

New Testament 11
He Spoke Many Things unto Them in Parables
(Matthew 13)
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(This material helps understand why Jesus spoke so often in parables; gives some keys to help understand them; and explains a few which are very difficult to understand)

I. Christ's use of parables began long before His earthly ministry.

A. As Jehovah, He often communicated His truths through "living parables" or "similitudes in the lives of the prophets" (Hosea 12:10).

B. Just prior to Jesus telling why He spoke in parables, He made reference to some of those Old Testament similitudes.

1. In Matthew 12:39-41, He refers to "the sign of Jonah." Jonah's three day burial in a fish and resurrection was a living parable about Jesus' three day death and resurrection. (For further details, see my OT lesson 33 on this web site).

2. He also referred to Queen Sheba. Her seeking King Solomon's wisdom was a living parable of how many kings and queens would one day seek Jesus' wisdom. (For further details, see Matthew 12:42 and my OT lesson 26 on this website).

II. By teaching in parables, Jesus fulfilled prophecy.

A. Isaiah 6:10, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed" speaks not only of Isaiah's writings, but also Jesus' teachings.

B. Psalm 78:2 also prophesies of Him, "I will open my mouth in a parable..."

C. **Jehovah/Jesus' usage of first similitudes and later parables was ingenious.**

1. They were designed to conceal truth from the proud and hardened heart.

2. Yet they were also designed to reveal. Those who came to understand the symbols within the parables found they *clarified* the truth, allowing truth to have more impact.

3. As Simeon had prophesied at Jesus' birth, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34-5).

a. Truly through His use of parables, Jesus was able to separate the proud and hard-hearted from the meek and teachable.

D. Thus **His teachings would become as a stone, over which some would stumble. But they would be for others as a seer stone, a stone of enlightenment, and a foundation stone upon which to build.**

III. Additional reasons why the Savior deliberately made His teachings difficult.

A. In Romans, Chapter 11, Paul explains the overall plan of the Savior. The Gospel was meant to go first to Israel, but it was actually intended that most would reject it, so it would then go to the Gentiles to bless the rest of the world (Romans 11:7-11).

B. Later the pure gospel would also be rejected by the Gentiles as they would fall into apostasy (Romans 11:17-25).

C. Christ's covenant would then return to the House of Israel in the Last Days (Romans 11:26-36). Thus everyone would have the opportunity to receive its blessings. (For

further explanations of the Lord's plan, refer to the Parable of the Wild and Tame Olive Tree in Jacob 5, *The Book of Mormon*).

IV. Jesus' own Parable of the Sower certainly pertained to Him in His days.

- A. Most Pharisees and Sadducees had stony hearts and totally rejected His Word.
- B. The meek were teachable and would receive His Word.
- C. However many would in time fall away.
 - 1. Remember that throngs greeted Him as Messiah when He later enters Jerusalem, yet most of them turned away, some even becoming accessory to or silent at His Crucifixion.

V. The Parable of the Sower has application to us in our days as well.

- A. It helps us understand why many who hear the Restored Gospel harden their hearts and reject its truths.
- B. It helps us understand why many who hear the Restored Gospel believe at first, but insufficient faith and cares of the world cause the seed to die.
 - 1. Many critical of the Church make much about the fact that some who accept the Restored Gospel later fall away. This parable helps remind us this has always been true with Christ's Church. Through this parable **He teaches that the problem is not with the seed but with the soil which receives it: the depth of sincerity and desire for truth in the heart.**
- C. We should also note that Jesus here stresses good soil receives the word and brings forth good fruits, verifying that true discipleship leads to good works!

VI. Keys to understanding Christ's Parables

- A. Remember: Since His major purpose was to conceal truth, it is **obviously unlikely that His parables were primarily designed to teach principles of good behavior**, though concepts of good behavior can be drawn from them.
- B. They were therefore, like His OT Similitudes, **mostly about Himself as Messiah and His relationship to the House of Israel and the world in general.**
- C. So look first for things which witness of Him.
- D. Furthermore, do not let chapter and verse divisions separate important connections of meanings.

V. Christ explained most of His parables to His disciples. Here are some that He did not, and which are a little more difficult to understand. Using the keys given above, however, we can understand them.

A. The Parable of Leaven (Matthew 13:33).

- 1. He tells us it is a parable about His Kingdom, like the previous parable of the Mustard Seed, which He explained.
- 2. In this parable, He refers to Himself as the true leavening hid in the world. As that leavening, He would leaven and lift up the whole through His resurrection (Mat. 13:33). This understanding helps us see Him in contrast to the corrupt leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matthew 16:6-12).

B. The Parable of the House left barren (Matthew 12:43-45)

1. He was again speaking of His relationship to the House of Israel.
2. He had been casting out devils (A big issue with the church leaders, who claimed He did so by Beelzebul).
3. He knew the time would come when He and His disciples would be slain by the church leaders; then they could no longer cast out devils.
4. So He warns that in that day the devils He had cast out would return. They would find the “House of Israel” empty, because Christ and His disciples were no longer there.
5. The devils would then call all their fellows to come!
6. The state, therefore, of the House of Israel, would be far graver than before, because they had left themselves totally defenseless to the power of the Devil by rejecting Christ.

C. The Parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-12).

1. The meaning of this parable is hampered because of the false division of chapters and verses. Its meaning becomes clear when attached to Christ’s teachings in the previous chapters.

2. The **Savior had given a series of examples of faithful stewardship**: The shepherd who sought the lost sheep, the woman who sought her lost coin, and the father who rejoiced in the return of his lost son. Then He told the story of the Unjust steward who *lost his stewardship*. “... for thou mayest be no longer steward” (Luke 16:2) Regardless of the fact that, seeing his loss, he cleverly made a place for himself elsewhere, his stewardship was never returned.

Here Christ was warning the Jewish leaders of that day that their stewardship over the Lord’s Kingdom had been taken from them, and they would be wise to provide for themselves places elsewhere, like those of the world did. Of course, any other place would be temporary, with no Eternal reward, as He later shows in His warning, “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13).

3. When we are puzzled about meaning, often connecting the verses to the theme or flow of logic coming to and away from those verses will help us understand.

D. Remember: Christ’s teachings were not as disjointed as they sometimes appear! The placing of chapters and verses sometimes make them appear that way, but to truly understand His teachings, we must work to see them in the whole! They are a flow of connected ideas. We will be blessed with far greater understanding when we seek to read them this way.