

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture 6A – Matthew 13:1-23: The Parables of the Kingdom I

NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, FAQs

1) Abstract

This academic lecture focuses on **Matthew 13:1-23**, specifically introducing the **parabolic discourse of Jesus** within the Gospel of Matthew. The speaker analyzes the **structure and interpretation of these parables**, proposing different structural approaches and discussing the historical context of Jesus's ministry and the increasing opposition he faced. A significant portion addresses the **historical interpretations of parables**, critiquing both overly allegorical and overly simplistic views, while emphasizing the importance of understanding their **ancient historical and literary conventions**. The lecture concludes by examining Jesus's interpretation of the **Parable of the Sower**, linking it to different responses to the kingdom message and discussing the concept of **genuine discipleship**.

2) Briefing Document: This detailed briefing document reviews the main themes and important ideas from Dr. David Turner's Lecture 6A on Matthew 13:1-23, focusing on the Parables of the Kingdom.

Briefing Document: Matthew 13:1-23 – The Parables of the Kingdom I

Source: Excerpts from "Turner_Matthew_Lect06A_English.pdf" (Dr. David Turner, Matthew Lecture 6A)

I. Introduction to the Parabolic Discourse (Matthew 13)

- **Context of Opposition:** The parables in Matthew 13 are fitting due to the "increasing and getting more intense" opposition Jesus faces, including "accusations of collaboration with the devil and slanderous charges" (p. 1).

This growing hostility provides the backdrop for Jesus' shift in teaching method.

- **Purpose of Parables:** Jesus uses parables to:
 - "communicate the truth to his disciples who have the opportunity to get everything explained to them" (p. 1).
 - "basically shut the door to those who were only taking what he was teaching, to use it against them, and to come up with additional slanders" (p. 1).
 - Reveal truths to his disciples and conceal them from enemies of the kingdom (p. 5, citing 13:10-16).
- **Distinctive Passage:** Matthew 13, featuring the familiar parable of the sower, is described as "one of the most distinctive passages in the gospel of Matthew, and perhaps in the whole New Testament" (p. 1).
- **Primary Focus:** The parables primarily "focus... upon the varied responses to the kingdom message" (p. 5, citing 13:19). The background is the "increasing opposition to Jesus and his message, which has been narrated in Matthew 11 and 12" (p. 5). The parables help disciples understand this opposition.
- **Nature of the Kingdom:** Contrary to some dispensationalist views, the parables are **not** primarily about a future millennium or a rejected/postponed kingdom. The kingdom "is already inaugurated in Matthew 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, and especially 12:28" (p. 5). The parables describe its "present progress in the ministry of Jesus and his disciples, as well as its future glories" (p. 5).

II. Structure of Matthew 13's Parabolic Discourse

- **Third Major Discourse:** Matthew 13:3-52 constitutes Jesus' third major discourse, following the Sermon on the Mount (Ch. 5-7) and the mission commissioning (Ch. 10). All three discourses conclude with the distinctive phrase, "When Jesus had finished these words" (p. 1).
- **Two-Section Proposal (Turner's Preferred):** This discourse can be seen as having "two sections of four parables each if 13:51 and 52 is correctly interpreted as a parable" (p. 2). Dr. Turner argues 13:51-52 uses the same introductory formula ("kingdom of heaven is like...") as other parables (p. 2).

