

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares¹

Where Is This Parable in the Bible?

The parable is found in [Matthew 13:24-30](#). Jesus' explanation of it appears later in the same chapter, in verses 36-43, after He has dismissed the crowd and gone indoors with His disciples.

Matthew 13 is one of the most concentrated chapters of teaching in the entire Bible. Seven parables about the kingdom, all told in one sitting. This is the second.

Why Does the KJV Say “Tares” When Other Bibles Say “Weeds”?

¹ <https://evergrowingchristians.com/parable-of-the-wheat-and-ares-meaning/#the-parable-of-the-wheat-and-ares>

The Greek word is zizania, which refers to a specific plant, not just a generic weed. That plant is darnel, known botanically as *Lolium temulentum*. The King James translators used “tares” because it was the English word for this particular weed in the 17th century. Modern translations use “weeds” because most readers today have no idea what a tare is.

But “weeds” is actually a weaker translation. It loses the specificity. As you will see in the next section, the precise identity of this plant is the entire point.

Here is the text in full, from [Matthew 13:24-30 \(KJV\)](#):

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came

and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

The Context: Why Jesus Had to Tell This Parable

The Disciples’ Broken Expectation

The disciples had a very definite picture of what the kingdom of God was supposed to look like. It was not subtle. John the Baptist had preached it. The prophets had described it. Daniel had seen it in visions.

The Messiah was supposed to arrive and immediately lay the axe to the root of the tree. He was supposed to separate the righteous from the wicked, overthrow the oppressors, and establish a kingdom of pure righteousness. No tares. No Romans. No corrupt religious leaders clinging to power. Just the wheat, gathered, thriving.

Then Jesus showed up. And instead of purging Israel, He sat on a boat and told stories to mixed crowds. The kingdom had arrived, but it looked nothing like they expected. The wicked were still there. The righteous were still suffering. Nothing had been cleaned up.

This parable is Jesus' direct answer to that confusion. An explanation of why the world still looks the way it does after the Messiah has come, told as a parable.

The Pharisees, the Essenes, and the Purity Problem

Two of the most prominent movements of Jesus's day had already tried to solve the tare problem, each in their own way.

The Pharisees' answer was strict separation and moral boundary-drawing. Identify who is righteous, who is not, and keep clear lines between them. The result was a religious culture that defined itself primarily by who it excluded.

The Essenes went further. They literally withdrew from society, moved into the

desert, and created a community of people they believed to be the true righteous remnant of Israel. If the field was polluted, they would leave the field entirely.

Jesus is addressing both instincts in this parable. The impulse to purge and the impulse to withdraw are human responses to the same frustration: why are the tares still here? His answer is patient, disruptive, and completely different from anything either movement proposed.

Why Jesus Told the Parable in Two Stages

Jesus told this parable publicly, to the crowd on the beach, without any explanation. He then told two more parables, dismissed the crowd, went inside, and only then explained it privately to the disciples who came to ask.

That gap is not accidental.

The disciples did not ask Jesus to explain the Mustard Seed or the Leaven. They asked about this particular one. That tells you what the parable stirred in them. And the fact that Jesus withheld the explanation from the crowd means the parable itself was doing something to the mixed audience: sorting them by whether they would seek understanding or walk away satisfied with a nice farming story.

The parable is itself a sower, scattering the seed of its own meaning, separating those who pursue it from those who do not.

What Is Darnel and Why Does It Change Everything?

Darnel is a biological impersonator.

Botanically speaking, darnel is a Vavilovian mimic, meaning it has evolved explicitly to look like the crop it infiltrates. Young darnel and young wheat are, to the naked eye, identical. The same height. The same color. The same leaf shape. Farmers could walk through an infected field and not know it.

The difference only becomes visible at maturity, when the plant produces its ear. Wheat's ear is plump, golden, and heavy with grain. Darnel's ear is slim and black. By then, the roots of both plants are thoroughly intertwined underground.

