

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE GROUND IN  
THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER  
AND THE SEED

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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose of Paper

The purpose of this paper has two parts. First the parable will show why some people hear the Word and do not bear fruit, while others hear the Word and do. Second this paper will show that today's ministry leadership can use the information in the parable to help people correct the aspects of their lives which prevent them from bearing fruit.

#### Background of the Problem

I chose this topic after reading an article by Kenneth Copeland. The article was on The Parable of the Sower and the Seed. The parable showed that there was a problem with various people bearing fruit but offered no solutions to the problem. As I read the article it sparked an interest in me. What are the characteristics of good ground? I went to the Word, Matthew chapter 13, and read the parable, but was not able to find out what constituted good ground. Since I am interested in bearing fruit in my life I studied the parable very closely. I not only found the characteristics of good ground, but also the characteristics of poor ground. The parable was rich in detail as to why some people do and some people do not bear fruit. I could now apply the Word in my life and see consistent fruit. I could now, I realized, teach these principles to others and help them bear fruit.

#### Definition of Terms

The term "bear fruit", refers to the results of applying the Word.

If people apply the principles properly they get the results, the fruit.

### Objectives

I will show that there are three characteristics of the people who do not bear fruit, and the opposite characteristics of the people who do bear fruit.

The parable is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. I will compare the three records to get the fullest meaning from the parable. I will show word studies which I did on key words in the parable. I will also relate some personal experiences, but I know that after the reader finishes this paper he will be able to relate several experiences of his own.

Chapter Two  
BIBLICAL STUDY

Introductory Remarks

The parable of the Sower and the Seed is recorded in three Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. The parable occurred at a different time in Luke. The parable was first spoken to the multitudes from the courtyard of a home, as recorded in Luke.<sup>1</sup> Jesus later gave the parable again but this time from a boat in the Sea of Galilee, as recorded in Matthew and Mark. Matthew and Mark are so similar in wording that I will use only Matthew and Luke to illustrate the parable.

There are several words which are different in the two accounts noted in this study. For example in Matthew 13:5 the seed is sown on "stony places", while in Luke 8:6 the seed is sown on "a rock". The Greek word in Matthew is petrodees, which refers to small rocks in an area. In Luke the Greek word is petra, which refers to a large rock. The description of good ground in Luke uses the words "honest and good", "keep it" and "patience", while the record in Matthew does not. There are several other differences which are more subtle, but these will be covered later in this chapter.

The parable was spoken to the multitudes. In both instances Jesus gave the interpretation to his disciples, the twelve plus all of the rest who faithfully followed him. After he had spoken to the

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<sup>1</sup>The Way International, Preliminary research presented at "Sound Out '84" Biblical Research Seminar, January 1984, p.5.

multitudes, the disciples took him aside and asked him what the parable meant. Just before Jesus gave them the interpretation, he said, in Matthew 13:11 "it is given unto you to know [ginosko-to know experientially or in a personal and true relationship]<sup>2</sup> the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven". He contrasted the disciples to the rest of the people, in verse 15, "For this peoples heart is waxed gross [dull, unfeeling]<sup>3</sup>, and their ears are dull [heavy, stupid]<sup>4</sup> of hearing..... lest at any time they should.....understand with their heart". The Greek word for understand is sunieeme. Of the 26 uses of the word sunieeme in the New Testament, 8 are used in the context of ears that cannot hear or hearts that are waxed gross. This gives us some understanding of what prevents sunieeme. Kittel's defines sunieeme as "to perceive" or "to accept something by hearing and to follow it".<sup>5</sup> The word sunieeme can be broken down into sun (with) and hiemi (send). Send being an action verb implies action in the word sunieeme. Thus sunieeme carries with it action or the possibility of action on something heard with ears that hear and a heart that is not dull or un feeling.

Ears that are dull of hearing and a heart that is waxed gross are not characteristic of someone who is hungry for truth, the Word of God. This hunger and this action (from the word sunieeme) will be

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<sup>2</sup>Peter J. Wade, That Ye May Know (New Knoxville, Ohio: The American Christian Press) p.5.

<sup>3</sup>Harold K. Moulton, The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), s.v. "pachuno".

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., s.v. "Bareus"

<sup>5</sup>Gerhard Kittle and Gerhard, eds. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. 10 vols., trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964 - 76) s.v. "sunieeme" p.888.

key elements in the Parable of the Sower and the Seed.

