

# Tares

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On a particular day Jesus went out and sat down by the sea. A crowd gathered about him. He began to teach them in parables. One parable was to teach patience: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. . . . Let both grow together until the harvest" (Matt. 13:24-25,30, KJV).

A reference to tares appears in the Bible only in Matthew 13. What is this plant? The Greek word for tares (*zezanea*) means darnel or false (cheat) grain. Darnel is a member of the ryegrass family. Some four varieties are found in Israel: *lolium perenne* (ryegrass), *lolium multiflorum* (gaud), *lolium rigidum* (gaud), and the *lolium temulentum* (bearded darnel; the variety pictured in Matthew). The bearded darnel is also very common in Syria, Lebanon, and other countries that border on the Mediterranean.

The perennial ryegrass (common darnel) has been used to establish new lawns and to prevent erosion on exposed barren slopes. However, the bearded darnel (that grows wild like a weed in grainfields) is frequently infested with poisonous fungi besides the poisonous narcotic in its seeds. If eaten, this poison could cause dizziness, vomiting, or sometimes even death. During the Roman period, to plant tares in someone's field for revenge was a crime.

Prior to harvest time it is nearly impossible to distinguish between the darnel and the wheat, so both are left in the field until the harvest. Then the ear of the darnel branches out with grain on each twig; the wheat has long, slender leaves with a hollow stem (usually) and heads composed of numerous flowers (sometimes as many as one hundred). The farmer hired women and children to pick out the darnel.

Separation of the wheat and the darnel required much skill and patience. Jesus' parable teaches that God will separate the wheat and the tares ultimately. He knows his own. ○

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