The whole moral weight of the story depends on the fact that darnel looks like wheat. It grows like wheat. It claims the same soil, the same water, the same light. Only time and maturity reveal what it actually is.

There is one more detail to it. Roman law explicitly prohibited sowing darnel in someone else's field. It was a recognized crime, significant enough to require its own legal prohibition. Which means what the enemy in this parable did was not random mischief. It was targeted, deliberate, legally actionable sabotage.

Darnel Thrives in the Presence of Wheat

Darnel does not just tolerate the presence of wheat. It exploits it. The same conditions that make a field good for wheat make it good for darnel. Rich soil, consistent water, good drainage. The enemy did not scatter seed randomly across the countryside. He planted it in the good field, because that is where it would thrive.

The presence of believers does not discourage the enemy's work. It focuses it.

The Spiritual Meaning of Wheat in the Bible

Weeds, the Curse, and Genesis 3:17

The Old Testament connected wheat directly to God's blessing and provision. [Psalm 81:16](#): "He would have fed them also with the finest of the wheat." [Joel 2:24](#): "And the floors shall be full of wheat." When God was pleased, the wheat was full. When He was not, the harvest failed.

Weeds were the opposite. When Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3, the ground was cursed and began producing thorns and thistles. Every weed a Jewish farmer pulled

from his field was a reminder of the fall. Weeds were the curse made visible, a sign that something in the world had gone profoundly wrong.

When Jesus makes a weed the enemy's weapon, He is invoking all of that weight. The tares in this parable are the curse itself, deliberate and weaponized, planted in the field God intended for good.

The Meaning of the Parable of the Wheat and Tares

Who Is the Sower?

Jesus identifies the sower as the Son of Man, His preferred title for Himself, drawn from [Daniel 7:13](#). This is the Messianic figure to whom the Ancient of Days gives an

everlasting kingdom. Jesus is not just saying “God planted the world.” He is saying that the one who sows the children of the kingdom is the same one who will one day send the reapers.

The sower and the judge are the same person. That is important. The one who planted the wheat knows exactly where every stalk came from.

What Do the Tares Represent?

The tares are identified by Jesus as “the sons of the evil one.” Children of the devil. That is sharper than a general description of bad people or unbelievers. The Greek word for sons (huiou) is the same word used for the children of the kingdom in the previous phrase. Two fathered populations. Two genealogies. Two entirely different origins,

growing in the same field, indistinguishable to human eyes.

The tares are not just people who have not yet responded to the gospel. They are people whose lives, whether by choice or by deception, are advancing the enemy's work rather than the kingdom's.

Who Sows the Tares?

The devil. And the timing reveals his character completely.

He came "while men slept." He chose the cover of darkness, when no one was watching, sowed his seed quietly, and left without a word. The servants did not discover what had happened until the plants were already in the ground and beginning to grow.

This is how the enemy works. Through quiet infiltration rather than open confrontation. The damage is done before anyone realizes there was an attack.

What Did Jesus Mean by “An Enemy Has Done This”?

When the servants report the tares to the master, his answer is: “An enemy has done this.”

He does not say “I do not know how this happened.” He does not express surprise. He knows exactly what occurred and who is responsible. The master’s calm certainty is itself pastoral. Nothing happening in this field is outside his awareness. The sabotage was not a failure of oversight. It was the enemy’s act. And the master already has a plan for it.

Is the Field the Church or the World?

Jesus says explicitly in verse 38: “The field is the world.” That single word settles the question. And it matters, because if the field were the church, the master’s command to let both grow together would directly contradict Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18 about dealing with unrepentant sin in the community.

But Augustine’s observation is worth holding alongside this: the tares are sown among the wheat, targeted at the children of the kingdom. So while the field is the world, the strategy of the enemy is focused on the church within it.

The Donatists used “the field is the world” to demand a pure church. Augustine countered by noting both grow together. Martin Luther

preached that this parable should “terrify the grand inquisitors.” Roger Williams used it to argue for separation of church and state. The parable has driven more political theology than any other in Matthew 13.

