



The Propbet Joseph Smith teaching a group of brethren, including Brigham Young (left). Brigham Young said that the Propbet could “take the scriptures and make them so plain and simple that everybody could understand.”



Truths from the Savior's Parables in Matthew 13

*“The chariot wheels of the Kingdom are still rolling on,
impelled by the mighty arm of Jehovah;
and in spite of all opposition, will still roll on,
until His words are all fulfilled.”*

From the Life of Joseph Smith

As construction on the Kirtland Temple neared completion, Joseph Smith and the Saints began to prepare themselves for the great blessings they would receive there. To help prepare the brethren for the temple dedication, a session of the School of the Elders began in November 1835. This school had been established in 1834, a continuation of the School of the Prophets held earlier.

Among other subjects, Joseph Smith and the other brethren studied Hebrew, the language in which most of the Old Testament was originally written. The Prophet's journal for this period shows that he studied Hebrew nearly every day, often for many hours a day. His journal entries include words such as “Spent the day in reading Hebrew” or “Attended school and read Hebrew.”¹ On January 19, 1836, he recorded: “Spent the day at school. The Lord blessed us in our studies. This day we commenced reading in our Hebrew Bibles with much success. It seems as if the Lord opens our minds in a marvelous manner, to understand His word in the original language.”² A month later, he wrote: “Attended the school and read and translated with my class as usual. My soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original.”³

Joseph Smith's experience in the School of the Elders is just one evidence of his love for the scriptures. He studied the scriptures diligently, finding in them solace, knowledge, and inspiration throughout his life. Significantly, it was a passage from the Bible that led him to seek wisdom from God and receive the First Vision when he was just 14 years old (see James 1:5).

The Prophet's writings and sermons are filled with scriptural quotations and interpretations, for he had studied the scriptures so extensively that they became an integral part of his thinking. In his teachings, he quoted scriptures directly, he alluded to them, he paraphrased them, and he used them as the foundation for his sermons. "I know the scriptures and understand them," he declared in April 1844.⁴

His extraordinary knowledge of the scriptures allowed him to teach and interpret them with great power and clarity, and many who heard him speak remembered this ability. President Brigham Young recalled that the Prophet could "take the scriptures and make them so plain and simple that everybody could understand."⁵

Wandle Mace recalled: "I have listened to the Prophet Joseph Smith in public and in private, in sunshine and in shower, as many others have done as he taught them from the stand. And in my own, and in his house, I have been familiar with him . . . and do know that no man could explain the scriptures, throw them wide open to view so plainly that none could misunderstand their meaning, except he had been taught of God.

"I have sometimes felt ashamed of myself because, having studied the scriptures so much, even from a child, I had not seen that which was so plain when he touched them. He, as it were, turned the key, and the door of knowledge sprang wide open, disclosing precious principles, both new and old."⁶

The Prophet's knowledge of the scriptures is evident in the following letter, in which he gave a prophetic interpretation of the Savior's parables in Matthew 13. He taught that these parables describe the establishment of the Church in the Savior's time and its marvelous growth and destiny in the latter days.

Teachings of Joseph Smith

The Savior taught in parables so that those who believed in His teachings could gain greater light, while those who rejected His teachings would lose the light they had.

“‘And the disciples came and said unto [the Savior], Why speakest thou unto them in parables? [I would here remark, that the “them” made use of in this interrogation . . . refers to the multitude.] He answered and said unto them, [that is unto the disciples,] because it is given unto *you* to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but to *them*, [that is, unbelievers,] it is not given; 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.’ [Matthew 13:10–12.]

“We understand from this saying, that those who had been previously looking for a Messiah to come according to the testimony of the Prophets, and were then at that time looking for a Messiah, but had not sufficient light on account of their unbelief to discern Him to be their Savior, and He being the true Messiah, consequently they must be disappointed, and lose even all the knowledge, or have taken away from them all the light, understanding, and faith which they had upon this subject. Therefore he that will not receive the greater light, must have taken away from him all the light which he hath; and if the light which is in you becomes darkness, behold, how great is that darkness! ‘Therefore,’ says the Savior, ‘speak I unto them in parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand; and in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias [Isaiah] which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive.’ [Matthew 13:13–14.]

