

Mark 4

While Matthew presents several long sermons by Jesus, Mark only records two: chapter 4 and chapter 13. This chapter is Mark's collection of several parables with "seed" being a key theme. The noun "seed" is only used twice (4:26-27), but the verb is used twelve times: 4:3-4, 14-16, 18, 20, 31-32. Jesus teaching in parables was predicted in Psalms 78:2 (see Matthew 13:34-35 for his explicit reference to this psalm as fulfilled in Jesus). The Gospels record 60 parables of Jesus with the majority recorded by Matthew and Luke, a few in Mark, and none in John.

TRANSLATION - 4:1-9:

1 And again He began to teach by the sea; and there gathers to Him a great crowd, so that He into a boat embarks to sit in the sea, and all the crowd to the sea on the land they were. **2** And He kept teaching them in many parables and was saying to them in His teaching, **3** "Listen. Behold the one sowing went out to sow. **4** And it happened when he sowed what fell by the road, that the birds came and devoured it. **5** And other fell on the rocky soil where it did not have much land, and immediately it sprouted because it did not have deep land; **6** And when the sun arose it was scorched and because it did not have root, it withered. **7** And other fell into the weeds, and the weeds came up and choked it, and fruit it did not give. **8** And other fell into the good land and it gave fruit, coming up and growing and produced, one thirty times and one sixty times, and one a hundred times. **9** And He kept saying, "Whoever has ears to hear, let him hear."

GREEK WORDS:

"To teach" (ver. 1) was used earlier at 1:21. "Sea" would refer to the Sea of Galilee; see comments at 1:16. "Parables" (ver. 2) is used 50 times, first in 3:23. "Teaching" is the noun form of the verb used in verse 1. The noun was used earlier at 1:22, 27. "Listen" (ver. 3) or "hear" was used earlier at 2:1. "Behold" is used to get the audience's (or reader's) attention. Mark uses the word seven times (first at 1:2). "To sow" is used 52 times in the NT, twelve times in Mark, all in this context. "Way" (ver. 4) was used earlier at 1:2. "Birds" is used only in this context in Mark (4:4, 32), out of 14 uses. "To devour" is used in 4:4 and 12:40 in Mark, out of 14 uses. "Rocky soil" (ver. 5) is found in Matthew 13:5, 20 and Mark 4:5, 16. "Immediately" was used earlier at 1:3. "To sprout" was used in Matthew 13:5 and here (4:5).

"To scorch" or "to burn up" (ver. 6) was used at Matthew 13:6; here; and in Revelation 16:8-9. "Root" is used 17 times in the NT; in Mark in this context (4:6, 17) and 11:20. "To wither" or "to dry up" is used 15 times, in Mark first at 3:1. "Weeds" (ver. 7) is used 14 times in the NT; only in this context in Mark (4:7, 18). "To choke" is used in Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:7, 19; Luke 8:14, 42. "Fruit" is used 66 times in the NT, five times in Mark: 4:7-8, 29; 11:14; 12:2. "To come up" is used 82 times, nine times in Mark, beginning at 1:10. This is the verb used for the "ascension" of Jesus. "To grow" or "to increase" is used 21 times, only here in Mark. "To produce" is used 66 times, 15 times in Mark. "Thirty times" is used 11 times, only in this context in Mark (4:8, 20). "Sixty times" is used only 9 times, only in this context in Mark (4:8, 20). "A hundred times" is found 17 times, in Mark at 4:8, 20; 6:40.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

The verbs translated "kept teaching" (ver. 2) and "kept saying" (ver. 9) translate the imperfect tense, which denotes continuous action in the past.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

A picture of one sowing is found in Jeremiah 31:27-28 and Hosea 2:23.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

See the parallel accounts in Matthew 13:1-23; Luke 8:4-15.

COMMENTS:

Jesus is a teacher (ver. 1). The first action He takes after leaving His temptations was to start preaching (1:14-15). He is identified as the “Teacher” in 4:38 as well as eleven more times in Mark. The crowd was so large that Jesus entered a boat and sat down; the Greek text says He sat in the sea, but Mark means to say He sat in the boat in the sea. The crowd stood on the shore since the area apparently made a natural amphitheater. Jesus taught them many things in parables. Usually “parable” is defined as an “earthly story with a heavenly meaning.” The Greek word denotes more than just a narrative as we have here in verses 3-9. It can mean many different modes of teaching; what they all have in common is using earthly ideas to convey spiritual messages. Jesus will teach in John 6:44-45 that man cannot come to God unless He is taught.

