

THE CRISTADELPHIAN
TIDINGS
of the Kingdom of God

Vol. 72

August, 2009

No. 7

Special Issue

**Hearing the Word:
Studies on the Parable of the Sower**

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The CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS of the Kingdom of God

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The CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS of the Kingdom of God (USPS 107-060) is published monthly by The Christadelphian Tidings, 42076 Hartford Drive, Canton, MI 48187-3360. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID at San Dimas, California. POSTMASTER: Return Service Requested to The Christadelphian Tidings, P.O. Box 530696, Livonia, MI 48153-0696.

Tidings Publishing Committee: Joe Hill (Chairman), John C. Bilello, Peter A. Bilello, Steve Cheetham, Ken Curry, Clive Drepaul, Mark Giordano, Tony Isaacs, Ted Sleeper, Phil Snobelen, Ken Sommerville, Jeff Wallace.

The Tidings is published on the 25th of the month for the month following. Items for publication must be received by the 10th of the month. Correspondence to the Editor: George Booker, 2500 Berwyn Circle, Austin, TX 78745-3559. E-mail: editor@tidings.org. Administrator: Rose Madge: rm_madge@yahoo.com. Publication of articles does not presume editorial endorsement except on matters of fundamental doctrine as set forth in the BASF. Copyright 2009, Tidings Publishing Committee. Reproduction in whole, or in part, without permission is prohibited.

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Subscriptions

United States: \$24, Canada: \$32. Checks payable to *The Tidings* and sent to P.O. Box 530696, Livonia, MI 48153-0696. Tax-deductible donations may be sent to the same address. Changes of address and other subscription matters to Rose Madge at the above address or by e-mail at rm_madge@yahoo.com. **Australia: \$39.** Mail checks to Fran Caudery, 35 Jeffery Street, Blackburn, VIC 3130. **New Zealand: \$39.** Mail checks to John Beer, P.O. Box 559, Te Awamutu 3840. **South Africa: R 140.** Mail checks to Anthony Oosthuizen, P.O. Box 50357, Durban 4062. **United Kingdom: £14.** Mail checks to Malcolm Cross, Grange Farm, East Cottingwith, York YO42 4TB.

Hearing the Word

Introduction

This special issue of the *Tidings* presents six studies on the Parable of the Sower. The studies look at the details of the parable from six different perspectives. In this way, we begin to understand the parable's richness. We discover that it is not just black-and-white words on a two-dimensional page, but a living multi-faceted source of insight into the mysteries of God's kingdom and our role in it.

Moreover, I hope the six perspectives are themselves interesting. They each provide a way of studying the gospels in general. Bro. Carter writes, "The extended explanation which [Jesus] gave, however, does not discourage the student from looking at details and seeking for meanings conformable to the general lesson of the parable and in harmony with the plain teaching of the word of God" (89). By following Bro. Carter's exhortation to study the details and seek for additional meanings of the Parable of the Sower, we gain understanding not only of this parable, but also of methods that can be used to study the rest of the gospels.

Think of the studies as six paths leading up to the same mountain peak, each path approaching the peak from a different starting point, each with its own terrain, its own features, its own vistas, its own fields of discovery. Or think of the studies as six viewing angles, each providing a distinct perspective from which to consider the Parable of the Sower at their center.

In short, Jesus' Parable of the Sower is truly multidimensional. No one meaning is sufficient by itself. All the meanings shed light on different aspects of the kingdom. Together, they show the greatness of our Lord, the depth of his spiritual insights and his genius as a teacher. In this regard, I pray that these studies might give a small indication of the wonders of inspiration. Scripture is indeed a never-ending source of spiritual instruction. These studies have helped me to appreciate more than ever the beauty of God's Word, and I hope the same will be true for you.

Tools and Acknowledgements

There is a critical tool used throughout these studies. It is a table of gospel parallels, or harmony of the gospels, which shows the various accounts in parallel columns so the similarities and differences can be easily seen. For convenient reference, the insert in the center pages has the three parallel records for the Parable of the Sower, Jesus' Reason for Parables, and the Interpretation of the Sower.

Occasionally, connections between passages are hard to see in the English translations; in these cases, to avoid the need to understand Hebrew or Greek, I put Strong's numbers in angle brackets <...>, together with the Hebrew or Greek words for the first usage in a given context. Throughout the studies, I have included extensive lists of verses that can be used for more detailed investigation. These can be ignored on first reading. Two parallel lines || in verse lists indicate parallel passages.

As the References make plain, these studies have benefited from the writings of those in the Truth (like Brothers Barling, Bilello, Carter, Sargent, and Whittaker) as well as the writings of scholars (like Professors Bowker, Cope, Evans, Farrer, Gerhardsson, Gertner, Goulder, and Tolbert). In seeking help from these latter sources we have done our best to sift wheat from chaff so we can learn as much as possible from God's Word.

There are two versions of this special issue: the printed one and a downloadable version available online at www.tidings.org. The online version has extensive endnotes, including quotations from the scholarly literature.

This special issue has been improved significantly by the helpful comments of Sisters Ethel Archard and Kathy Hill, both faithful servants in the Lord.

(1) The Parable of the Sower

This first study takes a holistic approach to the parable, emphasizing the similarities of the parallel records to determine the core of its message. Combining the three gospel accounts into a single view encourages us to grasp the big picture.

“The story of the sower was one of the simplest and most effective of all that Jesus told. Its meaning should have been tolerably obvious to all who heard. Nevertheless his immediate disciples later insisted on an explanation, so Jesus supplied this point by point” (Whittaker: 262). “In his explanation of the sower...Jesus explained that the seed is the word (Mark 4:14) and the four kinds of soil repre-

sented four different kinds of people. The fowls that devoured the seed were ‘the wicked one’ (Matt 13:19), Satan (Mark 4:15), the devil (Luke 8:12). The sun which scorched the shallow-rooted plant growing on a layer of rock covered by only a thin covering of soil, was tribulation, affliction and persecution. The thorns were the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things. The good ground represented the honest and good of heart who hear the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Carter: 88-89).

Hearing the Word

The key message of the parable concerns the responses of those who hear the word preached to them. Throughout Mark 4 there is a repeated emphasis on “hearing” and especially “hearing the word”:

“Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow... He that hath ears to hear, let him hear... That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand ... And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness... And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word... And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit... If any man have ears to hear, let him hear... Take heed what ye hear... and unto you that hear shall more be given... And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it.”

A Parable of Soils

The essence of the parable is the differences in the kinds of soils, which represent the different responses to the gospel.

“What is revealed by the sower’s work is the soil’s productiveness. Not all soil provides the conditions suitable for plant-growth, and this is made clear by results when the seed has been scattered upon it. It might be said, therefore, that the seed tests the soil, or, to transfer this to the explanation of the parable, the preaching of the gospel tests and reveals the suitability of men and women for divine purposes... With Christ’s explanation before us, the parable should be thought of as a parable of soils, equally or perhaps more than a parable of the Sower, although the figure of the Sower has a peculiar significance” (Carter: 90-91).

“It is as much a parable of soils as of sowing (in Mark the emphasis switches from one to the other) for the outcome depends on where the seed falls” (Whittaker: 262).

“The parable of the sower details the nature of the calling of our Lord and the range of response to it by mankind... The soil is critical... Once the seed is planted everything depends on the quality of the soil... The soil that receives the seed of the word is the ‘heart and mind’ of the recipient. This soil must be fertile and remain fruitful throughout our lives” (Bilello: 58, 60, his underlining).

The importance of the various kinds of soil is made apparent by the repetition throughout Mark 4 of the Greek word *ge* <1093>, translated “land”, “earth”, and “ground” (Mark 4:1, 5, 8, 20, 26, 28, 31; and parallels).

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear

Jesus closes the parable with the saying: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 4:9 || Matt 13:9 || Luke 8:8). Such a challenge no doubt put those who heard Jesus on edge. It might be what prompted the disciples to ask him for an explanation, not only of why he was teaching in parables, but also the meaning of the Parable of the Sower. It indicates that the Parable of the Sower is fundamental, not only to Jesus’ original audience, but to any audience who hears the gospel story. It alerts the hearer that the Parable of the Sower is important and needs to be taken seriously.

This phrase has a more specific meaning as well. It was used in Jewish literature to ask for agreement to an interpretation of a Bible passage.¹ In further support of this idea, when the phrase occurs in the New Testament, it is found in close proximity to quotations from the Old Testament:

- Mark 4:9 || Matt 13:9 || Luke 8:8. Isaiah 6:9,10 is paraphrased in Mark 4:12 and is quoted in toto in Matt 13:14, 15 (see Study 3: Old Testament Images).
- Mark 4:23. Jeremiah 4:3 on not sowing among thorns (compare Hos 10:12, Hebrew and Greek) is alluded to in Mark 4:21, 22 (see Study 3).
- Mark 7:16. Isaiah 29:13 on the traditions of men is quoted in Mark 7:6, 7.
- Matt 11:15. Malachi 3:1 (see also Exod 23:20; Isa 40:3) is quoted in Matt 11:10 and Mal 4:5, 6 is alluded to in Matt 11:14, both with reference to John the Baptist.
- Matt 13:43. The beginning of the verse, “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”, alludes to Dan 12:3. In addition, Psa 78:2 is cited in Matt 13:35 with reference to Jesus teaching in parables.
- Luke 14:35. Luke 14:34, 35 is about salt that has lost its saltiness, perhaps with reference to the salt put on sacrifices (Lev 2:13; Ezek 43:24).

So Jesus’ comment indicates that the Parable of the Sower is based on Old Testament scriptures, and that his hearers ought to be able to recognize the echoes of those scriptures and agree to Jesus’ use of them. The current set of studies attempts to identify some of the most important connections between the Parable of the Sower and the Old Testament scriptures underlying it.

(2) Three Accounts, Three Perspectives

Our second approach focuses on the differences between the three accounts, and links those differences to each gospel writer’s general patterns and purposes.

Bro. Whittaker observes, “Gospel Variations: It is interesting, and not unprofitable, to compare the main differences in the reporting of the parable by the three synoptists” (262). These differences are usually in line with the distinct styles and rhetorical purposes of the divinely inspired writers. Bro. Sargent writes: “Why

does Mark...give the fullest of the three accounts of the Parable of the Sower?... The difference is only partly accounted for by greater fullness in style. Each writer uses parables in a different way” (60).

Mark: The Basic Account

It is probable that Mark's gospel was the first to be written down. Once the apostles were no longer alive, it became important for there to be a written record of the ministry of Jesus, so God inspired Mark to create one. Mark had heard Peter recount the events over and over again in his own home (Acts 12:12). The Spirit of truth moved Mark to write these in a way that would accomplish God's purpose. Here we look at seven aspects of Mark's account that set it apart from Matthew and Luke.

(1) **Hearken.** Bro. Sargent notes, “In Mark alone the story is prefaced by the imperative ‘Hearken!’ recalling the summons, ‘Hear, O Israel!’ of Deut. 6:4 and the command ‘to him shall ye hearken’ of Deut. 18:15” (61). Study 5: Jesus and the Shema explores the first of these connections.

(2) **The disciples ask Jesus about the parables in private** (Mark 4:10). By doing so, they give Jesus an opportunity to explain why he was teaching in parables. They also give Mark an opportunity to repeat the Parable of the Sower with its interpretation. This repetition emphasizes the parable's importance to the audience hearing the gospel being performed. Mark uses this rhetorical device several times in his gospel to give Jesus a platform for repeating important teachings and for providing additional explanations (7:17; 9:28; 10:10; 13:3, 4).

(3) **Why parables?** “And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them” (Mark 4:11, 12). The gift is wonderful for those to whom it is given, but what about “them that are without”? It seems that Jesus taught in parables explicitly to prevent them from understanding, converting, and being forgiven of their sins.

Bro. Whittaker faces this problem head on:

“Hiding Truth: The Lord's other reason [besides revealing truth about the kingdom] for this reliance on parables is hardly what one would expect. It is, according to Mark and Luke, “*in order that* seeing they may see and *not* perceive; and hearing they may hear and *not* understand; *lest* at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven (Mk 4:12).

“The meaning of this saying appears to be so stringent that some have sought an alternative, less drastic, interpretation. It is true that the prophets of the Lord were often described as taking dramatic action against their contemporaries when actually they were merely pronouncing with divine authority the fate that God was to bring on them.

“In similar fashion, it has been suggested, Jesus foretold the *outcome* of his use of parables—that the religious leaders who should have been the first

to accept him would be blinded and confused by them, and left without the new life they as much as any were in need of.

“However, careful attention to the words seems to require the harder meaning, that by his parables Jesus *aimed* at their confusion. After all, if he knew that the consequences of using these parables would be their blindness, then in his systematic reliance on this medium he was ensuring their downfall. Is that any difference worth mentioning?...He neither sought nor expected the conversion of the mass of the nation. Parables help to draw the line of demarcation the more clearly. As Matthew Henry concisely put it: ‘A parable is a shell that keeps good fruit for the diligent, but keeps it *from* the slothful’ ” (265-266; his emphasis).

(4) Jesus uses the Targum to link healing and forgiveness. Concerning Mark 4:10-13, Bro. Sargent writes: “Mark’s paraphrase of Isa 6:9-10...corresponds with the Targum rather than the Hebrew or Septuagint texts” (64). The phrase “lest at any time they should be converted, *and their sins should be forgiven them*” (Mark 4:12) echoes “lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and repent *and it be forgiven them*” (Isa 6:10, Targum). In contrast, the Hebrew and Greek versions refer to conversion and healing: “lest they...convert, and be healed” (Hebrew) and “lest they...be converted, and I should heal them” (LXX). The Targum’s interpretative Aramaic translation is based on the strong relationship between healing and forgiveness of sins. For example:

- “And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity” (Isa 33:24).
- “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases” (Psa 103:2, 3).
- “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). The Greek word translated “save” <4982 *sozo*> is also translated “make whole” and “heal” (Mark 5:28, 34 || Matt 9:21, 22 || Luke 8:48; Mark 5:23 || Luke 8:50; Mark 6:56; Luke 8:36; Mark 10:52; Luke 17:19; Acts 4:9 referring to 3:1-11; and 14:9). In each of these incidents, people are rescued from their illnesses.
- “When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee...Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house” (Mark 2:5, 9-11 || Matt 9:2, 5, 6 || Luke 5:20, 23, 24). In this episode, Jesus “heals” the man spiritually by forgiving his sins, then he heals him physically as evidence that he has authority to forgive sins.
- “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17 || Matt 9:12, 13 || Luke 5:31, 32).

By citing the Targum, Jesus makes it clear what the stakes are when it comes to hearing his word: our response to Jesus determines whether we will be forgiven and healed, or not.

(5) **Jesus expects his disciples to know.** “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?” (Mark 4:13). The two words for “know” here are different, and the difference is significant. The first word, *oida* <1492>, refers to fullness of knowledge, to know perfectly, to know instinctively, to know at first sight; the second, *ginosko* <1097>, refers to beginning to know, getting to know, becoming familiar with, to know from experience or learning (see, for example, John 8:55; 13:7). Jesus was disappointed that his disciples did not understand the Parable of the Sower right away. Its meaning should have been obvious to them. It should not have required them to learn what it meant. They should have understood it immediately, instinctively.

Jesus’ second question indicates that if his disciples, including us, cannot understand the Parable of the Sower, we have little hope of understanding the rest of the parables, which contain the mysteries of the kingdom. The current studies highlight the many connections to important OT passages. Jesus committed these to memory in preparation for his ministry. He meditated on them and applied them throughout his life. He expects his disciples to follow his example, and is disappointed when they don’t.

(6) **Satan.** It is interesting that the three gospel writers use three different terms for the enemy: Mark uses “Satan” (4:15), Matthew “the wicked one” (13:19), and Luke “the devil” (8:12).

(7) **Immediately.** One of Mark’s favorite words is “immediately” <2112 *eutheos*> from <2117 *euthus*> which also means “immediately” sometimes. Mark uses these two words 42 times in his gospel, compared to 18 times in Matthew and 8+9 times in Luke+Acts. In the Parable of the Sower, Mark and Matthew record that some of the seed fell on stony ground “and *immediately* <2112> / *forthwith* <2112> it sprang up” (Mark 4:5 || Matt 13:5). Jesus says this means that when they had heard the word, they “*immediately* <2112> / *anon* <2117> received it with gladness” but when affliction or persecution arises, “*immediately* <2112> / *by and by* <2117> they are offended” (Mark 4:16, 17 || Matt 13:20, 21). In addition to these three occurrences, Mark has another one in his version of the Interpretation: when those by the wayside have heard the word, “Satan cometh *immediately* <2112>, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts” (Mark 4:15). In contrast with Mark and Matthew, Luke does not use either of these words for “immediately” in his account of the Parable and its interpretation.

Matthew: The Jewish Version

There is little doubt that Matthew had a copy of Mark’s gospel and was influenced by its divinely inspired descriptions of the ministry of Jesus. Matthew’s gospel is in many ways an extended version of Mark’s gospel. As we will see in Studies 4: Matthew and the Jewish Feasts and 6: Mark through the Eyes of the Parable, God seems to have intended Mark’s gospel to be performed in a single two-hour sitting, whereas He inspired Matthew to provide a gospel of weekly readings for a whole Jewish year. Matthew’s gospel provides a different perspective from Mark’s, adding details and events suited for its purpose. The fact that Matthew was writing to Jews has had significant impact on his account. For example, he is

the only gospel writer who uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven”. Following are eight differences that make Matthew’s record of the Parable of the Sower unique (compare Goulder 1974: 364-376).

(1) The word of the kingdom. In Mark, Jesus says, “The sower soweth the word.” Matthew’s gospel adds that it is “the word *of the kingdom*” (Matt 13:19; compare v 11). The kingdom is one of Matthew’s favorite subjects: the word “kingdom” occurs 54 times in Matthew’s gospel. It occurs 12 times in Matthew 13 alone, eight times in the phrase “kingdom *of heaven*” (Matt 13:24, 31, 33, 38, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 52; parallels “kingdom *of God*” in Mark 4:26, 30).

(2) Given to those who have. Matthew puts the saying, “For whosoever hath, to him shall be *given*, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath” (Matt 13:12 || Mark 4:25), in the middle of Jesus’ reason for teaching in parables. The word “given” connects this saying to and explains the implications of the previous verse, “He answered and said unto them, Because it is *given* unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not *given*” (Matt 13:11 || Mark 4:11).

(3) In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. As pointed out above, in Mark’s gospel, Jesus alludes to the Aramaic Targum of Isaiah 6:9, 10. In contrast, Matthew gives a complete citation of these verses from the Greek Septuagint (Matt 13:14, 15). Matthew’s introduction to this quotation, “And *in them is fulfilled* the prophecy of Esaias” (Matt 13:14), is like the introductions to his other formula citations (Matt 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 21:4; 27:9, 35). Study 3: Old Testament Images discusses the influence of Isaiah’s prophecies on Matthew’s account of Jesus’ ministry, especially the significant role it plays in the Interpretation of the Sower.

(4) Jesus uses a rabbinic teaching style. In Matthew’s account, Jesus uses a formal, repetitive structure following standard teaching methods of the rabbis.²

- Matthew *gives the parable a name*, “the parable of the sower” (Matt 13:18); compare “the parable of the tares in the field” (v 36).
- In the interpretation, Matthew’s account uses *singular* nouns and verbs throughout, referring to four individual people who represent four types of responses. In contrast, Mark has all *plurals* representing groups of people, and Luke has some of each (*singulars* referring to the seed, and *plurals* referring to the people).
- In all four explanations, Matthew has the same aorist (“indefinite” simple past) tense for “**THAT** which was sown” (Diaglott, including small caps).
- Unlike Mark and Luke, Matthew consistently has a present participle for “*hearing*” the word, indicating people who are continuously hearing God’s Word and who are expected to understand it and produce fruit.³

The purpose of such a formal style is pedagogical. It makes it easier for listeners to memorize the material, in this case, the Parable of the Sower and its Interpretation. Jesus expects us to remember the parable, to meditate on it, and to obey its spiritual principles.

(5) **A special blessing for the disciples.** Mark reports Jesus' response to the disciples' question: "Unto *you* it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables" (Mark 4:11 || Luke 8:10). He also reports Jesus' mild rebuke, "And he said unto them, Know *ye* not this parable? and how then will *ye* know all parables?" (Mark 4:13). In contrast, Matthew expands the blessing and omits the rebuke: "Blessed are *your* eyes, for they see: and *your* ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto *you*, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which *ye* see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which *ye* hear, and have not heard them. Hear *ye* therefore the parable of the sower" (Matt 13:16-18). Luke also omits the rebuke.

(6) **Contrast parables.** Prof. Goulder notes that Matthew prefers black-and-white contrasts: "The Marcan parables do not present clear contrasts, indeed most of them no contrast at all... It is different with Matthew. His long parables are without exception black-and-white caricature contrasts" (1974: 54-55).⁴

Matthew has two additions that turn the Parable of the Sower into a contrast parable. First, he emphasizes the difference in understanding <4920 *sunimi*>: "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and *understandeth it not*, then cometh the wicked one... But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and *understandeth it*" (Matt 13:19, 23).⁵ Second, as mentioned above, Matthew has the extended blessing on the disciples, which is an explicit contrast to those who do not see or hear: "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing *see not*; and hearing they *hear not*, neither do they understand... But blessed are your eyes, for they *see*: and your ears, for they *hear*" (Matt 13:13, 16).

(7) **The poetry of Jesus.** The structural form of this last verse is characteristic of Matthew, who regularly captures Jesus' poetic rhythms. Prof. Goulder identifies various poetic forms, including two used in the chapters we are studying: "There are in fact a number of rhythms in the Gospels which hardly occur, or do not occur, in the OT, but which are developed out of OT, and especially prophetic, rhythms. Their essence is a certain paradoxical flavour. We may isolate the basic, most common, synoptic rhythm as a four-point paradoxical antithesis, such as we find occasionally in the prophets:

'Can the *Ethiopian* change his *skin*, or the *leopard* his *spots*?' (Jer 13:23).

