

A Study of Mark 4

I. Outline. From Headings in *NJKV*

1. Parable of the Soils (Mark 4.1-20; Matthew 13.1-23; Luke 8.4-15).
2. Parable of the Lamp (21-25; Luke 8.16-18).
3. Parable of the Growing Seed (26-29).
4. Parable of the Mustard Seed (30-34; Matthew 13.31-35).
5. The Sea is Stilled (35-41; Matthew 8.23-27; Luke 8.22-25).

II. Summary.

“This is one of the few sections in Mark’s Gospel devoted to teaching. Although Mark frequently shows us Jesus teaching (1.21; 2.13; 6.2, 6), only here and in 13.2-37—and perhaps 7.1-13—does he give any sustained account of the content of his teaching. Chapter 4 contains four of Jesus’ parables: the parable of the sower and its interpretation (vv. 1-20), the parable of the lamp (vv. 21-25), the parable of the secretly growing seed (vv. 26-29), and the parable of the mustard seed (vv. 30-32). Parables are the most striking feature in the teaching of Jesus. Although he did not invent this form of teaching (parables are found both in the OT and in the writings of the rabbis), he used it in a way and to a degree unmatched before his time or since. The Sunday school definition of a parable—‘an earthly story with a heavenly meaning’—is good as far as it goes. Many parables are stories taken out of ordinary life, used to drive home a spiritual or moral truth. But they are not always stories. Sometimes they are brief similes, comparisons, analogies, or even proverbial sayings. The Greek word *parabole* (lit., ‘something placed along side’) includes all these meanings. The word most often used in the OT is *masal*. This can include anything from a simple metaphor to an elaborate story. ... The calming of the storm on the Lake of Galilee is a classic example of a nature miracle. Miracles of this kind seem to present the greatest problem to contemporary man. The NT, however, makes clear that Jesus Christ is not only Lord over the church but also Lord of all creation. ... (Col 1.17). It is completely inadequate to explain this miracle of the sovereign Lord by coincidence or to relegate it to myth or imagination” [Walter W. Wessel, *Mark*, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 8, pp., 646-47, 654].

III. Chronology.

BIBLE PERIOD: The Period of the Christ.

If you are not familiar with the 15 Bible Periods, please click here:

<https://maplehillchurchofchrist.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/15bibleperiods.pdf>

Estimate from: *The Reese Chronological Bible:*

IV. Words/Phrases to Study

1. 4.01... **THERE WAS GATHERED UNTO HIM A GREAT MULTITUDE**—“This was not something entirely new (cf., Mark 2.13; 3.7;), but now that the synagogue was becoming increasingly closed to Him, He continued these open air teaching services. Jesus wanted the common person to have access to Him and His teachings. There was a large crowd, but the parable implies that few responded. The presence of a large crowd is a recurrent theme in Mark (cf., Mark 2.13; 3.9; 4.1, 36; 5.31; 7.33; 8.1-2; 9.14, 17; 14.43; 15.8)” [Bob Utley, *freebiblecommentary.org*, An e-Sword Module].
2. 4.09... **HE THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR**—“A saying often used by Jesus. He intended it to prevent the people from regarding the parable as merely a beautiful description. It warned them of a meaning beneath the surface, and incited them to seek for it” [J.W. McGarvey, *The Fourfold Gospel*, An e-Sword Module].
3. 4.11... **BUT UNTO THEM THAT ARE WITHOUT, ALL THESE THINGS ARE DONE IN PARABLES**—“Did Jesus really speak in parables to hide the kingdom from “those outside”? According to the context here,

yes and no. Proper listening is the theme that connects the parables in chapter 4, and Jesus spoke in parables to distinguish between “anyone who has ears to hear” (v. 9; that is, those with responsive hearts) and those who do not. He knew His parables would have opposite effects on those ready to listen and those not ready. He therefore implied an element of culpability in the audience (see Mt 13:14). To those who have ears to hear, more revelation of the kingdom will be given, but to those who do not have ears to hear, even what revelation they have been given will be taken away, or will prove ineffective (Mk 4:25).” [Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1473). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers].