Jesus calls on His followers to listen (ver. 3) and He concludes the parable itself with the statement: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (ver. 9). The verb translated “listen” is the same verb as to “hear.” The verb is used in this chapter thirteen times: 4:3, 9, 12, 15-16, 18, 20, 23-24, 33. The illustration from daily life which Jesus uses here is that of a farmer, sowing his seed. Jesus titles this parable the “Parable of the Sower” in Matthew 13:18. This sower, in his normal routine, sows seed (ver. 3).

Some seed fell along the path as the farmer scattered the seed (ver. 4). But the birds quickly devoured that seed. Some seed fell among the stony ground; Palestine was well-known for having rocky soil (ver. 5). This soil was shallow so that the plant sprouted quickly (ver. 5); yet because it did not have deep soil, once the sun rose, the plant withered, wilted, and died (ver. 6). More seed fell among thorny weeds, which compete with vegetables and flowers for sunlight, water, and minerals from the soil. This seed also failed to produce anything (ver. 7).

A fourth group of seeds fell into good soil (ver. 8). This seed, with proper nutrients, grew, increased, and produced a crop. Some seeds produced thirty times more; some produced sixty times more, some produced one hundred times more!

Jesus will give the interpretation of the parable beginning in verse 14.

APPLICATION:

Because Jesus used daily objects to teach spiritual lessons, He was able to communicate important truths in ways that were easily understood by those with humble hearts and receptive minds (see the next paragraph). Christians should seek ways to communicate biblical truths in ways that are easily grasped by their audience, without changing the nature of those spiritual truths.

Each of the seven letters which compose the book of Revelation concludes with Jesus’ call for Christians to hear what the Spirit says (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

TRANSLATION - 4:10-12:

10 And when He was by Himself, those around Him began questioning Him with the twelve about the parables. **11** And He began saying to them, “To you the mystery has been given of the Kingdom of God; and to those outside in parables all things are, **12** in order that ‘Seeing they will see and not perceive, and hearing they will hear and not comprehend, lest they might turn back and it will be forgiven them.’”

GREEK WORDS:

On “parables” (ver. 10), see 3:23. “Mystery” (ver. 11) is used 28 times in the NT, only here in Mark. “Kingdom” was used earlier at 1:15. “Outside” is used 63 times, 10 in Mark. “To perceive” (ver. 12) is used 341 times in the NT, 43 times in Mark. “To comprehend” is used 26 times, five times in Mark: 4:12; 6:52; 7:14; 8:17, 21. “To turn back” or “to turn” is used 36 times, four times in Mark: 4:12; 5:30; 8:33; 13:16. It often denotes repentance.

GREEK GRAMMAR:

The verbs “began questioning” (ver. 10) and “began saying” (ver. 11) both translate the imperfect tense. Here, it seems to denote the beginning of the action; thus we translate “began to...”

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

For passages which reflect Israel deaf to God’s teachings, see: Isaiah 6:10; 43:8; 44:18; Ezekiel 12:2.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

See the parallels in Matthew 13:10-17; Luke 8:9-10.

COMMENTS:

When the disciples were alone with Jesus (ver. 10), including the Twelve, they asked Jesus about the meaning of the parables. Jesus spoke the parables publicly, giving His audience something to think about and on which to meditate. But privately (see also verse 34), He explained the meaning of the parables in more detail. God has revealed Himself and His truth to the perfect extent such that man will not be overwhelmed with Truth so that he has not choice except to believe, but also man will not be so far from the Truth that he gropes for it, cannot find it, and gives up in despair.

