Understanding the Bible

The Language of Prophecy

Tom Wilson

DRAFT

A Bible Study Guide

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The back cover caricature of the author was drawn by the well-known artist Jan van Haasteren as a favor to Els Rooswinkel, who maintained a web site dedicated to puzzles with artwork drawn by Jan. I originally created a version of this web site and handed it over to Els, who developed the site far beyond its initial content. In appreciation of my effort, Els asked Jan to draw me.

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Table of Contents

Preface . . . . . **v**
Dedication . . . . . **vi**

I Foundational Principles **1**

1 Proverbs and Parables **2**
1.1 What Is a Proverb? 2
1.2 What Is a Parable? 4
1.3 Why Speak in Parables? 5
1.4 Other Terms 7
1.5 The Language of Prophecy 9

2 Dreams and Visions **11**
2.1 What Is a Dream? 11
2.2 What Is a Vision? 13
2.3 What Is a Revelation? 15
2.4 Visions of the Writing Prophets 16

3 Tokens and Signs (planned) **18**

II Parables **19**

4 The Four Trees **20**
4.1 The Vine Tree 21
4.2 The Fig Tree 24
4.3 The Olive Tree 25
4.4 The Bramble 27

5 The Sower **30**
5.1 The Parable Presented 30
5.2 The Parable Explained 31
5.3 Deriving the Meaning 31

6 Kingdom Parables **37**
6.1 The Mustard Seed 37
6.2 The Leaven 38
6.3 The Marriage Feast (planned) 40

6.4 The Talents (planned) . . . 40
7 Other Parables (planned) . . . 41

III Dreams and Visions 42

8 Dreams (planned) . . . 43
9 Key Vision Phrases . . . 44
9.1 Eyes Opened (planned) . . . 44
9.2 Deep Sleep (planned) . . . 44
9.3 Up a High Mountain (planned) . . . 44
9.4 In the Spirit (planned) . . . 44
9.5 The Heavens Were Opened . . . 44
10 Notable Visions . . . 49
10.1 The Transfiguration . . . 49
10.2 The Temptations (planned) . . . 53
10.3 Paul's Conversion (planned) . . . 53

Reference Materials . . . 54
Index of Bible Verses . . . 55

List of Side Studies

4.1 The Vine of the Tribulation Harvest 23
4.2 A Tree and Its Fruit 24
4.3 The 4 Trees in the Garden 28

5.1 Differing Yields of Fruit 35

6.1 What a Woman Symbolizes 39

9.1 Hearing God's Voice 47

Preface

This draft has been made available in an incomplete form to provide the material that is referenced by completed study guides. Material not referenced might also appear in the draft simply because it is nearly complete. The content of this draft may not be fully developed nor polished.

Dedication

To Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, without whom nothing would be possible

Colossians 1:16—For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him

To Dahlia, my wife and my helper in all things

Genesis 2:18—And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.

To all the members of the body of Christ

2 Corinthians 13:11—Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

Part I

Foundational Principles

1 Proverbs and Parables 2
2 Dreams and Visions 11
3 Tokens and Signs (planned) 18

CHAPTER

1 Proverbs and Parables

The bible contains literal and non-literal descriptions. The latter can also be called *figurative*. *Similes* and *metaphors* are examples of such. Besides those, the bible commonly uses proverbs and parables to establish truth. Other terms also exist. Failure to recognize figurative language results in sensational traditions rather than truth.

1.1 What Is a Proverb?

The bible contains many proverbs, including an entire book with that name. Let's look at the dictionary definition and then many scriptures to help us understand them.

Dictionary Definition: proverb

1. A short sentence often repeated, expressing a well known truth or common fact, ascertained by experience or observation; a maxim of wisdom.
2. A by-word; a name often repeated; and hence frequently, a reproach or object of contempt.
3. In Scripture, it sometimes signifies a moral sentence or maxim that is enigmatical; a dark saying of the wise that requires interpretation.
4. Proverbs, a canonical book of the Old Testament, containing a great variety of wise maxims, rich in practical truths and excellent rules for the conduct of all classes of men.

All definitions have good information. A *proverb* is a wise saying. The most important is #3 which says that an interpretation is required.

Let's see what the bible says:

Proverbs 1:1-7

1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel;
2 To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;
3 To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;
4 To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.
5 A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:
6 To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.
7 The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge: *but* fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Verse 4 says that subtilty (or trickery) is added to something that is simple. Thus, it is called a "dark saying", according to verse 6, and it requires interpretation. We will look at other terms, like "dark saying", shortly.

1 Kings 4:30-34

30 And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.
31 For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.
32 And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.

33 And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that *is* in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.
34 And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

As the passage says, Solomon wrote numerous proverbs. Here is one example from the associated book of the bible:

Proverbs 1:8-9

8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:
9 For they *shall be* an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.

Verse 8 provides a simple truth; verse 9 likes it to jewelry.

Here is another:

Proverbs 26:11

11 As a dog returneth to his vomit, *so* a fool returneth to his folly.

The beginning of the verse gives us a rather disgusting example in life. But the end of the verse says that the given truth is just as awful. This verse is quoted in the new testament and extended with another analogy:

2 Peter 2:22

22 But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog *is* turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

The book of *Proverbs* isn't the only place in the bible where proverbs occurs. Here are a couple from the old testament:

1 Samuel 24:13

13 As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.

Ezekiel 16:44-47

44 Behold, every one that useth proverbs shall use *this* proverb against thee, saying, As *is* the mother, *so is* her daughter.
45 Thou *art* thy mother's daughter, that lotheth her husband and her children; and thou *art* the sister of thy sisters, which lothed their husbands and their children: your mother *was* an Hittite, and your father an Amorite.
46 And thine elder sister *is* Samaria, she and her daughters that dwell at thy left hand: and thy younger sister, that dwelleth at thy right hand, *is* Sodom and her daughters.
47 Yet hast thou not walked after their ways, nor done after their abominations: but, as *if that were* a very little *thing*, thou wast corrupted more than they in all thy ways.

The *Ezekiel* passage continues on for several more verses, but the proverb is demonstrated already.

Jesus taught using some proverbs:

John 16:25-29

25 These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.
26 At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:
27 For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.
28 I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.
29 His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb.

You can see the hint that the proverbs are not always clear. He says that a time will come where he won't speak that way. We will see more on this aspect once we have been introduced to parables.

1.2 What Is a Parable?

The same Hebrew word that is translated as “proverb” can be translated as “parable”.

Habakkuk 2:6

6 Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth *that which is* not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!

What is a “taunting proverb”? I’d say that it is one that makes fun of someone because he cannot understand it.

Let’s see the dictionary definition:

Dictionary Definition: parable

A fable or allegorical relation or representation of something real in life or nature, from which a moral is drawn for instruction.

A parable can teach something from real life, but isn’t itself a real story. It does teach a truth.

Let’s see a simple one:

Matthew 24:32-33

32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer *is* nigh:
33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even* at the doors.

The context of this parable is Jesus’ second coming. Before this, he spoke of several events that must occur. He said that these events would be as telling as seeing the leaves on the fig tree as an indicator of summer coming soon.

The next one will have some verses omitted:

Matthew 15:1-2

1 Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying,
2 Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.

There charge suggested that the disciples were defiled by not washing their hands.

Matthew 15:11

11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

Matthew 15:15-20

15 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.
16 And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?
17 Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?
18 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.
19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:
20 These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

So Jesus explained this one for us.

There are many parables that are not explained in the scripture (that’s what we are trying to do in this study guide). Many explanations are offered by people throughout history. But many bad explanations exist, as suggested by these proverbs:

Proverbs 26:7

7 The legs of the lame are not equal: so *is* a parable in the mouth of fools.

Proverbs 26:9

9 *As* a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so *is* a parable in the mouth of fools.

Hopefully, you have a little understanding of parables.

1.3 Why Speak in Parables?

In Matthew 13, Jesus gave a series of parables to Israel. Some of these will be presented in Part II. Within that series he explained why he spoke in parables. We will look at that explanation here:

Matthew 13:10-17

10 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?
11 He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.
12 For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.
13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.
14 And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive:
15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.
16 But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.
17 For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous *men* have desired to see *those things* which ye see, and have not seen *them*; and to hear *those things* which ye hear, and have not heard *them*.

In verse 10, Jesus is asked why he was teaching in parables. In verse 11, Jesus explained why he talked in parables: he wanted the disciples to know what he wanted to reveal, but he didn't want the unbelievers to know it. Israel had a history of being hard-hearted (i.e., not believing what God said). Isaiah (or, Esias) prophesied on the matter because God knew that Israel's unbelief would persist. Jesus reached a point in his ministry that he stopped talking as clearly as he was. Then he began talking to the masses in parables. This would end up hardening their hearts: they were told truth, yet they wouldn't believe it.

Verse 12 says "whosoever hath", which might be a reference to *faith*:

Romans 10:17

17 So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

So, Jesus was saying this: If you believe, you will have more to believe. If you believe not, you might even turn from what you already believed.

Verse 13 essentially explains why: they don't believe what they see and hear. Therefore, they do not understand. Verses 14-15 quote the following:

Isaiah 6:9-10

9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.
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.

In verse 16 (of Matthew 13), Jesus emphasized that the disciples would see and hear what Jesus was teaching about the kingdom. Verse 17 said that the prophets who spoke about the kingdom never got the same opportunity. That is suggested by this verse:

Isaiah 64:4

4 For since the beginning of the world *men* have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, *what* he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.