4. 4.13... **KNOW YE NOT THIS PARABLE? AND HOW THEN WILL YE KNOW ALL PARABLES?**—“The statement is unique to Mark, but shows that Jesus expected the disciples to understand. His family did not understand, the crowds did not understand, the religious leaders did not understand, and even the disciples, without special attention and explanation, did not understand” [Bob Utley]. ||||| “Probably this was said not so much in the spirit of rebuke, as to call their attention to the exposition of it which He was about to give, and so train them to the right apprehension of His future parables” [Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, an Olive Tree Bible App Module].
5. 4.15... **SATAN COMETH IMMEDIATELY**—“Elsewhere we are told that Satan can blind the minds of those who do not believe (2 Cor. 4:4). The fuller rendering of Jesus' explanation in Matthew's parallel account (Matt. 13:19) says that this person "does not understand" and then the "wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart."” [JFB].
6. 4.21... **IS A CANDLE BROUGHT TO BE PUT UNDER A BUSHEL**—“Jesus' lesson of the lamp, a small clay vessel that burned a wick set in olive oil, is that light reveals what it glows on. Like the lamp, Jesus' teachings reveal the motives of the human heart.” [Earl D. Radmacher, General Editor, New King James Study Bible, an Olive Tree Bible Study App Module].
7. 4.22... **THERE IS NOTHING HID, WHICH SHALL NOT BE MANIFESTED**—“The former verse expressed a parable. This one explained a literal reality. As a principle, people do not hide precious things forever. They only conceal them temporarily, and then they bring them out into view. If they remain hidden forever, they are virtually lost. People conceal them to protect them from others who would abuse and take them. For example, people who own expensive jewelry or art treasures may keep them locked up for safe keeping part of the time, but they display them publicly at other times. Keeping them locked up all the time is a misuse of their purpose. The disciples should not conclude that because God had previously hidden the characteristics about the kingdom that Jesus was revealing He wanted them to remain unknown. The time had come to proclaim them publicly” [Thomas Constable, *The Expository Notes of Dr. Constable*, an e-Sword Module].
8. 4.24... **TAKE HEED WHAT YE HEAR**—“That is, consider carefully what you hear before accepting it. Probably disciples then, as some are now, inclined to hear only so much as corresponded with their desires and notions and hence this admonition” [C.E.W. Dorris, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Mark*, Gospel Advocate, 1973, p. 107]
9. 4.25... **FOR HE THAT HATH, TO HIM SHALL BE GIVEN**—“The meaning here seems to be, he that diligently attends to my words shall increase more and more in the knowledge of the truth; but he that neglects them and is inattentive shall become more ignorant; the few things which he had learned he will forget, and his trifling knowledge will be diminished” [*Barnes' Notes*].
10. 4.28... **FOR THE EARTH BRINGETH FORTH FRUIT OF HERSELF**—“It is done while man sleeps by night and is engaged in other things by day. We are not to suppose that Jesus meant to say that the earth had any productive power of *itself*, but only that it yields its fruits, not by the *power of man*. God gives its yielding power. It, like man, has no power of its own. So the word of God in the heart is not by the *power* of man. It grows he cannot tell how. It is by the power of God. At the same time, as without labor man would have no vegetable harvest, so without active effort he would have no fruit of the Spirit. Both are connected with and enjoyed in his efforts—both are to be measured by his efforts” [C.E.W. Dorris].

