

## FL103 Understanding Parables

**S**ymbols represent things other than themselves. When one symbol does not represent a complete truth, God combines several symbols to form a parable. Biblical parables are stories that teach moral and religious principles.

The term parable means “to lie alongside.” This arrangement enables a special story to explain a lesson that is not easy to understand.

Even as “side by side” symbols explain each other, “side by side” parables explain each other. When someone does not understand what you have just said, you say, “For example,” and then you tell a parallel story. The second story explains the first story.

Let’s be specific. God ordained the stories in the Old Testament, set the stages, and assigned actors to play the parts. Paul referred to these actors in 1Co. 10:11: “*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition...*” [1Co. 10:11]. Thus, Moses’ writings are an extensive collection of parables.

This collection, from Genesis through Deuteronomy, tells the story of the “Church in the wilderness” [Ac. 7:38]. The people of that Church played roles that teach the doctrines in the New Testament. And hidden within all those parables are blessings that God prepared for us to enjoy. Not just in this world, but also in the world to come.

God not only hid His blessings in parables, but He hid the parables by not calling them parables. Most of Moses’ writings are parables, even without identification.

God also hid His parables by calling them by other names. In the OT, God calls them proverbs, riddles, hard sayings, thick cloud, etc., the NT, He calls them allegories, figures and shadows. And like the OT, the NT contains many parables that are not identified.

The significant point to remember is that Moses’

### The Parable of the Sower

*Lu. 8:5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.*

*Lu. 8:6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*

*Lu. 8:7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.*

*Lu. 8:8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold.*

writings are parables. Once you know this, your eyes will open and you will see them. Then, instead of thinking of Moses as a Historian, you will know him as an OT professor of NT doctrines. You will learn NT doctrine by interpreting his OT symbols and parables. Thus, this lesson on parables is important because some NT doctrines that you believe are only partly true.

### Knowing all Parables

After telling His disciples the Parable of the Sower, Jesus asked them: “... *Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?*” [Mr. 4:13]

Jesus didn’t mean they will know all Bible parables by knowing this one. This would be the equivalent of being able to spell all the words in a dictionary by learning how to spell hypochondriac.

So what did He mean? The way He interpreted the sower parable is how to interpret all parables. Let’s see how He interpreted the sower parable so we can understand His method. [Luke’s is my choice of the three.]

Jesus interpreted each symbol and then applied it accordingly. He did this one symbol at a time. So, the first step is to learn the meanings of the symbols in the parable you want to interpret. Now let’s discuss the sower parable’s application to learn the benefits of its message.

First, notice this parable’s four segments. The popular

### The Interpretation

*Lu. 8:11-12 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.*

*Lu. 8:13 They on the rock [are they], which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.*

*Lu. 8:14 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.*

*Lu. 8:15 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.*

view is that these apply to four groups of people. The truth is, each person partakes of all four groups, although some

don't make it to the end. Some backslide, and some backsliders repent and complete the parable. We will discuss each segment in order as we continue.

### The Way Side

Fowls represent spirits — good and evil. When someone first hears the gospel, the devil often steals the word before it can take root in their hearts. Consider that the first biblical theft occurred when a serpent deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden [Ge. 3:1]. He didn't steal by taking what she had; he stole by telling her a lie that contradicted what she had.

There are many evil spirits in the Serpent's kingdom. Leviticus 11:13-19 lists 20 unclean fowls and each of these represents other spirits. With this many spirits, it's probable that few of us bypass the first stage of this parable.

And we shouldn't limit this interference to one time. How often have you heard a certain promise more than once before you had ears to hear? Much of what's true for the first segment applies to the other three segments of the sower parable.

### The Rocky Places

This second segment begins after the potential disciple recovers from the theft by the wayside. Luke says that he receives the Word with joy [Lu. 8:13] and Mark says that the seed instantly springs up [Mr. 4:5].

This is an excellent report, but the plant doesn't endure. In Mark, the scorching sun withers it; in Matthew, tribulation or persecution offends it, and in Luke, temptation overcomes it. The plant withers away.

Now examine the scene. In Luke, the seed falls on a rock; in Mark, it falls on stony ground, and in Matthew it falls in stony places. Concentrate on the word stony. Stones represent witnesses [Jos. 24:27]. Witnesses are often individuals, what they say and do and a host of diverse things.

As you can see, when two or more writers share the same story, it helps to compare the symbols in one parable with the symbols in like parables. The "Sower Parable" in Matthew, Mark and Luke is a perfect example of this. This isn't something new, we do this when we harmonize the Gospels.

### The Thorny Places

The third segment doesn't begin until we recover from the second segment. Thorns represent the struggles of normal life. So then, after overcoming evil spirits by the way-side

and false witnesses in stony-ground, we must learn to combat the trials of every-day life.

Everyone wars against these trials in their daily life from dawn to dusk. These are greater tests than the evil spirits by the way-side and the witnesses in the stony-ground. There are many causes, but something God said to Adam rings loud and clear in these thorny-places: "... *cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee...*" [Ge. 3:17-18].

This curse comes from cares for riches and pleasures [Lu. 8:14] and for other lusts [Mr. 4:19]. These choke the word and cause it to become unfruitful.

### The Good Ground

The "good ground" differs from the previous places. We enter this ground by doing what Jesus taught in Mt. 6:24-34. This text teaches you how to think and how not to think concerning a variety of circumstances. You should read it often.

We accept the fact that life will never be "a bowl of cherries," that the cares of this life will follow us to the grave. So then, because we cannot change our situations, we should take the Lord's advice and "seek first the kingdom of God." Then God "works all things together for our good" [Ro. 8:28].

Ponder this in your heart: Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by understanding the word [Heb. 11:1]. Without a good understanding, it's tough to keep an honest and good heart. It's challenging, but not impossible to overcome the devil, the world, and the curses of this life. A firm conviction that God has something better on the other side helps us through the bad times.

### A Universal Parable

It's important to understand that the Sower Parable is for everybody. Many hear the Gospel, but the birds and stones prevent their coming to the Cross.

The doctrines of redemption are the same for everyone. However, the Word includes many specialized messages that clear the way for those plagued by the birds, stones, and thorns in everyday life.

Knowing the "Sower Parable" and how its teachings show the way of life, relieves undue expectations and leads the traveler from failure to victory on the path of life.