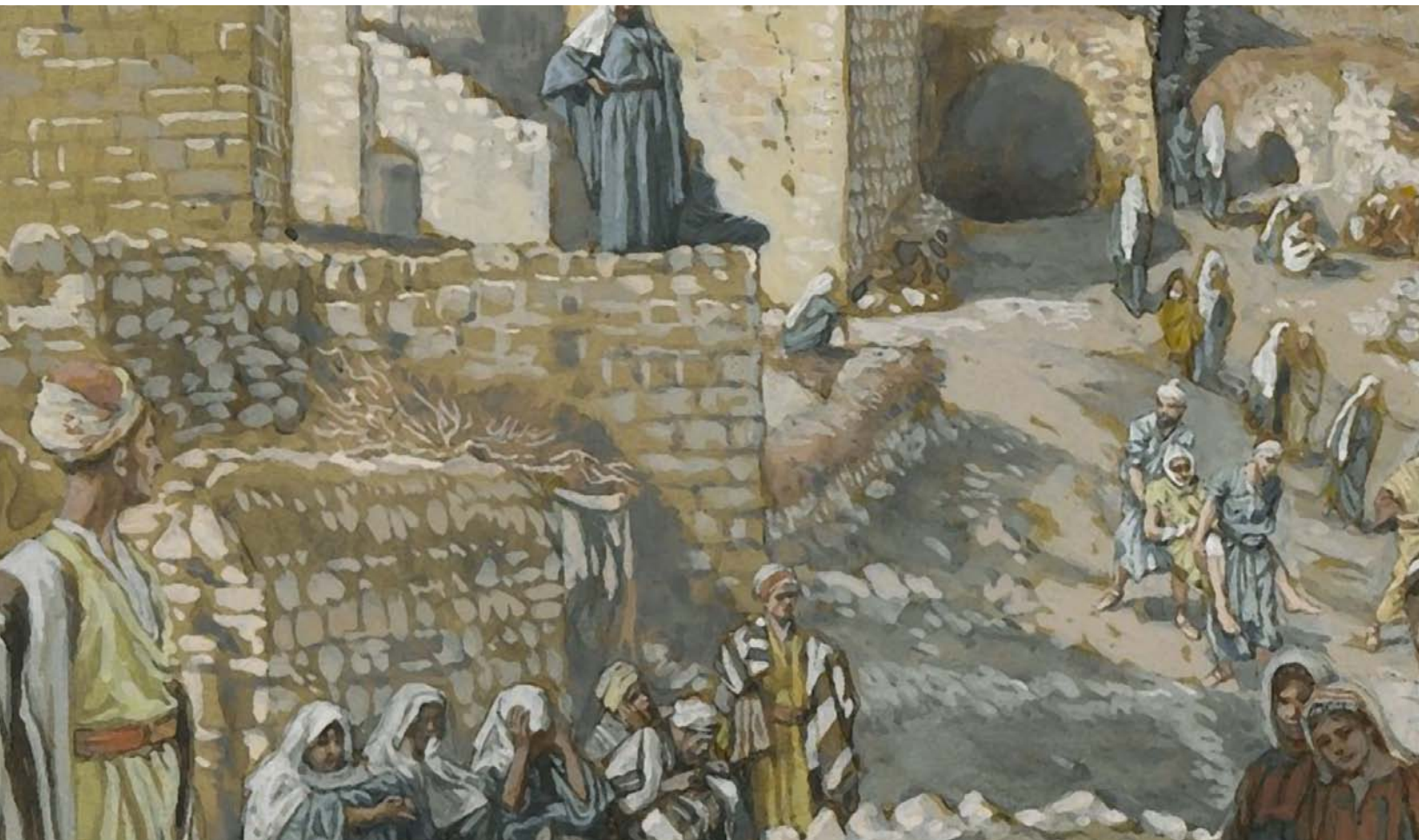
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Matthew 13:52

**Matthew 13:52** In the Jewish world, scribes were scholar teachers who interpreted the Torah. Jesus called for a new type of scribe, “which is instructed into the kingdom of heaven.” These new scribes, who have been taught by Jesus (which included Matthew himself), would need to go through the traditions, the learnings, the scriptures and separate out, or find new things in light of the Gospel. Everything takes on a new light through understanding Christ’s Plan of Salvation. “At its heart the gospel consists of ‘new things,’ and that newness must never be underestimated. But for Matthew, these ‘new things’ presuppose and are fundamentally loyal to the ‘old things.’”<sup>29</sup> Matthew’s Gospel is an example of a new scribe who ties the OT and the NT together.