- In both sections, Jesus answers a question from his disciples about parables (13:10-17 in the first half, 13:36-43 in the second).
- Matthew's editorial comment explaining the fulfillment of prophecy in Psalm 78 (13:34-35) lies between the two sections.
- A pair of short, similar parables concludes the first section (13:31-33: Mustard Seed & Leaven) and introduces the second (13:44-46: Treasure & Pearl) (p. 2).
- The first half is addressed to a larger group outside, while the second group of parables (13:36ff) is addressed to the disciples in a house (p. 2).
- **Davies and Allison's Three-Part Proposal:** Suggests a three-part structure where each part begins with a parable, followed by interpretation and further discussion of parables (p. 2).
- This approach "tends to break down in section 3, where the order of the discussion and interpretation is reversed" and doesn't as nicely deal with the shift in audience (p. 2).
- **Wenham's Chiastic (Introverted Parallelism) Structure:** Proposed by Wenham (1979), this structure focuses on the middle as the core (p. 3).
- The "heart of this discourse" is Jesus' explanation for using parables (citing Psalm 78) and the interpretation of the parable of the tares (p. 3).
- Symmetrical elements surround this core, including pairs of short parables (Mustard Seed/Leaven and Treasure/Pearl), parables contrasting good and evil (Tares and Net), and the disciples' question/Jesus' answer and Jesus' question/disciples' answer (p. 3).
- Turner finds this approach "rather helpful" due to its emphasis on order, symmetry, and "literary aesthetic wonder" (p. 3). However, he notes an issue with the non-symmetrical placement of Jesus' two interpretations of the parables (p. 3).

III. Interpretation of Parables in General

- **Avoid Imaginative Allegorizing:** The history of the church shows a "prevalence of imaginative interpretations" (p. 4). The "Sunday school

definition" – "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning" – is good, but "multitudes of such heavenly meanings have been superimposed upon the parables" (p. 4).

- **Example: The Good Samaritan:** Early church fathers "transformed that into the story of Adam and Eve and their fall," where each detail (Jericho, thieves, Samaritan, inn) is allegorized to represent theological concepts (mortality, devil, Paul, church) (p. 4). This "allegorizing approach... tends to atomize the parables" and "obscure the true interpretation" (p. 4).
- **Avoid Reader-Response Criticism:** This approach "stresses the modern reader's sort of knee-jerk response to the parable, again, rather than the historic or literary context" (p. 4). It often yields results with "only a tangential relationship to the history and literary context of the parable" (p. 5).
- **Critique of Jülicher's "One Main Point" View:** Adolf Jülicher (1899) argued that Jesus' parables have "only one main point," in reaction to allegorizing excesses (p. 5). However, this "narrow approach seems contrary to Jesus' own interpretation of his parables... let alone the polyvalence or flexibility of meaning inherent in the use of stories" (p. 5).
- **Key Principles for Interpretation:** "Parables are indeed allegories, but it's not up to us to allegorize them. The allegorical aspect is a matter which is done by the author, not by us as the reader" (p. 5).
- **Historical Context is Crucial:** "Their imagery must be understood in terms of their own ancient historical and literary convention," drawn from "1st century Palestine" (p. 5).
- **Literary Context is Crucial:** The preceding context often provides "the key, since the parabolic imagery answers to and matches up with the key characters and issues in the narrative" (p. 5). Concluding general comments also apply imagery to contextual matters.

IV. Jesus' Explanation for Using Parables (13:10-17)

- **Not a Novel Method:** The disciples' question implies parables are new, but Jesus had "previously used parabolic imagery" (e.g., 7:24-27, 9:15-17) and

continued to speak plainly to unbelievers (p. 6). There is no "bifurcation between non-parable before 13 and all parables after 13" (p. 6).

- **Transition in Ministry:** Matthew 13 does mark a "real sense in which... a transition in Jesus' ministry" occurs, as "opposition has indeed come to a head in Matthew 12" (p. 6).
- **Present Response, Not Postponement:** Jesus' parables "describe the present response of Israel to his kingdom message" (p. 7). They also describe the response of the nations to the disciples' preaching "all the way to the end of the age" (p. 7).
- **Sovereignty of God and Human Responsibility:** Matthew 13:11-15 (citing Isaiah 6:9-10) is a strong "affirmation... of God's prerogative to reveal himself to whomever he wishes" (p. 7). This aligns with 11:25-27, where God hides the message from those who reject it.
- Crucially, "the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of God's creatures go hand in hand" (p. 7). Those whom God sovereignly rejects are those who "willfully reject God" (p. 7).
- Divine election "comforts those afflicted by sin and afflicts those who are comfortable with sin. It also provides assurance that the preaching of the kingdom message will be attended with God's blessing" (p. 7). (Turner self-identifies as a Calvinist here).