Mark gives a much shorter explanation concerning teaching in parables:

Mark 4:10-12

10 And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable.
11 And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables:
12 That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and *their* sins should be forgiven them.

Mark says "mystery" whereas *Matthew* says "mysteries". We shouldn't make too much of that, but perhaps it is because *Matthew* teaches 7 parables and *Mark* only 2. *Mark* has far less detail, but essentially says the same thing.

Luke also only has a brief explanation:

Luke 8:9-10

9 And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?
10 And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.

Let's go back to the quoted passage in *Isaiah* and keep reading:

Isaiah 6:11-12

11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate,
12 And the LORD have removed men far away, and *there be* a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

It says how long Israel will be kept in the dark. What is spoken of is essentially the tribulation. Jesus taught about the tribulation on several occasions.

Because of the interruption of the dispensation of grace, Paul says that this blindness continued:

Romans 11:25

25 For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

It is "in part" because some Jews can believe in the dispensation of grace and understand much about what the scriptures were teaching.

Also in the midst of the series of parables in Matthew 13, Jesus said this:

Matthew 13:34-35

34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:
35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.

The last verse partially quotes Psalms 78:2. The psalm declares Israel to be a parable (the past generation declaring to a future generation):

Psalms 78:1-8

1 Give ear, O my people, *to* my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
2 I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:
3 Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.
4 We will not hide *them* from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.
5 For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:
6 That the generation to come might know *them, even* the children *which* should be born; *who* should arise and declare *them* to their children:
7 That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:
8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation *that* set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.

But, shouldn't we expect to find clear truth in the bible? Not always—we must study to understand. Simple reading will often not suffice.

1.4 Other Terms

We saw in Habakkuk 2:6 that a proverb and parable were related. We also saw in Proverbs 1:6 that a proverb is a "dark saying". What other words are related in the bible?

One way to answer that question is to use a bible concordance. The idea being to find how else the Hebrew and Greek words are translated. I will use Strong's concordance [7]. A concordance can be a great tool to further your understanding of what words mean. Like the dictionary, the concordance is not a source of truth. It also should not be used to correct the translation.

We will look at a few words that are translated as both "parable" and "proverb":

***mâshâl* (H4912)**

Apparently from H4910 in some original sense of superiority in mental action; properly, a pithy maxim, usually of metaphorical nature; hence, a simile (as an adage, poem, discourse); byword, like, parable, proverb.

***parabolē* (G3850)**

From G3846; a similitude ("parable"), i.e., (symbolic) fictitious narrative (of common life conveying a moral), apothegm or adage:–comparison, figure, parable, proverb.

***paroimía* (G3942)**

From a compound of G3844 and perhaps a derivative of G3633; apparently a state alongside of supposition, i.e., (concretely) an adage; specially, an enigmatical or fictitious illustration:–parable, proverb.

Some other similar words are: byword, like, comparison, and figure.

Here is the verse where H4912 is translated as "like":

Job 13:12

12 Your remembrances *are* like unto ashes, your bodies to bodies of clay.

Essentially, we have a simile—two actually. The word "like" occurs frequently in the bible. We won't study it further.

Here is one verse where H4912 is translated as "byword":

Psalms 44:14

14 Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people.

We will look at other words translated as "byword" a little later.

Here is the verse where G3850 is translated as "comparison":

Mark 4:30

30 And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?

This is like a simile.

Here is one verse where G3850 is translated as "figure":

Hebrews 11:19

19 Accounting that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

This refers to how Isaac was to be sacrificed (even though he wasn't) as a type of Jesus. The earier verse explains it: Abraham offered up his only begotten son:

Hebrews 11:17

17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*,

The word "figure" occurs a few more times in scripture, and usually refers to the likeness of a man.

Here is another word translated as *proverb*:

***mâshal* (H4911)**

Denominative from H4912; to liken, i.e., (transitively) to use figurative language (an allegory, adage, song or the like); intransitively, to resemble; be(-come) like, compare, use (as a) proverb, speak (in proverbs), utter.

I'll leave the investigation of this word as an exercise because there is nothing out of the ordinary concerning it.

Finally, there is one other word translated as *proverb* and it occurs only one time:

***chîydâh* (H2420)**
From H2330; a puzzle, hence, a trick, conundrum, sententious maxim; dark saying (sentence, speech), hard question, proverb, riddle.

But let's note that this word has several other very interesting meanings: riddle, dark saying/sentence/speech, hard question. These indicate things that should be figured out. Those seeking God do such; fools do not. We will look at examples.

First, "dark saying/sentence/speech" (we saw "dark sayings" more than once already):

Psalms 49:3-4

3 My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart *shall be* of understanding.
4 I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp.

Daniel 8:23

23 And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.

Numbers 12:8

8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

Next, "hard questions":

1 Kings 10:1

1 And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions.

And finally, "riddle":

Ezekiel 17:2

2 Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel;

That associates the riddle with *parable*.

Here is a long passage that tells a riddle and its answer:

Judges 14:12-19

12 And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle unto you: if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find *it* out, then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty change of garments
13 But if ye cannot declare *it* me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.
14 And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle.
15 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire: have ye called us to take that we have? *is it* not *so*?
16 And Samson's wife wept before him, and said, Thou dost but hate me, and lovest me not: thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told *it* me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told *it* my father nor my mother, and shall I tell *it* thee?
17 And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted: and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him: and she told the riddle to the children of her people.
18 And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What *is* sweeter than honey? and what *is* stronger than a lion? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.

19 And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil, and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.

Now, let's go back to words translated as "byword". H4912 was one. Here are others:

***millâh* | *milleh* (H4405)**

From H4448 (plural masculine as if from the second form); a word; collectively, a discourse; figuratively, a topic; + answer, by-word, matter, any thing (what) to say, to speak(-ing), speak, talking, word.

This one usually means normal speech or speaking. Here is the only time it is translated as "byword":

Job 30:9

9 And now am I their song, yea, I am their byword.

You'll have to read the surrounding context to get confirmation of the appropriateness of the word.

***m^{e}shôl* (H4914)**

From H4911; a satire; byword.

This word only occurs once:

Job 17:6

6 He hath made me also a byword of the people; and aforetime I was as a tabret.

***sh^{e}nîynâh* (H8148)**

From H8150; something pointed, i.e., a gibe; byword, taunt.

Here is one of the three verses where the word is translated "byword":

Deuteronomy 28:37

37 And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee.

H8148 is also translated "taunt":

Jeremiah 24:9

9 And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for *their* hurt, *to be* a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them.

"Taunt(ing)" occurs two more times in the bible from two different Hebrew words. We saw one instance in Habakkuk 2:6 mentioned a "taunting proverb". "Taunting" comes from H8148.

1.5 The Language of Prophecy

This passage tells us that prophecy contains dark speech:

Numbers 12:6-8

6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, *I* the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, *and* will speak unto him in a dream.
7 My servant Moses *is* not so, who *is* faithful in all mine house.
8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

When God spoke to Moses, he spoke to him clearly. But it says that when he speaks through (other) prophets he will not do so clearly. The takeaway from that is to understand that the majority of the bible is prophecy. Even straightforward narratives contain hidden symbolism. The passage also mentions visions and dreams, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

Let's extend the relationship and note that proverbs are prophecy:

Proverbs 30:1

1 The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, *even* the prophecy: the man spake unto Ithiel, even unto Ithiel and Ucal,

Proverbs 31:1

1 The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.

Most people misunderstand what the book of *Proverbs* is about. They think it is wisdom for living. That is true. But it is a book of prophecy to help Israel get through the tribulation.

Dark speech requires an interpretation so that the reader or hearer can be edified:

1 Corinthians 14:26

26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

But that interpretation is not someone's opinion. It must come from scripture:

2 Peter 1:20

20 Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.

The only way to explain the multitude of passages in the bible is to study how the bible speaks and solve the symbolism. This is really the theme of the entire study guide.

CHAPTER

2 Dreams and Visions

The bible considers dreams and visions to be about the same thing:

Numbers 12:6

6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, *I* the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, *and* will speak unto him in a dream.

Job 7:14

14 Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions:

Joel 2:28

28 And it shall come to pass afterward, *that* I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:

While they are closely related, we will see that there are subtle differences. Regardless, we need to understand that we are usually dealing with the language of prophecy.

Dreams were a means for God to communicate with man:

1 Samuel 28:6

6 And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.

2.1 What Is a Dream?

You are probably pretty confident that you know what a dream is since you have had them. But a dream from God is more than that. First, let's look at the dictionary definition:

Dictionary Definition: dream (noun)

1. The thought or series of thoughts of a person in sleep.
2. In scripture, dreams were sometimes impressions on the minds of sleeping persons, made by divine agency.
3. A vain fancy; a wild conceit; an unfounded suspicion.

So, one thing that we will note is that a dream comes when one is asleep. We are interested in definition #2 since that is what we are going to encounter in the bible. Let's see the passages that the definition references:

Genesis 20:3-7

3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou *art but* a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she *is* a man's wife.
4 But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?

5 Said he not unto me, She *is* my sister? and she, even she herself said, He *is* my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this.
6 And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.
7 Now therefore restore the man *his* wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore *her* not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that *are* thine.

Verse 3 highlights that the dream was by night. Notice the interaction between God and Abimelech in the dream.

Here is the other passage:

Matthew 2:19-22

19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,
20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.
21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.
22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

In this case, it is an angel (of the Lord) that delivered the message to Joseph. When verse 22 says "warned of God", we would expect that an angel delivered that warning.