'He looked for *judgement*, but behold *oppression*, for *righteousness*, but behold *a cry*' (Isa 5:7).

We shall require a name for sayings of this form, and in piety to Jeremiah I shall call them *pardics* [*pardic* is the Greek word for 'leopard']. A *pardic* is defined as a four-point antithesis which has a paradoxical element, and is sufficiently crisp. It commonly has, but does not require, 4 nouns, and a link-word, usually a verb—'change', 'looked for' in the instances I have given. About 12 Greek words is normal" (1974: 71).

Prof. Goulder identifies 50 different *pardics* in the Synoptic Gospels: 4 occurring in Mark, 44 in Matthew, and 20 in Luke (of which 14 are also in Matthew),

including the following sampling:

- “Is it lawful to *do good* on the sabbath days, or to *do evil?* to *save life*, or to *kill?* (Mark 3:4 || Luke 6:9).
- “For what shall it profit a man, if he *gain* the *whole world*, and *lose* his own *soul?*” (Mark 8:36 || Matt 16:26 || Luke 9:25).
- “The *spirit* is *willing*, but the *flesh* is *weak*” (Mark 14:38 || Matt 26:41).
- “Let not your *left hand* know what your *right hand* *doeth*” (Matt 6:3).
- “Do men gather *grapes* of *thorns*, or *figs* of *thistles*” (Matt 7:16 || Luke 6:44).
- “The *harvest* truly is *plenteous*, but the *labourers* are *few*” (Matt 9:37 || Luke 10:2).
- “Be ye therefore *wise* as *serpents*, and *harmless* as *doves*” (Matt 10:16).
- “For *many* are *called*, but *few* are *chosen*” (Matt 22:14).
- “For that which is *highly esteemed* among *men* is *abomination* in the sight of *God*” (Luke 16:15).
- “And it is easier for *heaven and earth* to *pass*, than one *tittle of the law* to *fail*” (Luke 16:17).

Related to our study of the Parable of the Sower, Jesus’ saying, “But blessed are your *eyes*, for they *see*: and your *ears*, for they *hear*” (Matt 13:16), is a parric.

After identifying several more types of poetic forms, Prof. Goulder continues, “In addition to the above rhythms, all of which are based upon a straightforward parallelism or antithesis, we may isolate a number of triple rhythms. The basis of these is formed by the use of the same root three times in a sentence, which we may call a poteric” (1974: 80)—*poteric* is the Greek word for “cup” found in Mark 10:38: “Can you *drink* of the *cup* that I *drink* of?” Mark 10:38 continues, “and be *baptized* with the *baptism* that I am *baptized* with?” making this verse a double poteric. Other examples, also double poterics, include:

- “For with what *judgment* you *judge*, ye shall be *judged*; and with what *measure* you *mete* it shall be *measured* to you” (Matt 7:2).
- “A *good* man out of the *good* treasure of the heart bringeth forth *good* things: and an *evil* man out of the *evil* treasure bringeth forth *evil* things” (Matt 12:35 || Luke 6:45).

With respect to our study, there are two poterics, one a double, in the chapters we have been studying:

- “With the *measure* you *mete*, it shall be *measured* to you” (Mark 4:24).
- “That many prophets and righteous men have desired to *see* those things which ye *see*, and have not *seen* them; and to *hear* those things which ye *hear*, and have not *heard* them” (Matt 13:17).

We usually focus on the content, the meaning of the words in Scripture. In this case, we are looking at the form, the rhythmic structure of the sayings. Jesus was a poet. By using these catchy thought-rhymes Jesus was making his teachings more memorable. If you hear the start of any of these sayings, you can easily complete the rest of the saying. This “poetic” method used by Jesus is another indication of his genius as a teacher.

(8) A second OT justification for speaking in parables. Mark ends his section on parables with a summary statement, “And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples” (Mark 4:33, 34). Matthew has a similar summary, “All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them” (Matt 13:34).⁶ Then, unlike Mark, Matthew continues with another OT quote justifying parables: “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matt 13:35). This statement is a verbatim quotation of “I will open my mouth in parables” (Psa 78:2a LXX), followed by a paraphrase of “I will utter dark sayings which have been from the beginning” (Psa 78:2b LXX). The last phrase, “from the foundation of the world”, also occurs in Matthew’s version of the Olivet prophecy: “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt 25:34; compare 1Cor 2:7; Eph 3:9; Col 1:26).

Luke: Exhortations for Everyone

It is likely that Luke had copies of the gospels of both Mark and Matthew, and that they influenced his version of Jesus’ life. God moved Luke to write his gospel from yet another perspective to suit His purpose. For example, Luke emphasizes that Jesus’ ministry continued into the ministry of the apostles and the growth of the gospel in Acts. Also, Luke’s gospel is full of colorful, life-like stories and exhortations. Following are 12 ways in which Luke’s version of the Parable of the Sower is unique (see Goulder 1994: 407-419).

(1) Emphasis on women. In Luke’s setting for the Parable of the Sower, he mentions the role women were playing in the ministry of Jesus: “And *certain women*, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, *Mary called Magdalene*, out of whom went seven devils, And *Joanna* the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and *Susanna*, and *many others*, which ministered unto him of their substance” (Luke 8:1-3). Luke is the only gospel writer to give us these details. Luke pays special attention to women throughout Luke and Acts, emphasizing their role in the ministry of Jesus and the early ecclesia.⁷

(2) Context for the Parable of the Sower. Luke connects the Parable of the Sower to its setting in the ministry of Jesus in two ways. First, the reference to Jesus speaking a parable to the people who were coming to him out of every city (Luke 8:4) and Jesus’ explanation that he spoke in parables because the disciples were given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God (v 10) both point back to the setting at the start of the chapter: “And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout *every city* and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of *the kingdom of God*: and *the twelve* were with him” (v 1). These links between the parable and its narrative context indicate that the Sower represents Jesus.

Second, unlike the other gospels, Luke puts the episode concerning Jesus’ family (Luke 8:19-21) after the parables (vv 8-18). This makes the phrase “these which *hear the word of God*” (v 21) echo the explanations of the Parable of the Sower

and the Saying about the Candle. These links illustrate that the parable and the saying describe those who were hearing Jesus' preaching of the kingdom. Luke's narrative highlights that it is their varied responses to Jesus' message that determine what kind of soil they are.

(3) **A single parable.** In Mark and Matthew the Parable of the Sower is the first in a sequence of parables. In each case, the fact that there are multiple parables is stressed: "And he taught them many things by *parables*... And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him *the parables*" (Mark 4:2, 10 RV || Matt 13:3, 10). In contrast, the Parable of the Sower stands alone in Luke's gospel. Luke highlights that it is a single parable: "he spake by a *parable*... And his disciples asked him, saying, What might *this parable* be?" (Luke 8:4, 9).

(4) **A sower went forth to sow his seed.** Luke's versions of Jesus' parables have many small details that add color to the story. For example, in Mark, Jesus says, "there went out a sower to sow" (Mark 4:3). In Matthew, Jesus says, "a sower went forth to sow" (Matt 13:3). In Luke's version, the phrase "his seed" is added to form a triple rhythm: "A *sower* went forth to *sow* his *seed*" (Luke 8:5). Bro. Whittaker observes, "'The sower went forth to sow his seed: and as he sowed... (Lk). In the Greek text the key word comes four times in ten words. It is '*his seed*' which is sown; and on this Burgon comments: 'Let ministers of Christ beware how they sow any other seed than His' " (262). Luke might have added "his seed" as a brief allusion to Jesus' Parable of the Seed Growing Secretly: "And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast *seed* into the ground" (Mark 4:26).

(5) **It was trodden under foot.** In Mark, Jesus says, "And it came to pass, as he sowed, some seed fell by the way side, and the birds came and devoured it" (Mark 4:4 RV || Matt 13:4 RV). As is his custom, Luke has an additional detail: "and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and *it was trodden under foot*, and the birds of the heaven devoured it" (Luke 8:5). There is no explanation of this addition in the Interpretation. Given the connections to Psalm 119 to be listed in Study 3: Old Testament Images, the phrase "trodden under foot" might allude back to the psalmist's, "Thou hast *trodden down* all them that err from thy statutes: for their deceit is falsehood" (Psa 119:118).

By adding such unexplained details, Luke paints more vivid pictures in the parables, but by doing so he also reduces the allegorical content. In Matthew and Mark every element in the parable is interpreted. In contrast, Luke's version, following his general pattern, has elements in the parable that have no corresponding interpretations in the explanation.

(6) **The seed is the word of God.** In Mark's account, Jesus says, "The sower soweth the word" (4:14). In Luke's account Jesus says, "The seed is *the word of God*" (Luke 8:11). Bro. Whittaker comments, "This splendid phrase is one of Luke's favourites" (262). The phrase does not occur in Matthew and it occurs only once in Mark (7:13). In contrast, Luke uses it 19 times (6+13 in Luke+Acts):

- "*The word of God* came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (Luke 3:2). "And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every *word of God*" (4:4; Matt 4:4 and Deut

8:3 have “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”). See also Luke 5:1; 8:11, 21; 11:28.

- “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake *the word of God* with boldness” (Acts 4:31). “The twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave *the word of God*, and serve tables” (6:2). “And *the word of God* increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly” (6:7). See also Acts 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7, 44, 46; 17:13; 19:20.

Bro. Whittaker suggests that by using this phrase throughout his gospel and Acts, Luke is “providing a continuation of the parable of the sower” (262). Jesus and the apostles spread the seed of the gospel in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, unto the uttermost parts of the earth (Acts 1:8).

(7) **An exhortation.** By adding certain phrases, Luke turns his version of Jesus’ Interpretation of the Sower into an exhortation:

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. 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. 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. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience” (Luke 8:11-15).

What kind of soil are we? How do we react to the Word of God? Do we reject it outright? Do we accept it only to fall away during hard times? Do we go our own way, letting the things of this life choke us? Or do we have an honest and good heart, hear the word and keep it, and with perseverance produce fruit for our heavenly Father?

(8) **Lest they should believe and be saved.** In Mark, Jesus says,

“lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them” (Mark 4:12; compare Targum of Isaiah 6:10).

Similarly, in Matthew, Jesus says,

“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 them” (Matt 13:15; compare Isa 6:10, Hebrew and Greek).

In Luke, Jesus says something similar,

“lest they should believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12).

Luke has replaced the language of Isaiah, whether from the Hebrew and Greek (as in Matthew) or from the Aramaic (as in Mark), with one of his favorite combination of ideas: *having faith* <4102 *pistis*> or *believing* <4100 *pisteuo* from 4102>, and *being saved* or *made whole* <4982 *sozo*>. Luke uses this combination of faith and salvation nine times (6+3 in Luke+Acts), whereas Matthew only has it once, and Mark three times (Luke 7:48, 50; Luke 8:48 || Mark 5:34 || Matt 9:22; Luke 8:50; Luke 17:19; Luke 18:42 || Mark 10:52; Acts 14:9; 15:11; 16:31; Mark 16:16).

Luke uses his own words to tell the Interpretation of the Sower so that it aligns with one of his favorite themes.

(9) They on the rock. In the interpretation of those on the rock, Luke's words differ from those used by Mark and Matthew:

“They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive <1209 decho-mai> the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while <2540 kairos> believe <4100 pisteuo>, and in time <2540> of temptation <3986 peirasmos> fall away <868 ahistemi>” (Luke 8:13, with words unique to Luke highlighted).

This is another example of Luke, as was his custom, telling the gospel story in his own words, using his favorite words and phrases:

- “receive the word”: Luke 8:13; Acts 8:14; 11:1; 17:11; (compare Matt 10:14).
- “a while” and “time”: 13 times in Luke and nine times in Acts; (compare five times in Mark and 10 times in Matthew).
- “believe” <4100 pisteuo> and its cognate “faith” <4102 pistis>: these occur a total of 45 times in Luke and 26 times in Acts; (compare 19 times in Mark and 17 times in Matthew). Note especially how frequently Luke uses these words in the book of Acts, with its description of the growth of the gospel.
- “temptation”: Luke 4:13; 8:13; 11:4; 22:28, 40, 46; Acts 20:19; (compare Mark 14:38; Matt 6:13; 26:41).
- “fall away”: Luke 2:37; 4:13; 8:13; 13:27; Acts 5:37, 38; 12:10; 15:38; 19:9; 22:29. Paul uses this same word in 1Tim: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart <868> from the faith” (4:1).

(10) Pleasures of this life. “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when *they* have heard, go forth, and *are choked* with cares and riches and *pleasures of this life*, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14). Luke's account differs from the others in three ways:

- The people themselves are being choked, rather than “the word” as in Mark and Matthew.
- The cares and riches phrases are shorter.
- He has added the phrase “pleasures of this life”, which is similar to a phrase in his version of the Olivet Prophecy: “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and *cares of this life*, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Luke 21:34).

(11) In an honest and good heart...with patience. “But that on the good ground are they, *which in an honest and good heart*, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with *patience* [Perseverance, Diaglott; persevering, NIV]” (Luke 8:15; compare Luke 21:19). Luke identifies the perfect kind of soil as those with an honest and good heart who persevere. Such patient endurance is an essential difference between the “good ground” people who hear the word and by keeping it are able to bring forth fruit, and the earlier types of people, each of whom had heard the word, but had failed to produce fruit because they did not endure to the end, whether because the word was immediately snatched away, or because they were offended by persecution, or because they let the cares and riches of

the world choke them. This exhortation is perhaps the most important one for those of us in the Truth. All of us have heard the word and have received it with joy. The only test left for us is whether or not we will persevere to the end. Each of us answers the question: Which kind of soil am I?

(12) Luke's account is shorter than Mark's. The table of gospel parallels makes it easy to see that Luke, again following his general practice, omits many phrases that occur in Mark's account.

(3) Old Testament Images

The first two studies have dealt exclusively with the three gospel accounts of the Parable of the Sower, and the local contexts of the parable within each of those accounts. This third study identifies the primary Old Testament sources for the images Jesus uses in the Parable and its Interpretation.

First century farming practices?

An assumption is often made that the odd farming practices in the Parable of the Sower (sowing before or without plowing, and scattering seed everywhere without regard to the productivity of the soil) describe actual methods in first century Palestine. This assumption is not true.⁸

Scripture testifies to the practice of plowing first, then sowing:

“Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say. When a farmer ploughs for planting, does he plough continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? When he has levelled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cummin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its place, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way” (Isa 28:23-26, NIV).

“Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break up his clods. Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you” (Hos 10:11-12; see also Jer 4:3-4).

The standard practice was to clear the field of thorns, which would be gathered and burned. Then the field was plowed and harrowed. Only then, after the field had been properly prepared, was the seed planted. Also important for our purposes, notice how each of these inspired prophets derives a spiritual lesson from the practice of planting and harvesting.⁹

Similar spiritual lessons are found in the Apocryphal book of 2 Esdras:

“For as the husbandman soweth much seed upon the ground, and planteth many trees, and yet not all that is sown shall come up in due season, neither shall all that is planted take root: even so they that are sown in the world shall not all be saved” (8:41, RV).

“O Lord, thou didst shew thyself among us, unto our fathers in the wilderness, when they went forth out of Egypt, and when they came into the wilderness, where no man treadeth and that beareth no fruit; and thou

didst say, Hear me, thou Israel; and mark my words, O seed of Jacob. For, behold, I sow my law in you, and it shall bring forth fruit in you, and ye shall be glorified in it for ever. But our fathers, which received the law, kept it not, and observed not the statutes: and the fruit of the law did not perish, neither could it, for it was thine; yet they that received it perished, because they kept not the thing that was sown in them” (9:29-33, RV).

In this last passage, sowing represents God’s giving of His law (in this case, to Israel when they came out of Egypt). Similar images occur in Scripture:

“For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa 55:10-11).

“And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth; And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel [God sows]. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God” (Hos 2:21-23).

Which brings us back to the Parable of the Sower: “Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow... The sower soweth the word” (Mark 4:3, 14).

So, if Jesus did not base his Parable of the Sower on first century farming practices, what was the source of his imagery? The answer is easy and obvious—Jesus, the Word made flesh, found these images in the Old Testament:

“It has been truly said that Jesus thought in pictures, for his language teemed with images. He scarcely made a statement which did not contain some bold figure of speech... his greatest storehouse of truth, and also of the forms of expression with which he clothed it, was not the world of Nature but the pages of the Old Testament Scripture. His thinking was saturated with its teaching and his vocabulary with its phraseology. Time and again the figures which he used were but veiled allusions to the Scriptures, or adaptations of the proverbs and similes to be found there... Jesus thus thought in pictures drawn as much from the limitless depository of the Old Testament as from the store which his own observation and experience had painted for him” (Barling: 137, 138, 139).

One of the keys to proper understanding is that the parable serves the purpose of its meaning, not the other way around. Because the gospel must be preached to all kinds of people the seed in the parable had to be sown in all kinds of soil.

“The gospel word has come, first and foremost, from ‘the’ Lord Jesus Christ. It was he above all others who instructed the multitudes on how the word was to be preached. ‘The’ sower spreads the seed in what seems like a haphazard fashion, such that it falls onto every imaginable type of soil... With the Word of God... it must be given unconditionally to all alike, rich or poor, regardless of race or ethnic heritage; nor is God concerned

with age or gender (Gal 3:26-29; James 2:9). We must always remember it is God who gives the increase (1Cor 3:6, 7)” (Bilello: 58, 60).

The parable concerns the preaching of God’s word to all alike and each hearer’s response to that gospel message. There are four kinds of soil because there are four kinds of response; there are not four kinds of response because there are four kinds of soil.¹⁰

Another point confirming this principle is that the parable has no mention of other critical elements required for successful farming. For example, despite every expectation that it should be part of the story, there is no mention of rain in the parable or its interpretation.

“Without rain a Palestine harvest would fail absolutely; the biblical texts frequently emphasize the importance of rain [note 2. See for example Lev 26:4, 19f.; Deut 11:14, 17; Isa 55:10; Jer 5:24; Joel 2:23f.; Zech 10:1; Acts 14:17; James 5:7. Note especially 2 Esdras 8:43f.], and the pious Jew was daily reminded of this in the *Shema*, where it is said that there can be no growth unless God gives the former and latter rain (Deut 11:14, 17)” (Gerhardsson 1972-73: 187, including his n. 2).

Some fell by the wayside

“And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side [*para ten hodon*], and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up... And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in [them, RV]” (Mark 4:4, 15). Matthew and Luke are both more specific that the heart is the location of the sowing: “catcheth away that which was sown in his *heart*” (Matt 13:19); “taketh away the word out of their *hearts*” (Luke 8:12).

The primary source of this image is likely the Shema, which mentions both having God’s words in your heart and talking about them when you are walking by the way: “*These words*, which I command thee this day, *shall be in thine heart*: and thou...shalt talk of them...when thou walkest *by the way* [*en hodo*, LXX]” (Deut 6:6, 7).

This image of God putting His law in the heart of his people is common in the OT (Deut 11:18, 21; Isa 51:7; Jer 31:33; Psa 37:30, 31; Prov 3:1-4; 4:1-4). Furthermore, having God’s law in one’s heart is the specific prayer and commitment of the righteous (Psa 19:7, 8, 14; 119:11, 36, 80, 111, 112, 161). This is no mere intellectual exercise, rather we are to seek the Lord with our whole heart (Deut 6:5; Psa 119:2, 10, 34, 145).

In contrast to these positive statements, the proud have hearts that are as fat as grease and as an adamant stone (Psa 119:69, 70; Zech 7:11, 12). This image of the hearts of the wicked waxing fat and becoming hardened reminds us of:

- The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart when God sent His prophet Moses to ask the Egyptians to free His people Israel (see Exod 4:21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 13:15; 14:4, 8, 17);
- The prophecy in Isaiah 6:9, 10 that Israel’s heart would be made fat when the

prophet Isaiah was sent to them with God's message; and

- Israel being exhorted not to harden its heart: "Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness" (Psa 95:8).

Some fell on stony ground

"And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away... And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended" (Mark 4:5, 6, 16, 17).

One source of these images is likely to have been the "parable" in Ezekiel 17, which has a lot of the same details including "the seed", "planted in a fruitful field", "the roots", "the good soil", and the possibility that God might cut it off and let it "wither" (Ezek 17:1-10).

Some of these images are used frequently. In particular, the roots of the righteous are often compared to a tree having deep, immovable roots that enable the tree to yield fruit (Psa 1:1-3; Jer 17:7, 8; Prov 12:3; Prov 12:12; Psa 80:8-11). In contrast, the roots of the ungodly are said to be dried up so they can bear no fruit (Hos 9:16; Isa 5:18-24). The ungodly are compared to a tree that quickly withers away or is torn up by the roots, and as the grass on the housetop that withers before it grows up (2Kgs 19:26 || Isa 37:27; Psa 37:1, 2, 20; 129:5-7; Isa 40:6-8 cited in 1Pet 1:23-25).

Some fell among thorns

"And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit...And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful" (Mark 4:7, 18, 19).

The primary source of this image of sowing among thorns is Jeremiah:

"Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings" (Jer 4:3, 4).

The command to "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart" (Jer 4:4) provides another connection to the Parable of the Sower, the sowing of the seed in the heart (Matt 13:19; Luke 8:12, 15).

Also, Prof. Gertner (1962) shows that Jesus' saying about the candle, which Mark locates right after the interpretation of the Parable of the Sower, is a play on words based on a standard midrashic* technique applied to Jer 4:3, 4:

* Prof. Goulder writes, "The word midrash derives from *darash*, to probe or examine.

“And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick? For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 4:21-23).

