

# PARABLES OF JESUS

**MADE EASY**



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**ROSE**  
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# INTRODUCTION: WHAT ARE PARABLES?

Finish this sentence: *My bedroom is like ...*

Congratulations! You've just created a parable.

Sure, it's a simple one, and perhaps not deep with meaning like the ones Jesus spoke a few thousand years ago, *but still ...* Your act of symbolic comparison functions similarly to a parable. Our English word “parable” comes from the Greek term *paraballo*, which literally means “to cast beside.” In other words, this ancient story-form is a creative way to set (“cast”) two things beside each other for the sake of comparison.<sup>1</sup>

In all of human history, no one mastered the art of parable telling better than Jesus. Others used this teaching technique—Plato, Aristotle, and Nathan the prophet (see 2 Samuel 12:1–13), to name a few. Yet no one else has so effectively awakened the imagination to reveal truth in short, simple stories like Jesus did.

At the same time, after thousands of years, no one can yet claim to fully understand the depth of meaning and



symbolism that Jesus layered within his “simple” stories. According to Mark 4:10–12, Jesus did that intentionally, at least in part. But he also promised his followers that they would understand his parables (Mark 4:11). And so we will take him up on that promise here and now.

## HOW TO READ AND INTERPRET PARABLES

It can be helpful to approach Jesus’s parables with a framework for how to read and interpret them. Matthew 13 describes a time when Jesus explained two of his stories to his disciples, so he is our best model for how to understand his parables today. As you go through this book (with your Bible by your side), keep Jesus’s examples in mind.

When explaining the parables of the Sower and the Seed and the Wheat and Weeds, Jesus did three things:

1. *Jesus identified what the main elements of his story represented.* Notice that he didn’t assign meaning to every random, tiny detail! His symbolism tended to be straightforward, and it applied to the major characters and events in his stories.
2. *Jesus gave real-life application to the themes in his story.* For instance, in Matthew 13:21, he identified trouble or persecution as the real-life factor that causes some to fall away.

3. *Jesus summed up each story with a main point to be learned—and taken seriously.* For example, in the parable of the Sower and the Seed, Jesus said that in God's kingdom, the fruitful person "hears the word and understands it" (Matthew 13:23 NIV). In the parable of the Wheat and Weeds, he promised that even though evil is still part of our world, a day is coming when his angels will "weed out ... everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (Matthew 13:41 NIV).

With that in mind, as you study Jesus's parables, try to discover: (1) What's represented in each story? (2) How does the story translate into your life? (3) What's the main point for daily guidance and inspiration that you can take away from the story?

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

There are thirty-five parables told by Jesus in the New Testament (though some Bible scholars identify fewer and others identify more, based on how they define "parable"). Some are as short as one Bible verse, while others are very detailed, with several paragraphs describing particular events and characters.

Jesus's parables typically fall into one or two of the following teaching categories:



### *Instruction*

These parables focus their teaching on *right living* or how to best live out what God desires for us.



### *Understanding*

Jesus's stories were often given in response to a question or for the purpose of explaining something important to his listeners.



### *Prophecy*

The prophetic parables mostly deal with the nation of Israel, Jesus's return, or both. Using metaphors, they reveal events that are to come.



### *Promise*

These parables declare and assure that God is doing—and will do—something good for people.

Of course, some of Jesus's parables fit into more than one category. For instance, the Good Samaritan falls under both the instruction and understanding categories. The Sheep and the Goats delivers an end-times prophecy and a promise of reward for Jesus's followers. Every parable will fit into at least one of these four categories, and knowing which one will help to guide your thinking as you explore each of Jesus's stories.

As you work through Jesus's thirty-five parables, here's what you will find for each entry:

1. Title
2. Scriptures
3. Category
4. Theme
5. Summary
6. Symbols (what the elements within a parable represent).
7. Insights (background information—from history, culture, and theology—to aid in understanding).
8. Takeaway for Today

Now, with your Bible in hand, let's begin.

**Note:** Italicized type in Scripture quotations indicates the author's emphasis.

## JESUS'S PARABLES AT A GLANCE

|    | Parable                                             | Category                |  |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 1  | The Two Builders<br>(The Wise and Foolish Builders) | Instruction             |  |
| 2  | The Sower and the Seed                              | Understanding           |  |
| 3  | The Wheat and Weeds                                 | Understanding; Prophecy |  |
| 4  | The Growing Seed                                    | Promise                 |  |
| 5  | The Mustard Seed                                    | Promise                 |  |
| 6  | The Yeast (The Leaven)                              | Promise                 |  |
| 7  | The Hidden Treasure                                 | Instruction             |  |
| 8  | The Pearl of Great Price                            | Instruction             |  |
| 9  | The Fishing Net                                     | Understanding; Prophecy |  |
| 10 | The Unforgiving Servant                             | Instruction             |  |
| 11 | The Workers in the Vineyard                         | Understanding; Promise  |  |
| 12 | The Two Sons                                        | Understanding; Promise  |  |
| 13 | The Wicked Tenant Farmers                           | Understanding; Prophecy |  |
| 14 | The Wedding Banquet                                 | Prophecy                |  |
| 15 | The Guests for the Banquet                          | Prophecy                |  |
| 16 | The Fig Tree                                        | Prophecy                |  |
| 17 | The Watchful Servant<br>(The Faithful Servant)      | Prophecy                |  |
| 18 | The Ten Bridesmaids                                 | Prophecy                |  |