Now, we need to understand a key aspect of dreams (this will also be true of visions):

Isaiah 29:7-8

7 And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her munition, and that distress her, shall be as a dream of a night vision.
8 It shall even be as when an hungry *man* dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh; but he awaketh, and, behold, *he is* faint, and his soul hath appetite: so shall the multitude of all the nations be, that fight against mount Zion.

A dream (or vision) appears to be a real experience but is really only perceived. We shouldn't let this aspect of a dream deny that the dream can contain symbols, which require interpretation.

Although we haven't formally discussed visions (that will occur in the next section), the bible says that dreams are visions in the night that occur during deep sleep:

Job 4:13

13 In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men,

Job 33:14-15

14 For God speaketh once, yea twice, *yet man* perceiveth it not.
15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed;

Daniel 4:5

5 I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.

Daniel 7:1-2

1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, *and* told the sum of the matters.
2 Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea.

Daniel 10:8-9

8 Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.
9 Yet heard I the voice of his words: and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground.

As we have already mentioned, dreams require an interpretation:

Genesis 40:8

8 And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, *Do* not interpretations *belong* to God? tell me *them*, I pray you.

Genesis 41:15-16

15 And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and *there is* none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, *that* thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.
16 And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, *It is* not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

Daniel 2:26-28

26 The king answered and said to Daniel, whose name *was* Belteshazzar, Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof?
27 Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise *men*, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, shew unto the king;
28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these;

Daniel 7:15-17

15 I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of *my* body, and the visions of my head troubled me.
16 I came near unto one of them that stood by, and asked him the truth of all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things.
17 These great beasts, which are four, *are* four kings, *which* shall arise out of the earth.

We will look at dreams and interpretations that involve Joseph and Daniel in Chapter 8.

2.2 What Is a Vision?

We already know a vision is like a dream. Let's start with the dictionary and then see how they might differ.

Dictionary Definition: vision

1. The act of seeing external objects; actual sight.
2. The faculty of seeing; sight.
3. Something imagined to be seen, though not real; a phantom; a specter.
4. In Scripture, a revelation from God; an appearance or exhibition of something supernaturally presented to the minds of the prophets, by which they were informed of future events.
5. Something imaginary; the production of fancy.
6. Any thing which is the object of sight.

We will expect to see definition #4, but we might also find suggestions of definition #3.

Here is the first vision mentioned in scripture:

Genesis 15:1-2

1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward.
2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus?

Again, note the interaction between the LORD and Abram in the vision.

As we read about visions and dreams, we want to pay attention to words or phrases that are common. We will investigate these further in an upcoming section.

Numbers 24:2-5

2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding *in his tents* according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him.
3 And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said:

4 He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling *into a trance*, but having his eyes open:
5 How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, *and* thy tabernacles, O Israel!

Note the words: "spirit", "trance", and "eyes open", which can be vision indicator words or phrases. Balaam, like most in the old testament, didn't have the spirit of God. So, it came upon him to give him the vision. Notice that "parable" is also mentioned.

Notice some of the same terms here:

Acts 10:9-13

9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:
10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,
11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:
12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.
13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

There is no mention of the spirit of God here, but we should know that Peter has the Holy Ghost already. Also note the phrase "heaven opened". We will investigate this vision indicator in Section 9.5.

Next, most people miss that *Revelation* is a vision:

Revelation 9:17

17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses *were* as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.

Regardless, the book is full of symbolism and has other indicator phrases that the student should notice. The word "saw" is used 42 times.

Consider this one:

2 Corinthians 12:1-4

1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.
2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.
3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)
4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

Verse 1 mentions "visions and revelations". I would expect that the rest of the passage is an example. If it didn't happen, then perhaps we would call it a *vision*. If it did happen, then perhaps it is a *revelation*. I assume this happened to Paul. He said that he couldn't tell whether he was in his body or not. I think the point is that he seemed so real, it was as if he were there. Again, dreams and visions seem real as they occur. Since he didn't tell us what he heard, we don't know if there was symbology or not. That makes me lean toward it being a real event.

Acts 12:7-11

7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon *him*, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from *his* hands.
8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.
9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.
10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.
11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and *from* all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

In this story, Peter thinks he is having a vision. Probably because he cannot believe that he is going out of the prison (i.e., it is too good to be true). At the end, he is certain that it was really an angel that led him out. Technically, there is no vision here. But this is said by a man who had experienced visions.

Acts 18:9-10

9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:
10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

Paul had a vision in the night; so, it was probably a dream.

2.3 What Is a Revelation?

We just saw this verse in the last section:

2 Corinthians 12:1

1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

So, is there a difference between a vision and a revelation? Let's see the dictionary definition and then other example verses:

Dictionary Definition: revelation

1. The act of disclosing or discovering to others what was before unknown to them; appropriately, the disclosure or communication of truth to men by God himself, or by his authorized agents, the prophets and apostles.
2. That which is revealed; appropriately, the sacred truths which God has communicated to man for his instruction and direction.
3. The Apocalypse; the last book of the sacred canon, containing the prophecies of St. John.

Let's see some examples:

Galatians 1:12

12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 3:3

3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words,

Revelation 1:1

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John:

The previous examples seem to indicate the disclosure of information without regard as to the mechansim (e.g., it might not be a vision or dream).

Let's look at the concordance entry for the word translated as "revelation":

***apokalypsis* (G602)**

From G601; disclosure:–appearing, coming, lighten, manifestation, be revealed, revelation.

This next verse has G602 translated as "revealed":

2 Thessalonians 1:7

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

1 Peter 1:13

13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Those two passages suggest a physical revealing.

Scripture and prophecy come by revelation. This typically involves the Spirit of God:

1 Corinthians 2:10

10 But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

Ephesians 3:5

5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

Amos 3:7

7 Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.

Prophecy involves revelation.

This verse suggests that a revelation might require interpretation:

1 Corinthians 14:26

26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

So, let's go back to one revelation given to Paul:

2 Corinthians 12:1-2

1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.
2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

What was revealed to Paul? He had been to the third heaven! Other references to heaven in the scripture are either the first or the second heaven. This is a topic of discussion in *The Biblical Creation* [8].

So, a vision can reveal information, but a revelation can occur by means other than a vision.

2.4 Visions of the Writing Prophets

Here, I will iterate that many of the writing prophets wrote about visions that they had:

Isaiah 1:1

1 The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, *and* Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Ezekiel 1:1

1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the river of Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

Take note of "the heavens were opened". We will discuss the use of the phrase in Section 9.5.

Obadiah 1

1 The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; We have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle.

Habakkuk 1:1

1 The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

Habakkuk wrote about what he saw. The next verse tells you that it was a vision.

Habakkuk 2:2

2 And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make *it* plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

Nahum 1:1

1 The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.

Sometimes, there isn't a specific mentioning of a vision. But other language can make that clear. Of course, the presence of symbols that are not real is a big clue. Let's see a hint phrase:

Zechariah 1:7-8

7 Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which *is* the month Sebat, in the second year of Darius, came the word of the LORD unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet, saying,
8 I saw by night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that *were* in the bottom; and behind him *were there* red horses, speckled, and white.

When it says "saw by night", this means a vision in the night, or a dream.

The prophets may have had revelation by the Spirit of God without a vision. Such revelations still have prophetic language that can require interpretation.

Chapter 9 will investigate passages with the following vision indicators:

- eyes open
- in a trance
- deep sleep
- heavens opened
- in the spirit
- spirit lifted/taken
- up a high mountain

But take note, these aren't always an indicator of a vision.

CHAPTER

3

Tokens and Signs (planned)

Part II

Parables

4 The Four Trees 20
5 The Sower 30
6 Kingdom Parables 37
7 Other Parables (planned) 41

CHAPTER

4 The Four Trees

The book of *Judges* contains a parable where Israel is typified by four trees. A tree can represent a nation or its leader. The parable doesn't explain what the four types symbolize; those definitions occur elsewhere in the bible.

The four trees are:

1. the olive tree
2. the fig tree
3. the vine (or, grape) tree
4. the bramble (or thorn, brier, or thistle)

These four trees are used repeatedly in scripture. Understanding these types, or symbols, can help us understand these other scriptures.

So, let's look at the parable. The context in the beginning of Judges 9 is relevant to the application of the parable in that context, but we will skip over that.

Judges 9:8-15

8 The trees went forth *on a time* to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us.
9 But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?
10 And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, *and* reign over us.
11 But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?
12 Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, *and* reign over us.
13 And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?
14 Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, *and* reign over us.
15 And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, *then* come *and* put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.

In verse 8, the *trees* represent the nations. The four trees appear in an order that is important. Let's give the meaning of the symbols now and discover their meanings later in the chapter:

1. the olive tree: spiritual Israel
2. the fig tree: religious Israel
3. the vine tree: Israel as a nation
4. the bramble: apostate Israel

God was developing the nation Israel in this manner: #3 $\rightarrow$ #2 $\rightarrow$ #1; they were never meant to be #4.

What the parable is teaching is that the nations are ready to be reigned over.[1] Four aspects of Israel were asked in the order that God would want. The first three refused because Israel was consumed with itself. Finally, the fourth accepted but it wasn't a desirable reign for the people. This paints a problem that Israel has throughout the bible, particularly, in the old testament. The book of *Judges* was an example of that. We should also note the reference

[1] At this point in history, it has been about 1000 years since the judgment at Babel. See the *Biblical Time* study guide [1] for more information.

to *fruit* in verse 11. The meaning of this will become more apparent later when we talk about the works of the law (or, the religious system).