The Hebrew word for “break up” <05214 niyr> and “fallow ground” <05215 niyr> is also the word for “candle” <05216 niyr>. Jeremiah alludes to both meanings:

- “break up your fallow ground” has two of these Hebrew words, and
- “sow not among thorns...lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings” is an exhortation based on the burning of thorns, like the burning of a candle.

This play on words occurs in the Greek translation of Hos 10:12, where the Hebrew “break up your fallow ground” becomes “light ye for yourselves the light of knowledge” (LXX). The phrase “the light of knowledge” is the same one that Paul uses: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the *light of the knowledge* of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Cor 4:6).¹¹

In summary, there are four connections between Mark 4 and Jer 4:3, 4: sowing, thorns, the heart, and the candle.

Besides this specific allusion to Jer 4:3, thorns are often used in the OT as a metaphor for a punishment or a test following a failure to obey God’s commandments (Gen 3:17, 18; Num 33:55; Josh 23:13; Isa 5:6; Jer 12:13; Prov 22:5; 24:30, 31).

Some fell on good ground

“And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred... And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred” (Mark 4:8, 20).

As we discussed above, the righteous are compared to a tree firmly rooted in ground that is well-watered enabling it to bring forth fruit in season. In addition to this general collection of images, the specific allusion to a hundredfold yield comes from God’s blessing of Isaac: “Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him” (Gen 26:12).

Revelation is a bottomless mine of wealth; no pious man can be content to take what merely lies on the surface—he must *darash*, dig and bring up treasure. There are seventy faces to scripture: we must *darash*, examine it, and find it revealed from glory to glory. Revelation is, to take a more familiar image, a treasure-chest, out of which the wise householder can bring things new and old—old things, the tradition handed down by others, new things, whatever may be revealed by the Spirit to him now. Midrash comes to mean, by the second century of our era, commentary on scripture, the probings, the results of the examination... The purpose of midrash is broadly twofold. First, there is the duty to edify, to proclaim God’s word in the community, to interpret... Second, there is the duty to reconcile...” (1974: 28-29). The practice of midrash was guided by a set of acceptable techniques similar to the methods we use for Bible study.

The mystery of the kingdom of God

All three synoptic writers testify to Jesus' claim to be revealing the mysteries of the kingdom: "And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the *mystery* of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables" (Mark 4:11 || Matt 13:11 || Luke 8:10). The word "mystery" comes from Daniel (Dan 2:18, 19, 27-30, 47; 4:6, LXX). It is also used by Paul (e.g., 1Cor 2:7; Eph 3:9; Col 1:26). In all these cases, it refers to information that, while at first hidden, "can be made known only by divine revelation, and is made known in a manner and at a time appointed by God" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*: 424, "Mystery").

The mystery of *the kingdom of God being revealed* to the disciples reminds the audience of the gospel's opening words, which repeatedly mention *the gospel* and *the kingdom of God* (Mark 1:1, 14, 15). This is a common theme of the Targum of Isaiah:

- "For *the kingdom of the LORD of hosts will be revealed* on the Mount of Zion and in Jerusalem and before the elders of his people in glory" (24:23);
- "So *the kingdom of the LORD of hosts will be revealed* to settle upon the Mount of Zion and upon its hill" (31:4);
- "Get you up to a high mountain, prophets who herald *good tidings* to Zion; lift up your voice with force, you who herald *good tidings* to Jerusalem, lift up, fear not; say to the cities of the house of Judah, *The kingdom of your God is revealed!*" (40:9);
- "How beautiful upon the mountains of the land of Israel are the feet of him who announces, who publishes peace, who announces *good tidings*, that publishes salvation; who says to the congregation of Zion, *The kingdom of your God is revealed*" (52:7).

In other words, Mark emphasizes that the prophecy of Isaiah was now being fulfilled, at least partially, in the ministry of Jesus.

The mystery being given to the disciples is the second of three stages in God's revelation of the gospel of the kingdom. First, from the beginning the things of the gospel were hidden (Matt 13:34, 35; Psa 78:2). Second, during his ministry Jesus partially revealed these mysteries by teaching in parables. Third, at the return of Christ all things will be completely uncovered: "For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad" (Mark 4:22). This final unveiling is also indicated by the interpretations of the parables of the Wheat and Tares and the Dragnet (Matt 13:36-43, 47-50), both of which refer to the judgment at "the end of the world."

The ministry of Jesus and the ministry of Isaiah

The Targum of Isa 6:11-13 refers to Israel, like a withered tree, being reborn from its stump, the holy seed:

"Then I said, 'How long, O Lord?' And he said, 'Until the cities are devastated, without inhabitant, and the houses without me, and the land lies desolate and devastated, and the LORD removes the sons of men and devastation increases in the midst of the land. And one in ten they will be left

in it and they will again be for scorching like the terebinth of the oak, which when their leaves drop off appear dried up, and even then they are green enough to retain from them the seed. So the exiles of Israel will be gathered and they will return to their land. For the holy seed is their stump.”

The references to *withered plants* and *holy seed* link this passage to two later prophecies in Isaiah (55:10, 11; 40:68).

The three stages here in the Targum are the same as those in the Parable of the Sower:

1. The word is preached to a people who have eyes but can't see, who have ears but can't hear, and whose heart waxes fat and hardens so they can't understand.
2. The people, like the three kinds of unfruitful soil, dry up.
3. The holy seed, like the seed sown on good ground, returns to life.

Jesus is drawing a parallel between his ministry and the ministry of Isaiah. In both cases, the response to God's Word is at first negative, which provokes God's judgment. Nevertheless, a remnant is preserved, so out of judgment comes salvation.

The failure of the hardhearted people is ultimately overcome by the power of God's Word to accomplish His purpose. In Isa 6, the people's response is negative; whereas in Isa 55 and Isa 40 the gospel is fulfilled because of the surety of God's incorruptible Word. Peter makes the lesson plain by describing our rebirth:

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1Pet 1:23-25).

The seed in the Parable of the Sower is the Word of God. The grass withering is like the seed that fell on the stony ground, which, “when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.” The seed in the good soil corresponds to the holy seed born again of the incorruptible Word of God.¹²

The Gospel in Isaiah

In Acts 8:26-40, the Ethiopian eunuch has a copy of the scroll of Isaiah, and he is reading from Isa 53. He asks Philip whom the prophet is talking about, and Philip “began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” At that time, there were no gospels yet, but there was the Comforter to lead the disciples to all truth about the life of Jesus. The key events in his life were easily aligned with Isaiah's prophecies. In particular, Philip's first principle class that day was based on the book of Isaiah, from which he could teach the eunuch the whole story of Jesus Christ!

When the gospels were finally written down, these connections between the life of Jesus and the prophecies in Isaiah were a major part of that record. In particular, the Spirit led Matthew to cite many passages from Isaiah. These references established beyond any doubt that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's forecasts about the promised Messiah:

	Matthew	Isaiah
The virgin birth	1:23	7:14
John the Baptist	3:3	40:3-5
Preaching in Galilee	4:15, 16	9:1, 2
Bore sicknesses	8:17	53:4
Answer to John the Baptist	11:5, 6	35:5, 6; 61:1; 28:16
God's servant	12:18-21	42:1-4
Why parables?	13:14, 15	6:9, 10
Traditions	15:8, 9	29:13
Cleansing the temple	21:13	56:7

In addition to these explicit quotations, Matthew's gospel contains numerous allusions and verbal parallels to Isaiah. For example, the Healing of Legion (8:28-34) uses language from Isaiah 65, and the Parable of the Vineyard (21:33-46) alludes to Isaiah 5. Indeed, Isaiah has had a profound influence on all of the New Testament (for example, Rom 9-11, 1Pet 2, and Rev 21).*

Matthew makes explicit the connections between the Parable of the Sower and Isaiah (see Cope: 13-31). He alone quotes Isa 6:9, 10 in full. The words Jesus uses in his response to the disciples' question (Matt 13:10-17) are based on these words from Isaiah:

- “Therefore I speak to them in parables because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (v 13) echoes “By hearing they shall hear, and shall in no wise understand, and seeing they shall see, and shall in no wise perceive” (vv 14, 15; Isa 6:9).
- “But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men longed to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not” (v 16) contrasts with “For the people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest haply they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears” (v 15; Isa 6:10).

The Parable of the Sower and the Interpretation of the Sower, especially as reported in Matthew's gospel, depend heavily on this passage from Isaiah 6 and its connections to Isaiah 55 and 40. They are primary sources for:

- the sower and the seed (6:13; 55:10),
- the reference to hearing (6:9, 10),
- the word (40:8; 55:11),
- the heart (6:9, 10),
- the withering (6:11-13; 40:7, 8),
- and the bearing fruit (6:13; 55:10).

* One year our Teen and Young Adult Sunday School Class identified and marked all of the New Testament quotations and allusions to Isaiah. It was a wonderful exercise that we highly recommend to everyone.

Isaiah 6:9, 10 emphasizes the importance of understanding, which, in Matthew's gospel, is the fundamental distinction between those who are fruitful and those who are not. This idea dominates Matthew's account, occurring in

- the reason for parables (v 13),
- the quotation from Isa 6:9, 10 (vv 14, 15),
- the Interpretation of the Sower (vv 19, 23),
- and Jesus' question whether the disciples understood what he was teaching them (v 51).

It is clear that the gospel message revealed by Isaiah has played an important role in Jesus' construction of the Parable of the Sower and its interpretation. At long last in the ministry of Jesus the gospel of the kingdom of God began to be revealed. We eagerly await the day when it shines forth in glorious splendor!

(4) Matthew and the Jewish Feasts

This fourth study shows that Matthew's gospel aligns, in sequence, with the themes of the Jewish feasts. Matthew 13 corresponds to the Feast of Tabernacles and its two major themes: the harvest Feast of Ingathering; and Solomon, who had wisdom, spoke in parables, and dedicated the temple at the Feast of Tabernacles. Thus, the Parable of the Sower is an integral part of an exhortation appropriate for the Feast of Tabernacles.

Today we all have our own copies of the Bible (some of us more than one). We can read the Scriptures on our own time in the privacy of our own homes. The situation in the first century was completely different. Few individuals, such as the Ethiopian eunuch, had their own copies of a portion of Scripture. The reading of God's word occurred almost exclusively in public worship services. The Bible often alludes to this practice:

- At Antioch, Paul and company go to the synagogue on the sabbath day. After the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue ask them to speak. In his talk, Paul refers to "*the prophets which are read every sabbath day*" (Acts 13:14, 15, 27).
- James says, "For *Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day*" (Acts 15:21).
- Similarly, Paul's epistles (1Thess 5:27; Col 4:16) and the book of Revelation (Rev 1:3) were read in ecclesial worship services.
- See also Exod 24:7; Deut 31:9-13; Josh 8:34, 35; 2Kgs 23:1, 2; Neh 8; Luke 4:16, 17, 20, 21, RV; 2Cor 3:12-15, RV.

Because the reading was done out loud it was more like a live recital. The audience had to listen and remember what they heard. The style of writing for public reading is different than the style of the books we read today. In writing that is to be read aloud, sign-posts are essential to guide hearers through the story. Repetition provides emphasis and helps the audience remember key points. Most important to this study, the content aligns with current topics for the season of the year.

This leads us to the idea that Matthew's gospel was intended to be read in an annual cycle at the weekly worship services of a Jewish Christian ecclesia. Our brethren often exhort on the readings from the Bible Companion for that day or week. Similarly, Matthew was organized to be read alongside the readings for the Jewish calendar (Goulder 1974; Goulder 1999).

If this is so, the reading plan is fundamental. When studying a passage we usually ask, "Who wrote it? To whom was it written? When was it written? Why was it written?" This study shows that we also need to ask, "When during the year was it read?" and "What else was being read at the same time?"

You can find the Jewish reading plan in the *Tanakh* (the Jewish Publication Society's translation of the Old Testament) or in most books on Jewish practice. This study gives a summary of the readings and themes for each of the feasts and shows their connections to the relevant sections of Matthew (see the chart on pages 343-345).

The sequence of Jewish holy days is defined in the Calendars of the Covenant (Exod 23:14-17; 34:18; Deut 16), of Holy Convocations (Lev 23), and of Sacrifices (Num 28-29). In addition to these are the fast of the Ninth of Ab (Zech 7:5; 8:19), and the feasts of Purim (Esther) and Hanukkah (1, 2 Maccabees; John 10:22). Besides the weekly Sabbath there are eight special times in the Jewish year: Passover, Pentecost, Ninth of Ab, Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles, Hanukkah, and Purim.* These occasions were opportunities to read and teach God's Word, like our Bible Schools and Study Weekends!

Matthew 23-25 read during the first month, leading up to Passover

Matthew's gospel ends with the crucifixion and resurrection at Passover. Passover is celebrated in the first month of the Jewish sacred year, from the 14th to 21st. Thus, the annual cycle of readings would begin with Matthew 23-25, which allude to the Torah readings for the first two weeks of the year. The first weekly Torah reading (Gen 1:1-6:8) is echoed in "ye serpents, ye generation of vipers" (Matt 23:33 || Gen 3:15) and "the blood of righteous Abel" (Matt 23:38 || Gen 4:1-10). The second Torah reading (Gen 6:9-11:32) covers Noah (Matt 24:37-39 || Gen 6:4 in those days; 7:7 they went in into the ark) and "the door was shut" (Matt 25:10 || Gen 7:16).

Also, these chapters in Matthew talk about the preparations for Passover:

- Proselytes (Matt 23:15) were accepted and circumcised in preparation for Passover (Exod 12:43, 44, 48).
- Tithes (Matt 23:23) were due at Passover in fourth and seventh years.
- Cups and platters (Matt 23:25, 26) were essential at Passover.
- Whited sepulchres (Matt 23:27) refers to the practice of whitewashing graves a month before Passover to avoid contact with the dead (Num 9:9-14; 19:16).
- Two at the mill (Matt 24:41 || Exod 11:5).
- At midnight there was a cry (Matt 25:6 || Exod 12:29, 30).

* Bro. Greg and Sis. Vicki Wrobel coined the following mnemonic: Polly Played Nine Trumpets at Tabitha's Hanukkah Party.

Matthew 26-27 read at Passover

The first Passover is recorded in Exodus 12-15, which is the primary reading for the feast. These chapters tell the story of God's deliverance of Israel from their bondage in Egypt, of the Passover lamb and sprinkling of the blood on the door posts, of the days of unleavened bread, of the protecting and destroying angels, of the teaching of the children, of the crossing of the Red Sea, of the glory of God that was light to the Israelites and darkness to the Egyptians, of Pharaoh's army being completely destroyed, and of the Song of Moses. There are lessons about blood sacrifice and baptism being required for redemption and of the dead being raised up to new life (Ezek 37 was also read at Passover).

Of course, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection occurred at Passover time (Matt 26:2, 17, 18, 19; 27:15). On Passover itself Jews were expected to stay up all night just like their fathers did at the first Passover, and Matthew's account is organized in a sequence of three-hour periods, perhaps designed for reading throughout the all-night vigil in an annual commemoration of Jesus' final hours. There are fourth century records of a church in Jerusalem showing they used Matthew this way.

Between Passover and Pentecost

Matthew's gospel ends at Passover, in the first month of the sacred year. Following the annual cycle of weekly readings, the first part of the book would be read between Passover and Pentecost. Matthew 1-4 contains many allusions to topics relevant to this period:

- Joseph the son of Jacob dreams dreams (Matt 1:16, 20; 2:13, 19-23 || Gen 30:22-24; 37:5-11).
- Into Egypt (Matt 2:13, 14 || Gen 45:4-10; 46:2-4, 8; Exod 1:1).
- Male children killed (Matt 2:16 || Exod 1:15, 16, 22).
- All are dead who sought the child's life (Matt 2:19, 20 || Exod 4:19).
- My son called out of Egypt (Matt 2:15 || Exod 4:22, 23; Hos. 11:1).
- Baptism (Matt 3:13-17 || Exod 14:15, 16, 21, 22, 29; 15:19; 1Cor 10:1, 2).
- Into the wilderness to be tempted (Matt 4:1 || Exod 15:22, 25; 16:4; Deut 8:1, 2).
- Forty day fast (Matt 4:2 || Israel 40 years – Exod 16:35; Deut 2:7; 8:2, 3; Moses 40 days – Exod 24:18; 34:28; Deut 9:9, 18).
- Man does not live by bread alone (Matt 4:2-4 || Exod 16:2, 3; Deut 8:3).
- Thou shalt not tempt the Lord your God (Matt 4:5-7 || Exod 17:2, 7; Deut 6:16).
- Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and serve Him only (Matt 4:8-10 || Exod 20:2-6; Deut 6:13; contrast Exod 32:4).
- Assistants chosen (Matt 4:18-22; 10:1; Acts 2:1-4 || Exod 18:24-26; 24:1, 9; Num 11:16, 17).
- Commands from the mount (Matt 5:1, 2 || Exod 19-20).

A first century Jewish Christian audience would have recognized these connections, especially if the first chapters of Matthew were read between Passover and Pentecost.

The Sermon on the Mount: A Pentecost Exhortation

The children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai in the third month (Exod 19:1), the same month as Pentecost, seven weeks after the first Passover. The major theme for Pentecost is the giving of the Law and the primary reading is Exodus 19-20. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) is filled with the themes of Pentecost:

- Blessed are those who keep the Law (Matt 5:3-10 || Psa 119:1, 2 sung at the Pentecost vigil; Psa 1:1, 2; 94:12; Prov 29:18; 3:1-4; see also Deut 6:1-9; Prov 8:1, 32, 33).
- The kingdom (Matt 5:3, 10 || Exod 19:3, 6; 1Pet 2:9).
- Inherit the earth/Land (Matt 5:5 || Exod 3:8, 17; 6:4, 8; 12:25; 13:5, 11; 19:5; 20:12; 23:30).
- See God (Matt 5:8 || Exod 19:16-20; 20:18-21, 22; 24:10, 12-18).
- Prophets persecuted for preaching the Law (Matt 5:12 || Neh 9:26; 2Kgs 17:13, 14; Jer 18:18; Zech 7:11, 12).
- God's Law the light (Matt 5:14, 15 || Psa 119:105; Prov 6:23; Isa 51:4; 62:1; 2:2, 3).
- To fulfill the law and the prophets (Matt 5:17-19).
- It has been said...but I say unto you: on murder (Matt 5:21 || Exod 20:13); on adultery (Matt 5:27 || Exod 20:14); on divorce (Matt 5:31 || Deut 24:1); on swearing and false witness (Matt 5:33 || Exod 20:16); on an eye for an eye (Matt 5:38 || Exod 21:14).
- Love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy (Matt 5:43 || Exod 20:17; Matt 19:18, 19; Rom 13:9).
- Hallowed be thy name (Matt 6:9 || Exod 20:7, 8).
- The Law summarized (Matt 7:12).
- These words (Matt 7:24, 26, 28 RV || Exod 19:6, 7; 20:1; 24:3, 4).
- Hear and do (Matt 7:21, 24, 26 RV || Exod 19:5-7; 24:3, 7).
- When the words had ended (Matt 7:28 RV || Deut 31:24-27).

The Ninth of Ab

After Pentecost, the next holy day in the Jewish calendar is the fast on the Ninth of Ab (Zech 7:3-5; 8:19). On this day Jews mourn the burning of the temple by the Babylonians (2Kgs 25:8, 9; Jer 52:12, 13), and the book of Lamentations is read. The discussion about fasting (Matt 9:14-17) would be an appropriate gospel reading. John's disciples and the Pharisees kept the fast, but Jesus' disciples did not. Jesus indicates how inappropriate it would be for his disciples to fast while he was with them. He goes on to indicate that these old Jewish traditions needed to be replaced by new Christian traditions. This exhortation would apply especially to first century Jewish believers reading Matthew's gospel.

The Feast of Trumpets

The next major festival period occurs during Tishri, the seventh month of the sacred year and the first month of the Jewish civil year. Tishri has three major holy days: the Feast of Trumpets on the first, the Day of Atonement on the tenth, and the Feast of Tabernacles from the 15th to the 22nd.

(1) **The Kingdom.** Three major themes are associated with the Feast of Trumpets: Kingdoms, Remembrances, and Trumpets. In their worship service for Trumpets, the Jews recite ten passages for each of these themes—three from the Torah, three from Psalms, three from the Prophets, and a final one from the Torah.¹³ In Matthew 10-13, there are many references to the kingdom. Jesus sends out the 12 apostles with the words, “As ye go, preach, saying, *The kingdom of heaven* is at hand” (10:7). Jesus refers to the kingdom in conjunction with John the Baptist (11:11, 12). In the Beelzebub controversy, Jesus says, “If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then *the kingdom of God* is come unto you” (12:28). And, most impressive of all, the parables teach lessons about the kingdom (13:11, 19, 24, 31, 33, 38, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 52).

(2) **The Day of Judgment.** The Feast of Trumpets is also called *Rosh Hashanah* (New Year) and *Yom Hadin* (Day of Judgment). The “day of judgment” is a major theme of Matthew 10-12. Jesus tells the apostles that “it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in *the day of judgment*, than for that city” (10:15). Similarly, when he began to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, he says, “It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *at the day of judgment*, than for you” and “It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in *the day of judgment*, than for thee” (11:20-24). In the Beelzebub controversy, Jesus says that “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in *the day of judgment*” (12:36). In addition, Matt 12 has several other references to judges and judgment (vv 18, 20, 27, 41, 42). The parables of the Tares and the Dragnet portray the dividing of good from bad at the judgment at the end of the world.

The Day of Atonement

Tishri 10 is the Day of Atonement. Not surprisingly, Matthew 8-12 has Atonement themes such as repentance, forgiveness, and Jonah.

(1) **Repentance.** Jesus upbraids the cities “because they *repented* not” and says, “If the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have *repented* long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matt 11:20, 21). “The men of Nineveh...*repented* at the preaching of Jonah” (12:41).