V. Interpretation of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:18-23)

- **Invalidates "Single Point" Idea:** Jesus' "detailed interpretation of the parable of the sower invalidates a popular idea that a parable has only a single point of reference to reality" (p. 7). The "central point... is clearly the reception of the kingdom message," but "several signifying details add depth and detail" (p. 8).
- **The Sower:** Jesus is the sower, but the parable applies immediately to the disciples' ministry and ultimately to the church's proclamation of the gospel (p. 8).
- **Four Types of Soil / Factors Hindering Reception:** **Hard Ground (Path):** Represents hearts "hardened by both human sin and divine abandonment"

(p. 8, citing 13:15). Satanic opposition is effective here, snatching the seed (13:19).

- **Rocky Ground:** Represents an "immediate joyful reception" that is "solely emotional... lacking the root of intellectual understanding" (p. 8, citing 13:21). Persecution causes them to fall away.
- **Thorny Ground:** Represents those whose reception is "thwarted by... greed and secular concerns," when "the demands of discipleship confront a materialistic lifestyle" (p. 8, citing 13:22).
- **Good Ground:** Represents genuine reception and fruit-bearing (13:23).
- **Lordship Salvation Controversy (Fruit as a Test):** Turner rejects the view that all soil types (except perhaps the first) represent genuine conversion, even if unproductive.
- He argues that "fruit is a test of genuine discipleship" in Matthew (p. 8, citing 3:8-10, 7:16-20, 12:33, 21:19, 21:34, 41, 43).
- Therefore, "only the good soil which receives the seed and bears fruit is a picture of true conversion" (p. 9).
- **Warning Against Legalism:** While fruit is essential, "there are degrees in fruit bearing" (30, 60, 100-fold) (p. 9). Preachers should "avoid legalism and perfectionism," not setting "human standards for discipleship" or expecting "mature discipleship overnight" (p. 9).
- The balance: salvation by grace, but believers "will take Jesus as Lord and begin a process of following in His footsteps" (p. 9).

VI. Conclusion

- Matthew 13:1-23 "provides an explanation for the rejection experienced by Jesus in Matthew 11 and 12" (p. 9).
- The message has gone to many, but "relatively few have received it and borne fruit" (p. 9).
- This "mixed response to the kingdom will continue to the end of the age" (p. 9), as seen in the parable of the weeds and the wheat (13:24ff).

- This explanation for rejection is found in "the wickedness and unbelief of humans and in the schemes of Satan, but ultimately it will be explained in God's mysterious sovereign purpose" (p. 9).

3) Study Guide: Understanding Matthew 13: The Parables of the Kingdom I

Study Guide

This study guide is designed to help you review the lecture on Matthew 13:1-23, focusing on the Parables of the Kingdom. It covers the structure of the discourse, the interpretation of parables in general, and the specific meaning of the Parable of the Sower.

I. Introduction to Matthew 13 and the Parabolic Discourse

- **Context of the Parables:**
 - Why did Jesus begin using parables at this point in his ministry (Matthew 13)? What was the escalating situation in Matthew 11 and 12?
 - How did parables serve to both reveal truth and conceal it? From whom were these truths revealed, and from whom were they concealed?
- **Structure of the Parabolic Discourse (Matthew 13:3-52):**
 - Identify Jesus' three major discourses in Matthew. How do they typically conclude?
- **Proposal 1 (Two sections of four parables):** What is the key to identifying the two sections? (Hint: Matthew 13:51-52 as a parable).
 - What questions from the disciples bracket these two sections?
 - What editorial comment from Matthew is found between the two sections?
 - Describe the pattern of short parables concluding the first section and introducing the second.
- **Proposal 2 (Davies and Allison – Three-part structure):** Describe the recurring pattern within each of their proposed sections.