The old testament is full of uses of the types that appear in the parable. Here are many examples with no discussion:

1 Kings 4:25

25 And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

Psalms 128:3

3 Thy wife *shall be* as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.

Jeremiah 8:13

13 I will surely consume them, saith the LORD: *there shall be* no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade; and *the things that* I have given them shall pass away from them.

Hosea 2:12

12 And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These *are* my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them.

Amos 4:9

9 I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured *them*: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.

Joel 1:7

7 He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast *it* away; the branches thereof are made white.

Habakkuk 3:17

17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither *shall* fruit *be* in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and *there shall be* no herd in the stalls:

Haggai 2:18-19

18 Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth *month, even* from the day that the foundation of the LORD'S temple was laid, consider *it*.
19 Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless *you*.

4.1 The Vine Tree

The vine tree is the easiest type to demonstrate with scripture. This first passage summarizes Israel's beginning as a nation:

Psalms 80:8-9

8 Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.
9 Thou preparedst *room* before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.

Israel is the nation that God brought out of Egypt. He cast out the nations of the land and put Israel in it. Because God was for his people, he intended that they remain in the land forever.

This passage also summarizes some aspects of Israel, particularly how Israel became apostate:

Isaiah 5:1-7

1 Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill:

2 And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.
3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.
4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?
5 And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; *and* break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down:
6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.
7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts *is* the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

The *vineyard* (i.e., the land) is where the vine (i.e., the nation) grows. God gathered out the stones (i.e., heathen) and fenced it (i.e., protected it with his laws, angels, and his promises). But instead of bringing forth (good) grapes, they brought forth wild (i.e., rebellious) grapes. Then, God said what he would do to the land. He was dealing with the land in order to reprove and correct the people. But he said that briers and thorns would come up. We'll come to that type shortly. Verse 7 gives you further definitions. While the vineyard is the house of Israel, we can include the *land* in that definition since a nation isn't a nation without its land. Only the men of Judah is called the *vine* since the northern kingdom is in greater apostasy and would soon go into captivity.

Hosea 10:1

1 Israel *is* an empty vine, he bringeth forth fruit unto himself: according to the multitude of his fruit he hath increased the altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly images.

Because of Israel's disobedience, they were called an "empty vine".

Now let's see application of this type in the new testament. Jesus called himself "the true vine" (or Israel):

John 15:1-8

1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.
2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.
3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.
4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.
5 I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.
6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned.
7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.
8 Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

The branches are the people and they abide in the vine. The passage has many references to fruit. They do produce fruit, but this fruit really comes from the people's living according to the religious system that they have. Israel was in a transition from the old covenant to the new. Thus, Jesus makes reference to "the word which I have spoken to you". This was intended to take them to the spirtual nature that he wanted to instill in the nation.

Matthew 20:1-16 tells the parable of the vineyard laborers. I'll just give the first verse:

Matthew 20:1

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

The householder is Jesus. The laborers are the disciples. The vineyard is the nation. The point is to convert the nation to believers in order to bring in the promised kingdom. See the *Matthew* study guide [4] for a complete study of the passage.

Here is the parable of the two sons:

Matthew 21:28-32

28 But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.
29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.
30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I *go*, sir: and went not.
31 Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.
32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

Jesus was talking to the religious leaders. The second son represents them—they are supposed to serve God, but they really don't. The first son represents the sinners—they weren't really living righteously, but when Jesus called them to repent, they did. All of this is respect to the vineyard, which represents the nation.

Matthew 21:33-41, Mark 12:1-9, and Luke 20:9-16 tells the parable of the tenants. That parable is studied in Chapter 7 rather than here. I'll just give the first verse from *Matthew*:

Matthew 21:33

33 Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

Again, a vineyard is mentioned, so this concerns Israel. The husbandmen represent the old testament leadership.

Side Study 4.1: The Vine of the Tribulation Harvest

We should be careful not to blindly apply a symbolic meaning. We should still be doing proper studying, including looking at cross-references. Here is a passage that refers to the vine:

Revelation 14:14-20

14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud *one* sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.
15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.
16 And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.
17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.
18 And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.
19 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast *it* into the great winepress of the wrath of God.
20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand *and* six hundred furlongs.

One cross-reference should be this passage:

Joel 3:9-14

9 Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up:
10 Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I *am* strong.
11 Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD.
12 Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about.
13 Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness *is* great.
14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD *is* near in the valley of decision.

This doesn't mention the vine, but it does mention the sickle and the press (short for winepress). The prophecy in *Joel* concerns Gentiles and not Israel.

4.2 The Fig Tree

The fig tree represents Israel's religious life. The type is suggested here:

Genesis 3:7

7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

After sinning, Adam and Eve attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves.

During Jesus' ministry, we read about the following event:

Matthew 21:18-20

18 Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.
19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.
20 And when the disciples saw *it*, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

Why does he curse the fig tree? The same story is told in *Mark*, but there are some subtle differences:

Mark 11:12-14

12 And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:
13 And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not *yet*.
14 And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard *it*.

This story is interrupted by another event where Jesus cleansed the temple (in *Matthew* the latter story is told before the former). Afterward, we read:

Mark 11:20

20 And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots.

Essentially, the two stories are the same. As already stated, the fig tree represents Israel's religious life. It is not producing the fruits that God expects. Jesus cursed the fig tree since God intended to replace Israel's religious system.

Side Study 4.2: A Tree and Its Fruit

A tree is known by its fruits.

Matthew 7:15-20

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.
16 Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?
17 Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.
18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.
19 Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

James 3:11-12

11 Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet *water* and bitter?
12 Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so *can* no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

The fruits symbolize works:

Psalms 104:13

13 He watereth the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.

Proverbs 31:31

31 Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

While applicable to all trees, this truth is emphasized with respect to the fig tree.

However, *Luke* has a parable rather than the story above:

Luke 13:6-9

6 He spake also this parable; A certain *man* had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.
7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?
8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung *it*:
9 And if it bear fruit, *well*: and if not, *then* after that thou shalt cut it down.

In this parable, the fig tree also has no fruit. That observation has the same meaning as in the stories in *Matthew* and *Mark*. In this case, the parable is teaching that God is going to give Israel another year to show some evidence of being a righteous nation. Of course, it ends up not happening.

This next parable requires some of the context that precedes it. Jesus was telling of the events that would precede his return. Let's see what the three accounts say:

Matthew 24:32-33

32 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer *is* nigh:
33 So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, *even* at the doors.

Mark 13:28-29

28 Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near:
29 So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, *even* at the doors.

Luke 21:29-31

29 And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees;
30 When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand.
31 So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

This parable has a two-fold meaning. The straightforward meaning is this: just as leaves on the tree indicates that summer is near, when the events described before the parable occur, you will know that Jesus' return is near. *Luke* says "and all the trees" besides the fig tree; *Matthew* and *Mark* only mention the fig tree. Why mention that tree. If we let the fig tree represent Israel's religious life, we can see the deeper meaning. Jesus cursed a fig tree earlier in his ministry: it was to never bear fruit again. This typified the religious system that Israel had: that system would come to a halt. However, when the antichrist is revealed, he will restart Israel's religious system. This will culminate in the abomination mentioned in Matthew 24:15.

4.3 The Olive Tree

The olive tree represents Israel's spiritual life. It doesn't show up in the scripture as often as the previous two trees. Olive tree wood was used in the temple:

1 Kings 6:21-23

21 So Solomon overlaid the house within with pure gold: and he made a partition by the chains of gold before the oracle; and he overlaid it with gold.
22 And the whole house he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the house: also the whole altar that *was* by the oracle he overlaid with gold.
23 And within the oracle he made two cherubims *of* olive tree, *each* ten cubits high.

1 Kings 6:31-32

31 And for the entering of the oracle he made doors *of* olive tree: the lintel *and* side posts *were* a fifth part *of the wall*.

32 The two doors also *were of* olive tree; and he carved upon them carvings of cherubims and palm trees and open flowers, and overlaid *them* with gold, and spread gold upon the cherubims, and upon the palm trees.

A door represents access. The doors were made from olive trees, so the access is meant to be spiritual.

The lamps in the tabernacle (and temple) burned olive oil:

Leviticus 24:2

2 Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually.

Here, olive oil is a type for the Spirit of God, and, of course, represents spiritual life.

Understanding basic symbols and types enables the understanding of harder passages:

Zechariah 4:1-3

1 And the angel that talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep,
2 And said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked, and behold a candlestick all *of* gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and his seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which *are* upon the top thereof:
3 And two olive trees by it, one upon the right *side* of the bowl, and the other upon the left *side* thereof.

Zechariah 4:11-14

11 Then answered I, and said unto him, What *are* these two olive trees upon the right *side* of the candlestick and upon the left *side* thereof?
12 And I answered again, and said unto him, What *be these* two olive branches which through the two golden pipes empty the golden *oil* out of themselves?
13 And he answered me and said, Knowest thou not what these *be*? And I said, No, my lord.
14 Then said he, These *are* the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

These next verses provide some explanation of the symbols in the former passage.

Revelation 11:3-4

3 And I will give *power* unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.
4 These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

The olive trees represent two people that are witnesses (see *How to Study the Bible – Volume 3: Advanced Topics* study guide [3] to understand that they will not be Moses and Elijah). The olive tree and the implied olive oil represents a spiritual component. The olive oil itself suggests the involvement of the Spirit of God. The two witnesses are speaking for God. They will likely be involved in growing the church during the tribulation.