(2) **Forgiveness.** Jesus tells the man sick of the palsy, “Thy sins be *forgiven* thee” and responds to the scribes, “Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be *forgiven* thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to *forgive* sins (then saith he to the sick of the palsy), Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house” (9:2, 5, 6). In the Beelzebub controversy, Jesus says, “All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be *forgiven* unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be *forgiven* unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be *forgiven* him: but whosoever speaketh a word against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be *forgiven* him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (12:31, 32).

(3) **One greater than Jonah.** The book of Jonah with its themes of repentance and forgiveness is read on the Day of Atonement. Matthew’s reading for Atonement

(12:38-50) refers to Jonah.

*“Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet **Jonah**: for as **Jonah** was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of **Jonah**; and behold, **a greater than Jonah is here**” (Matt 12:38-41).*

How appropriate! The participants in this exchange would have just heard Jonah read to them in the public worship service for the Day of Atonement.

The Feast of Tabernacles

The series of Tishri holy days concludes with the eight-day Feast of Tabernacles. It is also called the Feast of Ingathering because it is an autumn harvest festival, a time to rejoice, similar to our Thanksgiving (Exod 23:16; 34:22; Lev 23:39, 40; Deut 16:13). The readings for Tabernacles include 1 Kings 8, Solomon’s dedication of the Temple at the Feast of Tabernacles (v 2), and Ecclesiastes, “the words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem”. The themes for Tabernacles include the Temple, Solomon, and Harvest, which are also the themes of Matthew 12-13.

(1) One greater than the Temple. The dedication of the Temple is a major theme of Tabernacles. Jesus responds to the Pharisees, “Have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in *the temple* profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That *in this place is one greater than the temple*” (Matt 12:5, 6).

(2) Solomon, son of David. The readings during Tabernacles emphasize Solomon, his wisdom, his parables, and the understanding he provided the people. These are also major themes in Matthew 12-13. After he healed the blind and dumb man, “all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this *the son of David*?” (Matt 12:23). Later, Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees, “*The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here*” (12:42). Solomon was in the readings, so Solomon was on everyone’s mind, and Jesus was greater than Solomon.

(3) Wisdom and a hearing heart. Solomon is famous for the wisdom and the hearing heart that God gave him.

*“And Solomon said...Give therefore thy servant **a hearing heart** to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad...And God said unto him...lo, I have given thee **a wise and a hearing heart**...And God gave Solomon **wisdom and understanding** exceeding much, and **largeness of heart**... And Solomon’s **wisdom** excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was **wiser than all men**...And the LORD gave Solomon **wisdom**” (1Kgs 3:6, 9, 11, 12; 4:29-31; 5:12).*

Jesus explicitly refers to the wisdom of Solomon, “The queen of the south...came... to hear *the wisdom of Solomon*” (Matt 12:42). Correspondingly, Matthew refers to the wisdom of Jesus, “And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this *wisdom*, and these mighty works?” (13:54). Furthermore, as we have seen, Matthew 13 emphasizes “hearing” (vv 9, 13-17, 19, 20, 22, 23); this point recalls especially, “And there came all people *to hear the wisdom of Solomon*, from all kinds of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom” (1Kgs 4:34).

(4) **Parables.** Solomon “spake three thousand proverbs (*parables*, LXX): and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of *trees*, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of *fowl*, and of creeping things, and of *fishes*” (1Kgs 4:32, 33). Likewise, Jesus “spake many things unto them in *parables*” (Matt 13:3; see also vv 10, 13, 18, 24, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 53). And his parables involved *trees* (v 32), *fowls* (vv 4, 32), and *fish* (vv 47, 48), just like Solomon’s did.

(5) **Harvest.** As we noted above, Tabernacles was also known as the Feast of Ingathering, which was celebrated when the children of Israel gathered their labours out of the field. It is no coincidence that Jesus’ parables in Matthew 13 deal with the Sower, the Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, and the Dragnet. The word “gather” occurs seven times (Matt 13:28, 29, 30, 40, 41, 47, 48).

Matthew’s chapter of harvest parables provides an ideal reading for Tabernacles. It is a Tabernacles exhortation!

Matthew 16-19: Hanukkah and Purim

Between Tabernacles and Passover come the feasts of Hanukkah and Purim. Hanukkah (“dedication”) refers to the re-dedication of the temple by the Maccabees. The Feast of Hanukkah is like a little Feast of Tabernacles (2Macc 1:18; 10:6) because they were both eight-day feasts celebrating the dedication of the temple and its filling with glory. Hanukkah is also called the Festival of Lights. Readings for the feast include Num 7-9 (the dedication of the altar, the candlestick, and the pillar of cloud) and Zech 3-4 (Satan and Joshua’s clothes, and the two candlesticks and olive trees). Matthew 16-19 alludes to various themes of Hanukkah:

- Upon this rock I will build my church (Matt 16:18) is the dedication, the Hanukkah, of the new spiritual temple (Eph 2:19-22; 1Pet 2:3-5; 1Cor 3:9-11).
- Satan (Matt 16:23 || Zech 3:1, 2).
- Temple filled with glory (Matt 17:1-8): “face did shine like the sun” (Matt 17:2 || 2Macc 1:22), “raiment was white” (Matt 17:2 || Num 8:6, 7, 21; Zech 3:3-5), “as light” (Matt 17:2 || Num 8:1-4; Zech 4; Festival of Lights), “tabernacles” (Matt 17:4 || 2Macc 1:18; 10:6), “bright cloud overshadowed them” (Matt 17:5 || Exod 40:34; Num 9:15-23; 1Kgs 8:10, 11; 2Macc 2:7-12).
- Temple tax (Matt 17:24-27 || Exod 30:11-16; Num 7).
- Gathering of God’s sheep (Matt 18:11-14; 2Macc 1:27, 29; 2:7, 17, 18; compare John 10:1-18; 22-28; Ezek 34).

Finally, the book of Esther gives the history for Purim (Lots) and is read at the

feast. The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt 22:1-14) refers to a king, a marriage, a feast, and an execution, all of which are also in Esther, making the parable an appropriate gospel reading for Purim.

Summary of Matthew’s Gospel

Five times in his gospel, Matthew concludes major speeches of Jesus with words like “when he had ended these sayings”:

- the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7 (Matt 5:28);
- the Mission in chapter 10 (Matt 11:1);
- the Parables in chapter 13 (Matt 13:53);
- the Exhortation on Offenses in chapter 18 (Matt 19:1); and
- the Olivet Prophecy in chapters 24-25 (Matt 26:1).

These speeches were carefully crafted exhortations for the feasts on which they were originally delivered, and were later read every year in the cycle of readings from the gospel of Matthew. The Sermon on the Mount was for Pentecost, the Mission was for Trumpets, the series of Parables was for Tabernacles, the Exhortation on Offenses was for Hanukkah, and the Olivet Prophecy was for Passover. In this way, Matthew shows how Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets (Matt 5:17, 18). Week in and week out, and especially on the feasts, Matthew offers gospel episodes corresponding to the topics and themes of the Jewish readings. His gospel provides an ideal collection of readings for early Jewish Christians who were still keeping the Jewish calendar and following the Jewish reading plan.

Recognizing this alignment with the Jewish feasts provides context for the Parable of the Sower in Matthew’s gospel. It is a harvest parable perfect for the Feast of Tabernacles, and it illustrates the wisdom of Jesus, the one greater than Solomon!

Table of Readings for the Jewish Feasts and Allusions to them in Matthew’s Gospel			
Feast	Readings and Themes	Matt	Parallels
Passover (Unleavened Bread) 1/14-21 Barley harvest (Nisan/Abib = April)	Exod 12-15: Exodus, Red Sea 2Kgs 23: Josiah’s Passover 2Sam 22: David’s Song Ezek 37: Dry Bones Calendars Song of Songs	23-28	Passover speeches (vipers, Abel, Noah, door shut; proselyte, tithe, cups & platters, whited sepulchers, at the mill, midnight) Unleavened bread Death at Passover Resurrection
Between Passover and Pentecost		1-4	Up to Pentecost

Pentecost (Weeks) 3/6 Wheat harvest (Siva = June)	Exod 19-20: Law at Sinai Psa 119: Law Ezek 1: Theophany Hab 3: Mount Sinai Calendars Ruth (compare Gen. 38)	5-7	Beatitudes Law fulfilled But I say unto you Law summarized These words Hear and do
Between Pentecost and Trumpets		8-9	Up to Tishri
Ninth of Ab 5/9 (Ab = August)	Lamentations Burning of the Temple Fast (Zech 7:5; 8:19)	9:14- 17	Fasting
Trumpets (New Year, Day of Judgment) 7/1 (Ethanim/ Tishri = October)	Kingdoms Remembrances Trumpets Gen 21-22: Isaac Isa 35: Healings Calendars	10-11	Isa 35: Healings (8-9; 11:4, 5) The Kingdom (10:7; 11:11, 12; 12:38; 13) Day of Judgment (10:15; 11:20-24; 12:36)
Atonement 7/10	Lev 16-18 Jonah Repentance Forgiveness Fast (Lev 23:27, 32)	12	Repentance (11:20, 21; 12:41) Forgiveness (9:2, 5, 6; 12:31, 32) Jonah (12:28-41)
Tabernacles (Ingathering) 7/15-22 End of the year's harvest	1Kgs 8: Solomon dedicates the Temple Zech 14: Tabernacles in the Kingdom Age Calendars Ecclesiastes	12-13	Temple (12:5, 6) Solomon (12:23, 42) Wisdom (1Kgs 3-5; Matt 12:42; 13:54) Parables (1Kgs 4:32, 33 Matt 13) Harvest (Matt 13)
Between Tabernacles and Hanukkah		14-16	Up to Hanukkah
Hanukkah = Dedication (Festival of Lights) 9/25-10/2 (Chislev = December)	Num 7-9: Dedication, candlestick, pillar of cloud Zech 3-4: Joshua's clothes; candlesticks & olive trees Tabernacles (2Macc 1:18; 10:6) Glory (2Macc 2:7-12) Gathering (2Macc 1:27, 29; 2:17, 18)	16-19	Dedication of the "Temple" (16:13-20) Glory (17:1-8) Shekel (17:24-27) Gathering (18:12-14)
Between Hanukkah and Passover		20-22	Up to Passover

Purim = Lots 12/14-15 (Adar = March)	Esther	22:1- 14	King, wedding, feast, saved, rejected
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(5) Jesus and the Shema

“Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”¹⁴ Since before the time of Jesus (and still today), Jews have recited the Shema (pronounced “shehMAH”) every morning and evening, taking upon themselves the yoke of the kingdom. This fifth study links the Parable of the Sower with this first and greatest of all commandments.

“In New Testament times—and not only then—every pious Jewish man sanctified his life morning and evening by reciting the *Shema*¹ (consisting of Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41). This sacred text, named after the first word in Hebrew (*Shema*), is a short summary of the conditions upon which the people of God continue to exist, a life in covenant with him. Reading the *Shema*¹ was often aptly called ‘taking upon oneself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven,’ i.e. placing oneself consciously and explicitly under the dominion of God.

“The *Shema*¹ contains the covenantal obligations in concentrated form. The passage begins ‘Hear, O Israel, JHWH our God, JHWH is one’ and concludes ‘I am JHWH your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. I am JHWH your God.’ Within this framework, which solemnly proclaims the place and role of God himself, the duties of the covenant people are defined. First come the well-known words ‘*And you shall love JHWH your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole might*’, and immediately before the conclusion which has just been quoted we find the words ‘*So you shall think upon and perform...all my commandments, and be holy to your God*’.

“The *Shema*¹ emphasizes that it is the duty of God’s people to hear, learn, teach, think about, speak about, and live according to the word of God.

“Thus the *Shema*¹ was the covenant in miniature, a passage which summarized all that God had promised to his people and all that he demanded of them. The *Shema*¹ both comprehended all the other words and commands of God and pointed outwards towards them. So it was always relevant and was continuously read and meditated upon” (Gerhardsson, 1967-68: 167, 168, his emphasis).

The Yoke of the Kingdom

The Mishnah* Berakoth 2:2 says, “Why does the section *Hear, O Israel* [Deut 6:4-

* *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary*, 2001, defines the Mishnah to be “the collection of oral laws compiled about A.D. 200 and forming the basic part of the Talmud.” Prof. Goulder refers to the Mishnah as “the ever-developing system of case law... Rabbinic activity is divided into two, Mishnah and Midrash. Mishnah is the making and codification of laws in interpretation of the written Law. It is derived from *shannah*, to repeat, and means the repetition, that which has to be known by heart, and not

9] precede *And it shall come to pass if ye shall hearken?* [Deut 11:13-21]—so that a man may first take upon him the yoke of the kingdom of heaven and afterward take upon him the yoke of the commandments” (Danby: 3). In the liturgy of the Shema, there is a custom that the people respond to the first sentence, “The LORD our God is one LORD”, with the benediction, “Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.”

The idea of a yoke can have either positive or negative connotations. Bro. Carter writes,

“A yoke is...something which unites two creatures for some particular task. There can be a willing and an unwilling yoking; therefore, the yoke can be a figure of an accepted service or an imposed bondage, of joy or woe, freedom or slavery.

“The Jews were also familiar with the use of the figure for instruction: ‘the yoke of the law,’ ‘the yoke of the precept,’ ‘the yoke of the kingdom of heaven’ signified instruction pertaining to these things. Men of Belial were ‘men without the yoke’—uninstructed men. The book of Ecclesiasticus, in an appeal to seek learning and instruction, says: ‘Put your neck *under the yoke*, and let your soul *receive instruction*’.

“Turning now to the words of Jesus, he says: ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek, and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden (load) is light.’ It is a call to discipleship—‘Come unto me’ and ‘learn of me’—and discipleship is taking his ‘yoke.’ It is entering into harness with him as fellow: it is sharing his outlook, approaching life his way, copying his meekness and lowliness of heart” (73-75, his emphasis).

The daily recitation of the Shema is like a pledge of allegiance:

“The Shema is not a prayer in the ordinary sense of the word, but for thousands of years it has been an integral part of the prayer service. The Shema is a declaration of faith, a pledge of allegiance to One God, and affirmation of Judaism. It is the first ‘prayer’ that children are taught to say. It is the last utterance of martyrs. It is said on arising in the morning and on going to sleep at night. It is said when one is praising God and when one is beseeching Him.

“In the first paragraph of the Shema [Deut 6:4-9], we declare our ‘acceptance of the yoke of Divine rule’ (*kabalat ol malkhut shamayim*). This consists of three elements: an affirmation of belief in His unity and in His sovereignty over the world; a deep, abiding, and unconditional love of God; and the study of His teachings.

written down...” (1974: 12, 28). He points out a similarity between the Mishnah and the gospel of Matthew, “The Mishnah is divided into Tractates, as the rabbis grouped teaching of various topics together. So Matthew groups together logia on discipleship in the Sermon, from all over Mark; or on the Apostles’ mission from Mark 6, 9, and 13. He puts the parables of growth of the kingdom together in 13, concentrates the miracles in 8-9, and generally makes his book a tidy construction where it is easier to find things...as we can all witness” (1974: 27).

“The second paragraph of the Shema [Deut 11:13-21] moves from principles of faith to application of faith, from the theoretical to the practical. We declare our ‘acceptance of the yoke of the commandments’ (*kabalat ol mitzvot*), which is the undertaking to carry out the specific regulations, the mitzvot, as evidence of our loyalty to God” (Donin: 144, 148).

“The *Shema* was also viewed as representing the acceptance of the yoke of both the kingship of heaven...and of the commandments...It effectively became a ‘pledge of allegiance’ and a repetition of the ceremony at Mount Sinai, where the Israelites took an oath of loyalty to God the King and pledged to obey the royal laws” (Eisenberg: 14).

In like manner, we must acknowledge God’s authority over us, out of love, love for our Father, our heavenly Father who has had pity on us, who provides all things for us, and who has promised to bless us with eternal life, if only we remain faithful to His covenant with us. We should live every moment of every day constrained by the love which He has shown us.

Accepting God’s rule in our lives underlies the words of our Hymn 163:

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee...

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King...

Take my heart, it is Thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

In singing these words of dedication, we commit our lives to God. As the Shema says (Deut 6:6), we must have His law written in our hearts, which is fulfilled in the new covenant (Jer 31:33). And we must make every effort to live by that law, following the example of Jesus, God’s obedient son. In this way, we become the true brothers and sisters of Christ, our Lord. The practice of reciting the Shema every day, morning and evening, comes from the text itself (Deut 6:6-9). Likewise, in the hymn, we sing, “*Take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.*”

The Shema in Deuteronomy

The first portion of the Shema (Deut 6:4-9) is part of an exhortation on the first two of the ten commandments:

“I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments” (Deut 5:6-10).

These phrases are echoed throughout Deuteronomy 6 (compare Deut 6:12, 21, 23 with 5:6; Deut 6:4, 14 with 5:7; Deut 6:15 with 5:9; and Deut 6:5, 17 with 5:10).

The themes of the Shema are fundamental to the whole book of Deuteronomy. For example:

“And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?” (Deut 10:12, 13).

“And the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:5, 6).

Prof. Miller summarizes,

“As the Shema indicates, this love can be commanded. Its various associations and contexts in Deuteronomy tell us something of the character of the love that identifies the people who say, ‘Our God is the LORD.’ It is closely related to fear and reverence. It is expressed in loyalty and service. Its primary manifestation is in obedience to the demands of the law, which are spelled out quite specifically in Deuteronomy. To love God is to be loyal to the Lord, to keep the Lord’s commandments (10:12-13; 11:1, 22), to walk in the way of the Lord (19:9; 30:16), to do or heed the commandments, statutes, and ordinances. It was never left unclear how Israel was to manifest love toward the Lord. In worship and in obedience to the requirements of the covenant, the love of the Lord was to be demonstrated. And as the final words of the Shema make clear, the love called for is a total commitment. Time and again Deuteronomy underscores its injunctions with a call for loving, obeying, keeping ‘with all your heart and with all your soul.’ ” (102).¹⁵

Why heart, soul, and might?

The Shema commands us to love God completely. We are to be fully committed to our heavenly Father. Why then are three terms used? Why with all your heart, *and* with all your soul, *and* with all your might?¹⁶ This issue was a constant point of discussion among the rabbis. Following is a summary of their answers, taken primarily from the Mishnah Berakoth 9:5 (Danby: 10) and Prof. Gerhardsson (1967-68: 168-69). For additional quotations see the endnotes of the downloadable version.

(1) With all thy heart. Mishnah: “*With all thy heart (lebab)*—with both thine impulses, thy good impulse and thine evil impulse...Because ‘heart’ is here written in Hebrew with two beths (*lebab*) instead of but one (*leb*).”¹⁷ Prof. Gerhardsson: “The scripture says ‘with your whole heart’ to emphasize that you must love God ‘with both the inclinations of the heart’. Your inclination to hear and do God’s word must rule your heart so that your evil inclination (the lust for food and drink, reproduction, sensual pleasures, etc.) can neither have free rein nor dominate you. Another formula was: ‘your heart must not be *chalaq* [i.e., ‘divided’ or ‘smooth’, hypocritical] (cf. Hos 10:2) towards God.”

(2) With all thy soul. Mishnah: “*and with all thy soul*—even if he take away thy

soul.”¹⁸ Prof. Gerhardsson: “The scripture says ‘with your whole soul’ to teach you that you must love God *‘even if he takes your soul (your life)’*. You must love God more than your soul and be prepared to give up your life for his sake. It was this formula above the others which motivated the doctrine that the people of God must be ready to surrender its life for the covenant faith; the duty of martyrdom.”

(3) **With all thy might.** Prof. Alter comments on the difficulty in translating this phrase, “The Hebrew *me’od* elsewhere is an adverb (‘very’), not a noun. It is not clear whether this distinctive Deuteronomic usage reflects stylistic inventiveness in converting one part of speech to another or rather records an idiomatic sense of the word that is simply not used elsewhere in the biblical corpus” (912). As a result, the rabbis proposed various alternatives, each based on a different way of reading the Hebrew word *me’od*.

(a) *With all your wealth, money, property, resources, mammon.* Mishnah: “and with all thy might—with all thy wealth.”¹⁹ Prof. Gerhardsson: “The scripture says ‘with your whole might’ and means ‘with your whole mammon’. By mammon is meant all man’s resources apart from life and the body, i.e. all exterior assets such as possessions and property.”

(b) *No matter what measure God measures out to you.* Mishnah: “Another explanation is: with all thy might (*meodeka*)—for whichever measure (*middah o middah*) he measures out to thee, do thou give him thanks (*modeh*) exceedingly (*bimeod meod*)...An example of word-play characteristic of the rabbinical method of Midrash Haggadah.”²⁰ Prof. Gerhardsson: “The meaning is that you shall accept from God whatever outward assets he chooses to give you—whether he makes you rich or poor—and bless him for it. The longing for property and riches must not replace or reduce your love for him.”

(c) *To address what is more precious to people.* Sifre Deuteronomy offers an explanation for both phrases being used, “R. Eliezer says: having said *with all thy soul*, why does Scripture go on to say *with all thy might*? And if it says *with all thy might*, why does it say *with all thy soul*? There are men whose bodies are more precious to them than their wealth, and *with all thy soul* is directed to them. There are other men whose wealth is more precious to them than their bodies, and *with all thy might* is directed to them” (Piska 32, Hammer 1986: 60).

(d) *With all your reason.* Prof. Gerhardsson comments, “If a comparison is made between the different Jewish and early Christian texts, where the Shema’ is quoted in a Greek translation, a confused picture emerges; the phrases vary greatly. This has several causes: first, the text itself is so formulated as to easily give rise to variants: expressions like ‘with your whole heart’, ‘with your whole soul’, and ‘with your whole might (property)’ invite alternative formulae, e.g. ‘with your whole understanding’, ‘with your whole ability’, etc. It is particularly tempting to make the third phrase congruent with the first two and so let it refer to a human faculty...”