The field is the world. The target of the attack is always the wheat.

What Does the Harvest Represent and Who Are the Reapers?

The harvest is the end of the world. Jesus says this plainly in verse 39. The final judgment at the close of history. That is what the harvest represents in this parable, and everything else in the explanation flows from it.

The reapers are angels. Sent by the Son of Man, who alone has the authority and the

sight to make this separation. The servants in the parable wanted to do the reaping themselves. The master said no. That instinct has not changed much in two thousand years. The answer is still no.

What Do the Barn and the Fire Represent?

The barn is the kingdom of the Father. The wheat is brought in, preserved, home. The fire is the furnace of judgment. The tares are gathered first and burned.

Notice the order: tares first, then wheat. The removal of the tares is what clears the way for the wheat to be fully and finally gathered. The judgment on evil precedes the entrance of the wheat into the barn.

What Is the Difference Between Wheat and Tares?

Three things:

Appearance: identical until maturity. The difference is not visible in early growth.

Roots: intertwined by the time both are grown. You cannot separate them without pulling up both.

Fruit: wheat produces grain that gives life. Darnel produces seeds that poison and disorient.

The difference between the children of the kingdom and the children of the evil one is not always visible in early stages. It becomes apparent in maturity. It is revealed by fruit.

The Seed Changes Between the Sower and This Parable

In the Parable of the Sower, which Jesus told immediately before this one, the seed is the Word of God. The sower scatters the Word and the different soils represent different human responses to it.

Then Jesus tells the Parable of the Wheat and Tares, and something quietly shifts.

Here, the seed is people. “The good seed are the children of the kingdom.”

The kingdom advances not only by the Word being planted in hearts. It also advances by people being planted in the world. Believers are not just soil. They are seed. They are

placed deliberately by the Son of Man into the field of the world to grow, bear fruit, and be gathered at the harvest.

You are not just someone the gospel was sown into. You are someone Jesus sowed into the world.

Judas Was in the Room

When Jesus told it to the crowd, Judas was sitting among the twelve. Right in the inner circle. He had been chosen by Jesus, given authority to heal and cast out demons, trusted with the money, present at every miracle, every private teaching, every intimate moment of the ministry.

And not one of the other disciples suspected him.

If you had asked Peter to point out the tare in the group, he would not have pointed at Judas. He might have pointed at himself. He kept saying the wrong things, kept misunderstanding, kept putting his foot in the wrong place at every critical moment. John and James, through their mother, had sought the chief seats in the kingdom, which had not gone well either.

Judas was the one who kept his composure. Managed the finances. Did not speak out of turn.

Tares look like wheat. The parable does not just teach that in principle. It was teaching it to a group of people who were living proof of it, whether they knew it or not.

How Jesus Treated Judas: The Parable Lived Out

Jesus knew. He knew from the beginning. John 6:64 is explicit: “But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.”

So how did Jesus treat the man He knew

He gave him duties. He included him in every meal, every journey, every teaching. He washed his feet at the Last Supper. He never publicly named him to the group as a whole. He gave him every possible opportunity to turn.

That is the parable lived out. The master knew the tares were there. He did not announce them, did not pull them up, did not treat them differently in a way that would uproot the wheat around them. He let them grow, because that was the wise and patient

thing to do, and because some tares, given enough time, become wheat.

If you are wondering what it looks like to live the lesson of this parable in a difficult relationship, a church conflict, or a painful workplace, look at how Jesus treated Judas. That is the answer.

This Parable Is Jesus' Answer to Why Evil Coexists with Good

The Parable Makes Clear God Did Not Plant the Tares

One of the most persistent misunderstandings about God is that He is the author of everything that happens, including evil. People ask: if God is in control,

why does He allow this? Why does He send this?

This parable corrects that directly.

The master sowed only good seed. He went to sleep, as a farmer does at night, and the enemy came. An enemy. A hostile, intentional, external force who exploited the darkness to plant something the master would never have put in his field.