Verse 11 explains His reasoning. The “mystery of the kingdom” has been given to His followers. The word “mystery” does not refer to anything intended by God to be esoteric and understood by only a few. The word refers to something that was a *secret* through the period of the Old Testament, but is revealed through the person and work of Jesus Christ. See Romans 16:25-26. Paul will say explicitly in Ephesians 1:10; 3:1-7 that the mystery is specifically the inclusion of the Gentiles into God’s saved people. Of course, during Jesus’ lifetime, this message had to continue to remain secret (a “mystery”) until the resurrection could put His message in the theological context of God’s plan to save man from His sins. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:7 that if God had not kept His plan a mystery, then Satan would not have crucified “the Lord of glory.”

The Jews were expecting the Messiah to establish a literal kingdom, sitting on a literal throne, from Jerusalem. They failed to grasp the spiritual nature of Christ’s kingdom. Jesus had to reveal the nature of that kingdom slowly, otherwise even His disciples might have quickly rejected His message. He preached the imminent coming of the kingdom in 1:15. This chapter will teach something through parables about the nature of that kingdom: 4:26, 30. Those within Jesus’ audience would not die before they saw the kingdom established (9:1). The opposite of entering the kingdom is being cast into hell: 9:47. Entrance into the kingdom of God requires humility (10:14-15), which relates to the purpose of Jesus teaching in parables. Those “outside” do not grasp the meaning of the parables and fail to ask Jesus, as His disciples do, for an interpretation. They do not have the humility needed to be in the kingdom. The disciples also, at times, had difficulty understanding (Mark 7:17).

In those people “outside,” that is those who are outside of His followers, Jesus sees fulfilled the words of Isaiah (6:9-10; this text is quoted six times in the NT). In the days of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem and Judea (722s BC), Isaiah dealt with his people who refused to hear and obey the message from God. God sent Isaiah to teach them, but because of their hardness of heart, they refused to believe it and obey it. They could see, physically, but they could not perceive spiritually. They could hear physically, but they could not understand. Their problem was a lack of humility. If they had perceived and understood, they would have returned to God (“repented”) and been forgiven.

APPLICATION:

This paragraph illustrates to us the need for Christians to *a/ways* be humble toward the word of God. Every teaching, every practice, every ritual must be submitted to and found in the

Word of God. That requires humility, lest we create a religion, a god, and a savior after our own image and likeness (2 Cor. 11:4).

TRANSLATION - 4:13-20:

13 And He says to them, “You do not know this parable, and how all the parables will you know? **14** The one sowing, sows the word. **15** And these are those by the way; where the word is sown and whenever they might hear, immediately the Satan comes and takes away the word having been sown among them. **16** And these are those by the rocky soil having been sown, these whenever they might hear the word immediately with joy they are receiving it, **17** and they do not have root among themselves but are temporary, then happening tribulation or persecution on account of the word immediately they are offended. **18** And others are those into the weeds are sown; these are those the word hearing, **19** and the cares of the age and the deceitfulness of riches and the other desires entering in choke the word and unfruitful it becomes. **20** And those are the ones on the good land sown, who hear the word and receive [it] and bear fruit one thirty times and one sixty times and one a hundred times.”

GREEK WORDS:

“To know” (ver. 13) is used 318 times, 21 times in Mark. The second verb, different from the first, “to know” is used 222 times, twelve in Mark. “Word” (ver. 14) is a synonym in the NT for the “gospel.” See comments at 2:2. “Satan” means “adversary.” He is found 36 times in the NT, first in Mark at 1:13. “To take away” is used 101 times, first in Mark at 2:3. “Joy” (ver. 16) is used only here in Mark, out of 59 occurrences. “Temporary” (ver. 17) or “transitory” is used four times: Matthew 13:21; Mark 4:17; 2 Cor. 4:18; Heb. 11:25. “Tribulation” is used 45 times, three times in Mark: 4:17; 13:19, 24. “Persecution” is used 10 times, in Mark at 4:17; 10:30. “To be offended” or “caused to stumble” is used 29 times, 8 times in Mark. The word gives us the word *scandal*.