“Secondly, there is room for doubt about which Greek words accurately reproduce the meaning of the three Hebrew ones.

“And, thirdly, it was not unknown to paraphrase the biblical texts occasionally in order to extract some particular homiletic [exhortational] significance. The rabbis allowed themselves such re-readings and re-interpretations because they were convinced that the scriptures contained endless riches; this, in spite of the fact that normally they clung fast to the actual wording of the text they had received: the accepted literal meaning was the melody, even for those who could also hear the harmonies that lay behind.”

In particular, Prof. Gerhardsson notes, “This demand for congruence led to the *ʾal-tiqrey* [changed or double] reading *maddaʿcha*, ‘your reason,’ instead of *meʾodecha*, ‘your property.’ This reading is only one of the many puns which the expositors made on this relatively rare word. The different readings did not rule out the other.”

Evidence from Greek translations of the Hebrew

The translations of Deut 6:5 and 2Kgs 23:25 reflect this variety of meanings:

	Hebrew	Greek LXX
Deut 6:5	And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine <i>heart</i> < <i>lebab</i> >, and with all thy <i>soul</i> < <i>nephesh</i> >, and with all thy <i>might</i> < <i>meʾod</i> >.	And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy <i>mind</i> < <i>dianoia</i> >, and with all thy <i>soul</i> < <i>psuche</i> >, and with all thy <i>strength</i> < <i>dunamis</i> >.
2Kgs 23:25	And like unto him [Josiah] was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his <i>heart</i> < <i>lebab</i> >, and with all his <i>soul</i> < <i>nephesh</i> >, and with all his <i>might</i> < <i>meʾod</i> >, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.	There was no king like him before him, who turned to the Lord with all his <i>heart</i> < <i>kardia</i> >, and with all his <i>soul</i> < <i>psuche</i> >, and with all his <i>strength</i> < <i>ischus</i> >, according to all the law of Moses; and after him there rose not one like him.

Jesus confirms these interpretations of “with all thy might” in his discussion on the first and great commandment (Mark 12:28-31, 32-34; Matt 22:34-40; and Luke 10:25-27).^{21,22} Prof. Derrett comments on the episode in Mark 12:

“Jesus and the scribe agree somewhat emphatically in Mark that the difficult word *mʾodʿcha* [thy might] must be glossed as the rabbis themselves gloss it. They choose the intellectual faculty. Whether we say *dianoia* [mind, Mark 12:30] or *sunesei* [understanding] (Mark 12:33) God needs to be loved not merely with financial and other resources (*mʾodʿcha*), but also with the intelligence (*maddaʿacha*)” (224).²³

In summary, Jesus, the scribe, and the lawyer all seem to be familiar with the multiple explanations in the rabbinic commentaries and the LXX. They also do not choose between them, as they are all appropriate.²⁴

Jesus' exhortations based on the Shema

Besides these three explicit citations of the Shema, Jesus gives us many exhortations based on the three aspects of this great commandment to love our God with all our heart, soul, and might. His teachings incorporate the same ideas as the rabbis.

(1) *Love God with all your heart.* In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers to both the good and evil inclinations of the heart: "Blessed are the pure in *heart*: for they shall see God...But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his *heart*...For where your treasure is, there will your *heart* be also" (Matt 5:8, 28; 6:21). He makes the same point to the Pharisees when they claimed he was casting out demons by Beelzebub: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the *heart* the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the *heart* bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt 12:34, 35). See also Mark 7:6, 7, 18-23 || Matt 15:7-9, 16-20. Jesus is comfortable talking about the two inclinations of the heart, and his exhortations are clear: we must love the Lord with all our heart, both the good inclination and the evil.

(2) *Love God with all thy soul (or life).* Immediately after telling the disciples for the first time that he would be crucified in Jerusalem, he gathers the people together,

*"And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his **life** <6034 *psuche*> shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his **life** <6034> for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own **soul** <6034>? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his **soul** <6034>?"* (Mark 8:34-37 || Matt 16:24-26).

The English words "life" and "soul" are both translated from the same Greek word. He had told the disciples the same thing when he sent them out to preach (Matt 10:38, 39 || Luke 9:23-25). He also draws the same exhortation based on Lot's wife (Luke 17:32, 33). We must love the Lord with all our soul, even if it means giving up our lives.

(3) *Love God with all thy might (or mammon).* We all remember his teaching on the impossibility of serving both God and mammon: "No man can serve two masters [God and mammon]: for either he will hate the one [mammon], and *love* the other [God]; or else he will hold to the one [mammon], and despise the other [God]. Ye cannot serve God and *mammon* [= wealth personified]" (Matt 6:24 || Luke 16:13). We must never let our financial situation get in the way of our love for God.

The testing of God's son

Study 4: Matthew and the Jewish Feasts compared the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness with the temptation of Israel in the wilderness. Both Jesus and Israel are sons of God (Exod 4:22, 23; Matt 3:17; 4:3, 6), and the temptations test

whether they would be obedient to their heavenly Father. Jesus' responses are taken from Deuteronomy 6-8, where the Shema is introduced (Deut 6:4-9). In fact, his three temptations correspond precisely to the three aspects of the Shema (see Gerhardsson 1966).

(1) *Would Jesus love God with all his heart?* The first temptation was hunger. Jesus "answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4; Deut 8:3). What was God's purpose in suffering Israel and Jesus to hunger? The context of Jesus' quote provides the answer:

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut 8:2, 3).

God was proving them, to see what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or not. In other words, this first test was to see if God's son would love him with all his heart. Israel failed, but Jesus remained faithful to his Father by remembering the law.

(2) *Would Jesus love God with all his life?* The second temptation was whether Jesus would plead for God to rescue him from death:

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt 4:5-7; Psa 91:11, 12; Deut 6:16).

Unlike the children of Israel, Jesus refused to tempt his Father. The children of Israel were afraid they and their children would die in the wilderness asking whether God was among them or not (Exod 17:1-7). In contrast, Jesus was willing to die if necessary in order to remain faithful to the Lord's command to love Him with all his life.

(3) *Would Jesus love God with all his mammon?* The third temptation was whether Jesus would let the kingdoms of the world and their glory lure him away from serving God:

"Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt 4:8-10).

The test was whether he was willing to give up wealth and honor to remain faithful to his Father. Israel failed by creating the golden calf and worshipping it. In contrast, Jesus' love for God took priority over his love of mammon. Jesus

was willing to give up all the glory of all the kingdoms of the world in order to serve God.

In each case, Jesus met the temptation by citing the relevant Scripture, as commanded by the last paragraph in the Shema:

“And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God” (Num 15:39, 40).

Jesus remembered and he obeyed.

How fitting that the first temptations of Israel and of Jesus revolve around the great commandment to love the Lord God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might!

The testing of the disciples

Throughout Jesus’ ministry his disciples are put to the same three tests that he faced (Gerhardsson 1994: 44-46; Gerhardsson 1979).

(1) *Would the disciples love God with all their heart?* The two feeding miracles (the 5,000: Mark 6:30-44 || Matt 14:13-21 || Luke 9:10-17 || John 6:1-14; the 4,000: Mark 8:1-9 || Matt 15:32-39) are about the same basic issue as Jesus’ first temptation: Would the disciples depend on God to provide for their physical needs? In an editorial comment, Mark explains that the disciples failed to understand the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000: “For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for *their heart was hardened*” (Mark 6:52). Later, Jesus is more explicit:

*“And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? **Have ye your heart yet hardened?** Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?” (Mark 8:14-21 || Matt 16:5-12).*

Jesus applies Isa 6:9, 10 to the disciples. They were failing the first test, to love God with all their heart. Instead, their heart was hardened!

(2) *Would the disciples love God with all their life?* The gospels describe two storms at sea: the first when Jesus is asleep on the ship (Mark 4:35-41 || Matt 8:23-27); the second when Jesus walks on the water and Peter tries to join him (Mark 6:45-52 || Matt 14:22-33). Both times, the disciples fear they are going to die, and want to be saved. Both times, Jesus reprimands them in strong words: “Why are ye

fearful, O ye of little faith?” “O thou of little faith, why do you doubt?” Their fear is a symptom of an underlying lack of love for God. Instead of loving him with all their soul, when put to the test, they recoil. God expects them to be willing to give up their lives for Him, but instead they are afraid and want to be rescued. Their fear trumps their faith. No wonder Jesus is so harsh! These tests are but a preview of things to come. If they can't pass these preliminary pop quizzes, then how will they ever pass the final exam that will come later?

(3) *Would the disciples love God with all their might and mammon.* Four episodes in the last week of Jesus' ministry put the disciples to the test concerning might and mammon.

- After Jesus' second prediction of his impending crucifixion and resurrection, Peter asks about paying the temple tax (Matt 17:24-27), and Jesus tells him that God would provide the money for the tax.
- Immediately after that, the disciples quarrel over who is the greatest (Mark 9:33-34 || Matt 18:1 || Luke 9:46). How disappointing this would have been to Jesus, especially since he knew the trouble that lay ahead. His disciples would be no help to him.
- After Jesus tells the disciples about how hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God, they wonder who then can be saved, and remind him that they had left everything. Jesus assures them that whatever they had left behind would be repaid a hundredfold, now and in the world to come (Mark 10:17-31 || Matt 19:16-30 || Luke 18:18-30).
- Finally, after Jesus' third prediction of his sacrifice and resurrection, James and John ask, “Grant us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.” Again, their minds are in the wrong place. There must be sacrifice first.

The disciples were worried more about wealth and power and fame than about serving God. Jesus was trying to teach them a better way, the way of the Shema. He had faced the same test in the wilderness. When he had been offered all the glory of all the kingdoms of the world, he turned it down so that he might serve his Father. He watched as his disciples were failing the test, despite his repeated exhortations.

In each of the three aspects of the Shema the disciples are put to the test repeatedly. Yet God continues to give them opportunities. No matter how many times they fail, He gives them another chance to succeed. There is some comfort in that.

The Parable of the Sower

With this background we are now ready to see the relationship between the Shema and the Parable of the Sower. First, remember that in Mark, Jesus started the parable with “*Hearken* <191 akouo>”, which is the Greek word that the LXX uses in Deut 6:5 to translate the Hebrew word *shama'* from which the Shema gets its name. Study 1: The Parable of the Sower highlighted the importance of the word “hear” throughout the three Parable accounts. If we spoke Hebrew, we might call them the Shema chapters!

Second, just as the recitation of the Shema was “taking on *the yoke of the kingdom*”, so also Jesus speaks in parables to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, with the parable of the Sower itself being a call to hear the word of the kingdom, to understand it, and in an honest and good heart, to keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience. Following our Lord, we should embrace the wonderful yoke of the kingdom with joy!

Third, “*by the wayside <hodos>*” echoes the Shema phrase “when thou walkest *by the way <hodos, LXX>*” (Deut 6:7; 11:19).

Fourth, the first three types of soil represent the unsuccessful sowing of the word, and correspond to people who fail to love the Lord with all their heart, or all their soul, or all their might and mammon, respectively (Gerhardson 1967-68):

- “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” (Matt 13:19). The close-mindedness of those by the wayside prevents them from loving God with all their heart.
- “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth 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*” (Matt 13:20, 21). The fear of losing their lives prevents those in stony places from loving God with all their souls.
- “He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; *and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches*, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful” (Matt 13:22). The love of money prevents those among thorns from loving God with all their might and mammon.

The failure of these soils to produce fruit reflects God’s threat in the Shema: “*Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD’S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you*” (Deut 11:16, 17).

Fifth, the last type of soil allows the seed to grow, and corresponds to those who faithfully love God with all their heart, soul, and might: “But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; *which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth*, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty” (Matt 13:23). Study 3: Old Testament Images showed that “bringing forth fruit” are the righteous who demonstrate an active loyalty to the covenant, who hear and do God’s word. This image echoes the words of the Shema:

“*And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full*” (Deut 11:13-15).

Sixth, in Mark's gospel the Parable of the Sower is followed by the saying, "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you" (Mark 4:24). This reference to "measure" reminds us of one of the rabbinic interpretations of *me'od* ("might"): "*With all thy might (meodeka)*—for whichever measure (*middah o middah*) he measures out to thee, do thou give him thanks (*modeh*) exceedingly (*bimeod meod*).” (Mishnah Berakoth 9:5, Danby: 10).

Seventh, the Parable of the Sower provides an outline for the other six parables in Matthew 13, which continue to develop the themes of the Shema (Gerhardsson 1972-73):

- "By the way side" leads into the Wheat and Tares. In both, the enemy is "*the wicked*" (vv 19, 38).
- The "stony places" relate to the Mustard Seed and the Leaven. Continuing the topic of loving God with all your life, these twin parables explain that the man's mustard seed and the woman's leaven must die to create growth, as Jesus teaches elsewhere: "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, *Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit*. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:23-25).
- "Among thorns" links to the Treasure in the Field and the Pearl of Great Price. Continuing the discussion of loving God with all your might, or money, these twin parables explain why a man might sell all that he has in order to buy a treasure (from the field) or a pearl (from the sea), each representing the kingdom of God, which has unlimited value.
- The "good ground" corresponds to the Dragnet. The twin parables of the Wheat and Tares and of the Dragnet highlight the contrast between those who do understand the word and those who do not understand it, between the good wheat and the bad tares from the field, and between the good and the bad fish from the sea.

This connection between the Parable of the Sower and the other parables in Matthew 13 may explain why Jesus asked the disciples, "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" The Parable of the Sower and its alignment to the Shema provides the key to these other parables.

Eighth, "In the 'parable chapter' in Matthew there are two direct quotations from the scriptures. The first is from 'the Prophets' (Isa 6:9f.) and the other from 'the Writings' (Psa 78:2). But although not directly cited, a far more important role than these is played by the crucial passage from 'the Law' (Deut 6:4f.). It is not difficult to see on what principles the three passages have been combined. Deut 6:4 is introduced 'Hear O Israel'...In Psa 78:1 the first words are 'Hear O my people'...and in Isa 6:9 the prophet receives the commission to go and say 'to this people...Hear'" (Gerhardsson 1967-68: 179).*

* In addition, Deut 6:4-9 and Psa 78:1-8 both have exhortations on the importance of teaching children so they will remember God's word.

In summary, the Parable of the Sower is based on the Shema, which was recited every morning and evening, the first and great commandment, like a daily pledge of allegiance. No wonder Jesus was disappointed his disciples didn't immediately understand the parable. We must strive to do, or be, better than them. Hearing the Word means more than just physically hearing. To be good soil, we must hear and do God's Word. We must love Him with all our heart, all our soul, and all our might!

(6) Mark through the Eyes of the Parable

This study looks at the critical role the Parable of the Sower plays in Mark's gospel. Mark intends his audience to identify the sower as Jesus and the different soils as groups of people in the gospel who hear Jesus' preaching. A first century audience familiar with live performances of books like Mark's gospel would have been on the alert for such connections and their meaning.

"The parable reflects what the passing of time was revealing in the experience of Jesus himself. His hearers were becoming 'classified' as they showed their reactions to his work and words" (Carter: 91). "For Mark, the parables are an integral part of the history; they come at crucial points, summarising and reflecting on events as Jesus himself saw them" (Sargent: 60).

Mark ties the parables to their immediate context in Jesus' ministry. In the Parables of the Sower, the Seed Growing Secretly, and the Mustard Seed, the farmer spreads the seed on the "ground." Similarly, Jesus teaches by the sea to the multitude who were on the "land" (Mark 4:1, 2). An audience in the first century would immediately pick up on the connection because the Greek word translated "land" is the word translated "earth" and "ground" in the three parables.

When the disciples ask Jesus to explain the Parable of the Sower, the elements of the parable are repeated. This repetition would allow the audience to make a mental note of the four categories and their characteristics. They would recognize some of the categories immediately and would look for the others as the story continued. Such plot summaries were common practice in first century novels, which were performed publically rather than read at home in a lounge chair as we might do today.

The Sower

The Sower represents Jesus, who went out preaching and teaching. "Jesus did not indicate who was represented by the sower: in the first and most important sense he is the sower, but perhaps the absence of identification left open a wider application to include those who continue in his work of sowing the seed of the kingdom" (Carter, 89). "In the KJV of Matthew 13:3, the article is given as 'a' sower, but the *Emphatic Diaglott* and most modern language versions render this as 'the' sower. The gospel word has come, first and foremost, from 'the' Lord Jesus Christ. It was he above all others who instructed the multitudes on how the word was to be preached" (Billelo: 58).

Mark's gospel clearly identifies Jesus as the Sower by using the same words and ideas to describe them. Just as the Sower "went out" <1831 *exerchomai*>, so Jesus says, "For therefore came I forth <1831>" (Mark 1:38). The preaching of the kingdom of God is the key to the work of the Sower and the work of Jesus. Before interpreting the parable, Jesus tells his disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of *the kingdom of God*". From the beginning, "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of *the kingdom of God*, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and *the kingdom of God* is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14, 15). See also Mark 1:28; 2:1, 2, 13; 5:2; 6:1, 34; 7:31; 8:27; etc.

Mark specifically states, "the sower soweth *the word* <3056 *logos*>" (Mark 4:14-20). The link with Jesus is obvious: "He preached *the word* unto them" (Mark 2:2). In the Interpretation of the Sower and in the ministry of Jesus, the word is associated with hearing: "And with many such parables spake he *the word* unto them, as they were able to *hear* it" (4:33; see also 8:31, 32; 9:9, 10; 10:22, 24). Throughout Mark's gospel the people were hearing of Jesus and the great things he was doing (Mark 3:7, 8; 5:27; 7:25; 10:47; see also 3:19-21; 6:55; 11:18; 16:11).

To summarize, Jesus "went out" just like the Sower, he preached "the word" about "the kingdom of God" just like the Sower, he was "heard" just like the Sower, and people who heard him reacted to his preaching in the same ways that the people represented in the Parable of the Sower reacted. A first century audience listening to a performance of Mark's gospel would have immediately identified the Sower as Jesus, and would have maintained that connection throughout the entire performance.

Furthermore, the audience would also understand that the groups of people represented by the various soils in the parable corresponded to the different characters in Mark's gospel. The audience would be listening for clues to help them properly identify the characters whose responses matched the four types of soils in the parable. Because of the placement of the Parable of the Sower in the gospel text (Mark 4), the earlier actions that had already been reported would have partially prepared the audience as to who was who, just as they would have already recognized the Sower to be Jesus.

We will look at these groups from easiest to hardest: those by the way side, those on good ground, those among thorns, and those on stony ground. The stony group will likely be a bit of a surprise, so I save it for last.

The wayside

Birds swoop down and devour the seed that falls on the hard ground by the path. Jesus compares this to the hard of heart who promptly reject the word: "but when they have heard, Satan cometh *immediately* <2112 *euthos*>, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts" (Mark 4:15).

The audience would quickly relate these words to the scribes and Pharisees. Throughout Mark 2 and 3, leading up to the parable, this group has repeatedly shown themselves to be hard of heart against Jesus. They reasoned in their hearts, "Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies?" (2:6, 7). They looked down on

Jesus for eating with publicans and sinners (2:16). They challenged his disciples for not fasting (2:18). They condemned the disciples for picking grain on the sabbath (2:24).

When Jesus found a man with a withered hand in the synagogue, “they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him” (3:2). This episode uses exactly the same language about the Pharisees as those by the way side. Mark says Jesus was “grieved for *the hardness of their hearts.*” Then, after Jesus heals the man, “the Pharisees went forth, and *straightway* <2112 euthos> took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him” (3:5, 6).

Finally, they showed their total rejection of Jesus by accusing him of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of the demons (3:22).

There would have been no doubt that the seed sown by the wayside represented the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus’ constant adversaries, whose hardened hearts prevented them from hearing the truth concerning God’s son. This identification is repeatedly confirmed throughout the rest of the gospel: the scribes and Pharisees, together with their colleagues the chief priests and Herodians, are those with hardened hearts by the wayside (7:1, 2, 5; 8:11, 15, 31; 10:2, 32-34; 11:15, 18, 27, 28; 12:1, 6-8, 12, 13, 14, 38-40; 14:1, 10, 11, 43, 53, 55; 15:1).

Good ground

The seed that falls on fertile ground takes root and produces crops, multiplying itself thirty, sixty, and hundredfold. Jesus says these represent those who eagerly accept the word, and who bring forth much fruit by spreading the word to those around them (Mark 4:8, 20).

By the time we get to Mark 4, there have already been five healings. In the story of the man sick of the palsy, we read, “When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (Mark 2:5). This suggests that those healed might be the good ground, representing the faithful who are saved by Jesus. Also, the healings cause Jesus’ fame to be spread: “And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee” (1:28); “And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door” (1:32, 33); “But he [the leper who Jesus had healed] went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter” (1:45); see also 3:7-10.

The first century audience would have been alert to the idea that the seed sown among good ground represents those who are healed by Jesus. Because it was a common practice of first century storytellers to use patterns, the audience would have been looking for patterns in the healings. Such patterns were used to tie together the individual stories in a novel and give the whole sequence more significance. Jesus healed many people (1:32-39; 3:7-12; 6:1-6, 53-56), as did his disciples (3:13-19; 6:7-13), so Mark could select the specific healings to include in his gospel in order to teach additional spiritual lessons. In this case, the pattern

is clear: in Mark's gospel Jesus heals 12 individual Jews and one Gentile. The 12 Jews represent the faithful from the 12 tribes of Israel, including parents, men and women, sons and daughters, and the one Gentile represents faithful Gentiles. They also reflect Jesus' power to heal all kinds of sicknesses and diseases.²⁵

The healings emphasize the importance of faith. In every case, the episode is initiated by those with faith (Jesus does not initiate these interactions, people come to him):

- “When Jesus saw their *faith*, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee” (2:5).
- “And he said unto her [the woman with an issue of blood], Daughter, thy *faith* hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague” (5:34).
- “As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto [Jairus] the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only *believe*” (5:36).
- “Jesus said unto him [the father of the epileptic boy], If thou canst *believe*, all things are possible to him that *believeth*. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I *believe*; help thou mine *unbelief*” (9:23-24).
- “And Jesus said unto him [blind Bartimaeus], Go thy way; thy *faith* hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way” (10:52).