The parable does not explain the origin of that enemy, or the full mystery of why evil exists at all. But it makes one thing unmistakably clear: God is not the one who planted the tares. The world contains evil because an enemy acted against His design. He is not the only one at work in this field, and the parable makes that plain.

When the Wicked Seem to Prosper: What Asaph Got Wrong and This Parable Corrects

Asaph almost lost his faith over this.

In Psalm 73 he writes that he envied the arrogant and nearly concluded it was pointless to remain faithful. He looked at the wicked and saw that “there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men.” He watched the wicked thriving, the righteous suffering, and came close to saying: “Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain.”

He did not have the parable of the wheat and tares. But we do.

The wicked prosper because harvest has not yet come. The tares grow in the same rich

field as the wheat. They use the same soil, the same rain, the same sun. In the growing season, they may even look better than the wheat. But the growing season is not the harvest. The barn has not yet been opened. The fire has not yet been lit.

If Asaph's question is yours, this parable is the answer Jesus gives. The wicked prosper now. The harvest is coming.

Why Didn't God Just Remove the Evil?

The Attack Is Targeted: Satan Sows Specifically Among the Wheat

Read the harvest sequence carefully. "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in

bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.”

This is a sobering point. The people who face the most direct opposition from the enemy are not random targets. They are wheat. The hardest relationships in a believer’s life, the most confusing betrayals, the most persistent attacks on faith and community, are not always random bad luck. Satan does not waste dandelion on a field that is not producing anything.

If your faith has been under sustained pressure, that is worth noting. It is not proof of anything on its own. But it is a reminder that the enemy tends to sow where the wheat is growing.

Why the Tares Are Gathered First

The tares go first. The removal of evil is what clears the way for the full glorification of the righteous. The angels gather the tares, the stumbling blocks, and all things that cause lawlessness out of the kingdom, and then the righteous are gathered. The judgment on evil precedes the entrance of the wheat into the barn.

Evil is not simply left behind. It is actively and deliberately removed so that the wheat can come home.

The Delay Is God's Patience, Not God's Indifference (2 Peter 3:9)

One of the question readers bring to this parable is: if God knows the tares are there, why doesn't He just act now?

The master gives one reason to the servants: because pulling the tares up now would damage the wheat. Human judgment is too imprecise, the roots too intertwined, the risk too high.

But Peter gives the deeper reason in [2 Peter 3:9](#): “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Every day the harvest is delayed is another day in which a tare can become wheat. The delay is mercy. The master is waiting because His patience is giving people time to change. God’s patience toward the ungodly is a sign that He has not stopped calling.

“All Things That Offend”: The Judgment Is Broader Than You Think

But look at what Jesus actually says the angels will gather in verse 41: “all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.”

All things. The judgment reaches beyond individual people to every system, structure, ideology, and pattern that has caused people to stumble.

What the Parable of the Wheat and Tares Says About the End of the Age

“The Righteous Will Shine Like the Sun”: Matthew 13:43 and Daniel 12:3

When Jesus closes His explanation of the parable, He says: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

That line is not original to Jesus. He is quoting [Daniel 12:3](#), almost word for word: “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

Daniel saw this moment. Hundreds of years before the parable, he had a vision of the end of the age and described what the righteous would look like after the separation. Jesus is telling His disciples that Daniel’s vision was

about this. The harvest, the gathering, the burning of the tares, and the shining of the wheat: all of it is the fulfillment of what Daniel saw.

The hope at the end of this parable is not invented comfort. It is ancient prophecy confirmed.

What “Wailing and Gnashing of Teeth” Actually Means in Matthew 13:42

This phrase appears six times in Matthew, and in nearly every instance it describes people who expected to be inside and found themselves outside. The son of the kingdom cast into outer darkness in [Matthew 8:12](#). The man without a wedding garment in

Matthew 22:13. The wicked servant in Matthew 24:51.

In nearly every instance, what it describes is the anguish of people who expected to be inside and found themselves outside. People who thought they were wheat. Who had performed the external behaviors of wheat. Who had sat in the right field, grown alongside the right people, been watered by the same rain.