“Cares” (ver. 19) or “worries” is used 6 times in the NT, only here in Mark: Matthew 13:22; Luke 8:14; 21:34; 2 Cor. 11:28; 1 Peter 5:7. “Age” or “time” is used 122 times, earlier at 3:29 in Mark. “Deceitfulness” is used 7 times: Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19; Eph. 4:22; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:10; Heb. 3:13; 2 Peter 2:13. “Riches” is found 22 times, only here in Mark. “Desires” or “lusts” (with negative connotations) is used 38 times, only here in Mark. “Unfruitful” is used only here in Mark, out of 7 uses. “To receive” or “to welcome” (ver. 20) is used 6 times: Mark 4:20; Acts 15:4; 16:21; 22:18; 1 Tim. 5:19; Heb. 12:6. “To bear fruit” is one word in Greek; it is used 8 times, only in this context in Mark: 4:20, 28.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

A harvest of 100 times as much as planted is a large, but not unusual, harvest; see Genesis 26:12.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

See also Matthew 13:18-23; Luke 8:11-15.

COMMENTS:

This paragraph is the interpretation of the parable given in verses 3-9. When the disciples asked about the meaning of the Parable of the Sower (ver. 10), Jesus asked them, “If you do not understand this parable, how will you understand all the parables” (ver. 13)? It would take some thinking and meditating and humility, as well as some spiritual perception, to understand the significance of the parable. Jesus will not explain the significance of all His parables as He does here.

First, the farmer, the one sowing, sows the “word.” We have already seen in 2:2 that Jesus preached the “word.” Therefore, the nature of the kingdom of God (ver. 11) will be intimately tied into preaching the “word.” In Luke 8:11, Jesus says the “seed is the Word of God.” It is through that seed that God creates His children; it is through the seed of the Spirit

(Eph. 6:17) and the Spirit is able to bring forth the new birth (John 3:3, 5). For this reason, man cannot be saved by obeying man's doctrine. The Spirit does not operate through man's teachings. The Spirit only operates through His word. That's why Christians must be careful to sow only the word of God, without any addition of man's opinions and options.

The seeds sown on the path (ver. 15) symbolize people who hear the word, but Satan ("the birds") immediately comes and takes away the word. Satan can blind the minds of the unsuspecting (2 Cor. 4:3). Christians will talk with people and share biblical teaching with people which will go in one ear and out the other. The seeds sown among the stony ground (ver. 16) symbolizes those who hear the word and immediately "receive it with great joy." This writer has taught many people who initially were excited about the teaching of the word. But they have no "firm root in themselves" but their spiritual interest is only temporary (ver. 17). When affliction or persecution happens due to their desire to follow Christ, they fall away and fail to produce spiritual fruit. One theme that is emphasized throughout the NT is that God's people will suffer persecution because of their loyalty to Christ and His word (2 Tim. 3:12).

The third seed, sown among the thorns (ver. 18), symbolizes those individuals who have also heard the word, but life distracts them from obedience to the word with all their heart (ver. 19). There are "cares" of the world or the deceitfulness of wealth or desires for things beyond one's spiritual interest, and these choke the word and that individual becomes unfruitful. Observe that each of these individuals hears the word: 4:15, 16, 18, 20. The difference is in their response to that word.

The proper response to the word is found in verse 20. Some seed fell into the good soil, which Jesus defines in Luke 8:15 as "honest and good hearts." When the word is sown in "honest and good hearts," those individuals hear the word and accept it. They trust its message and they obey its commands. Then they produce fruit; different Christians will produce different fruit to the degree they are able.

APPLICATION:

It is important for the "sower" - the Christian trying to teach God's word - to understand that different people will respond differently to the gospel message. It is discouraging when people seem to have good and honest hearts, but they refuse to trust and obey what Jesus says to do. Satan has his methods of deceiving the hearts of the simple. On the other hand, each individual should examine himself or herself and see which soil symbolizes their own hearts. The only soil that will honor Jesus Christ is that one which symbolizes "honest and good hearts."

In contrast to the disciples who have trouble understanding, Mark presents others who grasp Jesus by faith: 5:34; 7:29; 9:24; 10:13-16; 14:3-9; culminating with the Roman centurion's epic confession of faith in 15:39.

Christians are warned to expect persecutions and trials: Acts 8:1; 13:50; Rom. 5:3; 12:12; 2 Cor. 4:17; 12:10; 1 Thess. 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:11-12; James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:3-6. Christians are also warned about the "cares of this life:" Matthew 6:24-34; 2 Cor. 11:28; 1 Peter 5:7. Yet again, Christians are warned about the lure of money: 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19. Deceit is also warned against in Eph. 4:22; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:10; Heb. 3:13; 2 Peter 2:13. On "desires" that could lead to sin, see 1 John 2:15-17.