Several of these are examples where <4982 sozo>, the Greek word meaning “to be saved”, is translated “to be made whole” (see the discussion in Study 2: Three Accounts, Three Perspectives). These folks are saved by their faith.

The characters represented by the wayside and the good ground would have been clear to the audience. Those by the wayside were the scribes, Pharisees, Herodians, chief priests, and elders, the enemies of Jesus. Those on good ground were the faithful who came to Jesus to be healed and afterward became fruitful by spreading the gospel message to everyone they could.

Thorny ground

The seed that falls among thorns cannot grow because the thorns overpower it. “And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful” (Mark 4:18, 19).

Three incidents in the gospel of Mark illustrate this type of response: the rich man, Herod, and Pilate.

The rich man wants to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus answers him:

“Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and

give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:17-22).

The fact that “Jesus loved him” rules out the possibility that the man’s claim, “Master, all these have I observed from my youth,” was merely a boastful overstatement; it appears to have been an honest confession of the facts. The man’s interaction with Jesus is initially positive. Then Jesus’ demand that the man sell everything he has and give it to the poor tests the man to see whether he would be like the seed sown on thorny ground, whether his riches would choke the word, or whether he would be willing to give up the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches to become a fruitful follower of Jesus. The record says he was sad and went away grieved, “for he had great possessions.” As far as we can tell from Mark’s record, this man’s choice puts him into the category of seed sown among thorns.

Likewise, when Herod decides to behead John the Baptist, pride and the desire to please others gets the better of him. At first, “Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly” (6:20), just like the seed among thorns, who hear the word. But when faced with the choice of remaining true to these first inclinations or allowing the cares of the world to take precedence over the word, he chooses the latter: “And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison.” Herod’s choice puts him into the category of seed sown among thorns, those who fail to be fruitful because they let the cares of the world interfere with the development of their faith.

Pilate makes a similar choice. His natural inclination is to release Jesus: “Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him” (15:14). But he caters to their evil demands rather than following his own better judgement, “And so Pilate, *willing to content the people*, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified” (15:15).

These three stories come after the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4, so the audience would have had to wait before they could determine who the seed among thorny ground represented.

Stony ground

The most difficult group to identify is the stony ground <4075 *petrodes*>. The seed immediately <2112 *eutheos*> starts to grow in its shallow soil, but the glaring heat of the sun scorches it, and because it has no root, it withers away. Jesus interprets the stony ground <4075> as those “who, when they have heard the word, immediately <2112> receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so *endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake*, immediately <2112> they are offended <4624 *skandalizo*>” (Mark 4:16, 17).

As surprising as it might be, the stony ground represents the disciples. There is plenty of evidence for this conclusion.

(1) Simon Peter the Stone and Judas the Betrayer. The audience has just heard that Jesus gave Simon a surname, “And Simon he surnamed *Peter* (‘Stone’) <4074 *Petros*>” (3:16) and that one of the twelve, “Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him” (3:19). The very allusion to “stony ground” <4075 *pretodes*> would have caused bells to go off, as would the reference to betrayal by one of his closest, specially-chosen followers.

(2) Received the word immediately. The audience will also recall that when the first disciples heard the word, they immediately received it with gladness. When Jesus had called Simon and Andrew to become fishers of men, the record says that “*straightway* <2112 *euthos*> they forsook their nets, and followed him.” When he called James and John, “And *straightway* <2112> he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him” (1:16-20). These hints prepared the audience to listen for more clues. Was the sudden decision to leave everything and follow Jesus to be a whim or a lifelong commitment?

(3) Fear and doubt. The shallowness of the disciples’ faith would soon be evident. In the very next scene they cross the sea in a boat. A terrible windstorm arises, and waves fill the vessel as Jesus sleeps. Panic-stricken, the disciples wake him and he stills the wind and the sea. He says to the disciples, “Why are ye so *fearful*? how is it that *ye have no faith*? And *they feared exceedingly*, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (4:37-41). In Matthew’s version, Jesus uses the phrase, “O *ye of little faith* <3640 *oligopistis*>”. In contrast to the faithful who come to be healed by Jesus, the disciples have little or no faith; when afflictions arise the disciples become fearful. Later, when there is another storm at sea, the disciples again react with fear (6:50). In Matthew’s version, Peter takes an initially brave step by climbing out of the boat to walk to Jesus, but then he doubts, fearing for his life, and again, Jesus rebukes him, “And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O *thou of little faith*, wherefore *didst thou doubt*?” (Matt 14:31). This is precisely the pattern of the stony ground, enthusiastic faith followed by fear and doubt.²⁶

(4) Ye shall be offended. The clencher comes at the last supper, when Jesus tells the disciples that they would all be offended, exactly as he had foretold earlier in the parable (the Greek word for “to be offended” means to “stumble” or “fall”):

“And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended <4624 skandalizo> because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee. But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended <4624>, yet will not I. And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all” (14:27-31).

Of course, Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself.²⁷

(5) **Betrayal, Desertion, and Denial.** In some ways the end of Mark's gospel is like a morality play: Judas plays the role of Betrayal (Mark 3:19; 14:10, 11, 17-21), the young man, representing all of the disciples, plays the role of Desertion (14:50-52), and Peter plays the role of Denial (14:66-72).

(6) **Responses to Jesus' impending suffering.** The disciples' responses to Jesus' predictions of his impending suffering, death, and resurrection could not be more inappropriate. After the first prediction, Peter rebukes Jesus, becoming a satan and stumblingblock to his Lord, because he has let humanistic thinking take priority over godly thinking. After the second prediction, the disciples, "understand not that saying, and were afraid to ask" (9:32), and along the way, they dispute who should be the greatest. After the third, James and John ask if Jesus would grant them to sit, one on his right hand, the other on his left, in his glory. These responses give us a glimpse into their motivations.

(7) **Disobedience.** The disciples constantly disobey specific commandments of Christ. Jesus takes a child in his arms and instructs the disciples: "Whosoever shall receive one of *such children* in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me" (9:36, 37). The disciples proceed to do exactly the opposite: "And they brought *young children* to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer *the little children* to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as *a little child*, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (10:13-16).

Jesus encourages his disciples to watch and pray:

"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is... Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (13:32-37),

In the garden, Jesus repeats the command to Peter, James, and John, his closest disciples, "Sit ye here, while I shall pray...My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch...he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch for one hour. Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." This was no ordinary night. Jesus needed them this night. They could sleep later. Instead, they do exactly the opposite by failing to watch and by falling asleep as Jesus himself exceedingly sorrowful was praying, seeking God's help in preparation for the impending suffering on the cross (14:32-43). In contrast, the disciples' failure to watch and pray in the garden caused them to be unprepared for the temptations that would come later that very night. Jesus' disciples ignore his exhortations at their own risk!

(8) **Hardened hearts.** A final and conclusive indication that this identification is correct is the fact that the disciples' hearts are hardened:

"For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was

hardened” (6:52).

*“And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? **have ye your heart yet hardened?** Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?” (8:17, 18).*

The end of Mark’s gospel focuses on the disciples’ unbelief (Mark 16:9-14). When Mary Magdalene tries to tell them that Jesus is alive, they do not believe her. When others confirm her story they still refuse to believe. Finally, Jesus appears to them, and rebukes them for “their unbelief and hardness of heart.” How shocking, and sobering, that Jesus describes his beloved disciples with the same harsh phrase he earlier used of the Jewish leaders!²⁸

Why are the disciples portrayed this way?

There is little room for uncertainty: the disciples are the stony ground. No matter what our initial reluctance to accept such a conclusion, the evidence is overwhelming. We are left with the question: Why does God inspire Mark to portray the disciples in this way, first eagerly accepting the word, but ultimately disobeying, betraying, fleeing, denying, and with hardened hearts refusing to believe the reports of Jesus’ resurrection, even though Jesus had openly told them about everything in advance?

The disciples’ questions serve as a narrative strategy; they help the audience by providing opportunities for Jesus to repeat, explain, and elaborate the Truth. The disciples act as foils for Jesus, highlighting the uniqueness of his outlook and faithfulness. Showing the disciples in a negative light makes the audience side with Jesus and the narrator. The audience sees the disciples’ flaws as characteristics to be avoided: they do not follow Jesus’ example; they do and desire the things of this world; their traits contrast with the behavior of those Jesus heals; and, unlike Jesus and the faithful ones he heals, the disciples crave self-advancement.

In short, the portrayal of the disciples as stony ground—at first eagerly following Jesus, then fearing and doubting, and finally being offended—offers much-needed exhortation for us all (Tolbert: 221-226).²⁹

A Program Guide

The Parable of the Sower is “A Program Guide for the Gospel of Mark.” Today, theatres distribute a printed program to help the audience follow a performance.³⁰ A first century audience would have been accustomed to the narrative strategies and rhetorical devices that Mark uses to inform them of these connections. The story is meant to be universal, in time and in place, so the different roles in the gospel are type cast, like in a morality play. It is intended to persuade the audience to become personally involved, being saved by the gospel message, becoming good soil that brings forth fruit. In this way we are led to the real purpose of Mark’s gospel: it is an exhortation to follow the way of Jesus, living as God’s children, having our hearts filled with God’s law, willing to lay down our lives in service to Him, forgoing the riches of the world, remaining faithful to the end, and producing fruit in abundance to His honor and glory.³¹

Epilog: Hearing the Word

The Parable of the Sower is one of the first things we teach our children. Its message is simple: the different soils represent the various ways people react when they hear God's Word. As we grow in the Truth we soon recognize the reality behind the parable as we see its fulfillment in ourselves and those we know. These exhortations are important and would be sufficient, but as with so much else in the Scriptures, that is really only the beginning.

The studies in this special issue show how the gospel writers focus on different messages. Mark's gospel is ideal for a public reading in a single two-hour sitting: he emphasizes the basic story of the parable; he gives important clues to the Old Testament sources underlying its images; and he connects the characters in his gospel to the soils in the parable. Matthew's gospel is a sequence of weekly exhortations especially appropriate for Jewish believers: he organizes his gospel to align with the themes of the feasts; he captures Jesus' standard rabbinic teaching methods (like exact repetition, crisp contrast, and poetic rhythms) to help us remember the parable and its lessons; he stresses that Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecies in Isaiah; and the alignment of the parable of the Sower with the Shema is illustrated throughout his gospel as Jesus and his hearers are tested by God to see if they love Him with all their heart, soul, and mammon. Luke writes for a general audience with exhortations that encourage us to follow the example of Jesus.

These studies encourage readers to seek the full meaning of God's Word. There is no end of searching, because God's Word has no limits. Examine a passage in its immediate context. Study it in conjunction with its parallels, seeking exhortation from their similarities and their differences. Find the allusions to Old Testament Scriptures. Memorize passages and meditate upon them, especially foundational passages like the Shema and the Parable of the Sower. Draw exhortations from the examples of Bible characters. Apply these lessons in your daily life.

It is my prayer that these studies will encourage others to seek out the riches of the Scriptures. May we all hear God's Word and do it. May we go forth and spread the seed upon everyone we meet. May we show ourselves to be good soil, persevering to the end, and bringing forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred! Amen.

Joe Hill (Austin/Leander, TX)

*We thank Thee, then, O Father / For all things bright and good,
The seed-time, and the harvest, / Our life, our health, our food.
No gifts have we to offer / For all Thy love imparts,
But that which Thou desirest / Our humble, thankful hearts.
All good gifts around us / Are sent from heaven above;
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord / For all His love.*

(Hymn 426.3)

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The CHRISTADELPHIAN TIDINGS of the Kingdom of God (USPS 107-060)
P.O. Box 530696 • Livonia, MI 48153-0696
Periodicals Postage Paid at San Dimas, California

Endnotes

1 Prof. Cope writes, "...the phrase may be an exegetical formula. This phrase is used in Jewish literature to call for assent to the exegetical comment" (15-16).

2 Prof. Gerhardtsson writes, "When the Markan and Matthean versions of this passage are compared, one is struck by the pedagogical tone of the latter. The parable itself is treated as a familiar pericope with a name (*siman* [Hebrew word for "name"]): *he parable tou speirantos* ["the parable of the sower" (Matt 13:18)]. The interpretation has a tendency to define and a uniformity of style with symmetrical and repetitive phrases: all of which formal characteristics are typical of rabbinic pedagogics. What Matthew is describing are not four undifferentiated groups of listeners but four individual cases (note that Matthew uses the singular) which are *types*. The same aorist participle, ["*ho...spareis*"], is used in all four sentences. This tendency to exact repetition is familiar from the didactic style of the rabbis" (1967-68: 175).

3 The three accounts of the Interpretation have different grammatical forms for the word "hear" <191 *akouo*>. The following table is based on Professor William D. Mounce's *Interlinear for the Rest of Us: The Reverse Interlinear for New Testament Word Studies*, 2006, Zondervan: Grand Rapids:

Hear <191 <i>akouo</i> >	Mark 4	Matthew 13	Luke 8
by the way side	v15 v.aas.3p	v19 pt.pa.gsm	v12 pt.aa.npm
on stony ground	v16 v.aas.3p	v20 pt.pa.nsm	v13 v.aas.3p
among thorns	v18 pt.aa.npm	v22 pt.pa.nsm	v14 pt.aa.npm
on good ground	v20 v.pai.3p	v23 pt.pa.nsm	v15 pt.aa.npm

Legend: {v = verb; pt = participle}. {aas = aorist active subjunctive; pai = present active indicative; pa = present active; aa = aorist active}. {3p = third person plural; gsn = genitive singular masculine; nsm = nominative singular masculine; npm = nominative plural masculine}.

Prof. Gerhardtsson (1967-68) highlights the significance of these differences:

- In Matthew – "It is also important to note that the *listening* is depicted in the *present* participle: *ho akouon* in all four cases. The passage concerns people who continually stand under God's word with the duty of listening to it and accepting it, and it explains how this listening to God's word is in fact done by the four defined types" (175).
- In Mark – "The hearing (*akouein*) is not uniformly expressed in the four cases: finite forms in the first two and the fourth, participle in the third; aorist in the first three, present in the last. The difference of tenses is significant however: the three first categories meet with the word on various occasions: the men of the good ground are continually listening to God's word" (181).
- In Luke – "It is worth noting the tenses used. In Matthew the hearing was in the present; in Luke the verb *akouein* is in the aorist. The evangelist is probably thinking of the man who comes and hears the word; what happens to those who go out from the service with the word sown in their hearts?" (183).*

* "Finite forms" are verbs and "participles" are "-ing" words that act as verbal adjectives

4 More completely, Prof. Goulder says, “The Marcan parables do not present clear contrasts, indeed most of them no contrast at all... It is different with Matthew. His long parables are without exception black-and-white caricature contrasts: the Two Builders upon sand and rock, the man and his enemy sowing their Wheat and Tares, the Dragnet with good fish in buckets and the bad thrown out, the ninety-nine safe sheep and the wanderer, the Merciful King and the Unmerciful Servant, the first Labourers in the Vineyard and the last, the obedient and disobedient sons, the invited and the chosen at the wedding feast, the faithful and the faithless servant in charge of the house, the wise and the foolish Virgins, the two good and faithful stewards and the wicked and idle steward. Often the contrasts... [use] repetitive language so that they shall not escape us, as with the Two Builders, the Unmerciful Servant, and the Talents especially. Usually the contrast is even: wheat with tares, five wise virgins and five foolish... So much is the contrast part of Matthew’s manner that he introduces contrasts of his own into both the long Marcan parables... Wicked Husbandmen... Similarly with the Sower... Thus all thirteen of the long Matthean parables are contrast-parables. There remain a number of shorter vinette-parables, which are not long enough to bear this type of handling. Nevertheless the weddings and funerals of the Children in the Market-place are a contrast; the Marcan Mustard Seed is supplied not only with a farmer to take and sow it in his field, but also with a pair in the woman taking and hiding leaven in the meal; and the Pearl makes a pair with the Treasure in the Field... The only parables in Matthew which are not contrasts are the Marcan Fig-tree and Matthew’s own Burglar” (1974: 54-55).

5 Prof. Goulder observes, “The parable is told very much as it stands in Mark, but the emphasis is changed in the interpretation by the addition of the significant word *sunieimi* to the first and last classes. What matters, Matthew has told us, is understanding... those along the path are those who hear and do not understand; those on the good soil are those who hear and do understand. The subtleties of the two intervening classes cannot be forced into this mould, and should not be omitted; and we are left with a complex four-point Marcan parable on which a simple two-point Matthean contrast has been grafted” (1974: 54-55). Actually, there are really two classes and six sub-classes, three for each class. The non-understanding, non-producing class is made up of those by the wayside, those on the stony ground, and those among thorns. The understanding, producing class is made up of those who bring forth fruit, some hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold.

6 Matt 13:35 has several connections to Mark 4. “I will utter things hidden <2928

(like a verb, a participle has tense; like an adjective, a participle agrees with the noun it modifies in case, number, and gender). The Greek “aorist” tense has no equivalent in English. The aspect of the aorist tense is undefined (the word “aorist” means “undefined” or “indefinite”). It describes action usually in the past, and states only that the action happened without indicating its duration; in contrast, the imperfect past tense has continuous aspect. The aorist tense should usually be translated into English with the simple past tense (“I ate” rather than “I was eating”). For more details, see William D. Mounce 1993, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids.

krupto>” (Matt 13:25, RV) includes language of “For there is nothing hid <2927 *kruptos*>, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret <614 *apokruphos* from 613 *apokruptos*, which is a compound of 575 *apo* and 2928 *krupto*>” (Mark 4:22). The concept underlying “I will utter...” (Matt 13:35) is the same as “he expounded all things to his disciples” (Mark 4:34).

7 Prof. Charles H. Talbert observes, “The evangelist pays special attention to women in his narrative of Jesus and the early church: Luke 1:24ff., Elizabeth (only in Luke); 1:26ff., Mary (only in Luke); 2:36ff., Anna (only in Luke); 4:38ff., Simon’s mother-in-law; 7:11ff., the widow at Nain (only in Luke); 7:36ff., the sinful woman (only in Luke); 8:2-3, women who ministered to Jesus and his disciples (only in Luke); 8:43ff., woman with a hemorrhage; 10:38ff., Martha and Mary (only in Luke); 15:8-10, the parable of the woman with a lost coin (only in Luke); 18:1-8, parable of the widow (only in Luke); 23:39, 55, the women at the crucifixion; 24:10-11, 22-23, the women at the tomb; Acts 1:14, the women and Mary at prayer; 5:1ff., Sapphira; 6:1ff., the widows; 9:30ff., Dorcas; 12:12ff., Mary the mother of Mark and Rhoda; 16:14ff., Lydia; 16:16ff., the slave girl who is healed; 17:12, Greek women of high standing believed; 17:34, Damaris; 18:2, 18, 26, Priscilla; 21:9, Philip’s four daughters; 23:16, Paul’s sister; 26:13, Bernice” (90-91).

8 In his book on parables, Prof. Jeremias attempts to justify the common view: “Also the pictorial element of the parables is drawn from the daily life of Palestine. It is noteworthy, for instance, that the sower in Mark 4:3-8 sows so clumsily that much of the seed is wasted; one might have expected a description of the regular method of sowing, and that, in fact, is what we have here. This is easily understood when we remember that in Palestine sowing precedes ploughing... What appears to the western mind as bad farming practice is simply customary usage in Palestinian conditions” (11, 12).

One of the professor’s pieces of evidence (see his Footnote 2 on pp. 11-12) is based on the Old Testament Pseudepigraphal Book of Jubilees: “And Prince Mastema [Satan] sent crows and birds so that they might eat the seed which was being sown in the earth in order to spoil the earth so that they might rob mankind of their labors. *Before they plowed in the seed, the crows picked it off the surface of the earth.* And therefore he called him Terah because the crows and birds were impoverishing them. And they ate their seed. And the years began being barren because of the birds. And they ate all of the fruit of the trees from the groves. If ever they were able to save a little from all of the fruit of the earth in their days, it was with great effort” (Jubilees 11:11-13, my emphasis). The highlighted sentence seems to support the idea that there was indeed a time when farmers scattered the seed before they plowed the field.

But Prof. Drury (57), points out that three paragraphs further on we read: “And in the first year of the fifth week, Abram taught those who were making the implements for oxen, the skilled carpenters. And they made implements above the ground facing the handle of the plow so that they might place seed upon it. *And the seed would go down from within it onto the point of the plow, and it would*

be hidden in the earth. And therefore they were not afraid of the crows. And they did likewise upon all the plow handles above the ground. And they sowed and tilled all of the earth just as Abram commanded them. And therefore they were not afraid of the birds” (Jubilees 11:23-24; my emphasis). In other words, two millennia before the first century, it was no longer common practice to sow before you plowed.

9 Further, Prof. Cave (383) points out that the Hebrew word translated “rain” in Hosea 10:12 is the *hiphil* of *arah* <03384>, which is often translated “teach”. In the Torah: “They shall *teach* Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law...” (Deut 33:10). In the Prophets: “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will *teach* us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:3); “For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth *teach* him” (Isa 28:26). In the Writings: “I will instruct thee and *teach* thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psa 32:8); “He *taught* me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live” (Prov 4:4).