That is the specific horror of “wailing and gnashing of teeth.” The cry of someone who genuinely believed they were wheat. And found out too late that they were not.

5 Lessons from the Parable of the Wheat and Tares

Lesson 1: The Enemy Works in the Dark — Stay Awake

The servants were not negligent. The text says they slept at night, which is when people sleep. The enemy simply chose the dark explicitly because that is when no one is watching.

The parable is a call to vigilance. [1 Peter 5:8](#) says to “be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” The lion does not attack in the open field at noon. He circles at the edges, in the low light, waiting for the moment of inattention.

Ask yourself honestly: where are my sleeping seasons? What areas of my spiritual life have I stopped paying attention to? The enemy knows. He has already looked at the calendar.

Lesson 2: Not Everyone Who Looks Like Wheat Is Wheat

This is the uncomfortable lesson no one wants to carry too long, because it can become paranoia if misapplied.

But the parable does not let us look away from it. Judas looked like wheat for the entire length of the ministry. He had all the external marks. He performed miracles. He listened to every sermon Jesus ever preached. He was trusted with the money.

The difference between wheat and tares is not visible in early growth. It is revealed in fruit, in maturity, in the moment of pressure when what is actually inside a person comes out. The parable does not ask you to identify the tares around you. It asks you to examine whether the fruit being produced in your own life is the fruit of someone genuinely rooted in

Christ, or the performance of someone going through the motions.

Lesson 3: Judgment Belongs to God, Not to You — and You Cannot Tell Who Is Who

The servants were well-intentioned. They wanted to clean up the field. They could see the tares. They had a plan. The master said no, and the reason He gave was precise: “lest while ye gather up the tares, ye also root up the wheat with them.”

You are not equipped to make this separation. Neither am I. The roots are too intertwined, the similarities too close, and human judgment too imprecise. Every time the church has tried to play reaper before the harvest, it has uprooted wheat. Good people, sincere people, young believers who looked

wrong and were crushed before they had a chance to mature.

The separation is the angels' job. Ours is to be faithful wheat, not amateur reapers.

Lesson 4: Some Tares May Yet Become Wheat

Augustine made this observation over fifteen centuries ago and it has not lost any of its force. The command to let both grow together until the harvest is not only about protecting the wheat from damage during premature separation. It is also about giving the tares the time they need to become wheat.

Some of today's tares are tomorrow's wheat.

The person who looks most like the enemy's agent right now, who is most hostile to faith, most entrenched in opposition, may be in the early stages of growth. The root has not yet gone deep enough for anyone to see which way it is growing.

Holding that posture takes honesty about the limits of our ability to see what is actually happening inside another person. It is the posture of Jesus, who washed the feet of the man He knew would betray Him.

Lesson 5: The Harvest Will Come

Asaph, looking at the prosperity of the wicked, almost lost his faith. Then he went into the sanctuary of God and understood their end.

The harvest is certain. The tares will not grow in the barn. The fire is being prepared. The angels know their assignment.

For anyone who has spent years watching evil apparently flourish while faithfulness goes unrewarded, this lesson carries the whole weight of the parable. The growing season is not the final word. The harvest is.

Hold on. The reapers are coming.

What This Parable of the Wheat and Tares Is NOT Saying

It Is Not a License to Label Others as Tares

Every major political and religious conflict of the last decade has produced someone invoking this parable to label their opponents as tares. It shows up in church splits, in culture war commentary, in social media threads where someone confidently announces that God is separating the wheat from the tares, and they know which category their enemies fall into.

The parable forbids this conclusion explicitly. The servants were told not to separate the tares because they could not reliably identify them. If the disciples who walked with Jesus for the entire length of the ministry could not identify the tare in their group, you cannot identify the tares in yours.

The parable is an invitation to examine yourself, and the servants' example is a warning about what happens when that invitation gets redirected outward.

