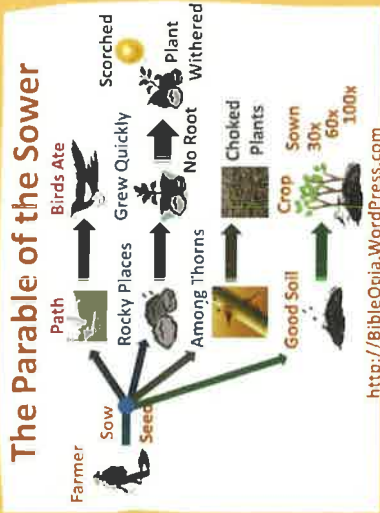


The Parable of the Sower

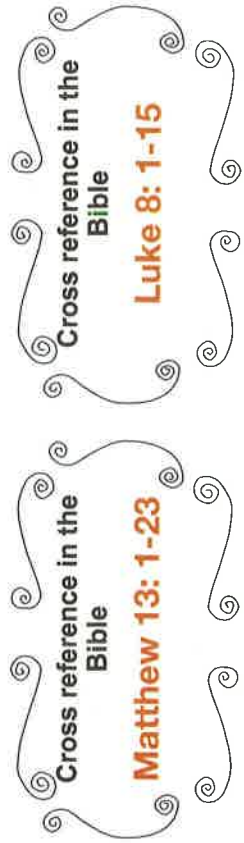
According to the Gospel of Mark



About the parable

Here Jesus describes a process called broadcasting: taking handfuls of seed and scattering it to the wind rather than depositing it directly in prepared soil. This method of planting was widely used in primitive agriculture, particularly in hilly regions like Galilee where rocks that could destroy a cast-iron plow often lay just below the surface. Since geological pressures cause subterranean rocks to migrate upward, farmers cannot be sure from year to year just where the rocks and the fertile soil are located. Finding & removing all rocks would be inefficient & time-consuming. So each spring Mediterranean grain farmers simply scattered the relatively inexpensive seed across their fields. Of course some would be lost to the unpredictable forces of nature: birds, weeds, hard ground, lack of rainfall. But there was always enough good soil to insure a harvest. So, from time immemorial broadcasting was the normal process of planting in the eastern Mediterranean.

Thus, the parable of the sower describes an annual ritual that any ancient rural audience was bound to recognise. The only unusual detail is the size of the harvest. In a good year a farmer might reap 5 to 10 times what he planted. So, ancient people familiar with normal yields would certainly have been particularly struck by this parable's prediction of a bumper crop 10 times ordinary expectations.



The Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:1-20)

Questions on the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4: 1-20)

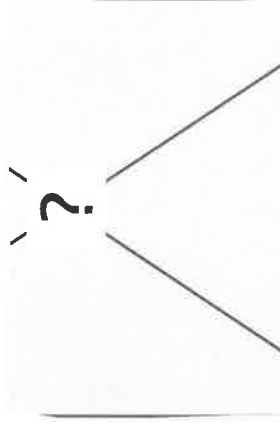
¹Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. ²He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: ³"Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times."

⁹Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

¹⁰When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. ¹¹He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables ¹²so that,

*"they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,
and ever hearing but never understanding;
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"*

¹³Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? ¹⁴The farmer sows the word. ¹⁵Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. ¹⁶Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. ¹⁷But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ¹⁸Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; ¹⁹but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²⁰Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown."



Outline reasons why a parable is an effective means to convey the type of message presented within the *Parable of the Sower*.



packed soil



stony ground



Describe what the symbols in the *Parable of the Sower* represent.



Explain how the symbols Jesus refers to in the *Parable of the Sower* make this story relevant to Mark's community.