Christians are never symbolized using the vine or fig trees. However, we do have a link to the olive tree:

Romans 11:16-24

16 For if the firstfruit *be* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*: and if the root *be* holy, so *are* the branches.
17 And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;
18 Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.
19 Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be graffed in.
20 Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear:
21 For if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed* lest he also spare not thee.
22 Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.
23 And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again.
24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural *branches*, be graffed into their own olive tree?

Like Israel, we have a spiritual relationship with God. We are from a “wild” olive tree. Although Israel was broken off, it will be grafted in again.

This provides more confirmation of what we just read in Romans 11:

Romans 15:25-27

25 But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints.
26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.
27 It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.

Note that the saints mentioned are kingdom saints. There aren't any kingdom saints today. So we don't do this now.

Finally, one final reference to an olive tree (via its leaves):

Genesis 8:11

11 And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth *was* an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth.

So. . . does the olive leaf symbolize something spiritual? It should, just as the dove symbolizes something similar.

4.4 The Bramble

Understanding what the bramble symbolizes will take a little bit of work. If you seek the dictionary definition, which I won't do, you will miss the bible's meaning. Searching the scriptures for the word will be more productive. Here are a couple of verses:

Isaiah 34:13

13 And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof: and it shall be an habitation of dragons, *and* a court for owls.

Luke 6:44

44 For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.

Some possible synonyms are: *thorns* and *nettles*.

Hosea 9:6

6 For, lo, they are gone because of destruction: Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them: the pleasant *places* for their silver, nettles shall possess them: thorns *shall be* in their tabernacles.

Isaiah 5:6

6 And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

Yet another word is *brier*.

These next two verses should help us understand that the thorn (and brier) symbolizes the heathen:

Numbers 33:55

55 But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them *shall be* pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

Judges 2:3

3 Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be *as thorns* in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

Applied to Israel, this would represent *apostacy*.

The parable of the sower is studied in Chapter 5. *Thorns* are referenced in it. The result is no fruit:

Mark 4:7

7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

One of the most interesting applications of the thorn symbol is this one:

Matthew 27:28-29

28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.
29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put *it* upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

Mark 15:17

17 And they clothed him with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his *head*,

John 19:2-5

2 And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put *it* on his head, and they put on him a purple robe,
3 And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands.
4 Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.
5 Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And *Pilate* saith unto them, Behold the man!

Jesus wasn't just the king of the Jews—he was king of the **apostate** Jews! It is interesting that *Luke*, the account written to Gentiles, does not make reference to the crown of thorns. It mentions only a "gorgeous robe".

Finally, consider this verse:

2 Corinthians 12:7

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Because many do not understand the bible's language, they do not understand that Paul's "thorn" is an apostate Jew. This would be a false teacher that Paul commented on in various places. Here is one example:

Titus 1:10

10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:

Conclusion

The four trees represent aspects of Israel. Israel was God's nation on the earth (the vine tree). He gave them a system to worship him (the fig tree). He gave them a spiritual relationship with him (the olive tree). Unfortunately, Israel's unbelief made them apostate (the bramble).

The Gentiles are symbolized as trees in the parable in *Judges*, but we are not described as any of these four trees. The body of Christ also has a spiritual relationship with God, so Paul tells us that we are grafted into the olive tree.

Side Study 4.3: The 4 Trees in the Garden

As you study, you will learn things that the scripture does not say plainly. An example of this is understanding that the four trees that are mentioned in *Judges* are also in Genesis 3. First, there was the fig tree:

Genesis 3:7

7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

The curse brought the bramble/thorns:

Genesis 3:18

18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

So are the other two trees present? The other 2 must be deduced. Let's start with the vine tree. Grapes are considered to be the "forbidden fruit" A Nazarite could not have wine:

Numbers 6:2-4

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate *themselves* to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate *themselves* unto the LORD:
3 He shall separate *himself* from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried.
4 All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.

Noah drank the fruit of the vine:

Genesis 9:20-21

20 And Noah began *to be* an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:
21 And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.

A grape is probably what Adam ate. So, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the vine tree
Therefore, the tree of life is the olive tree.

Try to figure out what the other trees represent: Cedar, myrtle, palm, mulberry, fir...

CHAPTER

5 The Sower

The parable of the sower tells how the gospel of the kingdom is received by Israel. It is the longest in this series of parables. It also is followed by the explanation, although not immediately since the reason for parables is explained first (we discussed this in Section 1.3). We will look at the presentations of the parable in all three accounts. Then we will look at the explanations in all three accounts. This will be followed by an analysis using all of the information that we have.

5.1 The Parable Presented

Matthew 13:3-9

3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;
4 And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:
5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:
6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.
7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:
8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirty-fold.
9 Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Mark 4:3-9

3 Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:
4 And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.
5 And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:
6 But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.
7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.
8 And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.
9 And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 8:5-8

5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.
6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.
7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.
8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

5.2 The Parable Explained

The explanation of the parable is not immediately given, since the explanation as to why Jesus taught in parables is given first (see Section 1.3).

Matthew 13:18-23

18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.
19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.
20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;
21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.
22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.
23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Mark 4:13-20

13 And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?
14 The sower soweth the word.
15 And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.
16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;
17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.
18 And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,
19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.
20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive *it*, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

Luke 8:11-15

11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.
12 Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.
13 They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.
14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection.
15 But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience.

5.3 Deriving the Meaning

We will go through each part of the parable. For each part, we will present the relevant verses from both the presentation and the explanation from each account for comparison (and you can skip over this information since it is repeated simply for convenience). The conclusions will follow.

Comparison: The Sower and the Seed

Matthew 13:3

3 And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow;

Matthew 13:18

18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

Mark 4:3

3 Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:

Mark 4:14

14 The sower soweth the word.

Luke 8:5

5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

Luke 8:11

11 Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.

This parable doesn't highlight who the sower is. The next parable will. But, we can just conclude that it is anyone who sows the seed. The seed is the word of God. More particularly, it is the gospel of the kingdom since that will align with much of the gospel accounts. Matthew 13:19 specifically states "the word of the kingdom". Also, recall from Section 1.3 that these parables are parables of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven/God. Jesus wasn't the only one preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

There are four places that the seed falls. Some incorrectly assume that the four places indicate that one-fourth of the people fall into each category. We will see why that is probably not true shortly.

Comparison: Soil #1 - The Way Side

Matthew 13:4

4 And when he sowed, some *seeds* fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up:

Matthew 13:19

19 When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth *it* not, then cometh the wicked *one*, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.

Mark 4:4

4 And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.

Mark 4:15

15 And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

Luke 8:5

5 A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

Luke 8:12

12 Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

The way side isn't a proper soil for sowing. It hasn't been prepared: The word is rejected by immediate unbelief. The ground essentially represents the condition of the heart of the individual. The fowls represent the devil. We can expand that to include all of the devils. The account in *Luke* makes it clear that this has to do with salvation.

Some suggest that "the wicked one" in *Matthew's* account is the antichrist based upon this verse:

2 Thessalonians 2:8

8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

However, Jesus' audience wouldn't have had that scripture. *Mark* and *Luke* tell us it is the devil. It is true that the antichrist is present during the tribulation, but this parable was applicable since the kingdom began to be preached by John the Baptist.

Comparison: Soil #2 - Stony Ground

Matthew 13:5-6

5 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth:
6 And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.

Matthew 13:20-21

20 But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it;
21 Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

Mark 4:5-6

5 And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:
6 But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.

Mark 4:16-17

16 And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness;
17 And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.

Luke 8:6

6 And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.

Luke 8:13

13 They on the rock *are they*, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

Note that the seed springs up: The word was received. The various accounts give you important words as to why: tribulation, persecution, affliction, and temptation. Notice that they do not endure in the word. That is important:

1 Peter 1:25

25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

John 8:31

31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed;

Matthew 24:13

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Comparison: Soil #3 - Among Thorns

Matthew 13:7

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them:

Matthew 13:22

22 He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Mark 4:7

7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.

Mark 4:18-19

18 And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word,
19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

Luke 8:7

7 And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it.

Luke 8:14

14 And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of *this* life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

We learned from Section 4.4 that a thorn represents an apostate—someone who once believed something but no longer does. The accounts detail what this means: care of this world, deceitfulness of riches, lusts of other things, and pleasures of this life. The believer produces no fruit because he returns to unbelief.

All of the previous soil types align with this verse:

1 John 2:16

16 For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

The *wayside* aligns with the pride of life.

Psalms 10:4

4 The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek *after God*: God *is* not in all his thoughts.

The devil's sin was pride, as his heart was "lifted up":

Ezekiel 28:17

17 Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.

These do not receive the word because they think that they know better.

The *stony ground* aligns with the lust of the flesh:

Matthew 26:41

41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.

Among thorns aligns with the lust of the eyes.

Comparison: Soil #4 - Good Ground

Matthew 13:8

8 But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Matthew 13:23

23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth *it*; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Mark 4:8

8 And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.

Mark 4:20

20 And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive *it*, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

Luke 8:8

8 And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Luke 8:15

15 But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep *it*, and bring forth fruit with patience.

The good ground produces fruit from the seed. But note that there are different yields:

- *Matthew*: 100. . . 60. . . 30
- *Mark*: 30. . . 60. . . 100
- *Luke*: only 100!

Not all good soils are the same! Is it the soil (i.e., the heart), or something else that causes the variation?

Side Study 5.1: Differing Yields of Fruit

Let's see what contributes to different yields of fruit.

John 15:2-5

2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.
3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.
4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.
5 I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

This passage mentioned bearing **fruit** (thirtyfold) and bringing forth **more fruit** (sixtyfold). Someone that believes can bring forth fruit. If he is purged, he can bring forth **more fruit**. But, he must abide in Christ to bring forth **much fruit** (hundredfold).