11. 4.31... **LIKE A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED**—“A reference to the common, black mustard plant. The leaves were used as a vegetable and the seed as a condiment. It also had medicinal benefits. **smaller than all.** The mustard seed is not the smallest of all seeds in existence, but it was in comparison to all the other seeds the Jews sowed in Palestine” [John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, Kindle Edition, Location: 40235].
12. 4.33... **AS THEY WERE ABLE TO HEAR IT**—“The verb ‘to hear’ (akouō) refers not only to the act of hearing, its usual meaning, but also in some contexts, to the act of understanding, as in 1 Corinthians 14:2. Here, our Lord spoke in parables, adjusting His discourse, to their capacity to understand. The implication is clear that parables were employed to make truth plain” [Wuest].
13. 4.34... **WITHOUT A PARABLE SPAKE HE NOT UNTO THEM**—“That is, the things pertaining to his kingdom. On other subjects he spake without parables. On these, such was their prejudice, so many notions had they contrary to the nature of his kingdom, and so liable would plain instructions have been to give offence, that he employed this method to “insinuate” truth gradually into their minds, and to prepare them fully to understand the nature of his kingdom” [*Barnes’ Notes*].
14. 4.38... **MASTER, CAREST THOU NOT THAT WE PERISH**—“‘Master, do you not care that we are about to die?’ There is possibly a rebuke in the words, although their aim might simply have been to shock Him into doing something. This was their last resort. The words bear the mark of the fear of brave men who have done all they could against the relentless wind and sea and are facing a certain end. Surely the Master (didaskalos - the authoritative master teacher) should know the situation, even if He was asleep? He instinctively knew so much. So why did He sleep on? Why did He not do something? It seemed that He did not mind whether they all died or not. And they did mind! Everything they now had to live for was in that boat. For we must recognise that their ‘we’ included Jesus. They were not just thinking of themselves. With them was perishing the hope of Israel. When the storms of life arise how easy it is for us to assume that God does not care and is not in control” [Peter Pett].
15. 4.40... **WHY ARE YE SO FEARFUL**—“And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful?—There is a natural apprehension under danger; but there was unbelief in their fear. It is worthy of notice how considerably the Lord defers this rebuke till He had first removed the danger, in the midst of which they would not have been in a state to listen to anything. **HOW IS IT THAT YE HAVE NO FAITH?**--next to none, or none in present exercise. In Matthew (Mt 8.26) it is, ‘Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?’ *Faith* they had, for they applied to Christ for relief: but *little*, for they were afraid, though Christ was in the ship. Faith dispels fear, but only in proportion to its strength” [JFB].

V. **Lessons & Applications.** “The Parable of the Sower”

- **INTRODUCTION:** A parable is a means of clarifying truth. It is taking something with which people are familiar and relating it in such a way to shed light on the unfamiliar. Jesus often taught in parables. Parables made the truth plainer to the apostles and the disciples, and they served to keep the Lord’s plan hid from the insincere (2 Thessalonians 2.10-12).
- **THE PARABLE STATED:** The sower went forth to sow the seed (Matthew 13.3; Mark 4.3; Luke 8.5). The seed fell: (1) Some fell by the way side and the birds devoured them (Matthew 13.4; Mark 4.4; Luke 8.5). (2) Some upon stony ground, and when they sprang up, the sun scorched them, because they had no root (Matthew 13.5-6; Mark 4.5-6; Luke 8.7). Some fell among thorns, and the thorns choked them (Matthew 13.7; Mark 4.7; Luke 8.7). Some fell upon good ground and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty (Matthew 13.8; Mark 4.8; Luke 8.8).
- **THE SOWER:** Jesus said that the sower went out to sow seed (Luke 8.5). A sower sowing seed was a familiar sight. The people could envision the sower as Jesus unfolded the parable. The sower represented the teacher (Matthew 28.19-20; Mark 16.15-16; Psalm 126.5-6). A teacher must sow the word and leave the increase with God (1 Corinthians 3.6; Ecclesiastes 11.6; Isaiah

55.10-11). Every member of the church should be a sower of the word (Acts 8.4; Hebrews 5.12-14; 2 Timothy 2.24).

