

Luke 8:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.

Analysis

A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side—The parable opens with *exēlthen ho speirōn tou speirai ton sporon autou* (ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπείρων τοῦ σπεῖραι τὸν σπόρον αὐτοῦ), literally "the sower went out to sow his seed." The redundancy emphasizes purposeful action—sowing is the sower's defining activity. The aorist tense *exēlthen* (went out) indicates a specific historical moment, while the present infinitive *speirai* (to sow) describes ongoing action. The phrase *para tēn hodon* (παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν, "beside the way") refers to the hardened footpath bordering fields.

And it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it—The verb *katepatēthē* (κατεπατήθη, "was trampled") in the aorist passive indicates the seed was trampled by passersby on the hard path. Then *ta peteina tou ouranou katephagen auto* (τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κατέφαγεν αὐτό, "the birds of heaven devoured it"). Jesus later explains (v. 12) that birds represent the devil stealing the word from hearts. The path-soil represents hardened hearts where truth cannot penetrate—the word remains on the surface, vulnerable to immediate removal by satanic activity before any root can form.

Historical Context

Palestinian farming involved broadcasting seed by hand across fields with varying soil conditions. Farmers walked paths through and around fields, creating hard-

packed earth where seed couldn't penetrate. Birds following sowers to eat exposed seed was common observation. Ancient farming lacked modern precision—seed inevitably fell on unproductive ground. The parable's realism made it accessible while conveying profound spiritual truth. In Jesus' interpretation (vv. 11-15), the four soils represent four responses to gospel preaching. The wayside/path represents those who hear but never understand or believe—Satan immediately removes the word (v. 12). First-century audiences understood that hard paths resulted from repeated trampling, just as hardened hearts develop through repeated rejection of truth. The image of birds devouring seed before germination perfectly pictures spiritual receptivity cut off before it begins.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What causes hearts to become hardened like trampled pathways, and how can we guard against developing impenetrable spiritual soil?
2. How does Satan's immediate activity to steal the word (represented by birds) emphasize the spiritual urgency of responding to the gospel when first heard?
3. In what ways does the broadcast sowing method—casting seed on all soil types—challenge modern pragmatic approaches that focus only on 'receptive' audiences?

Interlinear Text

Ἐξῆλθεν	ὁ	σπείρειν	τοῦ	σπείρειν	τὸν	σπόρον	αὐτό		
went out	G3588	A sower	G3588	A sower	G3588	seed	he		
G1831		G4687		G4687		G4703	G846		
καὶ	ἐν	τῷ	σπείρειν	αὐτό	ὃ	μὲν	ἔπεσεν	παρὰ	τὴν
and	as	G3588	A sower	he	some	G3303	fell	by	G3588
G2532	G1722		G4687	G846	G3739		G4098	G3844	
ὁδόν	καὶ	κατεπατήθη	καὶ	τὰ	πετεινὰ	τοῦ			
the way side	and	it was trodden down	and	G3588	the fowls	G3588			
G3598	G2532	G2662	G2532		G4071				
οὐρανοῦ	κατέφαγεν	αὐτό							
of the air	devoured	he							
G3772	G2719	G846							

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 2:1 (Parallel theme): Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

Mark 4:15 (Parallel theme): And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.

Genesis 15:11 (Parallel theme): And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.