John 12:24

24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

Here, one must die like Christ to bring forth **much fruit**. This isn't a literal death. These examples demonstrate what this idea of *death* might mean:

Matthew 16:24-25

24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.
25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

Mark 10:21

21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

The verse in *Mark* mentions taking up the cross, but is associating it with selling all. The corresponding verse in *Matthew* is:

Matthew 19:21

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me.

This mentions being *perfect*, or complete. That might be the hundredfold yield.

Finally, each of the presentations of the parable ends with "... hath ears to hear, let him hear". There are 8 such usages in *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*. Likewise, there 8 similar phrases in *Revelation* ("... have/hath an ear, let him hear"). Of course, everyone has ears: only those with faith actually listen to the instruction.

Let's note that the outcome of the sowing isn't really dependent upon the seed. It appears to be a function of the soil. Let's confirm that the 4 soil types do not represent one-fourth of the people:

Zechariah 13:7-9

7 Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man *that is* my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.
8 And it shall come to pass, *that* in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off *and* die; but the third shall be left therein.
9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It *is* my people: and they shall say, The LORD *is* my God.

A "third part" suggests one-third of Israel will believe (i.e., they are the good ground). "Two parts" would be the sum of the other three soil types. And finally, for the good soil, how the branch is maintained impacts the yield.

CHAPTER

6 Kingdom Parables

6.1 The Mustard Seed

The parable of the mustard seed is in *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*. In *Matthew* and *Mark*, it is near the parable of the sower. In *Luke*, there is a much different context.

Matthew 13:31-32

31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field:
32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Mark 4:30-32

30 And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it?
31 *It is* like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth:
32 But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.

Luke 13:18-19

18 Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?
19 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

Let's list the symbols that we know:[1]

1. A man: probably the Son of man (the parable of the wheat and tares)
2. A field: the world (the parable of the wheat and tares)
3. Fowls: ministers of Satan (parable of the sower)

In the parable of the sower, the sower sowed seeds. In this parable, he apparently sowed just one seed.

Here are the new symbols to solve:

1. The grain of mustard seed
2. The tree
3. Lodging in the branches / under the shadow

What is the "grain of mustard seed"?

Matthew 17:20

20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

[1] The parable of the wheat and tares appears in the *Matthew* study guide [4].

Luke 17:6

6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

The "grain of mustard seed" is *faith*, the faith of believers in the kingdom. In these verses, mountains or trees can symbolize kingdoms. Faith is necessary in God's kingdom:

Hebrews 11:6

6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

A mustard plant is an herb. A mustard seed should grow into a small bush. But this seed grows into a tree, which is not the natural growth:

Genesis 1:11-12

11 And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.
12 And the earth brought forth grass, *and* herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed *was* in itself, after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good.

Herbs and trees produce after their kinds. We will see why this unnatural growth occurs shortly.

While a tree can represent a kingdom, it more completely represents the leader and his kingdom. This tree represents the antichrist and his kingdom. While Jesus intended for his church to come from faith, it is taken over and turned into something else. As we already know, the fowls, or birds of the air, represent the ministers of Satan and all three trees have them present. The likely reason that this bush becomes a tree is explained in the next parable.

6.2 The Leaven

The parable of the leaven is in *Matthew* and *Luke*. In both cases, this parable accompanies the previous one because they go together. Given that statement, it is interesting that this parable does not appear in *Mark*.

Matthew 13:33

33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Luke 13:20-21

20 And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?
21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Here are the symbols that we must understand:

- The leaven
- The woman
- Three measures of meal
- Hiding the leaven in the meal

Leaven is a substance added to bread dough that causes it to expand or rise. *Yeast* is an example of leaven. It symbolizes pride and sin. We have verses that tell us what it symbolizes:

Matthew 16:6

6 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Matthew 16:11-12

11 How is it that ye do not understand that I spake *it* not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?
12 Then understood they how that he bade *them* not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Mark 8:15

15 And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and *of* the leaven of Herod.

Luke 12:1

1 In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.

So, leaven represents bad doctrine:

- Pharisees: hypocrisy, legalism, and self-righteousness
- Saducees: skepticism and unbelief
- Herod: corruption, materialism, and worldliness

These align with the three types of bad soils in the parable of the sower.

Galatians 5:9

9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

Side Study 6.1: What a Woman Symbolizes

A woman can symbolize Israel:

Revelation 12:1

1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

The woman is mentioned several times throughout Revelation 12.

A woman can also symbolize a corrupt religious system:

Zechariah 5:7-8

7 And, behold, there was lifted up a talent of lead: and this *is* a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah.
8 And he said, This *is* wickedness. And he cast it into the midst of the ephah; and he cast the weight of lead upon the mouth thereof.

Revelation 17:1-6

1 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters:
2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.
3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.
4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:
5 And upon her forehead *was* a name written, Mystery, Babylon The Great, The Mother Of Harlots And Abominations Of The Earth.
6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

When you put the two together, the woman represents a corrupt religious system that is within Israel itself.

The three measures of meal appears here:

Genesis 18:6

6 And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead *it*, and make cakes upon the hearth.

It is generally associated with one of Israel's offerings and there was not supposed to be leaven in it:

Leviticus 2:1

1 And when any will offer a meat offering unto the LORD, his offering shall be *of* fine flour; and he shall pour oil upon it, and put frankincense thereon:

Leviticus 2:4

4 And if thou bring an oblation of a meat offering baken in the oven, *it shall be* unleavened cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, or unleavened wafers anointed with oil.

Leviticus 2:11

11 No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the LORD, shall be made with leaven: for ye shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of the LORD made by fire.

This parable helps explain the parable of the mustard seed. Faith is involved, but many believe the wrong things. The bush grows into a tree because of the bad doctrine—the doctrine of devils:

1 Timothy 4:1-2

1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;
2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

6.3 The Marriage Feast (planned)

6.4 The Talents (planned)

CHAPTER

7

Other Parables (planned)

Part III

Dreams and Visions

8 Dreams (planned) 43
9 Key Vision Phrases 44
10 Notable Visions 49

CHAPTER

8

Dreams (planned)

CHAPTER

9 Key Vision Phrases

9.1 Eyes Opened (planned)

9.2 Deep Sleep (planned)

9.3 Up a High Mountain (planned)

9.4 In the Spirit (planned)

9.5 The Heavens Were Opened

We saw this verse in Chapter 2:

Ezekiel 1:1

1 Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the river of Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.

We concluded that the phrase "the heavens were opened" was a vision indicator. It is typically overlooked as the focus turns to the context around the phrase. The verse above is the only instance of the phrase in the old testament. But the new testament has 5 others. Let's see if opening the heavens relates to visions in those passages.

9.5.1 Peter's Trance

We will start with any easy case that clearly associates the phrase with a vision.

Acts 10:9-19

9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour:
10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,
11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth:
12 Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.
13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.
14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.
15 And the voice *spake* unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common.
16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.
17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate,
18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.
19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee.

Verse 10 uses the word "trance". Verse 11 has the phrase "and saw heaven opened". Verses 17 and 19 clearly tell you that it was a vision. When Peter recounted this event, he said:

Acts 11:5
5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me:

Both "trance" and "vision" were mentioned.

The vision teaches a truth (that God was going to Gentiles). Peter was being told that the prophecy program had changed. He eventually got better understanding from Paul that it had been put on hold.

9.5.2 John's Revelation

The book of *Revelation* was given to John to instruct Israel about its future:

Revelation 1:1-2
1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified *it* by his angel unto his servant John:
2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

The end of the passage says that John was to write what he saw. The phrase "I saw" occurs 35 times. Did he witness literal events or see symbolic ones?

Most of the book of *Revelation* has symbolic language in it. That is demonstrated here:

Revelation 1:20
20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

There's a "mystery" because there is dark speech. Some symbols are defined in the verse.

We are also told in one particular instance that there is a vision:

Revelation 9:17
17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses *were* as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.

Obviously, the information in 19:11-14 is symbolic, yet teaches a truth.

So, here is the phrase of interest:

Revelation 19:11-14
11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.
12 His eyes *were* as a flame of fire, and on his head *were* many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.
13 And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.
14 And the armies *which were* in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

The phrase is telling you that John had a vision. The language following it is full of symbols.

9.5.3 Jesus' Baptism

Jesus' baptism provides another occurrence of the phrase "the heavens were opened". This is a bit more complicated to understand, particularly in light of the traditions that are taught about it. Let's look at his baptism in all four accounts of his ministry. All four accounts tell us that, leading up to the baptism, many came out to John when he was baptizing. Some believed and some did not.

Here is the account in *Matthew*:

Matthew 3:13-17

13 Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.
14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?
15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it to be so* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.
16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:
17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Verse 16 says "the heavens were opened", but it is followed by "unto him". Then it says "he saw". My questions are: (1) Were the heavens opened unto anyone else? (2) Who saw the Spirit of God descending? (3) Who heard the voice? Note that the voice says "This is…" (the other accounts will say something else). We will postpone answering these for now.

Next, the account in *Mark* says:

Mark 1:9-11

9 And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.
10 And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:
11 And there came a voice from heaven, *saying*, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

This says that "**he** [Jesus] **saw** the heavens opened" and the Spirit descending. The voice says "Thou art…". Both seem to be something that Jesus experienced. Did anyone else? Let's keep going.

Now, *Luke* says:

Luke 3:21-22

21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,
22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

This says "the **heaven was** opened". Does that indicate something different (I don't think so). It also says "Thou are…". Again, that is addressing Jesus directly. There are subtle differences in the three accounts.

