



[Matthew 13:3-9](#)

(3) Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. (4) As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. (5) Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. (6) But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. (7) Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. (8) Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (9) He who has ears, let him hear."

New International Version

Jesus' first parable to the multitudes concerns a sower and his limited success in receiving fruit from the earth. Recognizing the context and audience reveals that this parable was a rebuke of the nation. It testified of the citizens' inability to receive "the word of the kingdom" (verse 19)—[the gospel](#) of the [Kingdom of God](#). It aptly describes what John the Baptist, [Jesus](#), and the apostles experienced in the first century. They saw within the people some interest—and even some willingness—to [repent](#) (after a fashion) and to [be baptized](#), but there was little depth because their hearts were so far from their King. In three out of four scenarios in the parable, the ground produced nothing of value.

Only the good soil—"he who hears the word *and understands it*" (verse 23; emphasis ours)—bears fruit. All the types of ground receive the Word, but [God](#) prepares the soil only of some. The masses lacked ears to hear, despite claiming Abraham as their father. They looked for a messiah who would improve their political condition while leaving their religious system and moral state unchallenged.

We see this even within the context of the Parable of the Sower. The critical factor is whether the “ground” heard and received the “word of the kingdom”—that is, whether God had given those hearing the Word the means to respond properly. In Jesus' explanation of the parable to His disciples, He refers to the multitude before Him when quoting [Isaiah 6:9-10](#):

Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.

The people to whom He gave the [parables](#) were fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. They were living proof of the truth in this first parable—they could not receive the truth. In contrast, He had prepared His disciples to hear and respond properly. They were the good soil that would yield an increase ([Matthew 13:16-17](#); see [John 15:1-17](#)).

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:

[God's Kingdom in the Parables \(Part One\)](#)

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