

19 PREPARE THE ROYAL HIGHWAY

Rabbi Hillel (ca 60 B.C.-A.D. 20) was a Jew who came to Israel from Babylon. Earlier in his life, he had shown no interest in the Jewish Torah, the first five books of what we call the Old Testament. But with the passing of years this changed. He became one of the most famous of all the Jewish teachers called *rabbis*.

Hillel studied the Torah in Jerusalem under the greatest scholars of the time. He endured hardships, but continued his years of earnest study. The time came when people sought his wisdom. He founded a school to which thousands came to study.

It is reported that once a man came to Hillel who was not a believer. He asked to be taught the Torah in the time he could stand on one leg. As the story goes, this man had already asked another rabbi the same thing, but the rabbi threw him out.

Looking deep into the man's eyes, Hillel told the man to stand on one leg. Then he said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary."

3 STATEMENTS

- Jesus' message of the kingdom of God was good news to the poor and powerless.
- The parables of Jesus give us new insight into the kingdom of God.
- Jesus gathered a kingdom of men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile, sick and healthy.

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Source

SETTING THE COURSE

Read Luke 4:14-15. This is how Luke began the account of Jesus' ministry. It was a ministry directed by the Holy Spirit. But what was Jesus doing? What were Jesus' goals and purpose?

This book you are reading is part of a curriculum that was designed to lead you through the Bible. The teacher guide that accompanies this student book has course and session objectives printed to help the teacher on your journey through God's Word. By reading the course and session objectives your teacher can see the direction each session will lead. In much the same way, Luke recorded the course objectives that Jesus used in his whole ministry. They were key objectives for Jesus and for Luke. They will be key objectives for you as you study the New Testament.

Read Luke 4:16-19. Here Jesus told the people of his hometown his "kingdom objectives." Jesus was reading from Isaiah 61:1-2. On the lines below, list the five kingdom objectives.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Discuss together what you think each of these kingdom objectives means. For instance, does the phrase "recovery of sight to the blind" mean

more than healing people whose eyes cannot see?

Jesus' message of the kingdom of God was good news to the poor and powerless. Jesus' reading of the prophet Isaiah's words came as surprising news to the people of Nazareth. But are these words news to you? There are at least three places in Luke's gospel where you have heard similar words. Look up the following passages and write a short description of the event.

- Luke 1:46-55 _____
- Luke 1:78-79 _____
- Luke 2:10-14 _____

Discuss together how these passages really say the same thing. According to all these passages, who are to be the receivers of this good news of the kingdom of God?

TROUBLE AT HOME

You would think that this would be good news to all the people. At first, all who heard it were amazed at what Jesus said. But then things turned sour.

Read Luke 4:23-30. Check (✓) the sentence that best describes what you think the people were saying to each other.

- _____ He is just a hometown man. We know his parents. Who does he think he is?
- _____ He is calling himself a prophet! No one should call himself that without a call from God!
- _____ Hey! He is saying that God is not on our side!
- _____ If we follow his words, that means that God is not for those of us who are rich and powerful. We can't let that sort of talk get out of hand.



Jesus' message of the kingdom of God was good news to the poor and powerless.

KINGDOM PARABLES

Jesus did more than read Bible verses to the people. He spoke to them in ways that the most ordinary person could understand. He told stories that we call *parables*.

You may know one or two parables, such as the stories of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, and the laborers in the vineyard. In the margin of this page, list any others that you know. Select one and tell it to a partner. You also may want to share what the parable means to you.

The parables of Jesus give us new insight into the kingdom of God. There is an interesting collection of parables in Mark 4 that illustrate the kingdom of God. You will look at just three of them: the parable of the sower, the parable of the seed growing secretly, and the parable of the mustard seed.

Read aloud the parable of the sower in Mark 4:3-9. This parable really comes to life if you act it out as a skit. Have someone be the sower, others the seeds, others the birds, sun, and thorns.

After you have acted out the parable, discuss the following questions.

- What do you think about the sower? Was the sower smart or foolish?
- How are the seeds like Jesus' teaching?
- Who or what is the main focus of the parable—the sower, the seeds, the birds, the rocks and thorns, or the soil?
- What do you think this parable has to do with the kingdom of God?

Now read another seed parable, the parable of the seed growing secretly (Mark 4:26-29).

Those who work with plants experience a sense of wonder about them. A tiny seed appears to have no life in it at all. But once it is buried in the soil and watered a marvelous process begins. Locked in that seed is the blueprint for a plant. Somehow, the root knows which way is down, and the shoot knows which way is up. The leaves appear at the proper time, and all the while the plant carries on the process of growth.

Imagine how ridiculous it would be for a farmer to stand in the field reading growing instructions to the plants. The plants already know. And when the harvest time has come, the farmer harvests the field before any of the grain can be lost.