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?
- **Proposal 3 (Wenham – Chiasmus/Introverted Parallelism):** What is the central focus of this chiastic structure?
- How does Wenham's structure illustrate the symmetry of the discourse?
- What is a potential weakness of this approach regarding the non-symmetrical placement of parable interpretations?
- **Overall takeaway:** Despite differing proposals, what does the presence of structural analysis suggest about Matthew's composition?

II. Interpretation of Parables in General

- **Historical Approaches to Interpretation:**
- **Early Church Fathers (Patristic Authors) and Allegorizing:** Describe the common practice of allegorizing.
- Use the example of the Good Samaritan to illustrate this approach. What are the problems with this method? (Hint: atomization, neglecting historical/literary context).
- **Reader Response Criticism:** What does this approach emphasize?
- What are its limitations in understanding the original meaning of parables?
- **Adolf Jülicher (and similar views):** What was Jülicher's main argument about parables?
- Why does the lecture suggest this "narrow approach" is problematic?
- **Sound Principles for Interpreting Parables:**
- How are Jesus' parables to be understood in relation to allegory? Who does the allegorizing?
- Why is understanding the imagery in terms of "ancient historical and literary convention" crucial?
- What role do the preceding and concluding contexts play in interpretation?

III. Interpretation of Matthew 13: The Kingdom Message

- **Purpose of Parables in Matthew 13:**

- What is the dual purpose of the parables as indicated in Matthew 13:10-16?
- What is the "primary focus" of the parables?
- How do the parables relate to the increasing opposition Jesus faced in Matthew 11-12?

- **Critique of Classical Dispensationalism:**

- What is the dispensationalist view regarding the parables of Matthew 13 (e.g., future millennium, rejected/postponed kingdom)?
- Why does the lecturer disagree with this view? How is the kingdom already inaugurated?
- What is the true nature of the kingdom described in the parables?

- **Matthew 13 as a Transition:**

- While Matthew 13 marks a transition, what is it *not* (e.g., novel teaching method, new teaching about a postponed kingdom)?
- What does Matthew 13 describe in terms of Israel's response and the future church's mission?

- **The Relationship of Parables to God's Sovereignty:**

- How does Matthew 13:11-15 (with Isaiah 6:9-10) affirm God's sovereignty?
- How does Matthew 11:25-27 further emphasize Jesus' shared divine prerogative?
- Explain the interplay between God's sovereignty and human responsibility as presented in the lecture. Provide examples (e.g., Matt 11:28-30, 16:15-17).
- What is the implication of God's sovereign election for those afflicted by sin and those comfortable with sin?

IV. Jesus' Explanation of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:18-23)

- **Critique of the "Single Point" Idea:**

- How does Jesus' detailed interpretation of the Sower parable refute the idea that a parable has only one point?
- What is the *central point* of the parable? What do the "several signifying details" add?
- **The Sower and the Seed:**
 - Who is implicitly the sower?
 - To whom does the parable have immediate application? Ultimate application?
 - What does the "seed" represent?
- **The Four Types of Soil:**
 - **Hard Ground (Beside the Path):**What hinders reception here? (Satanic opposition).
 - What does this soil represent?
 - **Stony Ground:**What hinders reception here? (Persecution).
 - Describe the nature of the initial response and its lacking element.
 - **Thorny Ground:**What hinders reception here? (Greed and secular concerns).
 - What is the conflict depicted here?
 - **Good Ground:**What characterizes this soil?
 - What is the "crucial question" raised about who represents a genuine disciple?
- **Lordship Salvation Controversy:**
 - Describe the "once saved, always saved" viewpoint and how it might interpret the soils.
 - What is the lecturer's counter-argument based on Matthew's consistent teaching? Provide specific examples from Matthew (e.g., 3:8-10, 7:16-20, 12:33, 21:19, 34, 41, 43).

