

# Weeds Among the Wheat

Devotional Reading: [2 Corinthians 13:1–10](#)

Background Scripture: [Matthew 13:24–43](#)

## **Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43**

<sup>24</sup> Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

<sup>27</sup> “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

<sup>28</sup> “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

<sup>29</sup> “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

<sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the peo-

ple of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

<sup>40</sup> “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. <sup>42</sup> They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

## Key Text

*“Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.”*

—**Matthew 13:30**

# The Righteous Reign of God

## Unit 2: Jesus Envisions the Kingdom

### Lessons 6–9

## Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the parable of the weeds.

2. Compare and contrast the parable of the weeds with the parable of the sower (lesson 7).
3. Explain one personal challenge of being a stalk of wheat living among weeds.

## Lesson Outline

### Introduction

- A. How Long?
- B. Lesson Context
- I. **Weeds with the Wheat (Matthew 13:24–30)**
  - A. Two Sowers (vv. 24–25)
  - B. Two Crops (vv. 26–27)
  - C. Two Harvests (vv. 28–30)
- II. **Wicked with the Righteous (Matthew 13:36–43)**
  - A. Private Audience (v. 36)
  - B. Cast of Characters (vv. 37–39)  
*You're Different*
  - C. Final Sorting (vv. 40–43)  
*The Forgetful Gardener*

### Conclusion

- A. The Wicked Among the Holy
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## How to Say It

Capernaum Kuh-*per*-nay-um.

Lolium temulentum Low-*lie*-um tem-you-*len*-tum.

Thessalonians *Thess*-uh-lo-nee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

## Introduction

### A. How Long?

It seems that daily I am reminded of the wickedness in the world. I'm sure you are reminded of the same when you turn on the television or check your social media feed. I hear stories of terrorists who use violence to bring horror and suffering to others, human traffickers who prey on the most vulnerable members of society, powerful people who dishonestly accumulate massive wealth, and companies who ravage God's creation in order to increase production.

Does the Bible have a word of warning for the wickedness in the world? Or, instead, can we only resort to the lament, like that of the prophet Habakkuk, "How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you do not save?" ([Habakkuk 1:2](#)).

### B. Lesson Context

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" occurs 32 times in the Gospel of Matthew. This is equivalent to the phrase "kingdom of God" as used dozens of times in the Gospels of Mark, Luke, and John but rarely in Matthew (see [Matthew 12:28](#); [19:24](#); [21:31](#), [43](#)). The kingdom of Heaven/kingdom of God is not defined by territory or government apparatus. It does not levy taxes or conscript people for military service. This kingdom is where God reigns as king; it is the dominion of his authority.



There is no limit to this potential, for, as the psalmist taught, “The LORD Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth” (Psalm 47:2; compare 83:18; 97:9). The psalmist affirms the nature of God with the repeated acknowledgment that “the LORD reigns” (93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1).

Both John the Baptist and Jesus called people to repentance and preparation for the coming of this kingdom; they warned that it was “near” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). Later, Jesus stated that his ministry of casting out demons signaled that the kingdom had come into the midst of humanity (12:28; see lesson 6). The arrival of the kingdom was something for which Jesus and his disciples had prayed (6:10).

Jesus’ disciples often heard him speak about the kingdom of Heaven/kingdom of God, and they were astonished and confused by his descriptions of its nature (example: Matthew 19:23–25). Much of their reaction can be traced to the fact that Jesus’ kingdom parables were metaphorical (figurative) in nature regarding aspects of the kingdom (see Lesson Context, lesson 7). Characteristically, these kingdom parables begin, “The kingdom of heaven is like ...”; the majority of those are found in Matthew 13. Today’s lesson text of the parable of the weeds among the wheat is the first time Jesus uses this introductory phrase in the Gospel of Matthew.

## I. Weeds with the Wheat

(Matthew 13:24–30)

### A. Two Sowers (vv. 24–25)

**24. Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.**

This *parable* involves sowing *seed*, as did the first parable in this chapter of [Matthew 13](#) (see [lesson 7](#)). The practice of sowing seed in a preindustrial era involved spreading it by hand. Wheat and barley were the staple grains planted in this way.