Satan is the "accuser" of Christians and he is still actively at work today, trying to influence Christians to leave the word of God out of their hearts, their minds, and their lives. "Satan" is mentioned in: Acts 5:3; 26:18; Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5; 7:5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:14; 12:7; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:20; 5:15; Rev. 2:9, 13, 24; 3:9; 12:9; 20:2, 7. In the Gospel accounts, he is found in Matthew 4:10; 12:26; 16:23; Mark 1:13; 3:23, 26; 4:15; 8:33; Luke 11:18; 13:16; 22:3; 22:31; John 13:27.

One should not be distressed when he sees another Christian who is producing more fruit than he is. Some *will* produce thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, and some 100 fold. God has given to each "according to his own ability" (Matt. 25:15) and the Spirit gives gifts individually

as He wills (1 Cor. 12:7). Therefore, the Christian should be thankful for the production God has given him and use that productivity to the best of his ability, realizing that God can do what He desires with what is His (Matt. 20:15).

Keeping with the focus on the “word,” we see in Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:13; 2 Cor. 11:4 and James 1:21 that the word is to be “received.” It is also to be received “with joy:” 1 Thess. 1:6. Persecution comes because of the word: 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Tim. 1:8-9. The word causes people to be offended: 1 Peter 2:8, but it also bears fruit for Christ: Colossians 1:6, 10.

TRANSLATION - 4:21-25:

21 And He was saying to them, “Surely the lamp is not brought in order under the bowl to put [it] or under the couch? But that on the lamp stand he may put [it]? **22** For there is not hidden except that it may be revealed, nor happens a secret but that it may come into public attention. **23** If any has ears to hear let him hear.

24 And He was saying to them, “Beware what you hear. By what measure you measure it will be measured to you and it will be added to you. **25** For who has, it will be given to him; and who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.

GREEK WORDS:

“Lamp” (ver. 21) is used 14 times, only here in Mark. “Bowl” is used at Matthew 5:15; Mark 4:21; and Luke 11:33. “Coach” or “bed” is used 9 times, in Mark at 4:21; 7:4, 30. “Lamp stand” is related to the word “light.” It is used 12 times, only here in Mark. “Hidden” or “secret” (ver. 22) is used 17 times, only here in Mark. “To reveal” is used 49 times in the NT, in Mark at 4:22; 16:12, 14. “Secret” or “hidden” is used at Mark 4:22; Luke 8:17; Col. 2:3. “Public attention” is used 18 times, earlier at 3:12. After 4:22, it will be used in Mark at 6:14. “Beware” (ver. 24) is used 132 times, 15 in Mark. “Measure” is used 14 times in the NT, only here in Mark. Its related verb “to measure” is used 11 times, only here in Mark. “To add” is used 18 times, only here in Mark. “To take away” (ver. 25) was used earlier at verse 15.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The lamps were made out of clay, with a wick, which burned olive oil. Bowl had a measurement of about 2.3 gallons.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

See Luke 8:16-18 for his parallel account.

COMMENTS:

In the second parable of this chapter, Jesus introduces the theme of “light,” which abounds in His teachings. The Greek word *fos* (“light”) is found 72 times in the NT, only once in Mark (14:54) but 33 times in all John’s writings, mainly in the Gospel. The word translated light in this text, 4:22 (*faneros*) is only used 18 times.

One does not bring a lamp to put it under a basket nor under a bed (ver. 21). The nature of a lamp is to give light, so that it needs to illuminate as much as possible. It is brought to be put on a lamp stand. Jesus’ application of that parabolic saying in this context is that He (as Messiah) and His message have been, throughout Old Testament times, “hidden.” But what was once hidden is intended to be “revealed” (ver. 22). What was once “secret” or a “mystery” (ver. 11) will come to light, and be understood. Verse 23 repeats Jesus’ call to “heart” which He gave at verse 9. See also Matthew 10:26.