- What is the lecturer's conclusion regarding which soil represents true conversion?
- How does the lecture balance the necessity of fruit-bearing with avoiding legalism and perfectionism? What do the "degrees in fruit bearing" (30, 60, 100 fold) imply?
- **Conclusion:**
- How does Matthew 13:1-23 explain the rejection Jesus experienced in Matthew 11-12?
- What will the parable of the weeds and the wheat further clarify?
- What are the ultimate explanations for the mixed response to the kingdom message?

Quiz: Short Answer Questions

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to the lecture, why did Jesus begin using parables in Matthew 13, given the preceding chapters?
2. How does the lecture suggest Matthew 13:51-52 should be interpreted, and what is its significance for understanding the structure of the discourse?
3. Explain one major problem with the allegorizing approach to parables, using an example mentioned in the lecture.
4. What is the "single point" view of parables (Jülicher's view), and how does Jesus' own interpretation of the Parable of the Sower challenge this idea?
5. What is the dual purpose of Jesus' parables in Matthew 13:10-16 regarding his disciples and his enemies?
6. Briefly describe the dispensationalist interpretation of Matthew 13's parables and explain why the lecturer disagrees with it.
7. How does the lecture reconcile God's sovereignty with human responsibility in the context of receiving the kingdom message?

8. According to Jesus' interpretation, what are the three factors that hinder the reception of the kingdom message, represented by the first three types of soil in the Parable of the Sower?
9. Explain the "Lordship Salvation controversy" as it relates to the interpretation of the different soils in the Parable of the Sower.
10. What evidence does Matthew provide to support the idea that fruit is a test of genuine discipleship, particularly in contrast to the "once saved, always saved" interpretation of the soils?

Answer Key

1. Jesus began using parables as opposition to him intensified, including accusations of collaboration with the devil. Parables allowed him to communicate truth clearly to his disciples, who received explanations, while simultaneously obscuring the truth from those who sought to use his teachings against him.
2. Matthew 13:51-52 should be viewed as a short parable, similar to others in the chapter, because it uses the introductory formula "the kingdom of heaven is like." This identification is crucial for understanding one proposed symmetrical structure of the discourse as having two sections of four parables each.
3. A major problem with the allegorizing approach, exemplified by interpreting the Good Samaritan as Adam, the devil, and Paul, is that it "atomizes" the parables. This means it takes the details apart piece by piece without regard for the original historical or literary context, obscuring the true meaning intended by the Gospel author.
4. The "single point" view, championed by Jülicher, argues that parables have only one main point of reference. Jesus' detailed interpretation of the Parable of the Sower, however, invalidates this, as he explains multiple signifying details that add depth and meaning beyond a singular focus.
5. The dual purpose of Jesus' parables in Matthew 13:10-16 is to reveal truths of the kingdom to his disciples, who are given understanding, and to conceal

those same truths from the enemies of the kingdom, who are left in their hardened state of unbelief.

6. Dispensationalists, such as Toussaint and Walvoord, often interpret Matthew 13's parables as primarily referring to a future millennium or teaching about a rejected and postponed kingdom. The lecturer disagrees, arguing that the kingdom is already inaugurated in Jesus' ministry and the parables describe its present progress and future glories, not a postponement.
7. The lecture explains that God's sovereignty and human responsibility go hand-in-hand, a mystery finite creatures cannot fully grasp. While God sovereignly reveals himself to whomever he wishes (Matt 13:11-15), he also appeals for people to come to him (Matt 11:28-30), and those whom God rejects are those who willfully reject him.
8. According to Jesus' interpretation of the Parable of the Sower, the three factors hindering reception of the kingdom message are: Satanic opposition (hard ground), persecution (stony ground), and greed/secular concerns (thorny ground). Each leads to the message not taking root or being choked out.
9. The "Lordship Salvation controversy" questions whether only the good ground represents genuine discipleship, or if the other soils (except perhaps the first) also indicate true conversion, even if unfruitful. Some "eternal security" adherents argue for genuine reception even when thwarted, while the lecturer maintains that Matthew consistently teaches fruit as a test of genuine discipleship.
10. Matthew consistently shows that fruit is necessary for genuine discipleship, countering views that allow for unproductive "genuine" disciples. Examples include John the Baptist's words in Matthew 3:8-10, distinguishing true from false prophets in 7:16-20, the lack of fruit among Jesus' contemporaries in 12:33, and the necessity of fruit in parables like the wicked tenant farmers (21:19, 34, 41, 43).