1. What do you think this parable says about the kingdom of God in the world?

Read the parable of the mustard seed in Mark 4:30-32. In this parable Jesus points out the great contrast between the mustard seed and the plant that grows from it.

2. In what ways are this parable and the parable in Mark 4:26-29 alike?

3. In what ways are they different?

Read Mark 4:33-34. This is Mark's conclusion of the collection of kingdom parables. It is clear that making sense of the parables was not always easy for the listeners. To help them, Jesus explained all the parables to his disciples.

Our picture of the kingdom that has emerged so far concerns people more than a place. The kingdom of God is the people whom God has come to save.

Jesus' parables show us that God will rule in a new way in the hearts and lives of those who love him. This kingdom began in the world with a handful of people, like a seed, but it will grow by the power of God.

When will the kingdom come? Today, Bible scholars explain Jesus' teaching about the kingdom as "already and not yet." The first Christians expected the judgment to come very soon. They expected the world to end in their lifetime.

The parables of Jesus give us new insight into the kingdom of God.



Richard West

GATHERING THE KINGDOM

In writing his gospel, Mark used a series of boat trips on the Sea of Galilee to show the way in which Jesus made the kingdom become a reality.

Mark had one thing in mind as he recorded this journey of Jesus. *Jesus gathered a kingdom of men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile, sick and healthy.* Complete the following chart to see Jesus' kingdom-preaching become a reality among the people. Some answers are completed for you. All references are from Mark.

Reference	Location	Subject	What Happened
4:35-41			
5:1-20	east	demoniac man	Jesus cast out demons
5:21-24, 35-43			
5:25-34	west	woman with flow of blood	heals woman
6:7-13			
6:30-44	west	the people	5000 fed
6:53-56			
7:24-30	east	woman's daughter	heals daughter
7:31-37	east	deaf man	healing
8:1-10			
8:14-21	middle of lake	disciples	taught disciples
8:22-26			

Shaping life

WHO IS INCLUDED?

Jesus did more than preach about the coming kingdom of God, although his preaching from Scripture was a very important part of his ministry. Jesus made the kingdom happen for the people around him. He made God's promises come alive. Sick people were healed, a dead girl was made alive again, people who were deaf were made to hear, and hungry people were fed. The good news of Jesus was not just for some future life. Jesus brought the rule of God to God's people. Jesus was God for the sake of all people.

1. Who are the people you know for whom these kingdom objectives would be good news?

2. In an age such as ours, why is Jesus' preaching and teaching and living so important to you?

A GENEROUS AND GRACIOUS GOD

The parable of the sower has been the subject of much study and reflection throughout the centuries. People have been trying to figure out what Jesus meant by it. Jesus discussed this parable with his disciples in Mark 4:10-20. Jesus carefully laid out for them what each detail of the parable meant.

People easily see that Jesus' comparison of the soils with different kinds of hearers was very important. But sometimes that comparison misses another very important point. Instead of focusing on the soil and what happens to the seed of God's Word in each type of soil, what if the *sower* is seen as the center of the parable? Discuss the following questions.

- If we compare the sower with God, what does the parable say to you about God?
- What does this parable say to you about God's generosity?
- How is God's generosity good news to you?

Jesus gathered a kingdom of men and women, young and old, Jew and Gentile, sick and healthy.

FURTHER

opportunities

Mishnah Minutes

Sometimes the gospel writers grouped parables of Jesus together to help people remember them. In Luke 15:3-32 you will find one such grouping. Three parables are about things that are lost: a sheep, a coin, and a son. Read one or more of these parables. Learn its content well enough to write it in your own words.

Activity 1

Citizens of a kingdom are protected by their king. They also respect and obey the wishes of the king. Write a few paragraphs about

how God has protected you, and about what you think God wishes for the world. Share your ideas with a friend or parent.

Activity 2

Make up a parable of your own to teach something about how a citizen of the kingdom should live. You could begin this way: "Once there was a youth who went on a journey through a strange land. . . ."

Activity 3

With one or two others act out one of your favorite parables for a class of younger Sunday school children. Then talk with them about how that parable shows Jesus' concern for them.

FOCUS

ON THE PARABLES

Parables are short stories or word pictures in which one thing is understood in comparison to another. This definition is very clear when Jesus said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?" (Mark 4:30).

A parable is a short, true-to-life story that has one meaning. This means that you cannot "dig" too deeply into the parable without destroying its meaning. Every detail does not have to stand for something else as in the literary form of allegory.

Jesus used parables for three purposes: 1) They gave a clear and easily remembered picture of his teaching; 2) Parables led those who heard them to reflect on Jesus' words and to bear responsibility for their decision to follow or oppose Jesus; and 3) Parables were sometimes used as debating points between Jesus and his opponents. In other words, sometimes Jesus used parables against his enemies.

The parables of Jesus recorded in the gospels function for many people as the gospel in miniature. Through their situations and characters, we see God active in our lives.