

What Does the Bible Say About Sowing and Reaping

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04 Galatians Lesson: Chapter 6, Question 6

Most of the Bible was originally written to those living in an agrarian society, people familiar with working the land, managing livestock, and raising crops. Many of Jesus' parables involve the farming life. Not surprisingly, then, the Bible contains many references to sowing and reaping, and here are some of the principles we learn:

Sowing and reaping is a law of the natural world. On the third day of creation, God commanded the earth to bring forth living plants "bearing seed" and fruit "with seed in it" (Genesis 1:12). These plants were then given to man for food (verse 29). Ever since the beginning, man has understood the process of sowing and reaping and has applied it to his benefit.

God uses the law of sowing and reaping to bestow His blessing. God's blessing comes generally to the whole world as He sends sun and rain to the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). In some cases His blessing comes more specially to those of His choosing, such as Isaac. Genesis 26:12 says that Isaac sowed a crop and received a hundredfold in one season because the Lord targeted him for blessing.

Israel's gratefulness for God's yearly blessing was expressed in the Feast of Firstfruits, when the first of the harvest was brought to the Lord as an offering (Exodus 23:19a; Leviticus 23:10).

God warned Israel that, if they forsook Him and pursued idols, the law of sowing and reaping would be suspended and their crops would fail (Leviticus 26:16b). This happened to disobedient Judah on a couple occasions (Jeremiah 12:13; Micah 6:15).

Sowing and reaping is also a law of the spiritual world. It is more than just an agricultural principle. It is an axiom of life that we reap what we sow. Galatians 6:7 says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows." There are natural consequences to our actions. The world operates under the law of cause and effect. There is no way around it: every time we choose an action, we also choose the consequences of that action.

Sowing and reaping implies a wait. Nothing good grows overnight. The farmer must be patient in order to see the fruit of his labors. When the Bible likens the ministry to planting, watering and reaping (1 Corinthians 3:6), it suggests a length of time. God will bring forth fruit to His glory in His time. Until then, we faithfully labor in His field

(Matthew 9:38), knowing that “at the proper time we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9; see also Psalm 126:5).

We reap in kind to what we sow. Those who plant apple seeds should expect to harvest apples. Those who sow anger should expect to receive what anger naturally produces. Galatians 6:8 says, “Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” Living a life of carnality and sin and expecting to inherit heaven is akin to planting cockle burrs and waiting for roses.

This principle works both positively and negatively. “The one who sows righteousness reaps a sure reward” (Proverbs 11:18b), but “whoever sows injustice reaps calamity” (Proverbs 22:8a).

We reap proportionately to what we sow. The rule is, the more seed planted, the more fruit harvested. The Bible applies this law to our giving. Those who show generosity will be blessed more than those who don't. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Corinthians 9:6). This principle is not concerned with the amount of the gift but with the spirit in which it is given. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7), and even the widow's mites are noticed by our Lord (Luke 21:2-3).

We reap more than what we sow. In other words, the law of sowing and reaping is related to the law of multiplication. Jesus spoke of seed that brought forth “a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown” (Matthew 13:8). One grain of wheat produces a whole head of grain. In the same way, one little fib can produce an out-of-control frenzy of falsehoods, fallacies, and fictions. Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). Positively, one kind deed can result in a blessing to last a lifetime.

Sowing and reaping is used as a metaphor for death and resurrection. When Paul discusses the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, he uses the analogy of planting a seed to illustrate physical death. “The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42b-44a). A seed may “die” when it falls to the ground, but that is not the end of its life (John 12:24).

Found throughout Scripture, the idea of sowing and reaping is an important principle imparting wisdom for both this world and the next.