“Now we discover that the very reason assigned by this prophet [Isaiah], why they would not receive the Messiah, was, because they did not or would not understand; and seeing, they did not perceive; ‘for this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, their eyes have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.’ [Matthew 13:15.] But what saith He to His

disciples? ‘Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear, 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.’ [Matthew 13:16–17.]

“We again make remark here—for we find that the very principle upon which the disciples were accounted blessed, was because they were permitted to see with their eyes and hear with their ears—that the condemnation which rested upon the multitude that received not His saying, was because they were not willing to see with their eyes, and hear with their ears; not because they could not, and were not privileged to see and hear, but because their hearts were full of iniquity and abominations; ‘as your fathers did, so do ye.’ [Acts 7:51.] The prophet, foreseeing that they would thus harden their hearts, plainly declared it; and herein is the condemnation of the world; that light hath come into the world, and men choose darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil. This is so plainly taught by the Savior, that a wayfaring man need not mistake it.

“. . . Men are in the habit, when the truth is exhibited by the servants of God, of saying, All is mystery; they have spoken in parables, and, therefore, are not to be understood. It is true they have eyes to see, and see not, but none are so blind as those who will not see; and, although the Savior spoke this to such characters, yet unto His disciples he expounded it plainly; and we have reason to be truly humble before the God of our fathers, that He hath left these things on record for us, so plain, that notwithstanding the exertions and combined influence of the priests of Baal, they have not power to blind our eyes, and darken our understanding, if we will but open our eyes, and read with candor, for a moment.”⁷

The parable of the sower shows the effects of preaching the gospel; it also shows that the Savior established His kingdom in the meridian of time.

“At the time the Savior spoke these beautiful sayings and parables contained in [Matthew 13], we find Him seated in a ship on

account of the multitude that pressed upon Him to hear His words; and He commenced teaching them, saying:

“Behold, a sower went forth to sow, and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprang up because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up they were scorched: and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up and choked them: but other fell in good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred fold, some sixty fold, some thirty fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.’ [Matthew 13:3–9.] . . .

“But listen to the explanation of the parable of the Sower: ‘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.’ Now mark the expression—that which was sown in his heart. ‘This is he which receiveth seed by the way side.’ [Matthew 13:19.] Men who have no principle of righteousness in themselves, and whose hearts are full of iniquity, and have no desire for the principles of truth, do not understand the word of truth when they hear it. The devil taketh away the word of truth out of their hearts, because there is no desire for righteousness in them.

“‘But he that receiveth seed in stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon, with joy receiveth it; 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. He also that receiveth 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. 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 hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty.’ [Matthew 13:20–23.]

“Thus the Savior Himself explained unto His disciples the parable which He put forth, and left no mystery or darkness upon the minds of those who firmly believe on His words.



“Behold, a sower went forth to sow, and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side. . . . But other fell in good ground, and brought forth fruit.”

“We draw the conclusion, then, that the very reason why the multitude, or the world, as they were designated by the Savior, did not receive an explanation upon His parables, was because of unbelief. To you, He says, (speaking to His disciples,) it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God [see Matthew 13:11]. And why? Because of the faith and confidence they had in Him. This parable was spoken to demonstrate the effects that are produced by the preaching of the word; and we believe

that it has an allusion directly to the commencement, or the setting up, of the Kingdom in that age; therefore we shall continue to trace His sayings concerning this Kingdom from that time forth, even unto the end of the world.”⁸

The parable of the wheat and tares teaches that the righteous and wicked will grow together until the end of the world, when the righteous will be gathered and the wicked burned.

“‘Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, [which parable has an allusion to the setting up of the Kingdom, in that age of the world also,] 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.’ [Matthew 13:24–30.]

“Now we learn by this parable, not only the setting up of the Kingdom in the days of the Savior, which is represented by the good seed, which produced fruit, but also the corruptions of the Church, which are represented by the tares, which were sown by the enemy, which His disciples would fain have plucked up, or cleansed the Church of, if their views had been favored by the Savior. But He, knowing all things, says, Not so. As much as to say, your views are not correct, the Church is in its infancy, and if you take this rash step, you will destroy the wheat, or the Church, with the tares; therefore it is better to let them grow together until the harvest, or the end of the world, which means the destruction of the wicked, which is not yet fulfilled. . . .

“‘. . . His disciples came unto Him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them,

He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the Kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one.’ [Matthew 13:36–38.]