- **THE SEED**: The sower sowed seed. The teacher sows the word, the seed of the kingdom. The life germ is in the seed. The seed will produce after its kind (Galatians 6.7; Genesis 1.11). The seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8.11; Mark 4.14). The word is able to save (James 1.21; Romans 1.16; 1 Corinthians 15.2). The word is indispensable to the growth of the kingdom. There could be no Christian without the word. The spiritual life germ is in the word (John 6.63; 1 Peter 1.23). The word of God brings forth after its kind. It produces only Christians (Acts 11.26). The doctrines of men produce denominational churches.
- **THE SOIL**: The success of the sowing depends in a great measure upon the soil into which the seed is sown. The soil must be prepared or the seed will fail. It must be turned and pulverized. The rocks and stones must be removed, and the thorns must be destroyed. The soil may be bad, worse, worst, good, better, or best. Such is the case with the soil of the human heart. The soil is the heart (Luke 8.11-12). The heart is the battle ground where the devil fights against God. The heart must be prepared (Ezekiel 18.31; James 4.8; 2 Chronicles 30.19; 19.3). The word that is sown in an unprepared heart has no better opportunity to spring forth and grow than does seed that is sown in unprepared soil.
- **THE WAY SIDE SOIL**: The way side soil is the path or road leading to the field. It is ground that has not been plowed. Such soil is not lacking in fertility. But such soil will not receive the seed. The seed lie uncovered. The birds devour them (Luke 8.5). The heart represented by the way side soil is a heart affected by dishonesty, prejudice, or indifference. It is an unprepared heart. The devil is always active. He takes the word out of the heart of those who do not believe (Luke 8.12). The word which does not remain in the human heart gives no understanding, no faith, and no salvation (Luke 8.12; Romans 10.17; Mark 16.16). The heart may be hardened: (a) By prejudice (Matthew 13.14-15; 2 Thessalonians 2.10-12). (b) By resisting the truth. (c) By a desire for popularity (John 12.42-43). (d) By the practice of sin (Hebrews 3.13). (e) By putting other things first (Matthew 6.33; Luke 9.57-62).
- **THE STONY GROUND**: The stony ground is a shallow soil. Though it had some preparation, it did not have sufficient depth to withstand the blazing sun. The plants withered and died. The same sun that caused the plants to wither and die caused the plants that sprang up in the good soil to thrive. The heart represented by the stony soil is a heart without strong convictions. The faith of the shallow heart fails in time of temptation or persecution. The response from the shallow heart is more from emotion than conviction. Feelings and emotions must be balanced with the truth to be genuine. Those characterized by the shallow heart did not have the word snatched out of their hearts. Satan brought other influences to bear against the word. Satan works upon the Christian just as he does the non-Christian (2 Timothy 3.12). Those characterized by the shallow hearts were and are people who failed to count the cost of discipleship (Luke 14.27-33). The parable teaches the possibility of apostasy (Luke 8.13; Mark 4.16; Galatians 5.4; 2 Peter 2.20-22; Hebrews 6.4-6). The parable teaches that one must continue faithful to the end to be saved (Matthew 10.22; Acts 2.41-42; 1 Corinthians 15.58; Revelation 2.10).
- **THE THORNY GROUND**: The thorny ground is a soil filled with thorns and briars (Mark 4.7; Luke 8.7). The soil was not lacking in fertility, but the thorns and snares grew as the plants grew. The plants lived, but they produced no fruit. The heart represented by the thorny ground is one that is one that is concerned with the cares of this life (Luke 8.14; James 1.8). Those characterized by the thorny ground were and are the people who are concerned about the physical things of this life, that is money, pleasure, power, popularity, etc. (Luke 8.14; Matthew 6.33; Luke 21.34-35). The riches of this life are deceitful and choke out the word. Riches cannot heal diseases, ward off evil, nor purchase a place in heaven (1 Timothy 6.7-10). Riches are of God, but if one makes money his chief aim in life, he will be lost (Haggai 2.8; 1 Chronicles 29.12). The pleasures of life, or desire for power, honor, etc., choke out the word. There is as much incompatibility between

worldliness and spirituality as there is between fire and water (Matthew 6.24; James 4.4). The spiritual plant must have room to grow. One can have too many interests at heart. One can let small and harmless things crowd out that which should be first (Matthew 6.33).