### The Sower

The parable starts in Matthew 13:3 "Behold, a sower went forth to sow". A sower, when he goes forth to sow, expects to get results. In the culture at that time, the man who wanted to grow a crop from seed would go into his field and scatter seed everywhere. He does this in full expectation of growing that which he is sowing. In the parable the sower sows seed. In the interpretation the sower sows the Word logos.

### By the Wayside

Matthew 13:19:

When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

Luke 8:12:

Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

This man heard the Word. In all four types of soil spoken of in the parable, in all three Gospels the word used for heareth, hear or heard is the word akouo. This man heard the Word as well as the man spoken of as good ground. It says in Matthew that the Word was "sown in [en] his heart". In Luke it says the Word was taken "out [apo] of their hearts". The word for "heart" is kardias, which is a figure of speech catachresis, and means the inner most part of the mind.<sup>6</sup> The Word was sown en (into) his hardias, but was taken from the apo (surface) of his kardias. This means he did not keep the Word en his heart. The

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<sup>6</sup>Victor Paul Wierwille,. The New Dynamic Church (New Knoxville, Ohio: American Christian Press, 1972) p.27.

significance of this will be seen in the section under good ground where the Word was kept.

In Matthew it says he "heareth" the Word and "understandeth it not". The word for "understandeth" is the word sunieeme. He was not "dull of hearing" because the Word got, en, into his heart. But his heart was "waxed gross" therefore he did not act on the Word.

James 1:22 - 24:

But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

For if any be a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straight way forgetteth what manner of man he was.

Because the man, by the wayside, did not act upon (was not a doer) what he had heard, he lost it; "then cometh the wicked one and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart".

#### Stony Places

The second type of ground is recorded in Matthew 13:5 and 6, and Luke 8:6.

Matthew 13:5 and 6:

Some fell upon stony places where they had not much earth: and forth with they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched: and because they had no root, they withered away.

Luke 8:6:

and some fell upon a rock: and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

The interpretation is in Matthew 13:20 and 21 and Luke 8:13.

Matthew 13:20 and 21:

But he that receiveth the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receive it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

Luke 8:13:

They on the rock are they which, when they hear, receive the word with joy: and these have no root, which for a while believe,

and in time of temptation fall away

This section of the parable has several descriptive words. First of all "stony places" and "on a rock" are similar, although not identical. They both depict a lack of depth of soil. Shallow soil is interpreted "hath he not root in himself" in Matthew. When the seed is sown in the shallow soil there is sufficient soil to sustain growth for a short period of time, until the root system expands.... When the root system expands, the plant requires more water and nutriments. Because the soil is shallow it can not supply the necessary water and nutriments, nor enable the roots to deepen. Then the sun scorches the plant and causes it to wither. The word "root" is riza. It most frequently is used when referring to an actual tree. The root system of a tree not only supplies water and nutriments but it also supplies physical support. It holds the tree in place during heavy winds. Deep roots will supply moisture during drought periods and sturdy support on very windy days.

The man in the parable has "not root in himself". He has no support internally. He has no staying power. He "in time of temptation [trial-when he is tried] falls away" (Falls away means to leave-depart, same word used in I Timothy 4:1 "some shall depart from the faith"). He is tried (tempted) with "tribulation or persection" because of the Word. Tribulation is the word thlipsis which means mental pressure.<sup>7</sup> Persecution is the word diogmas which means pursuit.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>E. W. Bullinger, A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) s.v. "Thlipsis".

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, s.v. "diogmas"

The word used for "offended", in Matthew, is very descriptive, it is the Greek word Scandalizo, from which we get the English word scandalized. When a little pressure comes along this guy splits. The words "dureth for a while" in Matthew are the word proskairos: it means temporary.<sup>9</sup> It doesn't mean endurance, it's more on the order of hanging around. Endurance is not a characteristic of this guy's life. He has no root in himself.

An interesting point about this type of soil or person is that at first he is hot. When he is witnessed to he "anon with joy receiveth it". The word for "joy" is the word kara. It's used in Matthew 2:10 to describe how the wise men felt when they saw the star over Bethlehem. But the joy does not last because it is temporary emotion. The last word I will describe in this section is the word "withereth". It is the same word used to describe "the withered hand" and "fig tree withereth" and "fountain of her blood was dried up [withereth]". It is a descriptive word depicting what happens to the Word in this individual.

The root problem here follows the logic started in the first part of this parable. This man does take action on the Word. He has a hunger for the Word, but he does not follow through with it. He says that he will stand on the Word but his commitment is shallow. He does not follow through fore he never sees the fruit of faithfully doing the Word.

#### Among Thorns

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<sup>9</sup>H. K. Moulton, The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), s.v. "proskairos".