**25. “But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.**

An *enemy* of the farmer now appears in the story. The *weeds* that the enemy *sowed* translates a Greek word that refers to a plant known as darnel (technical name: *Lolium temulentum*). It looks very much like wheat until it matures. These are not weeds that merely threaten the growth of the crop; rather, these are weeds easily confused with the crop itself. Ingesting darnel can cause nausea, leading some to call it “poison wheat.”

*Wheat* was a vitally important field crop in the ancient world, being the primary ingredient of bread—the dietary staple (see [Deuteronomy 32:13–14](#); [Psalm 147:12–14](#)). Further, it was also used in trade ([Ezekiel 27:17](#)) or for payment ([Luke 16:1–7](#); [Revelation 6:6](#)). Wheat’s importance is signaled by images of heads of wheat on ancient coins. The Bible refers to wheat dozens of times, the earliest being in the time of the patriarch Jacob ([Genesis 30:14](#)), many centuries before Jesus. Representations of ancient wheat fields in Egypt depict a taller plant than we experience today, reaching shoulder height at maturity. Galilean farmers grew wheat not only to meet their own households’ needs but also as a cash crop to sell. That seems to be the case here, for the farming operation is more than a single family; the *everyone* who slept worked for the landowner.

Visual for [Lesson 8](#). *Point to this visual as you discuss the Lesson Context and the other parables from [Matthew 13](#).*

There is nothing negligent implied about the people being asleep. Jesus' point is that the second sower comes at night so that he can work in darkness and secret as criminals tend to do (compare [1 Thessalonians 5:2](#)). The introduction of this enemy's "bad seed" would have been undetectable at this point in the planting and harvest cycle.

## **B. Two Crops (vv. [26–27](#))**

**[26–27](#). “When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the**

weeds also appeared. The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

At first, the two kinds of plants seem identical. But their differences become more apparent with time. Eventually the *servants* discern that their *field* is infested with *weeds*. Unlike in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23; see lesson 7), all the soil in this parable is fertile; it has readily received both *good seed* and bad. Not until the grain *heads* appear do the servants recognize the weeds among the *wheat*. Some weeds might be expected, of course, so the servants’ alarm indicates the presence of a large number of unwanted plants. As Jesus tells the story, the servants do not inform the landowner about the weeds in so many words. Rather, they ask how the situation has arisen.

### C. Two Harvests (vv. 28–30)

**28.** “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

The landowner knows what has happened. The servants’ response is in line with conventional wisdom: there’s no room for nonchalance where weeds are concerned. Every hour they live means that they are drawing water and nutrients away from the good plants, in addition to blocking sunlight. Surely the master will agree that the weeds must be dealt with immediately!

**29–30a.** “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.

The wise landowner rejects the servants’ suggestion. He knows that the roots of the plants are now entangled. Therefore *pulling the weeds*

risks inadvertently pulling out a substantial number of *wheat* stalks at the same time—weeding is bound to cause collateral damage. It is best to wait.

**30b.** “‘At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

The landowner does have a plan, though. *The harvesters*, who will conduct the harvest, are to follow the distinctive instructions we see here. The instructions are stated not only in terms of the final dispositions of *the weeds* and *the wheat*, but also of a certain sequence as evidenced by the word *first*.

Some students connect this verse with Jesus’ other teachings on the return of the Son of Man (compare [Matthew 13:37](#), below), the second coming of Christ to earth. Reading this parable in light of those teachings implies that the one who is “taken” in [Matthew 24:40–41](#) and [Luke 17:34–35](#) is a member of the weeds and the one who is “left” in those passages is part of the wheat.

Many in Jesus’ audience undoubtedly found this to be surprising. They expected that when God’s king brings God’s kingdom into the world, both evil and evildoers would be judged and eliminated immediately. But Jesus sketches a very different picture: the breaking in of God’s kingdom and the final judgment on evil are separated by a period of time. During that interval, the people of the kingdom live alongside evildoers. A separation will indeed come, but only at the harvest.

### What Do You Think?

How does this parable change your thinking and presuppositions regarding the nature of God’s kingdom?