- **THE GOOD GROUND:** The good ground is a rich, deep, well-prepared soil. The rocks have been removed, and the thorns have been destroyed. Seed sown in such soil will spring forth, grow and produce a bountiful harvest. The heart represented by the good ground is one that has great depth, conviction, and activity. Those characterized by the good soil are those who spring forth and produce a harvest, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, and some thirty-fold. They are those who accepted and practiced the word. They are those honest souls who did not allow Satan to take away the word or to bring any influence to bear against it. Those characterized by the good soil were different in talent but uniform in kind (Mark 4.20).
- **CONCLUSION:** We must hear the word and reject everything else (Mark 4.24). We must hear for eternity’s sake (Luke 8.18). What we hear and how we hear will determine our destiny (Luke 8.18; Mark 4.24).

[W. Gaddys Roy, *Sermon Outlines on the Parables of Jesus*, 1957, Athens, AL: The C.E.I. Publishing Company, pp., 14-18].

VI. Questions.

True or False

01. ____ Jesus said nothing about paying attention to WHAT you hear in this chapter.
02. ____ Although Jesus described three poor soils and one good, one could argue He spoke of three of each.
03. ____ Jesus said to His disciples: “How is it that ye have no faith?”
04. ____ Jesus gave no explanation of His Parable of the Sower/Soils.
05. ____ Jesus told a parable about the growth of the kingdom.

I Found it in Verse(s)

06. ____ Description of the audience for the Parable of the Sower.
07. ____ A choking.
08. ____ Where Jesus slept on the ship.
09. ____ Receiving the Word with gladness.
10. ____ Order of corn growing.

Short Answer

11. The Stony Ground Soil sprang up because it lacked depth of _____.
12. When Jesus and the disciples began to sail, what was with them:

13. What did Jesus stress about the Mustard Seed?

14. The Good Soil yielded _____, _____ up, and _____.
15. The Stony Ground Listeners, when affliction or persecution come immediately are _____.

Each Question is worth 7 Points

My Score is: _____

Answers will be found on next week's handout

ANSWERS to Mark 3 Questions... **01**—False (15-19); **02**—True (31); **03**—False, because of the multitude (9); **04**—True (5); **05**—True (22); **06**—35; **07**—17; **08**—5; **09**—14; **10**—24; **11**—Herodians, destroy (11); **12**—eternal (29); **13**—He had healed many (10); **14**—He cannot stand (26); **15**—Beside Himself (21).

VII. **Seek-A-Word Puzzle.** The words may be backwards, diagonal, upside down, etc. See if you can find them all. The more you use the words of the Bible, the greater blessed you will be! You might be surprised at how much this little exercise will help you retain important truths. THANK YOU for the good effort you are putting forth in Bible study. -DRL

B P A H H V Y G D A W V
D I M M E D I A T E L Y
K H P V G R O U N D T F
G S E A C H O K E U E E
N N D A R B T R R T D T
I O D E R A E F U I L G
H C N A E T B C S T L L
T H O R N S H L A L F T
R S G E N E H W E U Y W
O T H E R E A F M M S Y
F R U I T Y A A O E A E
L H O T U N W O S V I H
V K E D D R O W I N D Y

AWAY	BECAUSE	CHOKE	EARTH	ENTERED
EVEN	FEARED	FELL	FORTH	FRUIT
GREAT	GROUND	HEAR	IMMEDIATELY	MEASURE
MULTITUDE	OTHER	PARABLE	SAID	SEED
SHIP	SIDE	SOME	SOWN	THERE
THING	THORNS	WHEN	WIND	WORD

IX. EXTRA CREDIT FOR “SUPER” Bible Students...

Will you please consider answering these three SIMPLE questions based on the Bible text of this chapter? I will try to make use of your answers. Bring them with you next week. Tear out this last sheet from the Study Guide and be prepared to put it in a basket. I think it will be a great help to all of those in the class if you will do so. Thank you in advance for your marvelous cooperation!

W O R D: What word would you like to know more about in this chapter?

W O N D E R: I wonder what this phrase, verse, or series of verses means...

W I S H: I wish myself—or others whom I know or even don’t know—would understand this fact, principle, or concept from this chapter...