Next, Jesus tells His followers that they need to be careful *what* they hear (ver. 24). There are those who teach a “different gospel” (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-9) and will be condemned for teaching a gospel not found in the NT. But so will be condemned those who follow that “different gospel” (Matt. 15:13-14). The standard by which we measure others, we will be measured. If we use the standard of the pure Gospel of Christ, then we will receive even more of God’s blessings. Jesus’ law of reciprocation (ver. 25) is that if we are faithful to Christ’s

teachings, He will bless us more. If we are unfaithful to Christ's teachings, He will take away what we have. See Matthew 25:21, 23, 26-30.

APPLICATION:

The Parable of the Lamp illustrates that God's message and God's Messiah need to be spread around the world. They are God's light (Phil. 2:14-16). Again, John uses the "light" metaphor extensively in his gospel account. Consider the entirety of John 1 in this regard.

The Parable of the Measure illustrates to us the statement Jesus makes in Matthew 7:1-2. We will be judged by the standard by which we judge others. It is imperative, then, that we judge only based on what the New Testament reveals, doing so righteously (John 7:24) and with mercy (James 2:13).

TRANSLATION - 4:26-29:

26 And He was saying, "Thus is the kingdom of God as a man who might sow the seed on the earth **27** and he may sleep and he might get up night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows big as he does not know. **28** By itself the earth produces fruit, first the bud then the head then the full grain in the head, **29** and whenever the fruit produces fruit, immediately he sends out the sickle because the harvest has come."

GREEK WORDS:

"To sow" (ver. 26) was used earlier at 2:22. It is used 18 times in Mark. "To sleep" (ver. 27) is used 22 times, 8 times in Mark. "To get up" or "to rise" (referring to resurrections) is used 144 times, 19 in Mark, first at 1:31. "To sprout" is used four times: Matthew 13:26; Mark 4:27; Hebrews 9:4; James 5:18. "To grow big" is used only here in the NT. "By itself" (ver. 28) transliterated gives us the English word *automatic*. It is used here and Acts 12:10. "Bud" is used 15 times, in Mark at 4:28; 6:39. "Head" (of grain) is used five times: Matthew 12:1; Mark 2:23; 4:28; Luke 6:1. "Grain" is used 14 times, only here in Mark. "To produce" was used earlier at 1:14. "Sickle" is used 8 times, all but here (4:29) is in Revelation 14 (14:14-19). "Harvest" is used 13 times in the NT, only here in Mark.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

Joel anticipates a harvest (Joel 3:13), but we should not think that Joel was predicting the *final* harvest at the end of the world. For Joel, it was a metaphor for God's judgment in his day or in the near future.

COMMENTS:

In yet another parable, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to the growth of a seed (ver. 26). The farmer sows the seed and then goes to bed (ver. 27). While he sleeps, the seed has sprouted and grown, but the farmer does not know how. Even today, biologists think they know how things work, but all it takes is a little child to continue asking "why?" and eventually the biologist will say, "I don't know." There are mysteries in the universe which man does not understand.

Regarding plants, the soil produces the crops "by itself" (ver. 28), that is without the direct aid of the farmer. The bud or blade first, then the head, then the mature grain. At the end of the process, the farmer grabs his sickle and harvests his crop (ver. 29).

APPLICATION:

When Jesus talks about the new birth with Nicodemus in John 3:8, Jesus will say that man does not know how the Spirit moves, convincing men of sin (see John 16:7-11), revealing Jesus through the word, creating faith in Him (see Romans 10:17). Christian growth takes place without one seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting, smelling, or touching the Spirit. We just know that when we spend time in His word, He speaks to us and He matures us in the faith.

But eventually, there will come a harvest. The Judgment Day is pictured under various images in the NT: Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 14:14-20.

TRANSLATION - 4:30-32:

30 And He was saying, “How will we compare the kingdom of God or by which parable will we set it? **31** Like a seed of mustard, which whenever it may be sown on the land, smallest being of all those sown in the land, **32** and whenever it may be sown, it raises up and becomes greatest of all the garden herbs and makes great branches, so that under its shadow the birds of the heavens are able to nest.”