|  | Matthew         | Mark         | Luke     |
|--|-----------------|--------------|----------|
|  | 7:24-27         |              | 6:47-49  |
|  | 13:3-9, 18-23   | 4:1-9, 13-20 | 8:4-15   |
|  | 13:24-30, 36-43 |              |          |
|  |                 | 4:26-29      |          |
|  | 13:31-32        | 4:30-32      | 13:18-19 |
|  | 13:33           |              | 13:20-21 |
|  | 13:44           |              |          |
|  | 13:45-46        |              |          |
|  | 13:47-50        |              |          |
|  | 18:21-35        |              |          |
|  | 20:1-16         |              |          |
|  | 21:28-32        |              |          |
|  | 21:33-45        | 12:1-12      | 20:9-19  |
|  | 22:1-14         |              |          |
|  |                 |              | 14:15-24 |
|  | 24:32-35        | 13:28-31     | 21:29-33 |
|  | 24:42-51        | 13:32-37     | 12:35-48 |
|  | 25:1-13         |              |          |

|    | Parable                                            | Category                   |  |
|----|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| 19 | The Three Servants (The Talents)                   | Instruction                |  |
| 20 | The Ten Servants (The Ten Minas)                   | Instruction                |  |
| 21 | The Sheep and the Goats                            | Prophecy; Promise          |  |
| 22 | The Two Debtors                                    | Instruction; Understanding |  |
| 23 | The Good Samaritan                                 | Instruction; Understanding |  |
| 24 | The Friend at Midnight<br>(The Importunate Friend) | Instruction; Understanding |  |
| 25 | The Rich Fool                                      | Instruction                |  |
| 26 | The Barren Fig Tree                                | Understanding; Prophecy    |  |
| 27 | Counting the Cost                                  | Instruction                |  |
| 28 | The Lost Sheep                                     | Understanding              |  |
| 29 | The Lost Coin                                      | Understanding              |  |
| 30 | The Prodigal Son                                   | Understanding              |  |
| 31 | The Shrewd Manager<br>(The Unjust Steward)         | Instruction; Understanding |  |
| 32 | The Rich Man and Lazarus                           | Understanding; Prophecy    |  |
| 33 | The Unworthy Servant                               | Instruction                |  |
| 34 | The Persistent Widow<br>(The Unjust Judge)         | Understanding              |  |
| 35 | The Pharisee and the Tax<br>Collector              | Understanding              |  |

\* There are no parables in John.

|  | Matthew  | Mark | Luke     |
|--|----------|------|----------|
|  | 25:14–30 |      |          |
|  |          |      | 19:11–27 |
|  | 25:31–46 |      |          |
|  |          |      | 7:36–50  |
|  |          |      | 10:30–37 |
|  |          |      | 11:5–9   |
|  |          |      | 12:13–21 |
|  |          |      | 13:6–9   |
|  |          |      | 14:28–32 |
|  | 18:12–14 |      | 15:1–7   |
|  |          |      | 15:8–10  |
|  |          |      | 15:11–32 |
|  |          |      | 16:1–13  |
|  |          |      | 16:19–31 |
|  |          |      | 17:7–10  |
|  |          |      | 18:1–8   |
|  |          |      | 18:9–14  |



# PARABLES OF JESUS

## 1 THE TWO BUILDERS (THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS)

Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49

**Category:** 🍎 Instruction

**Themes:** Right Living, Discipleship

### Summary

Two people are building houses. The wise one places his home on a firm foundation, but the foolish one builds on sand instead. When an inevitable flood comes, the first house stands, but the second one is destroyed.



### Symbols

- Builder = One who chooses whether or not to put Jesus's teachings into practice
- House = A person's lifestyle and daily choices
- Rock foundation = Jesus and his teachings
- Sandy foundation = Any basis for life choices apart from Jesus

## Insights

Matthew records this parable of the Two Builders as the emphatic conclusion to Jesus's famous Sermon on the Mount. Luke places it at the end of the shorter but similar Sermon on the Plain. Both times, Jesus applied the story to the teachings he had just given to the crowds. His point: Don't simply listen to what I've been saying, but *follow it* in how you live day to day (Matthew 7:24, 26; Luke 6:46–47). In other words, this parable teaches that authentic belief in Jesus expresses itself *actively* each day.

This parable was probably set on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. During summer, sunbaked sand around the edges of that lake harden to a stone-like quality. It would be a tempting place to build and would seem safe enough—but that was foolishness. When the inevitable rains and floods came, the sand would disintegrate, and anything built on it would collapse spectacularly. So wise builders would dig down deep under the hard sand until they reached bedrock and place the foundation on that solid base. Built that way from the start, no rain, wind, or flood could move the builder's house.

Likewise, Jesus taught, “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock” (Matthew 7:24).