Now, let's see the account in *John* which is quite different:

John 1:29-34

29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.
30 This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.
31 And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water.
32 And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him.
33 And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.
34 And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

This is interesting. John the Baptist didn't know Jesus, although they were cousins. John was told that he would know who Jesus was when he witnessed the Spirit of God descending upon him. John's witness was that he saw the Spirit descending. It doesn't say that everyone saw it (which is still certainly possible).

My opinion is that we have vision language present in the first three accounts: "the heavens were opened" (or "heaven was"). All three emphasize that the experience is for Jesus. The account in *John* lacks this terminology since it simply summarizes what John the Baptist would see. My takeaway is that John had a vision as well so that he would know who Jesus was.

I think there is emphasis on John bearing record because there is no one else to. That makes him the forerunner of Christ. I don't think anyone else there saw or heard what is recorded.

Side Study 9.1: Hearing God's Voice

Some will say that God spoke from heaven three times: (1) at Jesus' baptism, (2) at the transfiguration, and (3) before the crucifixion. We are concluding that the baptism is a vision. Section 10.1 will study the details of the transfiguration, but will also acknowledge that it was a vision. We will address the last one shortly.

But, first, consider this passage:

John 5:36-38

36 But I have greater witness than *that* of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.
37 And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.
38 And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

This says that unbelievers have never heard God's voice. If there was a voice to hear at Jesus' baptism, they didn't hear it.

Now, let's see the last passage mentioned above:

John 12:27-30

27 Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.
28 Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, *saying*, I have both glorified *it*, and will glorify *it* again.
29 The people therefore, that stood by, and heard *it*, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him.
30 Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.

In this story, it is quite clear that many heard the voice from heaven. Those who feared or were in unbelief said that it thundered. Others heard a voice, but weren't sure as to who spoke. This story also draws our attention to events at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). It also provides contrast to what happened at Jesus' baptism, where no mention is made of anyone hearing anything.

So, at the baptism, only Jesus and John the Baptist hear God's voice. At the transfiguration, only Jesus, Peter, James, and John hear God's voice. Before the crucifixion, many believers heard God's voice.

There is a period of time between Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry that the testimony lay solely with John the Baptist. Once John was put in prison, Jesus began his ministry. Once Jesus began his ministry, he did miracles to confirm that he was the Son of God. You can decide for yourself, but passages like these are quite intriguing because of the language used.

9.5.4 The Stoning of Stephen

We will only look at the end of a long passage where Stephen reproved Israel. I'll also omit the very end where Stephen was stoned as a result of his speech. But, let's see the important part:

Acts 7:55-57

55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,
56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.
57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

Stephen looked up, possibly in a way that we might look up when we pray. But he then had a vision. We are clued into that by "I see the heavens opened". The last verse tells us that the crowd heard what he said, and we should conclude that they didn't see what he saw (citing John 12:27-30 as a contrast). This one should be pretty straightforward.

9.5.5 Angels Ascending and Descending

The last example is different from the others. It reminds us to think and not blindly apply a principle everywhere.

John 1:47-51

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!
48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.
49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.
50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.
51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

The last verse says "ye shall see heaven open". So, it hadn't actually happened yet. It also mentions that angels will ascend and descend uopn the Son of man. That seems to have symbolic meaning as well. It references this old testament passage:

Genesis 28:10-17

10 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.
11 And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put *them for* his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.
12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.
13 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I *am* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;
14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.
15 And, behold, I *am* with thee, and will keep thee in all *places* whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done *that* which I have spoken to thee of.
16 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew *it* not.
17 And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful *is* this place! this *is* none other but the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven.

There is no mention of the phrase that we are studying. Verse 12 says that Jacob dreamed. In the dream he sees "a ladder... reached unto heaven". That is going to give us understanding of what "opening the heaven" means in the book of *John*: access to God.

Verse 17 mentions the "the house of God". While this suggests the temple (refer to John 2:15-16), which obviously doesn't exist yet, it really suggests what the temple represents: the presence of God. Verse 16 states that. Verse 17 also mentions "the gate of heaven". A *gate* is where governmental activities take place. The *Ruth* study guide [6] has a side study on this topic.

The usage of "ye shall..." is not the same as the four other cases where a vision occurred. However, symbolic language was still present.

CHAPTER

10 Notable Visions

In this chapter, we will study a few explicit visions so that we can better understand how this communication mechanism worked.

10.1 The Transfiguration

Comparative Study Summary

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
17:1-9	9:1-10	9:27-36	

The transfiguration story occurs in three of the accounts of Jesus' ministry. From them all, we can get a deeper understanding of what happened and what it meant.

Let's see all 3 passages and then we will compare them in order to explain this event. For *Matthew*, we'll include the last verse of the previous chapter so that it aligns with the other accounts.

Matthew 16:28-17:9

28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,
2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.
3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.
4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.
5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.
6 And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.
7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.
8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.
9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

Mark 9:1-10

1 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.
2 And after six days Jesus taketh *with him* Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.
3 And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.
4 And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.
5 And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

6 For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.
7 And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.
8 And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.
9 And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.
10 And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.

Luke 9:27-36

27 But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.
28 And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.
29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment *was* white *and* glistering.
30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias:
31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.
32 But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.
33 And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.
34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.
35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.
36 And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept *it* close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

Comparison: #1 - Some Will See the Kingdom Before Dying

Matthew 16:28

28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.

The most critical element in *Matthew* is that verse 9 says that it is a vision.

Mark 9:1

1 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

Luke 9:27

27 But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.

The first verse of each passge is about the same; there are only some minor differences. It says that some will see the kingdom before dying. Some will explain that the apostles will live until the kingdom comes, but this prophecy is fulfilled in the subsequent passage. This is different than the passages that declare the following:

Matthew 24:34

34 Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

That says that the kingdom would come within about 40 years. That ends up not being fulfilled due to Israel rejecting the kingdom. Refer to the *Biblical Time* study guide [1] for the duration of a generation.

Comparison: #2 - Jesus Is Transformed

Matthew 17:1-2

1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,
2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.

Mark 9:2-3

2 And after six days Jesus taketh *with him* Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.
3 And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.

Luke 9:28-29

28 And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.
29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment *was* white *and* glistering.

So, the "inner three" (i.e., Peter, James, and John) got to witness the prophecy fulfilled. It is interesting that a few visions involve a mountain (e.g., Matthew 4:8 and Revelation 21:10). *Matthew* and *Mark* say "after six days" and *Luke* says "about an eight days". So, it sounds like we are talking about *seven days*. This typifies the kingdom as denoted by the creation week and many other references to *seven* (refer to the *Biblical Time* study guide [1]).
But it is *Luke* that tells us that Jesus went up to pray. What did he pray for? Well, essentially what happened afterward was the answer to his prayer. Jesus asked God to show his disciples a glimpse of the kingdom. Jesus just doesn't do these things on his own; he has to ask the Father to do it. It isn't until after his resurrection that he has all power and authority:

Matthew 28:18

18 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

The second verse of each passage gives you a slightly different description of the same thing. People seem to think that Jesus is going to glow in the kingdom, but I doubt it. He didn't appear this way after his resurrection. We also have descriptions of angels that appeared this way (e.g., Luke 2:9, Matthew 28:3, Luke 24:4) as well as Moses' face (i.e., Exodus 34:29). You might still argue that he will be glowing after the second coming. . .

Comparison: #3 - Moses and Elias Appear

Matthew 17:3-4

3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.
4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.

Mark 9:4-6

4 And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.
5 And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.
6 For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.

Luke 9:30-33

30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias:
31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.
32 But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.
33 And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.

Moses and Elias (i.e., Elijah) probably typify the law and the prophets, respectively. Both were definitely already

dead (to understand that Elijah died, see the *How to Study the Bible – Volume 2: Intermediate Topics* study guide [2]). So, this typifies the resurrection of the saints to the earth, which is supposed to happen at the beginning of the kingdom.

Peter's idea to build tabernacles should draw your attention to the feast of tabernacles (see the *Biblical Time* study guide [1]). This suggests the timing of that resurrection (see also the *Resurrection* study guide [5]). *Mark* tells us that Peter is a bit confused and doesn't know what to say.

The longer account in *Luke* has a few interesting details. First, it says that Moses and Elias talked with Jesus about his death (i.e., his decrease). This obviously cannot be the real future since Jesus would have already been resurrected. So, this is good evidence of a vision. Secondly, it tells us that the three disciples were asleep as the vision began. We can only speculate on details that are lacking, but it is possible that the disciples fell asleep after the climb up the mountain. Then Jesus prayed. As the prayer is answered, the vision begins. The disciples are awakened to be part of the vision since Jesus probably asked for them to see his glory in the kingdom. Finally, it also highlights Peter's lack of understanding of the event.

Comparison: #4 - God Speaks

Matthew 17:5-8

5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.
6 And when the disciples heard *it*, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.
7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.
8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.

Mark 9:7-8

7 And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.
8 And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.

Luke 9:34-36

34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.
35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.
36 And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept *it* close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

Why the cloud? God often veiled himself with a cloud. Even his image in the old testament, the LORD did so:

Numbers 11:25

25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that *was* upon him, and gave *it* unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, *that*, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

Notice what God said in the three passages. *Matthew* is slightly different. It is referenced by this passage:

2 Peter 1:16-18

16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.
17 For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.
18 And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.

After God spoke, the vision ended. Moses and Elijah were never really there. They still await the true resurrection when the kingdom comes. But, as we understand about visions and dreams, the experience can feel very real.