GREEK WORDS:

“To compare” (ver. 30) is used 15 times, only here in Mark. On “parable,” see 3:23. “Seed” (ver. 31) is used only here in Mark, out of 7 uses. “Mustard” is used 5 times: Matthew 13:31; 17:20; Mark 4:31; Luke 13:19; 17:6. “Smallest” is used five times in Mark: 4:31; 9:42; 14:35, 70; 15:40. “Great” is used 243 times, earlier in Mark at 1:26. “Garden herbs” is used four times: Matthew 13:32; Mark 4:32; Luke 11:42; Romans 14:2. “Branches” is used 11 times, in Mark only twice: 4:32; 13:28. “To nest” or “to settle” is used four times: Matthew 13:32; Mark 4:32; Luke 13:19; Acts 2:26.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The mustard seed was, proverbially, a small seed. It takes about 725-760 black mustard seeds to weigh a gram (the weight of a paper clip). It could grow between 10’ and 15’ high, although 4’ was the normal height.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

For parallels, see Matthew 13:31-32; Luke 13:18-19.

COMMENTS:

The final parable in this chapter is that of the mustard seed (ver. 30). While the mustard seed is not technically the smallest of all seeds (ver. 31), the expression was a parable. It was also the smallest seed of which the Palestinian would have been familiar. But, once this small seed was sown, fertilized, and allowed to grow, it became a large tree, compared to its small seed. The tree was large enough for birds to nest in its branches (ver. 32). Through this parable, Jesus hinted at the small beginning of the kingdom, but its eventually growth in maturity.

APPLICATION:

Daniel prophesied that the Messiah’s kingdom would break and consume all other kingdoms (Daniel 2:44-45; 7:13-14) and last forever. The kingdom started with a small group of Jesus’ disciples in the upper room, 120 of them in Acts 1:12-15. Three thousand were baptized into the kingdom on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). The kingdom began among the Jews, but eventually included the Gentiles so that by Acts 21:20, Luke will tell us that “myriads” (thousands of thousands) had become Christians. The kingdom was so wide-spread in the first century that Paul could say that the whole world had heard the gospel: Colossians 1:23.

TRANSLATION - 4:33-34:

33 And by such parables many He was speaking to them the word even as they were able to hear. **34** And without a parable He was not speaking to them, by Himself with His disciples He was explaining all things.

GREEK WORDS:

“To explain” (ver. 34) or “to interpret” is used here and Acts 19:39.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

See Matthew 13:34-35 for his parallel account.

COMMENTS:

Mark gives us a further editorial note about the teachings of Jesus in parables, comparable to 4:10-12. Jesus taught in parables as His disciples were able to embrace and mentally process the information. In John 16:12-13, Jesus told His apostles: "I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you."

Mark's comment that Jesus did not teach without parables (4:34) is either a hyperbole, to illustrate how widely Jesus used parables, or Mark refers simply to that period of time in Jesus' ministry. All His teachings were not in parables (see John 16:29). Yet, He explained the parables to His disciples while they were together alone.

APPLICATION:

Christians need to learn from Jesus (ver. 33). Non-Christians or even young, immature Christians will not be able to learn and grasp everything that the Bible has to teach. Mature Christians should be patient with young Christians and help them to grow in their knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). The author of the book of Hebrews recognized that there was "milk" in the word, for young Christians, and "meat" in the word for mature Christians (Heb. 5:12-14).

TRANSLATION - 4:35-41:

35 And He says to them in that day, evening coming, "Let us cross over unto the other side." **36** And leaving the crowd, they take Him with them when they were in the boat and other boats were with Him. **37** And it happened a great storm of wind and the waves were beating into the boat so that already the boat was filling. **38** And He was in the stern sleeping on a pillow. And they awaken Him and say to Him, "Teacher, isn't it a concern to you that we are perishing?" **39** And after awakening, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be silent!" And the wind ceased and there came a great calm. **40** And He said to them, "Why are you timid? Do you not yet have faith?" **41** And they feared with great fear and were saying to each other, "Who then is This One that even the wind and the sea submit to Him?"