“Now let our readers mark the expression—‘the field is the world, . . . the tares are the children of the wicked one, the enemy that sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the world, [let them carefully mark this expression—*the end of the world*,] and the reapers are the angels.’ [Matthew 13:38–39.]

“Now men cannot have any possible grounds to say that this is figurative, or that it does not mean what it says, for He is now explaining what He has previously spoken in parables; and according to this language, the end of the world is the destruction of the wicked; the harvest and the end of the world have an allusion directly to the human family in the last days, instead of the earth, as many have imagined, and that which shall precede the coming of the Son of Man, and the restitution of all things spoken of by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began; and the angels are to have something to do in this great work, for they are the reapers.

“ ‘As, therefore, the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world’ [Matthew 13:40]; that is, as the servants of God go forth warning the nations, both priests and people, and as they harden their hearts and reject the light of truth, these first being delivered over to the buffetings of Satan, and the law and the testimony being closed up, . . . they are left in darkness, and delivered over unto the day of burning; thus being bound up by their creeds, and their bands being made strong by their priests, [they] are prepared for the fulfillment of the saying of the Savior—‘The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.’ [Matthew 13:41–42.]

“We understand that the work of gathering together of the wheat into barns, or garners, is to take place while the tares are being bound over and preparing for the day of burning; that after the day of burnings, ‘the righteous shall shine forth like the

sun, in the Kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear' [Matthew 13:43]."⁹

The parable of the mustard seed teaches that the Church and kingdom of God, established in these last days, will spread throughout the earth.

“And again, another parable put He forth unto them, having an allusion to the Kingdom that should be set up just previous to or at the time of the harvest, which reads as follows—“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: 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.’ [Matthew 13:31–32.] Now we can discover plainly that this figure is given to represent the Church as it shall come forth in the last days. Behold, the Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto it. Now, what is like unto it?

“Let us take the Book of Mormon, which a man took and hid in his field, securing it by his faith, to spring up in the last days, or in due time; let us behold it coming forth out of the ground, which is indeed accounted the least of all seeds, but behold it branching forth, yea, even towering with lofty branches and God-like majesty, until it, like the mustard seed, becomes the greatest of all herbs. And it is truth, and it has sprouted and come forth out of the earth, and righteousness begins to look down from heaven [see Psalm 85:11; Moses 7:62], and God is sending down His powers, gifts, and angels to lodge in the branches thereof.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a mustard seed. Behold, then, is not this the Kingdom of Heaven that is raising its head in the last days in the majesty of its God, even the Church of the Latter-day Saints, like an impenetrable, immovable rock in the midst of the mighty deep, exposed to the storms and tempests of Satan, that has, thus far, remained steadfast, and is still braving the mountain waves of opposition, which are driven by the tempestuous winds of sinking crafts, which have [dashed] and are still dashing with tremendous foam across its triumphant brow; urged onward with redoubled fury by the enemy of righteousness? . . .



The Church is “like an impenetrable, immovable rock in the midst of the mighty deep, exposed to the storms and tempests of Satan, that has, thus far, remained steadfast.”

“The . . . clouds of darkness have long been beating like mountain waves upon the immovable rock of the Church of the Latter-day Saints; and notwithstanding all this, the mustard seed is still towering its lofty branches, higher and higher, and extending itself wider and wider; and the chariot wheels of the Kingdom are still rolling on, impelled by the mighty arm of Jehovah; and in spite of all opposition, will still roll on, until His words are all fulfilled.”¹⁰

The testimonies of the Three Witnesses and the latter-day scriptures are like the leaven that was hidden in meal; the parable of the net teaches about the worldwide gathering.

“‘And 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.’ [Matthew 13:33.]

It may be understood that the Church of the Latter-day Saints has taken its rise from a little leaven that was put into three witnesses. Behold, how much this is like the parable! It is fast leavening the lump, and will soon leaven the whole. . . .

“ ‘Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind, which when it was full they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.’ [Matthew 13:47–48.] For the work of this pattern, behold the seed of Joseph, spreading forth the Gospel net upon the face of the earth, gathering of every kind, that the good may be saved in vessels prepared for that purpose, and the angels will take care of the bad. ‘So shall it be at the end of the world—the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire, and there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus saith unto them, Have you understood all these things? They say unto Him, Yea, Lord.’ [Matthew 13:49–51.] And we say, yea, Lord; and well might they say, yea, Lord; for these things are so plain and so glorious, that every Saint in the last days must respond with a hearty Amen to them.