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the different proposed structures for the Parabolic Discourse in Matthew 13 (Davies and Allison, Wenham, and the two-section proposal).

Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each, and explain what their existence collectively suggests about Matthew's literary artistry.

2. Discuss the historical approaches to parable interpretation (allegorizing, reader response criticism, Jülicher's "single point" view) and critique their methodologies based on the lecture's principles. What are the key elements of a sound approach to interpreting Jesus' parables?
3. Explain how Matthew 13 serves as a transitional chapter in Jesus' ministry. How does it explain the increasing opposition Jesus faced, and what does it reveal about the nature and progress of the kingdom of heaven? Contrast this understanding with the dispensationalist view discussed in the lecture.
4. Drawing on Matthew 13:11-15 and 11:25-27, elaborate on the lecturer's discussion of the interplay between God's sovereignty and human responsibility in the reception of the kingdom message. How does the Bible, according to the lecturer, present these two concepts as going "hand in hand"?
5. Provide a detailed interpretation of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23) as explained in the lecture. Focus on what each type of soil represents, the obstacles to reception, and the lecturer's stance on the "Lordship Salvation controversy" in light of Matthew's teaching on fruit-bearing.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Allegorizing Approach:** A method of interpreting texts, particularly parables, where each detail or character is taken as a symbol for something else, often unrelated to the original historical or literary context. The lecture critiques this as "atomizing" the text.
- **Chiasmus (Introverted Parallelism):** A literary structure where elements are presented in a specific order (A-B-C) and then repeated in reverse order (C-B-A), often with a central theme or point at the apex. Wenham's proposed structure for Matthew 13 is an example.
- **Classical Dispensationalism:** A theological system that interprets biblical history as a series of distinct "dispensations" or eras of God's administration, often holding that the kingdom offer to Israel was rejected and postponed,

leading to a "mystery" period (the church age). The lecture disagrees with this view of Matthew 13.

- **Discourse:** A major section of teaching or speech by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. The lecture identifies three: Sermon on the Mount (Ch. 5-7), Commission of the Disciples (Ch. 10), and the Parabolic Discourse (Ch. 13).
- **Fruit-bearing:** In Matthew, this refers to evidence of genuine discipleship, particularly through actions, character, and response to God's word. The lecture emphasizes its necessity as a test of true conversion, as seen in John the Baptist's preaching and Jesus' teachings.
- **Good Samaritan (Parable of):** A parable from Luke's Gospel used in the lecture as an example of how early church fathers engaged in extensive allegorizing, often detaching the story from its original meaning.
- **Inaugurated Kingdom:** The belief, held by the lecturer, that the kingdom of heaven/God is not merely a future reality but has already begun its presence and work in the world through Jesus' ministry.
- **Lordship Salvation Controversy:** A theological debate concerning whether a genuine saving faith necessarily includes a commitment to Jesus as Lord (i.e., obedient discipleship and fruit-bearing). The lecture argues that true conversion in Matthew implies fruit, countering the "once saved, always saved" idea.
- **Matthew 13:51-52:** A passage that the lecture argues is a brief parable, using the "kingdom of heaven is like" formula, and is crucial for understanding one proposed structural outline of the entire parabolic discourse.
- **Parable of the Sower:** The first parable in Matthew 13, and the only one fully interpreted by Jesus in the passage. It describes different types of soil (representing responses to the kingdom message) and the factors that hinder or promote the "seed" (the word of the kingdom).
- **Parabolic Discourse:** The third major discourse of Jesus in Matthew (Chapter 13), characterized by the use of parables to teach about the kingdom of heaven, often with a dual purpose of revealing and concealing truth.