GREEK WORDS:

"To cross over" (ver. 35) is used 43 times, twice in Mark: 4:35; 10:25. "Storm" or "gust" is used here, Luke 8:23; 2 Peter 2:17. "Wind" is used 31 times, seven times in Mark, four in this text: 4:37, 39, 41. "Waves" is used 5 times: Matthew 8:24; 14:24; Mark 4:37; Acts 27:41; Jude 13. "To beat" or "to break" is used 18 times, four times in Mark: 4:37; 11:7; 14:46, 72. "To be filled" is used 8 times, only twice in Mark: 4:37; 15:36. "Stern" (ver. 38) is used three times: Mark 4:38; Acts 27:29, 41. "Pillow" is used only here in Mark. "To sleep" was used at verse 27. "To awaken" is used earlier at 1:31. "Teacher" is used here for the first time in Mark of Jesus. It is used 59 times, 12 in Mark. "To be a concern" is used 10 times, in Mark at 4:38 and 12:14. "To perish" or "to destroy" is used 90 times; it can be used for "to die" as here. It is used earlier at 1:24. "To awaken" (ver. 39) is used 6 times, only here in Mark. "To rebuke" is used 29 times, nine times in Mark. "To be quiet" is used 10 times, five times in Mark: 3:4; 4:39; 9:34; 10:48; 14:61. "To be silent" is used 7 times, twice in Mark: 1:25; 4:39. It connotes the idea of putting a muzzle on a dog. "To cease" is used at Matthew 14:32; Mark 4:39; 6:51. "Calm" is used at Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24. "Timid" (ver. 40) can also mean "cowardly." It is used at Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:40; Rev. 21:8. "Faith" was used in Mark earlier at 2:5. "To fear" is used 95 times, 12 times in Mark. Its related noun "fear" is used 47 times, only here in Mark. "To submit" or "to obey" is used 21 times in the NT, only twice in Mark: 1:27; 4:41.

OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES:

It is God who rules the winds and the sea (Psa. 107:29). For Jesus to control the elements of nature is to put Jesus into the category of being Jehovah God. Again, the storms are stilled by Jehovah God: Nahum 1:3-5.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

The Sea of Galilee was 7 miles wide and 13 miles long. A boat has been discovered that dates between 120 BC and 40 AD. It might have been the type of boat that Jesus and His apostles were in. It was 25 1/2' long, 7 1/2' wide, and 4 1/2' deep. A crew of five would control the boat with four oars or a sail. It could hold fifteen passengers. This would be enough room for Jesus and His twelve apostles.

PARALLELS IN THE OTHER GOSPELS:

See Matthew 8:23-27 and Luke 8:22-25 for their parallels.

COMMENTS:

After Mark presented this series of Jesus' parables, he turns again to Jesus' miracles. On the same day Jesus gave these parables (ver. 35), He told His disciples that they would traverse the Sea of Galilee to the other side. They left the crowds, taking more than one boat, and embarked (ver. 36). As can happen frequently on the Sea of Galilee with its topography, a fierce gale of wind came up and the waves started breaking over the boat, which began filling with water (ver. 37).

It should have been a message to the apostles, four of whom were experienced fishermen, but Jesus was not afraid (ver. 38). Surely being tired from spending His day teaching, Jesus was in the stern of the ship, asleep on a pillow. The apostles woke up the carpenter, asking the Teacher if He cared that they were dying? Of course the answer was "no," but their faith was shallow.

Jesus awoke, rebuked the wind and the sea, and calmed them down, just as He had rebuked the demons before (1:25). Because He is the Master, the wind and the waves calmed down completely (ver. 39). Then Jesus turned His attention to His apostles, chastising them for their lack of or little faith (ver. 40). The apostles, on the other hand, were struck with awe, deep fear, for they were astounded that even the winds and the sea must submit to His authority. "Who is this?" they ask. Mark is helping us, the reader, know "Who this is:" He is the "Son of God" (1:1). There will be ten miracles recorded between 4:35 and 8:26.

APPLICATION:

Jesus will rebuke His disciples' faith on several occasions in Mark: 7:18; 8:17ff, 21, 32ff; 9:19. This was an ideal opportunity for Jesus to test their disciples' faith and, when it turned out to be too shallow, to increase their faith by calming the storm. Jesus has authority over demons, disease, death, and storms. Even today, Christians can trust Jesus to calm the storms in their lives, if they will trust Him and obey His commandments.