## Digging Deeper

How does this parable illustrate that God's kingdom has *already* arrived, but that it has *not yet fully* come?

## II. Wicked with the Righteous (Matthew 13:36–43)

### A. Private Audience (v. 36)

**36.** Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

Having already been given a private interpretation of the meaning of the sower parable (Matthew 13:18–23), the *disciples* realized that there was a deeper meaning to *the parable of the weeds in the field*. With Jesus having *left the crowd*, they are back in *the house*, perhaps in Capernaum (see 13:1–2, lesson 7).

### B. Cast of Characters (vv. 37–39)

**37.** He answered, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man.

Jesus' interpretation reveals that the parable is an intended allegory, a story in which each character or action may have a second identification that is divorced from the setting that appears at first glance. An allegory uses a carefully constructed story as a way to present another matter, and that other matter is the primary focus of the teaching (compare Ezekiel 17:2). The point of this parable is not about farming. It is about

preaching the gospel and its reception.

Jesus began his explanation by saying that the sower is *the Son of Man*—a self-identification that occurs dozens of times in the four Gospels. But in contrast to the parable of the sower, *the good seed* is not exactly the Word of God. (See the next verse.)

**38. “The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one,**

*The field* upon which both good and bad seed falls is not a local plot of land, but rather is global in scope (compare [John 3:16](#)). This has inspired and motivated countless evangelists and missionaries in the history of the church. The idea that the field *is the world* means there are no limits on the need for evangelistic endeavors. Even the most closed countries, those with laws that make Christian evangelism illegal, are still the “field” where the word must be preached.

As the allegory proceeds, we learn that *the good seed* is not exactly the Word of God as “the seed” is in [Matthew 13:23](#). Rather, the good seed *stands for the people of the kingdom*. These believers are sown throughout the world in order that a harvest might result. But the Word of God is definitely involved since it is through the proclamation of the Word that people become the children of the kingdom.

The contrast between the two categories of children mentioned here is examined further in [1 John 3:10](#). The methods and motives of *the evil one*, whose identity is revealed next, are discussed in greater detail in [John 8:44](#).

### What Do You Think?

How will you support evangelists and missionaries in sowing the gospel message throughout the “field” of the world?



## Digging Deeper

What specialized training do you need in order to support this work or take part in the work yourself?

## You're Different

I was just a rural farm boy from a small town when I enrolled as an undergraduate student at a major university. The multicultural environment of the university was exciting, but also intimidating. Students, faculty, and staff came from all walks of life and followed every philosophy and religious faith (and non-faith) imaginable.

To help pay my bills during that time, I took a job in the library, working for a supervisor who lived a worldly lifestyle and embraced a variety of New Age beliefs. At first I was too intimidated to discuss my faith with coworkers, except for an elderly lady named Marlene. My supervisor, Karley, once said to me in Marlene's earshot, "There's something different about you. I can't quite place my finger on it, but you're different." Marlene quickly retorted, "He's got purity, Karley, and you wouldn't know anything about that!"

Being a stalk of "wheat" in what seems to be a field of "weeds" can be lonely and even intimidating, as we imagine how others might criticize us. However, we are called to be faithful witnesses to God's kingdom, to whomever God puts in our path. We have been given the opportunity to work with fellow "stalks of wheat" to witness to "weeds" that they might become "wheat" (see [2 Peter 3:9](#)). How can you better take advantage of those opportunities?

—A. W.



**39.** “and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

Three more identifications are now stated. *The devil* is the great adversary of God and humanity (2 Corinthians 4:4; 11:14; Ephesians 6:11; 1 Peter 5:8). *The harvest as the end of the age* is also described as such in Revelation 14:15; that passage, as here, affirms *the harvesters* to be *angels*.

### C. Final Sorting (vv. 40–43)

**40.** “As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

This verse summarizes what the next two state in more detail. The verbal image of sheaves of *weeds* being *pulled up and burned* corresponds to the judgment of “the people of the evil one” (Matthew 13:38, above). The angels will deliver them to eternal punishment (Revelation 14:16–20). This final judgment is more than an event scheduled for the end of a *period* of time. It is *the end of time*!