In 1835, the Prophet Joseph summarized his message to the Elders by repeating this parable and then said:

For the works of this example, see the Book of Mormon coming forth out of the treasure of the heart. Also the covenants given to the Latter-day Saints, also the translation of the Bible—thus bringing forth out of the heart things new and old, thus answering to three measures of meal undergoing the purifying touch by a revelation of Jesus Christ, and the ministering of angels, who have already commenced this work in the last days, which will answer to the leaven which leavened the whole lump.<sup>30</sup>





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# JESUS RETURNS TO NAZARETH

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Matthew 13:53–58

Similar to Luke’s record of Jesus’ visit to his little hometown of Nazareth, the locals do not appreciate him as anyone different than they anticipated—the son of Joseph the “builder/*tektonos*” (ISV). Jesus’ family is mentioned here and in Mark 6:3, both mentioning at least six other siblings (as the daughters are not numbered—which suggests there were several). For the people of Nazareth, their rejection of Jesus came at the tragic cost that they were not able to receive his miraculous healings, “because of their unbelief.”

*Header Image: The Exhortation to the Apostles by James Tissot.*

*Below: He Went Through the Villages on the Way to Jerusalem by James Tissot.*



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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Welch, Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communication, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Understanding that Jesus came almost a year after His resurrection is seen by comparing two editorial statements by Mormon: The great storm at Jesus' death came "in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month on the fourth day" and Jesus appeared "at the ending of the thirty and fourth year" (3 Nephi 8:5; 10:18–19).

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Fichtner, *Many Things in Parables: Reflections for Life* (New York: Alba House, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint, 1980), vol. 5. 261. This is taken from the prophet's Journal, kept by Willard Richards, Jan. 29, 1843.

<sup>5</sup> Kent Brown, Eric Huntsman, *Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary: The Testimony of Luke—A New Rendition* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 392.

<sup>6</sup> As described in an earlier week, early Christian historians recorded that Mark recorded Peter's Gospel.

<sup>7</sup> David Huggins, "No Till: How Farmers are Saving the Soil by Parking their Plows," *Scientific American* (July, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> The early Christian father, Cyril of Alexandria, saw the "birds" as wicked spirits: "Let us look, as from a broader perspective, at what it means to be on the road. In a way, every road is hardened and foolish on account of the fat that it lies beneath everyone's feet. No kind of seed finds there enough depth of soil for a covering. Instead, it lies on the surface and is ready to be snatched up by the birds that come by. Therefore those who have in themselves a mind hardened and, as it were packed tight do not receive the divine seed but become a well-trodden way for the unclean spirits. These are what is here meant by 'the bird of the heaven.' But 'heaven' we understand to mean this air, in which the spirits of wickedness move about, by whom, again, the good seed is snatched up and destroyed. Then what are those upon the rock? They are those people who do not take much cares of the faith they have in themselves. They have not set their minds to understand the touchstone of the mystery. The reverence these people have toward God is shallow and rootless. It is in times of ease and fair weather that they practice Christianity, when it involves none of the painful trials of winter. They will not preserve their faith in this way, if in times of tumultuous persecution their soul is not prepared for the struggle."

<sup>9</sup> Ten of the citations refer to "fulfilling" the spoken words of the prophet, and twice to what is "written" by the prophet. As mentioned earlier, fourteen represents "David/DVD" in Hebrew orthography, to witness that Jesus was the chosen son of David and the Promised Messiah. The 14 examples are Matthew 1:22; 2:5, 15, 17, 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17a, 12:17; 13:14a, 35, 21:4; 26:56; 27:9a.

<sup>10</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, *General Conference*, "The Parable of the Sower," April 2015.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting Catholic Arch Bishop, Charles J. Chaput, "The Great Charter at 800."

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 2:264–267.

<sup>13</sup> *New Testament Institute Manual*, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1976), 96–102.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 4:451.

- <sup>16</sup> David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Belief: a reference guide to more than 700 topics discussed by the Early Church Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 496–497.
- <sup>17</sup> Bercot, *Early Christian Belief*, 495. You can see the change in thought from approximately AD 195, when Clement of Alexandria described the seed as Christ’s salvation, to AD 390, when the *Apostolic Confessions* describe the parable: “The Lord has taught us that the word is like ‘a grain of mustard seed,’ which is of a fiery nature. If anyone uses it unskillfully, he will find it bitter. For in the mystical points, we should not be rash, but cautious.”
- <sup>18</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 2:268.
- <sup>19</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 3:389. Also see similarities with Daniel 4:21; Psalms 103:12; Ezekiel 17:22–24.
- <sup>20</sup> Brown, *Luke*, 667.
- <sup>21</sup> Kent Jackson, *Joseph Smith’s Commentary on the Bible*, 97
- <sup>22</sup> Andrew F. Ehat, and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 13.
- <sup>23</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet*, 101.
- <sup>24</sup> David Matz, *Daily Life of the Ancient Romans* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 28. *The European Magazine, and London Review*, 1813, Volumes 63–64. Other sources have the value of the pearl at different levels, but all over the equivalent of a billion dollars now.
- <sup>25</sup> Bercot, *Early Christian Belief*, 495–7.
- <sup>26</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 2:272.
- <sup>27</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables, McMaster New Testament Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 119.
- <sup>28</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of The Church*, 2:272.
- <sup>29</sup> Longenecker, *Jesus’ Parables*, 121.
- <sup>30</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet*, 102.