

THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

- 1. The Context:** Israel's leaders had rejected the second and final evidence of Jesus' Messiahship (Mt 12:22-37). Following this rejection of his person in Galilee, and anticipating rejection by the Sanhedrin, Jesus instructed his disciples about the form the kingdom would take until his return. The Old Testament prophets had predicted both Messiah's sacrificial death (Isaiah ch. 53) and also his kingdom rule (Isaiah 9:6). This series of parables outlines the dimensions of the kingdom between his rejection (his death) and his second coming (his rule). The second parable begins the sequence with the double sowing by Christ and Satan, distributing the citizens of their respective kingdoms around the world. It concludes with the separation at Christ's return of those who will remain for the kingdom and those who will be removed for judgment. Jesus described this intermediate form of the kingdom by such metaphors as the phenomenal growth of a mustard seed, a woman hiding yeast in her dough, and a fisherman separating clean from unclean fish.
- 2. The Sower and the Soils:** Against the backdrop of this refusal to accept Jesus' evidence of his person, the first parable addresses the issue of reception of God's revealed truth, symbolized by grain seed. Four possible kinds of responses to hearing the Word of God ("the seed") are illustrated. It may be rejected outright, received in a superficial way but with no lasting result, received, but later crowded out by contemporary pressures and interests, or it may be believed and obeyed. Note that this principle applies to anyone (saved or lost) whenever they are exposed to the Word. One may move from one category to another, either way, depending on one's reception of and obedience to the Word at any given time. Although the immediate context controlling this parable is the Pharisees' rejection of the truth about Jesus' Messiahship, its teaching is applicable throughout this age.
- 3. The Other Parables:** How did this first parable relate to the other parables of the kingdom? Jesus said, "Do you not understand this parable? And how will you understand all the parables? (Mark 4:13). This is the only parable not introduced by the words "the kingdom of heaven is like . . ." It illustrated the four kinds of reception of truth, indicating the ways in which Jesus' revelation about the course of the kingdom in this age—as predicted in subsequent parables—would be received.
- 4. The Location:** About two kilometers west of Capernaum lies a small cove in the shore of the Sea of Galilee which has come to be called "The Sower's Cove" because it could well have served as the place where Jesus spoke this parable. Recent acoustical research has shown that a "great crowd" of some 5,000-7,000 people could have assembled there and heard clearly a human voice originating from the center of the cove. Further, the bowl-like slope would easily permit the speaker to be seen from almost any angle, whether the crowd was standing or sitting.