**41–42.** “The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In contrast to the concept of a rapture of believers before the end of the world, Jesus presents his angels’ first move as roaming the entire earth and removing *everything that causes sin* as well as *all who do evil*. The physical tools of sin (such things as pornography, weapons of cruelty, and artistic representations that defy and mock God) will be no more. Likewise, the evildoers will be gathered by the *angels*. And *the Son of Man* (Jesus) will be in charge of this time of reaping and judgment (Revelation 14:14–20; etc.).

This answers the age-old question: Why do the righteous seem to suffer and the wicked prosper? (see [Jeremiah 12:1](#); [Ecclesiastes 7:15](#)). The answer: the wicked will not prosper forever. The way of the wicked will come to a dramatic end at the final judgment. They will join the devil and his angels in the eternal fire prepared for them ([Matthew 25:41](#)), the second death of the lake of fire ([Revelation 20:10–15](#)).

No one would desire this eternity, for it will be a place of *weeping* in pain and despair. Jesus dramatized this as a time of *gnashing of teeth*, a tight grimace of the mouth as a way to endure agony (compare [Matthew 8:12](#)). But there will be no relief. Satan, his demonic angels, and his earthly followers will experience eternal banishment from the presence of God at the final judgment.

### What Do You Think?

How would you respond to someone who said that this parable describes a capricious and spiteful God?

### Digging Deeper

How can you dig deeper into the nature of God, nature of man, and the nature of sin—with Scriptures like [Isaiah 55:6–7](#)?

**43a. “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.**

The future for the wheat—the children of the kingdom—stands as completely different. They will not suffer eternal, punishing fire, but will have an inner glory, an eternal fire that allows them to *shine like the sun* (compare [Daniel 12:3](#)). They will be rewarded with a place in the final fellowship of the saved, *the kingdom of their Father*. This will be the eternal community in which there is no mixing of wheat and weeds, righteous and wicked. Only the *righteous* will find this resting place.

# The Forgetful Gardener

Nebraska is an overlooked gem in the United States. The wind sweeps over the prairies and makes the grass ripple like waves. Enormous thunderstorms roll up in the spring, looking for all the world like dark tidal waves coming over the horizon. The coyotes yip and howl at night like rowdy teenagers. And in the late summer, wild sunflowers spring up along the highways and fencerows.

Being a transplant from the East Coast, I find the landscape fascinating. I once stopped by a highway and pulled up a small sunflower by the roots to transplant in my backyard — where it promptly died. I soon wrote it off as a failed experiment and forgot about it.

Fast-forward to a year later. Lo and behold, an unfamiliar plant started growing in my flower bed! I almost pulled it out, but something told me to wait and see what it was. I let it grow all summer. When it finally bloomed, the secret was revealed: yes, it was that sunflower (or seed from it) making a reappearance.

Perhaps you've had the same experience in your garden; but more importantly, perhaps you've had that experience in God's harvest field as well. You may have planted a seed in someone's life and didn't think much about what you said or the kind deed you did. But those words and actions can make a bigger impression than we might imagine. Maybe in this life, maybe in the next, don't be surprised if someone comes up to you and says, "Hey, thank you for the seed you planted in my life. Look at the beautiful harvest that came from it!"

—A. W.

## **43b. "Whoever has ears, let them hear."**

Jesus ends with a admonition that occurs dozens of times in Psalms,

the Prophets, and the New Testament. Jesus is not referring to physical ears on the sides of one's head, but to hearts attuned for hearing, believing, and obeying spiritual truth. The ones who *hear* in this manner will be like the wise man who chose a foundation of rock for his new house ([Matthew 7:24–25](#)).

### **What Do You Think?**

How can believers prioritize the health of their “spiritual ears”?

### **Digging Deeper**

How can believers transition from hearing Scripture to obeying Scripture (see [James 1:19–27](#))?

## **Conclusion**

### **A. The Wicked Among the Holy**

The parable of the weeds among the wheat explains one of the greatest mysteries of the kingdom: why God allows the wicked to prosper alongside his holy people. The parable teaches us that God is aware of wickedness but he chooses to leave such wickedness unjudged for the time being. God is neither oblivious to wickedness nor does his allowing the wicked to continue indicate his tacit approval.