- **Patristic Authors:** The early church fathers, whose interpretations of scripture often involved extensive allegorizing.
- **Polyvalence (of meaning):** The characteristic of a text or story to have multiple layers or levels of meaning, particularly when used by skilled speakers. The lecture suggests parables possess this, contrary to the "single point" view.
- **Reader Response Criticism:** A modern approach to interpretation that emphasizes the subjective experience and "knee-jerk response" of the modern reader to a text, rather than its historical or literary context. The lecture views this as problematic for interpreting parables.
- **Sovereignty of God:** The theological concept that God is supreme, all-powerful, and has ultimate control over all things, including who receives revelation. The lecture discusses its interplay with human responsibility.
- **Toussaint and Walvoord:** Dispensationalist commentators whose views on Matthew 13, particularly regarding a "postponed kingdom," are critiqued by the lecturer.

4) FAQs 1. What is the overall purpose of Jesus' parables in Matthew 13, particularly given the context of increasing opposition to his ministry?

The parables in Matthew 13 serve a dual purpose in response to the growing opposition Jesus faced. Primarily, they are a means for Jesus to reveal the truths of the kingdom of heaven to his disciples, providing them with explanations they can understand. Simultaneously, these parables act as a form of concealment, shutting the door to those who were intent on using his teachings against him and fabricating slanders. This strategic use of parables helps the disciples understand the mixed responses to the kingdom message and anticipate that this will continue until the end of the age.

2. How is Matthew 13 structured, and what are some of the proposed interpretations of its organization?

Matthew 13 contains Jesus' third major discourse, following the Sermon on the Mount and the commission of the disciples. It is consistently marked by the concluding phrase "when Jesus had finished these words." One prominent structural proposal suggests two sections of four parables each, with Jesus answering disciples' questions about parables in both halves (13:10-17 and 13:36-43), and Matthew's editorial comment on prophecy fulfillment (13:34-35) situated between them. Another approach, proposed by Davies and Allison, suggests a three-part structure, each beginning with a parable, followed by its interpretation and a discussion of parables. However, this model faces challenges, particularly in its third section where the order of discussion and interpretation is reversed. Wenham (1979) offers a chiasmic (introverted parallelism) structure, placing Jesus' explanation for using parables and the interpretation of the parable of the tares at the discourse's heart, flanked by pairs of short parables, and then the disciples' questions and answers, finally bookended by the parables of the sower and the homeowner. This chiasmic structure highlights the order, symmetry, and literary beauty of the passage.

3. What are the common pitfalls to avoid when interpreting Jesus' parables, and what is the recommended approach?

Historically, there have been two main pitfalls in interpreting Jesus' parables: excessive allegorizing and overly narrow "single point" interpretations. Early church fathers often allegorized parables to an extreme degree, transforming simple narratives like the Good Samaritan into elaborate allegories about Adam, Satan, the Old Testament, and the Church, often losing touch with the original historical and literary context. More recently, "reader response criticism" similarly risks detaching the parable's meaning from its original context, focusing instead on modern subjective reactions. In reaction to allegorizing, scholars like Adolf Jülicher argued that parables have only one main point, a view that is also problematic as it contradicts Jesus' own detailed interpretations (e.g., the Parable of the Sower). The recommended approach is to understand that parables are indeed allegories, but their allegorical aspects are embedded by the author, not to be superimposed by the reader. Understanding the imagery requires knowledge of its 1st-century Palestinian historical and literary context. The preceding context often provides key insights, and concluding general comments can also apply the imagery to specific contextual matters.

4. What is the significance of the "kingdom" in Matthew 13's parables, and how does this contrast with classical dispensationalism?