10 Bro. Whittaker summarizes the point as follows: “In one respect the story is not true to life. A good husbandman is careful to see that very little of his seed falls on stony places, in by paths, or among thorns. He is at pains to ensure that all but a tiny fraction of it falls in well-prepared soil where there is good tilth. But Jesus, even as he spoke this parable, was casting his seed broadcast, regardless as to what kind of ground it fell into. And this is how he would have his Word proclaimed in every generation. Certainly today, by whatever means the Word is proclaimed, most of it falls in unfruitful places. But as an illustration of the varying kinds of response to the gospel, this story could not be bettered” (262).

11 Prof. Gertner writes, “The term *niyr*, employed by the prophet both as a verb (*niyru*, plough) and as a noun (*niyr*, ground), lends itself to another interpretation. It can be taken as meaning, ‘to light a light’, or ‘to kindle a fire’; especially if, with the help of *al tiqrey* [‘that is, a changed or double reading of a word’, p. 270], we read *ner*, light, instead of *niyr*. It is highly probable that Jeremiah himself employed the verb in this sense. The burning of thorns before any work on the ground begins is a practical necessity. The prophet, speaking to people familiar with farming habits, admonishes them to kindle a fire (*niyru...niyr*) and to burn thorns before sowing. In the following verse, speaking of the uncircumcised heart, he then fittingly mentions the ‘fury’ that would ‘come forth like fire’, using ‘fire’ as an abstract image (of the burning fury) in a negative sense after having used it in a concrete and positive sense (of burning the thorns). Indeed, in a parallel prophetic admonition (Hos 10:12) LXX actually renders *niyr* by ‘light’: ‘Light ye for yourselves the light of knowledge’, the prophet there calls, in the spiritualized interpretation (and revised version) of the Greek translators” (272-273).

Prof. Gertner goes on to say, “Jesus must have had this version and translation in mind. It is, then, the light (*niyr*, *ner*) as a metaphorical image of knowledge, knowledge of ‘the word’ sown by the sower (Mark 4:14), of which he speaks. The

parable of the sower and the simile of the candle are two homiletical [exhortational] interpretations of one and the same biblical verse” (273).

12 These connections led Prof. Bowker to write, “Mark 4:1-20...the whole passage, both the parable and the interpretation, are understood as an exposition of the Isaiah passage in question, particularly since the section in Isaiah ends with a specific reference to *zera'*, seed...the targum on Isaiah particularly stresses the importance of the seed as a counterbalance to the withering and drying up of the terebinth and the oak: the seed, the [‘exiles of Israel’], is that which bears fruit when all else has failed and is desolate...Not surprisingly, on this basis (and because of the emphasis in vs. 7), later exegesis understood the passage to be essentially about repentance and forgiveness, despite the apparent statement of the reverse in vs. 10...But this simply establishes the strong sense of contrast in the passage: the seed can still shoot up, despite the appearance—and reality—of death and desolation. Thus, the occurrence of the word *zera'* and its fundamental importance for the targum interpretation make it at least credible that a parable about the sowing of seed should have been offered as an interpretation of the whole Isaiah passage. From this point of view, it is important to bear in mind that the form of the quotation from Isaiah in Mark (abbreviated though it is) is markedly closer to the targum text than to the Hebrew—which in itself would be less surprising if in fact Jesus had been asked about the meaning of the difficult Isaiah passage, because a targum version would have become a natural aid to exegesis” (311-312).

Prof. Evans writes, “Bowker argues that the Parable of the Sower is a midrash on the idea of the ‘holy seed’ in Isa 6:13. He points out that the Rabbinic understanding of *zr' qdsh* [‘holy seed’] was that it was the good seed spared by God ‘to bear fruit in abundance.’ Therefore, [the exegesis in Mark’s gospel], Bowker believes, has to do with the identification of the good seed with those who, according to the parable’s interpretation, are those who have received *ho logos* [‘the word’] and have been fruitful (throughout Mark’s gospel Jesus’ message is referred to as *ho logos* cf. 2:2; 4:33; 8:32). Thus, the logion of Mark 4:11-12 and its citation of Isa 6:9-10 may be viewed as integral to the chapter as a whole. I think, however, that Bowker has minimized the element of prophetic judgment surrounding Isa 6:9-10, one of the harshest texts in the Jewish prophetic tradition...If Mark possibly saw in Isaiah an analogy to the rejected ministry of Jesus then it is understandable that the evangelist would relate the words of prophetic judgment to the experience of the Lord...Therefore, just as Isaiah spoke of Yahweh’s word of judgment against a stubborn people that promoted obduracy and brought on judgment, likewise Jesus’ word (i.e. his ‘parables’) promoted obduracy” (1981: 234, 235).

In a later article, Prof. Evans writes, “In a recent study, I have suggested that the evangelist Mark has interpreted the judgmental aspect of Jesus’ parables (e.g., the ‘hardening’ idea of 4:11-12) in terms of the word of judgment Yahweh commanded Isaiah to speak, which was designed to render Israel obdurate. Just as Isaiah was to speak a word of obduracy to bring about Israel’s judgment, so the word of Jesus brought on judgment. Moreover, in the case of both Isaiah and Jesus a seed would be spared that would become abundantly fruitful. The emphasis seems to be on

the nature and efficacy of God's word. It is a word which separates 'outsiders' from 'insiders' and effects powerful results. If the basic point of Mark's Sower Parable is the efficacy of God's word (rather than either eschatology or ecclesiology), then the parable fits very well in its wider context, where the emphasis seems to be upon the growth of the kingdom which sprouts and grows to maturity (see vv 26-29) and greatness (see vv 30-32)" (1985: 465-466).

He continues, "I would like to suggest that the Sower Parable reflects the broader concern of canonical Isaiah, a concern which finds expression in the thematic passage of 55:10-11...In my estimation these passages in Isaiah (i.e., 6:9-13 and 55:10-11), linked by the catchword 'seed,' provide the basis for a skillfully developed midrash in Mark 4:1-20. The parable and its interpretation reflect the same metaphor and theology that we have in Isa 55:10-11, while the explicit citation of Isa 6:9-10 sets the tone of judgment and recalls the righteous remnant who were spared by God in order to become abundantly fruitful. Seen against the background of Mark's theology of the cross, Mark 4:1-20 witnesses the same theology of canonical Isaiah: out of judgment comes salvation... The unifying theme found in Isaiah and in Mark 4 is the idea of the efficacy of God's word. God's spoken word accomplishes his purposes, as Isa 55:10-11 declares and as the Sower Parable illustrates...Midrash does not simply involve verbal allusions to or quotations of specific texts, nor is it simply commentary on such texts. Rather, midrash often involves the appropriation of the theology and hermeneutic of given texts (and these 'texts' may be a few verses or whole OT books). At issue in the Sower Parable is the power of the word of God as proclaimed in Isa 6:9-13 and 55:10-11. Thus the hermeneutic of...Isaiah is appropriated and applied to a new context. The reaction of incomprehension and unbelief on the part of so many in the gospel narrative (an important and pervasive Marcan motif) becomes intelligible to first-century Christians in light of God's word of obduracy and judgment given to the...prophet Isaiah (i.e., Isa 6:9-13). Similarly, the assurance that the word will be fruitful and able to effect divine purposes in the Marcan context is provided in the word given to the...prophet (i.e., Isa 55:10-11)" (1985: 466-467).

Though we might have used different and less scholarly phrasing to make these points, nevertheless, these comments do help to increase our understanding of the role of the Parable of Sower in Mark's gospel.

13 The specific verses are (Idelsohn: 213-14):

- Kingdoms (The Lord Reigns): Exod 15:18; Num 23:21; Deut 33:5; Psa 22:28; Psa 93:1; Psa 24:7-10; Isa 44:6; Obad 1:21; Zech 14:9; Deut 6:4.
- Remembrances (God Remembers His Covenant): Gen 8:1; Exod 2:24; Lev 26:42; Psa 111:4; Psa 111:5; Psa 106:45; Jer 2:2; Ezek 16:60; Jer 31:20; Lev 26:4.
- Trumpets (God's Voice): Exod 19:16; Exod 19:19; Exod 20:18; Psa 47:5; Psa 98:6; Psa 81:3;—Psa. 150—Isa 18:3; Isa 27:13; Zech 9:14; Num 10:10.

14 The full Shema is: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine

heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (Deut 6:4-9).

“And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, That I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; And then the LORD’S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you. Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: That your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth” (Deut 11:13-21).

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God. I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God” (Num 15:37-41).

15 Commenting on Deut 6:5, Prof. Driver writes in his commentary, “The *love of God*, while alluded to as characterizing Jehovah’s true worshippers in the Decalogue (Exod 20:6 = Deut 5:10; cf. 7:9), is set forth in Deuteronomy with peculiar emphasis as the fundamental motive of human action (10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20; so Josh 22:5; 23:11 . . . : not elsewhere in the Hexateuch): compare in other books Judg 5:31; 1Kgs 3:3; Neh 1:5; Dan 9:4 (both from Deut 7:9); Psa 31:24; 97:10; 145:20” (91).

Prof. Driver continues, “*With all thy heart, and with all thy soul*] a specially Deuteronomic expression, implying the devotion of the whole being to God (see on 4:29). It occurs besides 4:29; 10:12; 11:13; 13:[3]; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10; Josh 22:5; 23:14 . . . ; 1Kgs 2:4; 8:48 (= 2Chr 6:38); 2 Kgs 23:3 (= 2Chr 34:31), 25 . . . ; 2 Chr 15:12; Jer. uses it once, of God, 32:41. It is strengthened here by the addition

of *and with all thy force*...; hence 2Kgs 23:25 (of Josiah),—the only passages in which *me'od* occurs in this sense (elsewhere always in adv phrases, with *force* = *greatly*).—The passage, Deut 6:4-5, is a great one; and it was a true instinct which led the Jews of a later time to select it for recitation twice daily by every Israelite (the Shema'). It is further significant that our Lord, when questioned as to the 'first commandment of all' (Matt 22:37f.; Mark 12:29f.), and as to the primary condition for the inheritance of eternal life (Luke 10:27f.), should have referred both His questioners to the same text, with which daily use must have already made them familiar" (91-92).

16 Prof. Gerhardsson writes, "No scribe had any doubt as to what was the collective, united demand made in Deut 6:5, and that one thing was here required: a sterling undivided love for God. But he was equally convinced that the holy scriptures never say anything unnecessarily, and so he examined the many formulae that gave expression to this one demand and asked, Why does the scripture here find it necessary to name the heart, the soul and the might (*lebab, nephesh, me'od*)?" (1967-68: 168-169).

17 Sifre Deuteronomy – "*With all thy heart* (6:5): With both your Inclinations, the Inclination to do good and the Inclination to do evil" (Piska 32, Hammer 1986: 59). Prof. Hammer explains, "The word *lebabka* ('thy heart') is spelled with two letters *bet*, which is taken to indicate the two parts of the heart, i.e., the two Inclinations. See Ber. 9:5" (1986: 404, n. 6). Sifre continues, "Another interpretation: *With all thy heart*: With all the heart that is within you" (Piska 32, Hammer 1986: 59). Prof. Hammer explains, "Dividing the word into two parts, *leb beka*, 'heart in you'..." (1986: 404, n. 7).

Sifre continues, "your heart should not be divided in regard to God" (Piska 32, Hammer 1986: 59), and Prof. Hammer comments, "One's trust in God must be complete and wholehearted. See Piska 31 and Deut. Rabbah, ed. Lieberman, p. 70: 'Your heart should not be divided, rather perform the commandments for their own sakes with a perfect heart'" (1986: 404, n. 8). Here the allusion to Piska 31 refers to the midrash: "Thus also you find that when our father Jacob was about to depart from this world, he called his sons and reprovved each one of them individually, as it is said, *And Jacob called unto his sons...Reuben, thou art my first-born...Simeon and Levi are brethren...Judah, thee shall thy brethren praise* (Gen 49:1-8). Having reprovved each one of them individually, he again called them all together and said to them, 'Do you have any doubts concerning Him who spoke, and the world came into being?' They replied, 'Hear, O Israel, our father! Just as you have no doubts about Him who spoke, and the world came into being, so do we have no doubts'" (Piska 31, Hammer 1986: 58). Prof. Hammer comments on the word "doubts": "Literally 'dispute,' meaning, are you divided, not wholehearted, in regard to the worship of God?" (1986: 403, n. 18). In *The Classic Midrash*, Prof. Hammer comments on the use of "be divided" in Sifre, Piska 32: "*be divided*. To have a divided heart means to have doubts" (1995: 312).

Prof. Driver writes on Deut 4:29, "The phrase 'with all the heart, and with all the soul,' is characteristic of Deuteronomy (see on 6:5), and a genuine expression of

the spirit which animates the Writer. It denotes (substantially) the entire spiritual being of man, the 'heart' being, in the psychology of the ancient Hebrews, the organ of intellect (see Jer 5:21; Hos 7:11 RVm; Job 12:24; etc.), and the 'soul' being the organ of the desires and affections (on 24:15)" (73-74).

Prof. Fox also notes that the heart can be equivalent to the mind: "5 Now you are to love YHWH your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your substance!...5 **heart**: the word is often the equivalent of 'mind' in biblical language" (881).

Prof. Alter comments, "with all your heart: The heart is the seat of understanding in biblical physiology, but it is also associated with feelings" (912).

Prof. Weinfeld writes, "5. *with all your heart* (*bkl lbbk*). *lb* and *lbb* are interchangeable; cf. 1Sam 6:6a versus 6b; Gen 31:20 versus 31:26; Judg 19:6 versus 19:9; but there is a predilection for *lbb* in Deuteronomy... *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* has *btry ysry lbkwn* 'with the two geniuses of your heart'...*with all your heart*... 'Heart' connotes mind, and indeed LXX has *dianonia* 'mind' instead of *kardia* 'heart'. In the NT the element of 'mind' and 'understanding' is even more explicit in the discussed context. There we find both the 'heart' and the 'mind': 'you shall love with all the heart (*kardia*) and with all the mind (*synesis*)' (Mark 12:30), and similarly in Matt 22:37: 'with all your heart (*kardia*)...with all your mind/understanding (*dianois*)'; and compare Luke 10:27. 'Heart' as 'mind' and 'understanding' was prevalent in late Hebrew literature... According to rabbinic interpretation, *bkl lbbk* here implies the personal genii/spirits of the man; one has to serve God with both the good genius/spirit (*yesser twb*) and the evil one (*yesser ra'*)" (332, 338, 339).

18 Sifre Deuteronomy – "And with all thy soul (6:5): Even if God takes away thy soul, as it is said, *For Thy sake are we killed all the day; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter* (Ps. 44:23). R. Simeon ben Menasya says: How can a man be slain all the day? Rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, credits the righteous as if they were slain daily. Simeon ben Azzai says: *With all thy soul*: love Him until the last drop of life is wrung out of you" (Piska 32, Hammer 1986: 59). Prof. Hammer explains, "The verse from the Psalms is quoted because like the verse under consideration it indicates the willingness to give up one's life for God. R. Simeon's interpretation of that verse is a dissenting one" (1986: 404, n. 9).

Professors Fox and Alter translate the phrase, "with all your being." Prof. Fox comments, "Heb. *nefesh* carries a host of meanings: 'life' or 'life essence,' 'breath,' 'self,' and 'appetite,' to mention a few. The traditional English 'soul,' while stirring in these passages, gives the impression of something contrasted to the body—not an idea that appears in the Hebrew Bible. It should be mentioned that the couplet 'heart and being,' which occurs a number of times in Deuteronomy, might also indicate 'mind and emotions.'" (881).

Prof. Alter comments, "The Hebrew *nefesh* means 'life-breath' or 'essential self.' The traditional translation of 'soul,' preserved in many recent versions, is misleading because it suggests a body-soul split alien to biblical thinking" (912).

Prof. Driver comments on 24:15, "*Setteth his heart upon it*] lit. *lifteth up his soul*

to it, a Hebrew idiom signifying ‘setteth his desire upon it’: cf. on 12:20, and see Hos 4:8; Jer 22:27; 44:14; Ezek 24:25; Psa 24:4, and in a religious sense (with God as the object of desire) 25:1; 143:8. With the thought, cf. Job 7:2; 14:6” (277).

Prof. Weinfeld writes, “with all your soul. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan has *w’pylw ntyl yt npskwn* ‘even if he takes your soul.’...” (332) and “with all your soul. The full phrase ‘with all the heart and all the soul’...has been understood by the rabbis and the Targum as readiness to sacrifice life for God, which might reflect the original intention...Nonetheless, one must take into account that the idiom itself expresses full devotion, like the idiom ‘with all your heart,’ so that the interpretation of readiness to sacrifice one’s life does not exclude the more general meaning of the idiom, namely, full devotion” (339).

19 Prof. Neusner translates this phrase “with all of your money” (14). Prof. Fox translates it, “with all your substance”, and comments, “Or ‘excess;’ others, ‘might,’ ‘capacity.’ There are other examples of biblical Hebrew words for ‘strength’ that also mean ‘wealth’ (e.g., *chayil* in Deut 33:11)” (881).

The Talmud says “might” means “money,” “wealth,” “substance,” and “economic might” (Berakoth 54a; 61b; Shabbath 56b; Peshahim 25a; Yoma 82a; Sanhedrin 74a).

Prof. Gerhardsson writes, “The rabbis took the phrase ‘with all your might’ in the sense ‘with all your mammon.’ I generally translate it ‘with all your resources’” (1994: 37, n. 13). “The rabbis took the last member (*bkl me’od*) to mean ‘with all your *mamon*’, i.e. your external resources, belongings, property, wealth, might and power; in other words: all your assets in addition to life and body. I prefer the translation ‘resources.’ The closest Greek translation is probably *ischus*...When in the Greek translations of the Shema’ we meet the word *dianoia*, the Hebrew text was read differently” (1996: 277, n. 2).

Prof. Weinfeld comments, “with all your might. *mid* is translated by the LXX with strength (*dynamis*) and force (*ischus*; ...in 2Kgs 23:25; cf. Mark 12:33; Luke 10:27). The Aramaic versions have *bkl nksk* ‘with all your property’ (*Tg. Onq.*), ‘with all your money (*mmwnk*)’ (*Tg. Ps.-J.* and *Neof.*), as does the rabbinic tradition (*Sipre Deut.* 32; *m. Ber.* 9:5)...In fact, ‘strength’ and ‘force’ (*dynamis, ishcys*) in Greek imply wealth too, like *kh* and *chyl* in Hebrew. Thus in Ezek 27 the word *hwn* ‘wealth’ is translated by the LXX once as *ischys* (v 12) and twice as *dynamis* (vv 18, 27)” (332) and “your might. Hebrew *me’odeka* is used only here and in...2Kgs 23:25 in this sense; otherwise it is an adverb meaning ‘very.’ The implication of ‘might’ is twofold: ability (i.e., power, strength), and means (i.e., wealth). The semantic range is similar to that of the nouns *koah* and *chayil*, which mean primarily ‘strength’ but are also used in the sense of ‘wealth’ ” (339).

20 Sifre Deuteronomy makes the same point, “R. Akiba says: Once Scripture says *with all thy soul*, *with all thy might* follows by inference from the major to the minor” (Piska 32, Hammer 1986: 60). Prof. Hammer observes, “R. Akiba—believes that since logic infers that if we are commanded to love God with our very lives, surely we are commanded to love Him with our possessions, the words

WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT must refer not to possessions, but to something else” (1995: 312). Sifre continues, “Why then *with all thy might*? Because *might* (*me’od*) implies whatever measure (*middah*) God metes out to you, whether of good or of punishment. Similarly David says, (*How can I repay unto the Lord all His bountiful dealings toward me?*) *I will lift up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord* (Ps. 116:12-13). *I found trouble and sorrow, but I called upon the name of the Lord* (Ps. 116:3-4)” (Piska 32, Hammer 1986: 60). Prof. Hammer comments, “In times of both joy and sorrow David ‘called upon the name of the Lord,’ i.e., acknowledged and accepted God’s decrees” (1986: 404, n. 11). Sifre continues, “So also Job says, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord* (Job 1:21), for the measure of good and for the measure of punishment. What did his wife say to him? *Dost thou still hold fast thine integrity? Blaspheme God and die* (Job 2:9). What did he say in reply? *Thou speakest as one of the impious women speaketh. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* (Job 2:10)” (Hammer 1986: 60).

21 The first and great commandment:

Mark 12:28-31	Mark 12:32-34	Matthew 22:34-40	Luke 10:25-28,29-37
<p>28 And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him,</p> <p><i>Which is the first commandment of all?</i></p>	<p>32 And the scribe said unto him,</p> <p>Well, <i>Master, thou hast said the truth:</i></p>	<p>34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.</p> <p>35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, <u>tempting him</u>, and saying,</p> <p>36 <i>Master, which is the great commandment in the law?</i></p>	<p>25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and <u>tempted him</u>, saying,</p> <p><i>Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?</i></p>
<p>29 And Jesus answered him, <i>The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:</i></p> <p>30 <i>And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.</i></p>	<p>for there is one God; and there is none other but he:</p> <p>33 And to love him</p> <p>with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength,</p>	<p>37 Jesus said unto him,</p> <p>Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.</p> <p>38 <i>This is the first and great commandment.</i></p>	<p>26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? How readest thou?</p> <p>27 And he answering said,</p> <p>Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind;</p>

<p>31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. <i>There is none other commandment greater than these.</i></p>	<p>and to love his neighbour as himself, <i>is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.</i></p>	<p>39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 <i>On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.</i></p>	<p>and thy neighbour as thyself.</p>
	<p>34 And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question.</p>		<p>28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. 29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? [vv 30-37 Parable of the Good Samaritan]</p>

22 These must be three different occasions. In the episode in Mark, the scribe is friendly and Jesus has nice things to say about him; whereas in Matthew and Luke, the lawyer is trying to tempt Jesus, and in Luke the lawyer is willing to justify himself. In Mark, Jesus answers the scribe's question with a summary of the Shema, and the scribe compliments him and offers his own summary; in contrast, in Matthew, Jesus answers the lawyer, who doesn't say anything, and in Luke, Jesus reflects the question back to the lawyer, who provides a summary of the Shema. There is another difference which is of no real significance. In Mark and Matthew the question is about the first and great commandment; whereas in Luke it is about what it takes to inherit eternal life. To the rabbis, these two questions are addressing essentially the same issue, as indicated by: "The more study of the Law the more life; the more schooling the more wisdom; the more counsel the more understanding; the more righteousness the more peace. If a man has gained a good name he has gained somewhat for himself; if he has gained for himself the words of the Law he has gained for himself life in the world to come" (Mishnah, Aboth 2:7, Danby: 448); see also Deut 30:6; 11:13-21.