To followers of God who are mixed among those who reject God, the point of the parable of the weeds among the wheat must not be lost: the presence of the wicked among us is temporary. We, like the prophet Habakkuk, wonder at the silence of the Lord when “the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?” ([Habakkuk 1:13](#)).

Even so, Jesus taught in this parable that God is not oblivious to these injustices. But we should not be in more of a hurry for the wicked to be

punished than he is (2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 6:10). We should remember that if God took immediate vengeance on a person with every sin committed, we, the children of the kingdom, would be punished on a daily basis. God’s timing is just that: a plan that he determines and controls in ways beyond our understanding. The “harvest” of the wicked and the righteous will come in God’s good time.

We must hope and pray for final, ultimate justice. We must be diligent that we and all whom we love are harvested as wheat, not weeds.

### **What Do You Think?**

How would you retell this parable for a modern audience? What would you need to adjust for your specific audience?

### **Digging Deeper**

What advantages are there in communicating eternal spiritual truths through stories and analogies?

## **B. Prayer**

Lord of the harvest, may we be workers in the field of your world. May we be ones who are unwilling to give up on those who seem wicked. May we not despair when evil seems to win the day. We believe the promise that your time of final judgment will allow the righteous to shine as the sun. We look forward to that day with faith and anticipation. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## **C. Thought to Remember**

You’re either wheat or weed.

There is no in-between!

# Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

## Into the Lesson

Write the words *Treat* and *Trash* on the board as headers to two columns. Distribute a list (you prepare) of random jelly bean flavors. (For ideas, search the internet for “best and worst flavors of jelly beans.”) Include some flavors that many people would find delicious (example: grape) and flavors that many people would find disgusting (example: sardine).

Ask for volunteers to read aloud the jelly bean flavors. As they do so, have the class vote by raising hands to indicate whether each flavor should go under the *Treat* column or the *Trash* column.

*Option.* Show pictures of different flavored jelly beans. Have learners indicate which column each flavor would go under.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Survival Recipes” activity from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

After either activity, lead into Bible study by saying, “It can be hard for us to judge what things are good and what things are bad, just from outward appearances. Discerning another person’s character and their heart is even more difficult. Let’s see what Jesus had to say about his timing regarding judgment on the hearts of people.”

## Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to recap the parable of the sower ([Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23](#); see [lesson 7](#)). Ask the volunteer to recall the four types of soil as described in that parable. Ask a different volunteer to read aloud [Matthew 13:24–30](#). Then ask the whole class to compare and contrast the thorns in [lesson 7](#) with the “weeds” from this week’s lesson.

Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—Was the landowner’s decision to wait a good strategy? Why or why not? 2—What other alternatives might the landowner have had? 3—What might have been the results of those alternatives?

Ask another volunteer to read aloud [Matthew 13:36–43](#). Ask the following questions for whole-class discussion: 1—Why does God wait some time before separating the “people of the kingdom” from the “people of the evil one” ([Matthew 13:38](#))? 2—Does the interpretation of the parable describe a literal reality? Why or why not? 3—How does having “weeds” among the “wheat” help the “wheat” live out their faith? 4—What is required of the “wheat” as they live among the “weeds”?

## Into Life

Ask for volunteers to name perceived challenges that believers may face as they live among unbelievers in the world. Write the responses on the board.

Divide students into small groups and have groups discuss actual situations that would involve the listed challenges. Invite groups to discuss handling these situations in a way that helps them remain fruitful “people of the kingdom” while also being a witness of Christ Jesus to those who may be “people of the evil one.”



Distribute an index card to each learner. In light of this week's Bible study and small-group conversation, have each learner explain one challenge of being a stalk of wheat living among the weeds.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the "Whole Wheat Living" activity from the activity page. Have participants work in small groups to complete as indicated. If time allows, ask for representatives from each group to state their group's responses to the questions.

Close class with a prayer asking God to help the class both to grow and be fruitful as wheat in God's field.