Comparison: #5 - The Vision Has Ended

Matthew 17:9

9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.

Mark 9:9-10

9 And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead.
10 And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.

Luke 9:36

36 And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept *it* close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

Only *Matthew* tells us that this is a vision. If we are good students of the bible, perhaps we should figure this one out anyway. God sometimes tells us things explicitly to establish us. But then there are other times that we have to figure these things out.
Two of the accounts relate that the disciples weren't to talk about the vision until after his resurrection. While the disciples were to understand his death and resurrection, the multitude were not likely to receive it (they weren't receiving the kingdom message even without this detail).
Only *Mark* focuses on their unbelief. Of course, this reminds us of what had just happened in the previous chapters in all of these accounts (if we had actually read them): Jesus began to teach that he had to die. This will also be the focal point of the story that follows in all three accounts: the disciples couldn't cast out a devil.

Jesus gave some of the disciples a glimpse of the kingdom. They needed to connect a few teachings that he gave them before and after this. His death and resurrection were a significant step before the kingdom was to come. His death was the foundation of his power over the enemy:

1 Corinthians 2:6-8

6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:
7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:
8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

While Jesus had power over the enemy before dying, he understood what had to come later. He gave the disciples power over the enemy without them understanding the connection. Their unbelief led to a reduction in some of this power.

Jesus' glory in the kingdom would only come after his death and resurrection. The resurrection of the kingdom saints would follow. Three disciples got to witness this before they died. Others could have witnessed the actual event that this vision typified if the kingdom had been received.

Finally, why doesn't this story appear in *John*. I cannot say for sure, but *John* focuses on Jesus being God (that came as a man). It's audience consists of the tribulation saints. *John* doesn't address the kingdom being at hand nor how it will come.

10.2 The Temptations (planned)

10.3 Paul's Conversion (planned)

Reference Materials

Completed and draft e-books are available via `https://thechurchoforlando.org`.

[1] *Biblical Time*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, 9/7/25

[2] *How to Study the Bible – Volume 2: Intermediate Topics*, Tom Wilson, e-book; partial Draft Edition, 2/25/26

[3] *How to Study the Bible – Volume 3: Advanced Topics*, Tom Wilson, e-book; partial Draft Edition, 2/3/26

[4] *Matthew*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, planned

[5] *Resurrection*, Tom Wilson, e-book; Second Edition, Revision A, 1/19/26

[6] *Ruth*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, Revision B, 3/29/26

[7] *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries*, J. Strong, 1890; this concordance is in the *e-Sword X* application

[8] *The Biblical Creation*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, 1/1/24

Index of Bible Verses

This index of bible verses is provided so that you can quickly find where passages appear. The index is organized by book name. Each book name is followed by an ordered list of chapters, followed by the verse(s) cited. Each reference is followed by the page(s) on which it appears. In the soft copy, the page numbers are hyperlinks. Boldface page numbers, if any, refer to references to verses rather than quoted verses.

1 Corinthians
- 2:6-8 – 53
- 2:10 – 16
- 14:26 – 10, 16

1 John
- 2:16 – 34

1 Kings
- 4:25 – 21
- 4:30-34 – 2
- 6:21-23 – 25
- 6:31-32 – 25
- 10:1 – 8

1 Peter
- 1:13 – 15
- 1:25 – 33

1 Samuel
- 24:13 – 3
- 28:6 – 11

1 Timothy
- 4:1-2 – 40

2 Corinthians
- 12:1 – 15
- 12:1-2 – 16
- 12:1-4 – 14
- 12:7 – 28

2 Peter
- 1:16-18 – 52
- 1:20 – 10
- 2:22 – 3

2 Thessalonians
- 1:7 – 15
- 2:8 – 33

Acts
- 7:55-57 – 47
- 10:9-13 – 14
- 10:9-19 – 44
- 11:5 – 45
- 12:7-11 – 14
- 18:9-10 – 15

Amos
- 3:7 – 16
- 4:9 – 21

Daniel
- 2:26-28 – 13
- 4:5 – 12
- 7:1-2 – 12
- 7:15-17 – 13
- 8:23 – 8
- 10:8-9 – 12

Deuteronomy
- 28:37 – 9

Ephesians
- 3:3 – 15
- 3:5 – 16

Exodus
- 34:29 – **51**

Ezekiel
- 1:1 – 16, 44
- 16:44-47 – 3
- 17:2 – 8
- 28:17 – 34

Galatians
- 1:12 – 15
- 5:9 – 39

Genesis
- 1:11-12 – 38

3:7 – 24, 28
3:18 – 28
8:11 – 27
9:20-21 – 29
15:1-2 – 13
18:6 – 39
20:3-7 – 11
28:10-17 – 48
40:8 – 13
41:15-16 – 13
Habakkuk
1:1 – 16
2:2 – 16
2:6 – 4, **7**, **9**
3:17 – 21
Haggai
2:18-19 – 21
Hebrews
11:6 – 38
11:17 – 7
11:19 – 7
Hosea
2:12 – 21
9:6 – 27
10:1 – 22
Isaiah
1:1 – 16
5:1-7 – 21
5:6 – 27
6:9-10 – 5
6:11-12 – 6
29:7-8 – 12
34:13 – 27
64:4 – 5
James
3:11-12 – 24
Jeremiah
8:13 – 21
24:9 – 9
Job
4:13 – 12
7:14 – 11
13:12 – 7
17:6 – 9
30:9 – 9
33:14-15 – 12
Joel
1:7 – 21
2:28 – 11
3:9-14 – 23
John
1:29-34 – 46
1:47-51 – 48
2:15-16 – **48**
5:36-38 – 47
8:31 – 33
12:24 – 35
12:27-30 – **47**, 47
15:1-8 – 22
15:2-5 – 35
16:25-29 – 3
19:2-5 – 28
Judges
2:3 – 27
9:8-15 – 20
14:12-19 – 8
Leviticus
2:1 – 40
2:4 – 40
2:11 – 40
24:2 – 26
Luke
2:9 – **51**
3:21-22 – 46
6:44 – 27
8:5 – 32
8:5-8 – 30
8:6 – 33
8:7 – 34
8:8 – 35
8:9-10 – 6
8:11 – 32
8:11-15 – 31
8:12 – 32
8:13 – 33
8:14 – 34
8:15 – 35
9:27 – 50
9:27-36 – 50
9:28-29 – 51
9:30-33 – 51
9:34-36 – 52
9:36 – 53
12:1 – 39
13:6-9 – 25
13:18-19 – 37
13:20-21 – 38
17:6 – 38
20:9-16 – **23**
21:29-31 – 25
24:4 – **51**
Mark
1:9-11 – 46
4:3 – 32
4:3-9 – 30
4:4 – 32
4:5-6 – 33
4:7 – 27, 34
4:8 – 35
4:10-12 – 6
4:13-20 – 31
4:14 – 32
4:15 – 32
4:16-17 – 33

4:18-19 – 34
4:20 – 35
4:30 – 7
4:30-32 – 37
8:15 – 39
9:1 – 50
9:1-10 – 49
9:2-3 – 51
9:4-6 – 51
9:7-8 – 52
9:9-10 – 53
10:21 – 35
11:12-14 – 24
11:20 – 24
12:1-9 – **23**
13:28-29 – 25
15:17 – 28

Matthew
2:19-22 – 12
3:13-17 – 46
4:8 – **51**
7:15-20 – 24
13:3 – 31
13:3-9 – 30
13:4 – 32
13:5-6 – 33
13:7 – 33
13:8 – 34
13:10-17 – 5
13:18 – 32
13:18-23 – 31
13:19 – 32
13:20-21 – 33
13:22 – 34
13:23 – 34
13:31-32 – 37
13:33 – 38
13:34-35 – 6
15:1-2 – 4
15:11 – 4
15:15-20 – 4
16:6 – 38
16:11-12 – 38
16:24-25 – 35
16:28 – 50
16:28–17:9 – 49
17:1-2 – 51
17:3-4 – 51
17:5-8 – 52
17:9 – 53
17:20 – 37
19:21 – 36
20:1 – 22
20:1-16 – **22**
21:18-20 – 24
21:28-32 – 23
21:33 – 23
21:33-41 – **23**
24:13 – 33
24:15 – **25**
24:32-33 – 4, 25
24:34 – 50
26:41 – 34
27:28-29 – 28
28:3 – **51**
28:18 – 51

Nahum
1:1 – 16

Numbers
6:2-4 – 29
11:25 – 52
12:6 – 11
12:6-8 – 9
12:8 – 8
24:2-5 – 13
33:55 – 27

Obadiah
1 – 16

Proverbs
1:1-7 – 2
1:6 – **7**
1:8-9 – 3
26:7 – 4
26:9 – 4
26:11 – 3
30:1 – 10
31:1 – 10
31:31 – 24

Psalms
10:4 – 34
44:14 – 7
49:3-4 – 8
78:1-8 – 6
80:8-9 – 21
104:13 – 24
128:3 – 21

Revelation
1:1 – 15
1:1-2 – 45
1:20 – 45
9:17 – 14, 45
11:3-4 – 26
12:1 – 39
14:14-20 – 23
17:1-6 – 39
19:11-14 – 45
21:10 – **51**

Romans
10:17 – 5
11:16-24 – 26
11:25 – 6
15:25-27 – 27

Titus
1:10 – 28

Zechariah
1:7-8 – 17
4:1-3 – 26
4:11-14 – 26
5:7-8 – 39
13:7-9 – 36

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