UNDERSTANDING THE PARABLES

WEEK 1 | The Kingdom, the Sower, and the Way We Hear

Before we ask what a parable means for our lives, we need to understand what Jesus was revealing about His Kingdom.

This guide follows the teaching and also stands on its own. Read the Scripture passages in your Bible as you work through each section.

1 THE STORY DID NOT END IN EXILE

Israel experienced exile because of covenant unfaithfulness, but the prophets announced that God would restore His people. The return from Babylon was real, yet the prophetic story pointed beyond that return to deeper renewal.

JEREMIAH Return to the land (29:10–14; 30:3); a new covenant and forgiven sins (31:31–34); a righteous Davidic King (23:5–6; 33:14–16).

ISAIAH Comfort and restoration (40:1–5; 52:7–10); a righteous King filled with the Spirit (9:6–7; 11:1–5); the Spirit poured out (44:3–5); salvation for the nations (49:6); the suffering servant (52:13–53:12); new creation (65:17–25).

EZEKIEL God gathers and cleanses His people, gives a new heart and His Spirit (36:24–27); a Davidic shepherd (34:23–24); life from death (37:1–14); His presence dwelling among them (37:26–28; 43:1–7).

DANIEL An everlasting Kingdom (2:44–45); the Son of Man receives dominion (7:13–14); the saints share in the Kingdom (7:18, 27); sin dealt with and righteousness established (9:24); resurrection (12:1–3).

Ezra and Nehemiah record the return and rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem. Yet covenant unfaithfulness remains, and Scripture does not narrate the visible return of God's glory to the Second Temple in the way Ezekiel describes.

2 JESUS ANNOUNCES THE PROMISED KINGDOM

John the Baptist prepares the way for the Lord (Mark 1:2–4; Isaiah 40:3). He baptizes at the Jordan, where Israel once entered the promised land. At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit descends and the Father identifies Him as His beloved Son (Mark 1:9–11).

READ MARK 1:14–15. Jesus announces that the time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand. He calls people to repent and believe the Gospel.

The Gospel of God is the good news that God is fulfilling His promises through Jesus Christ.

3 WHAT IS A PARABLE?



Parables are not merely moral stories. In Mark 4, they reveal the surprising arrival of God's Kingdom and expose different responses to Jesus.

4 THE SOWER AND THE SOILS | MARK 4:1–20

Jesus tells a story about seed falling on four kinds of ground. The seed is the word, the message Jesus proclaims about the Kingdom (Mark 4:14; compare Matthew 13:19). The soils picture different responses to hearing it.

PATH The word is heard, but Satan takes it away (4:15).

ROCKY GROUND The word is received with joy but has no lasting root when trouble or persecution comes (4:16–17).

THORNS Worries, riches, and other desires choke the word (4:18–19).

GOOD SOIL People hear, accept, and bear fruit (4:20).

Possible illustrations: resistant religious leaders, followers who abandon Jesus when following becomes difficult, and the rich young ruler. These are illustrations, not people Jesus explicitly identifies as the soils.

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5 WHY DOES JESUS SPEAK IN PARABLES? | MARK 4:10–12

After the crowd hears the parable, those around Jesus with the Twelve ask Him about it. Jesus says that the mystery of the Kingdom has been given to them, while those outside hear in parables.

Jesus quotes Isaiah 6:9–10. Isaiah spoke to a people whose hearts had become hardened. The quotation carries a serious warning: parables both reveal God's Kingdom and, for resistant hearers, become an occasion of judgment and concealment.

In Mark 3, some religious leaders reject Jesus and even attribute His work to Satan (3:6, 22). The problem is not simply missing information. Their response to what they see and hear matters.

The people who remained with Jesus asked for understanding, even though they did not yet understand everything.

6 THE LAMP AND THE MEASURE | MARK 4:21–25

Jesus speaks of a lamp meant to be placed on a stand and of what is hidden coming to light. In the context of Mark 4, this fits the unveiling of the Kingdom mystery: God is fulfilling His promises through Jesus in unexpected ways.

Then Jesus says to pay attention to what we hear. Those who receive what is revealed are given more; those who reject it risk losing even what they seem to have. God gives understanding, and Jesus calls listeners to hear and respond.

John 1:4–5 describes Jesus as the light that darkness cannot overcome. John 1:10–11 also says that many did not recognize or receive Him. This is a supporting connection, not an explicit explanation of the lamp in Mark 4.

7 THE KINGDOM GROWS | MARK 4:26–29

Read the parable of the growing seed. The farmer scatters seed and goes about his days, while the seed grows in ways he does not fully understand. The Kingdom is at work even when its growth is not immediately visible or under human control.

8 WHY START THE SERIES HERE?

Jesus is announcing that God's Kingdom has arrived. He is fulfilling what the prophets promised, but in ways many people did not expect. If we treat the parables as nothing more than moral lessons, we may miss what Jesus is revealing about His Kingdom.

People can hear what God is doing and still miss it. How we hear matters.

DISCUSSION AND PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Which promise from the prophets helps you better understand Jesus' announcement in Mark 1:15?

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2. What is the difference between hearing the word and receiving it?

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3. Why did some people seek further understanding while others resisted Jesus?

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4. What could make us miss what Jesus is revealing about His Kingdom today?

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SCRIPTURE READING FOR THIS WEEK

Mark 1:1–15 • Mark 3:1–35 • Mark 4:1–29 • Isaiah 6:9–10 • Matthew 13:44–46

As you read, ask: What is Jesus revealing about the Kingdom? How do people respond?