

THE KING OF KINGS: A STUDY OF MATTHEW

The King's Kingdom: A Study of Matthew 8–13

STUDY EIGHTEEN

A World Full of Wheat and Weeds

Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43

A parable is a story comparing something familiar with something unfamiliar to teach one main truth. To understand a parable, listen carefully, think deeply, and open your heart.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHEN we see the evil in our world and the pain people inflict on one another, we sometimes wonder, *Why doesn't God do something?* We know God is loving and holy. So why does He hold back His hand of justice? Why does He permit so much wrongdoing and suffering?

In his commentary, *Insights on Matthew 1–15*, Pastor Chuck Swindoll admits how hard it is to witness unchecked evil.

We long for our righteous Lord to step in and deal with evil sooner rather than later. *Now, not then.* But He doesn't do it—at least not usually. It's not uncommon for us to wait a long time for God to judge wrongdoing and to weed out the wrongdoers. Most often, we have to wait and wait . . . and wait some more.¹

However, we believe that, through our waiting, God is working out His plan. We live in a period between the arrival of the King at His first coming and the consummation of His messianic kingdom at His second coming. The Old Testament prophets didn't see this in-between age in which the King has defeated but not banished the enemy. Satan still “prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). This present era in God's redemptive plan is a *mystery*—a divine secret that Christ was revealing through parables.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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In His parable of the wheat and weeds, Jesus addressed the tension between good and evil in our world. He also reassured us that God is growing us to maturity during this waiting period as we anticipate the day when Christ will cage the enemy and set things right for all time (Revelation 20:1–3).



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Prayer is a good place to begin this study. We know things are not right and we yearn for Christ to come and fix our broken world. Using the space below, pour out your heart to the Lord and bring Him your hopes and fears as you open His Word.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Speaking from the boat just offshore on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus was peeling back layers of the kingdom of God with each parable. In the previous parable of the sower, seed, and soils, He used the image of *good soil* to teach how we must open our hearts to receive His “message about the Kingdom” (Matthew 13:19).

Jesus changed the image to *good seed* in His next parable of the wheat and weeds. Read about this parable in [Matthew 13:24–35](#), which also includes two more parables: the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast. Put yourself in the scene by the shore and imagine yourself as a first-century farmer listening to Jesus tell stories about subjects as tangible as the loaf of bread in your lunch sack!



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Observation: Wheat, Weeds, and Mustard Seeds

As you observe the passage, examine what it says without trying to unravel what it means.² In the next phase, we'll dig into the interpretation of the parables. For now, write down what you observe in Jesus' story about the farmer who planted good seed and his enemy's treacherous deed (*Matthew 13:24–30*).

Did you notice the periods of time in the story? The time for planting, the time for waiting, and the time for harvesting. During the waiting period, the farmer allowed the wheat and weeds to grow at an ordinary pace. Jesus' next parable of the mustard seeds also addresses the kingdom's growth. What do you observe about it in *13:31–32*?

Now read about the parable of the yeast in *13:33–35*? How does this parable describe the growth of the kingdom, and how does it complement what Jesus taught in the previous parable?



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Reflect on these three parables and write down the common features. What elements appear in each parable?

Tucked into these everyday stories is heavenly wisdom, “things hidden since the creation of the world” (Matthew 13:35). But not everyone was allowed a peek into the secrets. Only those to whom Jesus chose to reveal them. *Let's take a look!*

Matthew noted that “Jesus always used stories.” Remember to use illustrations when you teach and to rely on analogies to get the point across. Begin with the familiar before going to the unfamiliar. That's what Jesus did. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of the Parables

What were the weeds Jesus referred to in the first parable? Well, *they weren't dandelions!* The Greek word is *zizanion*, also translated “tare.” “Weeds” or “tares” refers to a poisonous type of rye grass indistinguishable from wheat while growing. Sowing these weeds was an act of sabotage, an attempt to spoil the crop and destroy a farmer's livelihood.

Read more about this killer weed in your study resources or the online article, “*Tares*,” in the Bible encyclopedia at biblegateway.com. What do you discover?



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Jesus left the shoreline for a house in nearby Capernaum where the disciples pressed Jesus for an interpretation. According to *Matthew 13:36–43*, what did Jesus say each of the following elements represents in the parable of the wheat and the weeds?

Farmer: _____

Field: _____

Good Seed: _____

Weeds: _____

Enemy: _____

Harvest: _____

Reapers: _____

It must have troubled Matthew's original readers that Christ would leave false believers in the church as weeds among the wheat. What warnings, as well encouragement, would the story have given these persecuted believers? What meaning does the parable have for us? For help with the interpretation, read pages 283–284 of Pastor Chuck's commentary.



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Jesus didn't explain the parable of the mustard seed or parable of the yeast. Take a moment to use your resources and dig out the theology of these short stories. Check pages 281–282 of Pastor Chuck's commentary for his interpretation.

The prophets envisioned the Messiah as a mighty warrior sweeping out of Jerusalem, overwhelming Israel's enemies, and ushering in an age of peace and justice (*Psalms 2:6–12; Isaiah 9:6–7; Jeremiah 23:5–6*). How did Jesus modify the prophets' picture of the kingdom, regarding its expansion and ultimate victory?



Correlation: The Cosmos in Which We Live

In our current period of waiting, between “planting” and “harvesting,” we remain vulnerable to the enemy's treachery. Why? Because we live in the “field” known as the *cosmos*—the sinful world system that is hostile toward God and Christ.



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Paul pegged Satan as “the commander of the powers in the unseen world” (Ephesians 2:2), even “the god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). What false treasures did John say Satan’s world offers, according to *1 John 2:16–17*?

Although the “entire world is guilty before God” (Romans 3:19), God *loves the world*. “He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Just as God sent His Son, Jesus sent *His followers* into the world as ambassadors of His kingdom and showpieces of His love (*13:34–35; 17:15–18*).

So while the world is a spiritually hostile place and will be judged, it is the “field” in which God has planted us. How does this truth help you accept God’s delay in judging the world and inspire you to flourish where you’re planted?

The devil is real. He’s the one who plants the weeds among the wheat, the ones who come across as workers for good but, in fact, are representatives of evil. We cannot tell the difference by looking, so we must use discernment based on what the Scripture teaches.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: Where Are You in This Parable?

Let's view our own circumstances through the lens of Jesus' parables.

First, *remember that hostile powers are always at work in our world*. Be wary of those who might do us harm as we model His love—as Jesus said, “Be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

Second, *it is hard to distinguish the good from the evil*. So be discerning. Don't let impressive people sway you from solid doctrine.

Third, *beware the tendency to rush to extremes*. The workers would have yanked out the weeds at the risk of harming the wheat. As we live in the cosmos, we must stay focused and balanced, loving our enemies while remaining faithful to Christ. That takes wisdom!

Fourth, *never forget that God is just, and He will judge*. The waiting period *will* be over someday when Christ returns. What a day that will be!

Which of these principles strike you as the most applicable personally? Do they calm your concerns and pacify your fears? How so?

We can be assured that the prophets were right. The King is coming as they foretold, perhaps not in the time they envisioned but certainly in the way. He will sort things out, the weeds from the wheat, and in the end, “the righteous will shine like the sun in their Father's Kingdom” (13:43).



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A FINAL PRAYER

To conclude this study, pen your own prayer of praise for the hope we have in the Son and our future glory with Him.

My Father,

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on Matthew 1–15*, vol. 1A (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 279.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