It Is Not a Call to Passive Tolerance of Sin in the Church

This parable is sometimes used to argue that the church should never address sin, never confront false teaching, never exercise any form of discipline, because “we might pull up wheat.” That reading is a misuse of the text.

Jesus is talking about the world, not a local church community. The field is the world. Letting tares grow alongside wheat in the world is not the same as ignoring unrepentant sin in a covenant community of believers.

The parable is about cosmic patience toward the world, not a blanket instruction against addressing sin within the church community.

The Field Is the World, Not the Church — Matthew 18 Still Applies

Jesus is explicit: the field is the world. If the field were the church, the master's command to let both grow until the end of the age would directly contradict [Matthew 18:15-17](#), where Jesus gives specific, clear instructions for addressing unrepentant sin within the community of believers. Those instructions involve confrontation, witnesses, and ultimately removal from the community if repentance is refused.

These two passages are not in conflict. They operate in different fields. Matthew 13 is about the world. Matthew 18 is about the church. Both are true simultaneously. The patience of the master toward the tares in the world does not cancel the responsibility of the church to pursue holiness in its own community.

What the Parable of the Wheat and Tares Means for Your Life Today

Jesus Planted You Exactly Where You Are

The Son of Man sows the children of the kingdom in the field. And the field is the world.

The parable establishes this much clearly: you are not here by accident. The children of the kingdom are placed deliberately in the world, not scattered randomly. That is the parable's direct claim. What it means practically is that the field you occupy matters. The difficult workplace. The neighborhood that has not changed no matter how much you have prayed for it. The family that does not understand your faith.

The church that feels small and overlooked. These are the spaces the kingdom needs wheat.

Paul calls the church “God’s field” in [1 Corinthians 3:9](#), using the same agricultural image. God gives the growth. Ministers plant and water. But the field belongs to God, and what grows in it is His business. Which means the question is not whether you ended up in the right place. The question is whether you are growing where you were planted.

The Strategy Is to Nourish the Wheat, Not Just Attack the Tares

The master’s instruction was not “go find the tares and keep an eye on them.” His instruction was to let both grow. The focus of the servants in the meantime was meant to be the wheat, not the tares.

This has a direct personal application. There is a version of the Christian life that becomes almost entirely organized around opposing evil, identifying threats, naming enemies, fighting cultural battles. None of that is wrong in itself. But when the main energy of a life is directed at the tares, the wheat in that person's own life tends to go undernourished.

Nourish the wheat. Invest in what is genuinely good. Build relationships that bear fruit. Feed the things in your own soul that are growing toward God. The tares will be dealt with. That is the master's job, and He has already announced His plan. Your job is to be the most faithful, deeply-rooted wheat you can be by the time the harvest comes.

Am I Wheat? How to Know If You Are a Child of the Kingdom

This is the question that matters most. Every other question this parable raises, every moral thread it pulls open, leads here.

Am I wheat?

The parable does not give you a checklist. But it gives you three things to examine.

First, your root. Wheat is rooted in Christ Himself. A set of opinions about Him, a tradition built around Him, a community that claims Him. These can all exist without the root going deep into the person. The root determines what the plant actually is, even

before the ear appears. What are you actually anchored to?

Second, your fruit. Wheat produces grain that gives life. Darnel produces seeds that poison and disorient. Look at the fruit being produced in your life over time. Not at your best moments or your worst, but at the pattern. Is what comes out of you life-giving? Is it nourishing the people around you? Is it consistent with someone who is genuinely, rootedly, growing in the character of Christ?

Third, your maturity. Wheat and tares look identical in early growth. The difference becomes visible in maturity.

The harvest will reveal it. But the root, the fruit, and the direction of growth are signs available now.

If this question unsettles you, pay attention to that. Genuine anxiety about your standing before God is more consistent with a living faith than indifference to the question is. The disciples who asked Jesus to explain this parable were not the ones who should have been worried. The one who should have been worried walked out quietly into the night without saying a word.

Ask the question. Bring it to the Lord of the harvest. He knows which seed He sowed.