The parables in Matthew 13 primarily reflect upon the varied responses to the message of the kingdom. They are not, as classical dispensationalism suggests, primarily about a future millennium or a mystery concerning a rejected and postponed kingdom. Instead, the kingdom is already inaugurated in Matthew (e.g., 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, 12:28). The parables describe the present progress of the kingdom through Jesus' ministry and that of his disciples, as well as its future glories. While the parables can have modern applications, their immediate focus is on the "hearing of the word of the kingdom" (13:19) and the ongoing ministry of the disciples (and the church) until the end of the age. This disagreement with dispensationalism centers on the nature and presence of the kingdom.

5. How does God's sovereignty relate to human responsibility in the context of Jesus' parables in Matthew 13?

Matthew 13:11-15, which cites Isaiah 6:9-10, strongly affirms God's sovereign prerogative to reveal himself to whomever He wishes. This concept is further emphasized in Matthew 11:25-27, where Jesus speaks of God hiding the kingdom message from those who willfully reject it, and Jesus shares in this divine prerogative. However, the Bible consistently presents God's sovereignty as hand-in-hand with human responsibility. Those whom God sovereignly rejects are precisely those who willfully reject Him. The doctrine of God's sovereign election, while comforting to those afflicted by sin and providing assurance for the spread of the kingdom message, does not negate the human choice to accept or reject the message. This interplay is seen, for example, in Matthew 11:28-30, where God's sovereignty is followed by Jesus' appeal for people to come to him, and in Peter's confession (16:15-17), which is both a willing act and a divine revelation.

6. What is the main point of the Parable of the Sower, and what specific details does Jesus emphasize in its interpretation?

The central point of the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9) is the reception of the kingdom message. Jesus himself is the sower, but the parable also applies directly to the disciples' ministry and the later church's proclamation of the gospel. Jesus' detailed interpretation (13:18-23) refutes the idea that a parable has only a single

point. He emphasizes several factors that hinder the reception of the message, represented by the different types of soil:

- **Hard ground beside the path:** Represents hearts hardened by sin and divine abandonment, where Satan effectively snatches away the word (13:19).
- **Rocky ground:** Represents an immediate, joyful but shallow emotional reception, lacking deep intellectual understanding, leading to turning away when persecution arises (13:20-21).
- **Thorny ground:** Represents hearts easily distracted by worldly concerns, greed, and the demands of a materialistic lifestyle, which choke the kingdom message (13:22). Preachers are warned to address these dangers of hardened hearts, superficial faith, and worldly attractions.

7. Does the Parable of the Sower suggest that all who hear the word are genuine disciples, and what is the role of "fruit-bearing"?

No, the Parable of the Sower, particularly through Jesus' interpretation, does not suggest that all who hear the word are genuine disciples. Only the "good ground" that receives the seed and *bears fruit* (some 30, some 60, some 100-fold) represents genuine conversion (13:23). This contrasts with the "lordship salvation controversy," where some Calvinists, emphasizing "eternal security," might interpret various types of soil (perhaps excluding the first) as genuine conversions despite lack of fruit. However, Matthew consistently teaches that fruit is a crucial test of genuine discipleship, as seen in John the Baptist's words (3:8-10), the distinction between true and false prophets (7:16-20), and other parables (e.g., 12:33, 21:19, 21:34, 41, 43). While fruit is necessary, it's also important to note degrees of fruit-bearing (30, 60, 100-fold), which should prevent legalism and perfectionism, acknowledging that godliness and fruit-bearing involve a growth process.

8. What is the ultimate explanation for the mixed response to Jesus' message as depicted in Matthew 13?

Matthew 13 provides an explanation for the rejection Jesus experienced in chapters 11 and 12. The message has been proclaimed to many, but relatively few have truly received it and borne fruit. This mixed response, as highlighted by the Parable of the Sower and further elaborated in the Parable of the Weeds and the Wheat, is expected to continue until the end of the age. The reasons for this varied reception

are attributed most obviously to the wickedness and unbelief of humans and the schemes of Satan. However, on a deeper theological level, this mixed response is ultimately explained by God's mysterious sovereign purpose, which reveals himself to whomever he wishes while holding humans responsible for their willful rejection.