“ ‘Then said He unto them, therefore every scribe which is instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things that are new and old.’ [Matthew 13:52.]

“For the works of this example, see the Book of Mormon coming forth out of the treasure of the heart. Also the covenants given to the Latter-day Saints [the Doctrine and Covenants], also the translation of the Bible—thus bringing forth out of the heart things new and old, thus answering to three measures of meal undergoing the purifying touch by a revelation of Jesus Christ, and the ministering of angels, who have already commenced this work in the last days, which will answer to the leaven which leavened the whole lump. Amen.”¹¹

Suggestions for Study and Teaching

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- Review pages 293–94. What can we learn from the example of Joseph Smith to help us in our own scripture study?
- Review Joseph Smith’s explanation of why the Savior sometimes taught with parables (pages 295–96). As we learn the truths of the gospel, what do you think it means to see with our eyes and hear with our ears? Why do you think light will be taken away from us if we are unwilling to receive greater light? Think about what you need to do to receive more gospel light.
- Study the parable of the sower (pages 296–99). In this parable, the Savior shows that the same gospel message produces different effects depending on how people receive it. Why is the word of God unable to grow in people “whose hearts are full of iniquity”? Why do tribulation and persecution lead some to set aside the word of God? In what ways might “the care of this world” and “the deceitfulness of riches” choke the word within us?
- How can we ensure that our “ground” is good when the word is planted in us? What can parents do to help children prepare their hearts to receive the word?
- In the parable of the wheat and the tares (pages 299–301), the wheat represents the righteous, or “the children of the Kingdom.” The tares represent “the children of the wicked one.” How can we remain faithful even though the “tares” are allowed to grow among the “wheat”? How does Doctrine and Covenants 86:1–7 help you understand the parable?
- In what ways is the Church today like the developing tree in the parable of the mustard seed? (For some examples, see pages 301–2.)
- Review pages 302–3. Note that leaven is a substance that causes bread dough to rise. In what ways are the latter-day scriptures like leaven for the Church? How are they like leaven

for you personally? How are the latter-day scriptures like treasures “that are new and old”?

- In the parable of the gospel net (page 303), why do you think it is significant that the net gathers fish of every kind? How is this parable being fulfilled today?

Related Scriptures: Luke 8:4–18; Alma 12:9–11; D&C 86:1–11; 101:63–68

Notes

1. *History of the Church*, 2:326, 387; from Joseph Smith journal entries, Dec. 7, 1835, and Jan. 29, 1836, Kirtland, Ohio.
2. *History of the Church*, 2:376; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, Jan. 19, 1836, Kirtland, Ohio.
3. *History of the Church*, 2:396; from a Joseph Smith journal entry, Feb. 17, 1836, Kirtland, Ohio.
4. *History of the Church*, 6:314; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.
5. Brigham Young, *Deseret News*, Dec. 30, 1857, p. 340; spelling modernized.
6. Wandle Mace, *Autobiography*, ca. 1890, p. 45, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
7. *History of the Church*, 2:265–66; second, third, and fourth sets of bracketed words in first paragraph in original; punctuation and grammar modernized; from a letter from Joseph Smith to the elders of the Church, Dec. 1835, Kirtland, Ohio, published in *Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1835, pp. 225–26.
8. *History of the Church*, 2:264–67; punctuation and grammar modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a letter from Joseph Smith to the elders of the Church, Dec. 1835, Kirtland, Ohio, published in *Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1835, pp. 225–26.
9. *History of the Church*, 2:267, 271; first set of bracketed words in first paragraph in original, and first set of bracketed words in fourth paragraph in original; punctuation and capitalization modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a letter from Joseph Smith to the elders of the Church, Dec. 1835, Kirtland, Ohio, published in *Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1835, pp. 226–29.
10. *History of the Church*, 2:268, 270; bracketed word in third paragraph in original; punctuation, capitalization, and grammar modernized; from a letter from Joseph Smith to the elders of the Church, Dec. 1835, Kirtland, Ohio, published in *Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1835, pp. 227–28. See page xvi for information about changes in the official name of the Church.
11. *History of the Church*, 2:270, 272; punctuation and capitalization modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a letter from Joseph Smith to the elders of the Church, Dec. 1835, Kirtland, Ohio, published in *Messenger and Advocate*, Dec. 1835, pp. 228–29.