23 Prof. Derrett notes, "The LXX trans. *me'od* as *ischus* only at 2Kgs 23:25, and as *dunamis* only at Deut 6:5 [!]" (224, n. 4). He also notes, "So Delitzsch. 'Alef and 'Ayin are interchangeable and may be removed or added according to the *'al-tikerey* technique [i.e., using a changed or double reading of a word]... *dianoia* is not an additional rendering of *levav*" (224, n. 5).

24 The variety of interpretations given in these summaries of the Shema is reflected in the following table, which shows the various Hebrew and Greek words and their English translations for the key verses.

<p>Deut 6:5 Hebrew, Mishnah, Sifre Deuteronomy</p>	<p>1. heart <<i>lebab</i>></p>	<p>2. soul <<i>nepshesh</i>></p>	<p>3. a. might <<i>me'od</i>> b. thy property/resources <<i>m^ood'cha</i>> c. measure <<i>middah</i>> d. thy reason/intelligence <<i>madda'acha</i>></p>
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2Kgs 23:25 Hebrew	1. heart <lebab>	2. soul <nephesh>	3. might <me'od>
Deut 6:5 LXX	1. mind <dianoia>	2. soul <psuche>	3. strength <dunamis>
2Kgs 23:25 LXX	1. heart <kardia>	2. soul <psuche>	3. strength <ischus>
Mark 12:30	1. heart <kardia>	2. soul <psuche>	3. mind <dianoia> 4. strength <ischus>
Mark 12:33	1. heart <kardia> 2. understanding <sunesis>	3. soul <psuche>	4. strength <ischus>
Matt 22:33	1. heart <kardia>	2. soul <psuche>	3. mind <dianoia>
Luke 10:27	1. heart <kardia>	2. soul <psuche>	3. strength <ischus> 4. mind <dianoia>

25 The healings of the 12 individual Jews form a pattern that make them easy to remember (Farrer 1966: 19-37):

1. 1:21-28 Capernaum demoniac	6. 5:1-20 Gadarene demoniac Legion	
2. 1:29-31 Peter's mother-in-law's fever	7. 5:21-24,35-43 Jairus's dead daughter	
3. 1:40-45 Leper	8. 5:25-34 Woman with issue	
	G. 7:24-30 Syrophenician woman's demoniac daughter	
4. 2:1-12 Palsy	9. 7:31-37 Tongue-tied deaf man	11. 9:14-29 Man's deaf-dumb demoniac son
5. 3:1-6 Withered hand	10. 8:22-26 Bethsaida blind man	12. 10:46-52 Jericho blind Bartimaeas

The first five and the second five line up with each other: two demoniacs (1, 6), two female relatives (2, 7), two cases of Levitical uncleanness (3, 8), four cases of impaired senses, feet and hands (4, 5) and ears and eyes (9, 10). The last two healings (11, 12) start again with a demoniac, and repeat the last two sicknesses, deafness and blindness, of the second handful (9, 10).

26 Such fear and doubt is the enemy of faith. For example, "But the woman *fearing and trembling*, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, *thy faith* hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague" (5:33, 34); in this case, the woman's faith casts out her fear, and by her faith she is saved. Faith being challenged by fear and doubt is a common theme in the gospel: "As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not *afraid*, only *believe*" (5:36) and "Jesus said unto him [the father of the epileptic boy], If thou canst *believe*, all things are possible to *him that believeth*. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, *I believe*; help thou *mine unbelief*" (9:23, 24).

27 That the cross was an offense even to believing Jews is stated plainly by Paul: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews *a stumblingblock* <4625 *skandalon*>" (1Cor 1:23); "And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is *the offence* <4625> of the cross ceased" (Gal 5:11); see also Rom 11:7-10. Mark addresses this issue by portraying the disciples, who are believing Jews, as stumbling at the very idea of the cross.

28 Commenting on Mark 4:11, 13 and 8:17-18, Prof. Bowker writes, “It remains the case in Mark, exactly as in the rabbinic uses, the *musterion* [‘mystery’] has not been acquired by the enterprise of men, it ‘has been given’ [Mark 4:11]. Its nature is, not *mishnah*, not circumcision, but *he basileia tou theou* [‘the kingdom of God’]. What that phrase means in Mark would require a separate and lengthy discussion; but for the purposes of what is being argued here, it is sufficient to say that *whatever* is represented in and through the term, that is what has been given to the disciples to see and know, in a way which they would not have seen and known if God had not given it to them directly as seed is given to the ground. For this reason the surprise of Jesus in vs. 13, which has perplexed some commentators, is not at all odd: for those to whom it has been given to recognise the *dunamis* [‘power’] of God at work in Jesus as being the *dunamis* of God (as opposed to the *grammateis* [‘scribes’] of 3:22ff., who attribute the visible effect to other resources, to ‘the prince of the devils’), the point of the parable should be immediately clear. They are not in the category of ‘those outside’, consequently they *should* know what he is talking about ‘in parables’; but if they do not know this one, how will they know all the rest? They are almost putting themselves back into the category of ‘those outside’; and this is why, perhaps, Jesus applies the same Isaiah text to the disciples in 8:17f.—there is no inconsistency: to those to whom the *musterion* has been given, the meaning of all that has just happened should be obvious; but almost in despair, one feels, Jesus says that they are virtually putting themselves into the category of ‘those outside’: ‘Do you not yet understand?’ In contrast, to return to Mark 4:11, there are those on the outside (as in the comparable rabbinic usage) to whom all things are in parables—not in the sense ‘enigmatically’, but ‘in clearest possible illustration’, exactly as the rabbis used parables in their own dialogues with ‘outsiders’” (313).

29 Here are Prof. Tolbert’s comments that formed the basis for my summary: **(1) The disciples’ questions are a narrative strategy that helps the audience by providing opportunities for Jesus to repeat, explain, and elaborate the Truth.** “The most obvious functional benefit bestowed upon the narrative by the disciples’ lack of comprehension is the opportunity it provides the author through both the narrator and the character Jesus to explain, repeat, and elaborate upon important teachings and issues. Because the disciples do not understand and because, next to Jesus, they are the most constantly present character group in the Gospel, they can become springboards for Jesus’ teaching. Often they ask him privately to explain what he has already said (e.g., 4:10; 7:17; 9:28; 10:10), permitting the repetition or expansion of material for the sake of the memory or clarification for the audience” (221).

(2) The disciples acting as foils for Jesus highlights the uniqueness of his outlook and faithfulness. “The disciples not only supply an opening for teaching but by speaking and acting in ways contrary to Jesus, they function as foils for him. He says children should be received (9:37) and he receives them (10:14-16), while the disciples do not (10:13); he says no one knows when the hour will come, so all must watch (13:32-37) and he watches and prays as the hour draws near (14:32-36), while the disciples sleep (14:37-41); he says that anyone who follows

his way must suffer, take up a cross, and die (8:31-35) and he does just that, while the disciples betray, flee, and deny. The use of contrasting examples to prove an argument or enhance the distinctive characteristics of a favored position was a recommended procedure of ancient rhetoric. As constant foils to Jesus' words and actions, the disciples allow the author to emphasize the special nature of Jesus' outlook and his faithfulness in following its consequences through to the end. Moreover, that the constant, primary foils to Jesus should be his specially chosen disciples makes the contrast all the more striking" (222).

(3) The negative portrayal of the disciples causes the audience to align their thinking with Jesus and the narrator, and encourages readers to become faithful disciples. "The negative characterization of the disciples has at least two related effects on readers. In the first place, because, as we have seen, irony is one of the most common devices used against the disciples in Mark, the audience is made to feel superior to the disciples in knowledge and understanding time and again. The audience shares the views of Jesus and the narrator in opposition to the actions of Peter, James, John, Judas, and the others. For example, while the disciples cannot fathom how Jesus will be able to feed the four thousand in the desert (8:3-4), the audience knows he will do it, just as he earlier fed the five thousand (6:35-44); and while the disciples sleep in Gethsemane, the audience hears Jesus' prayers and shares his pain. These incidents and many others contribute to making the audience *better than* the disciples, but the effect is actually even greater, for portraying the *disciples* as failing foils to Jesus manipulates the reader to respond by becoming a *better disciple*. In rejecting the views and actions of the Twelve and affirming the words and work of Jesus, the reader herself or himself becomes a faithful disciple" (223-224).

(4) The audience is encouraged to identify the disciples' flaws as negative characteristics to be avoided. "In addition to making faithful readers into faithful disciples, in the second place, the negative depiction of the Twelve encourages the audience to search for the flaws that make initially fertile ground into rocky ground... Achieving greater clarity on why some ground proves fertile and other ground proves unfruitful is manifestly a large element in the organizing intention governing the Gospel of Mark. Consequently, observing the character traits associated with the varying fates of all groups and individuals in the Gospel is a major part of the audience's experience of it... That personally selected disciples with greater opportunities to hear and learn than any others could still utterly fail their master raises for the audience a frightening prospect which they must consider for themselves. What flaws or faults or weaknesses can cause initially eager spirits to fall away? Because the typology the disciples illustrate is a universal truth, those same weaknesses may plague the reader—or people the reader knows—as well. Character in ancient literature was revealed by choices: what one wills to do or avoids doing" (224).

(a) The disciples do not follow Jesus' example. "What the disciples avoid doing is quite obvious in their actions of betrayal, fleeing, and denying and in their earlier rejection of Jesus' passion predictions: they avoid taking up their crosses and losing their lives for the sake of the gospel. Moreover, the parable of the Sower indicated

that their ‘falling away’ would come in relation to persecutions and tribulations ‘on account of the word’ (4:17), and throughout the rest of the narrative they are firmly associated with the response of fear (e.g., 4:40-41; 6:50; 9:6, 32; 10:32). Their fearful natures prevent them from enduring the inevitable sufferings involved in following the way of Jesus. Nor are they capable of watching and praying in order to survive their hour of trial or of accepting Jesus’ (or Scripture’s) warning about their impending behavior and future assurance (14:27-31). All of these actions the disciples evade” (225).

(b) The disciples do and desire the things of this world. “What the disciples do or want to do, on the other hand, is less obvious, for it must be derived from their conflicts with Jesus and occasional independent actions, but it is equally important. The disciples want to be great (9:34); they want to be first (9:35); they want to determine who can be part of their group (9:38) and who can approach Jesus (10:13), or, in other words, they want to rule over others (10:42-43); they want either riches to qualify one for the kingdom or leaving everything to be all that is required (10:26-28); they want glory (10:37) and admire concrete honors (9:5; 13:1); they want their physical needs satisfied before considering the needs of their hearts, minds, or spirits (2:23; 8:14-17; 14:37-41); and they want their words and views to supplant those of the Messiah (8:31-33; 14:29-31). They want the things of this world: fame, comfort, wealth, high reputation, authority, and glory. Furthermore, many of these same concerns may be found among the other groups illustrating unfruitful grounds. Herod has John the Baptist beheaded to protect his reputation before his guests (6:26); the rich man values his wealth more than eternal life (10:21-22). The Pharisees, the scribes, and the Jerusalem leaders challenge the authority of Jesus’ words (2:6-7; 11:27-28); want recognition, honor, and first places in synagogues and at feasts (12:38-40); value appearances and the performance of rules and rituals regardless of human needs (3:2-5; 7:5-8; 12:38); and want their traditions to supplant those of God (7:9-13; 10:2-9)” (225).

(c) The traits of the disciples contrast with the behavior of those Jesus heals. “In contrast to this remarkably consistent set of traits found among the various unfruitful earths is the depiction of the ones healed. They generally come out of anonymity and fade back into it. With only two exceptions they are unnamed, and even the woman whose story will be told wherever the gospel is preached ‘in memory of her’ (14:9) will be remembered only as a loving action, not as a specific, named individual. When they spread the word or heal, it is Jesus who is praised and becomes known, not they themselves (1:45; 5:20; 9:38-41). What money they have is given freely in devotion to God or Jesus (12:41-44; 14:3-9). They gladly serve the needs of others (1:31; 2:3-5; 5:18; 14:8-9), and they do not allow conventional practices or rules to stand in the way of their faith or love (2:4; 5:27-34; 7:25-30; 10:48; 14:3-5). They do not seek fame, wealth, personal glory, reputation, or honor. Instead, they hear the word that Jesus sows, emerge from the collective masses to respond in faith, are saved, and then go—all in anonymity. They are the last and the least of this world who have become the first in the kingdom of God” (225-226).

(d) The disciples crave self-enhancement, in contrast to Jesus and the faithful ones

he heals. “As the audience begins to discern the actions and desires of the disciples and to perceive the disciples’ similarities with the other unfruitful grounds and their contrasts with the persons who are healed, it should become clear that the flaw upon which the disciples’ originally eager spirits founder is their craving for self-enhancement. They want to be known, respected, honored, obeyed, and generally held in high repute as the greatest and the first. If we take Peter’s rebuke of the Messiah, the disciples’ concern with who is the greatest, and James and John’s request to have the first places in glory as incidents indicative of their character, that is, the actions they choose, the disciples are portrayed as following Jesus in hopes of gaining high repute or renown. Not only is this drive the antithesis of that embodied by the anonymous, faithful ones who are healed, it also stands in stark contrast to the depiction of Jesus himself, who... actively strives to suppress his reputation and keep his name from becoming known” (226).

30 Here is a possible handout for a performance of the Gospel of Mark (based on similar tables in Prof. Tolbert’s *Sowing the Gospel*):

Parable of the Sower	Interpretation	Gospel Character(s)
3 Hearken; Behold, there went out A SOWER to sow:	14 THE SOWER soweth the word.	JESUS, who went out preaching the word, the gospel message about the kingdom of God, who lived the principles he taught, was crucified and buried in the ground, only to come forth in new life, so that the message might be preached further to all nations.
4 And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell BY THE WAY SIDE, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.	15 And these are they BY THE WAY SIDE, where the word is sown; but <u>when they have heard</u> , Satan cometh immediately , and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.	SCRIBES, CHIEF PRIESTS, JEWISH LEADERS FROM JERUSALEM, who were Jesus’ constant adversaries throughout the gospel, whose hardened hearts prevented them from receiving the word when they heard it, thus fulfilling Isa 6:9, 10.
5 And some fell ON STONY GROUND, where it had not much earth; and immediately it <i>sprang up</i> , because it had no depth of earth: 6 But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.	16 And these are they likewise which are sown ON STONY GROUND; who, <u>when they have heard the word</u> , immediately receive it with gladness; 17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.	DISCIPLES, especially Peter (“Stony”), James and John, Judas, who immediately received the word when they first heard it, but stumbled when affliction and persecution arose; Jesus rebukes them in terms of Isa 6:9, 10; the reasons for their failures become powerful exhortations to us.

<p>7 And some fell AMONG THORNS, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.</p>	<p>18 And these are they which are sown AMONG THORNS; <u>such as hear the word</u>, 19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.</p>	<p>RICH MAN (10:17-22), who “was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.” HEROD (6:14-29), who “was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath’s sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.” PILATE, who, “willing to content the people,” released Barabbas and delivered Jesus.</p>
<p>8 And other fell ON GOOD GROUND, and did yield fruit that <i>sprang up</i> and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.</p>	<p>20 And these are they which are sown ON GOOD GROUND; <u>such as hear the word</u>, and <i>receive it</i>, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred. See also 4:26-29 Seed growing secretly; 4:30-32 Mustard seed.</p>	<p>THOSE HEALED BY CHRIST, who were saved by their faith and who brought forth fruit by spreading the word about Jesus and the gospel; the 12 Jews and 1 Gentile represent all 12 tribes of Israel and all Gentiles; the various specific conditions represent all kinds of sicknesses and diseases.</p>

31 Professor Tolbert summarizes: “...by drawing on whatever stylistically similar literature we can find, by culling the rhetorical handbooks that shaped (or perhaps reflected) the way Greco-Roman society wrote and spoke, we have been able to read the Gospel of Mark with ears slightly more attuned to its narrative rhythms. What has emerged from our study is a typographical, episodic, rhetorically molded religious tract that intends to sow abroad the good news of God’s imminent coup d’état over the murderous authorities of this generation, in order to disclose the good earth of God’s kingdom before the coming of the Son of man on the clouds of glory. It is an apocalyptic message in a popular narrative framework, replete with all the ‘helps for hearers’ an ancient audience needed and would have expected: repetitions, amplifications of major themes, plot summaries, foreshadowings, and recapitulations. Its characters embody general types and illustrate the various human traits that accompany success or failure, thus showing the audience what to emulate and what to avoid. Its purpose is not to provide information for reflection or analysis but to persuade its hearers to have faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, to follow the way he forged into inevitable persecutions, the cross, but also eternal life, and to become themselves sowers of the good news of God’s coming kingdom” (301-302).

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History

John and Elizabeth Reith



John Reith as he looked in 1877, a few years before his baptism into Christ

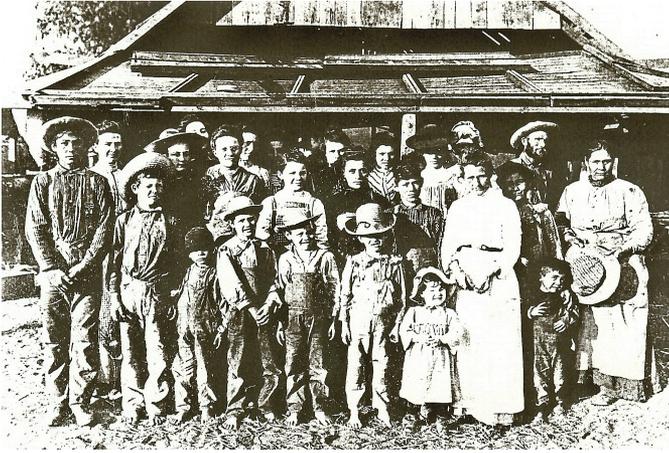
Few tragedies are as hard to understand as the death of a vibrant young person. But the hand of God can move in our lives in ways we might not expect or even desire, and it has the power to bring salvation through circumstances like sickness and death that to us might seem senseless. Such was the case in the baptisms of John and Elizabeth Reith, early Ventura County Christadelphians who were brought to see God's truth by the death of an enthusiastic 27-year-old brother named John M. Armstrong.

The story actually begins in Scotland where, at age 18, John Armstrong was baptized in Glasgow on October 3, 1875.¹ Eight years later, Bro. Armstrong emigrated to Santa Barbara because, like many before him, he was hoping the warm Southern California climate would have a positive effect on his failing health.² As he left Edinburgh and steamed to America, Bro. Armstrong would already have been well acquainted with several brothers and sisters living in the Santa Barbara area, particularly Robert Strathearn and Helen Shiells. In fact, Sis. Shiells was John Armstrong's aunt.³

The exact details of what happened after John Armstrong reached Santa Barbara have been lost, but his arrival would result in the baptisms of John and Elizabeth Reith in 1884. Apparently young John Armstrong was quite sick when he arrived in America, for he died the following year. Before his death, Sis. Shiells lovingly cared for her ill nephew, as reported by Sis. E.B. Cornwall over 20 years later in the 1908 *Christadelphian* as she spoke of Sis. Shiells' "large-heartedness to all, especially brethren and sisters, and those of her home country, who came here in search of health, she tenderly nursed, among whom was her nephew, our dearly-loved brother John Armstrong..."

Helen Shiells apparently recruited the help of Elizabeth Reith, a resident of nearby Ojai, California, to help her take care of Bro. Armstrong. Why Elizabeth came to be his nurse is a mystery, but as his own life was ending, Bro. Armstrong brought life to her and her husband John. Robert Strathearn had the following to say about this on the occasion of John and Elizabeth Reith's baptisms: "Sis. Reith was one of those who ministered to the comfort of our beloved brother Armstrong during his illness. He, in return, helped them to the possession of the pearl of great price. He greatly desired their salvation, so you see his labour in coming to this far-off land has not been in vain."⁴

It's not surprising Marian connected the preaching effort with bearing fruit because the Stocks were living on a large ranch north of Moorpark at the time, where they grew and sold apricots. Even today, over 100 years later, the beautiful canyon they lived in is still entirely agricultural and filled with orange, lemon, and avocado trees.



Apricot pitters on the Stocks ranch about 1903. Note the early Ventura County Christadelphians in the photo. Future Christadelphians, David and Ruth Stocks (Robert and Marian's children) have been circled.

Marian wrote to the Christadelphian magazine in 1905, mentioning a new preaching effort in Ventura County. “We were able to get a hall, rent free, in Somis, a small village, six miles from our ranch, and Brother Irwin gave three lectures there... As we expected, the attendance of strangers was very meager; but those of us who could attend were much edified. Brother Irwin did not bring the Pomona ecclesia tent outfit this time — it is laid up for the winter — but brought his ‘black-board’ cloth, which he fastened up outside the one store in Somis, printing dates, subjects, and places in white chalk, and very beautifully he can do it.” She also mentioned that their daughter, Ruth, was baptized at age 13. That same year her husband, Bro. Robert Stocks, “gave... a very acceptable and edifying address at the Lord’s table”¹⁴ in Los Angeles.



The store where Bro. J.T. Irwin led a Ventura County Christadelphian preaching effort in Somis, CA, in 1905.