

Bible College of Malaysia
Parables of Jesus
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION TO PARABLES	1-18
A. Definitions	1-2
B. Parables as Analogies	3-5
C. The OT Background	5-7
D. Rabbinic Parables	8-16
E. Purpose of NT Parables	17-18
F. Summary	18
II. EXEGESIS OF PARABLES	19-50
A. List and Categorization	19-21
B. Parables of Lost & Found	21-24
C. Parables of Forgiveness	24-26
D. Parables of Stewardship	26-29
E. Parables of Invitation & Rejection	29-31
F. Parables of the Second Coming	31-35
G. Parables of the Kingdom	35-42
H. Illustrative Parables	42-46
I. Acted Parables	46-50
APPENDIX	51-54
Article “Rabbinic Parables” in <i>IVP of NT Background</i>	
	54-56
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

COURSE NOTES PARABLES OF JESUS

I. INTRODUCTION TO PARABLES

A. DEFINITIONS: What is a parable?

1. The English word "parable"

a. From Webster's 3rd Intl. Dictionary

(1) comparison, similitude

(2) more specifically, a usually short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle

b. Used to translate Biblical words:

(1) regularly παραβολη *parabole* in Greek NT

(2) occasionally מָשָׁל *mashal* in Hebrew OT

2. The Greek Word Παραβολη *Parabole*

a. Etymology:

from preposition παρα *para* - *alongside*

and verb βαλλω *ballo* - *cast, put*

verb παραβαλλω *paraballo* means "cross over" in Acts 20:15, "compare" in Mark 4:30
(TR)

b. From Lexicon (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, 612-13)

most generally, *comparison*

(1) type, figure, symbol (Heb 9:9, 11:19)

(2) in teaching of Jesus: parable, illustration

c. Not defined in NT itself

apparently a form familiar to the people

don't misunderstand Matt 13; not that parables unheard of, but that people surprised when Jesus begins to concentrate on this form of speaking, 13:34

d. Matt 13:35 connects Jesus' parables with OT prophecy (Ps 78:2) where LXX has

Παραβολη *parabole* for מָשָׁל *mashal*

e. When Septuagint translated, Παραβολη *parabole* usually used to translate מָשָׁל *mashal*

3. The Hebrew Word מָשָׁל *Mashal*

a. Etymology

from verb מָשַׁל *mashal* - represent, be like (Ps 28:1, 49:12; Isa 46:5)

b. From Lexicon (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 605)

- (1) proverbial saying (1 Sam 10:12; Ezk 12:22-23, 18:2)
- (2) by-word (Deut 28:37; Ps 69:11)
- (3) prophetic, figurative discourse (Num 23:7; Isa 14:4; Hab 2:6)
- (4) similitude, parable (Ezk 17:2, 24:3)
- (5) poem (Num 21:27; Ps 49:4)
- (6) sentences of ethical wisdom (Proverbs and Eccl)

[BDB's particular set of categories not entirely satisfactory; see discussion below under "OT Background"; prob some uses in OT not explicitly called *mashal*]

4. NT Usage of the Word Παραβολη *Parabole*

occurs 49x, with range of meaning much broader than the specific, narrow English meaning

- a. Proverb: only once (Lk 4:23): "Physician, heal yourself," but a common OT meaning
- b. Paradox: also only once (Mk 7:17 and Mt 15:15 parallel): Jesus' teaching on defilement; cp Ezk 18:2; Jesus does use paradoxes elsewhere (e.g., Mt 10:39; Mk 9:35)
- c. Illustration or Paradigm: only in Luke (e.g., 12:16): Rich Fool; no obvious comparison involved
- d. Similitude: frequent (e.g., Mk 4:30): Mustard Seed; general (everyday) occurrence from which lesson drawn by comparison
- e. Story Parable: frequent (e.g., Mt 21:33): Tenant Farmers specific story from which lesson drawn by comparison
- f. Allegory: frequent (Mt 13:18): Sower; more artificial story, with various features independently figurative
- g. Acted Parable: probably a few (though term only used in Heb 9:9, 11:19) symbolic action

5. Parables as Analogies

Nearly all the occurrences of parables in the NT can be classified under the heading of "analogy."

B. PARABLES AS ANALOGIES

Making use of insights from general literature, John Sider has pointed out in his book *Interpreting the Parables* that parables (except perhaps for illustrative parables, or example stories) function by means of an analogy or comparison.

An analogy is a statement of comparison or proportionality, somewhat resembling proportions in mathematics. In mathematical proportions we say that 3 is to 4 (in the same proportion) as 6 is to 8. Alternatively, this may be stated as $3:4 = 6:8$, or $3/4 = 6/8$.

A simple verbal or literary proportion would be

house: person = garage: auto.

The point of comparison here is that the first item in each functions as the usual shelter for the second. Notice that this proportion can also be manipulated in certain ways and still be true: e.g.

person: house = auto: garage

person: auto = house: garage

but not:

person: garage = auto: house

Some Terminology:

Tenor	Sider uses the terminology "tenor" (in the context of teaching by analogy) to designate the message which the teacher is intending to convey;
Vehicle	Sider uses the term "vehicle" to designate the medium or picture by which the message/tenor is conveyed;
Point of Resemblance	Sider uses the term "point of resemblance" to indicate each aspect in which the teacher intends (or the audience suspects) that there is an analogy between the message and the picture.

Alternative Terminology for Analogies		
Tenor	Reality Part	Message
Vehicle	Picture Part	Medium
Point of Resemblance	Tertium Comparationis	Point of Analogy

Let's look at some examples:

Psalm 23: "The LORD is my shepherd"

Tenor or Message: Telling how God relates to me (David), the believer. Using the standard way of showing analogy or proportionality:

God: me

Vehicle or Medium: The picture which David chooses to express this relationship, that of a (good) shepherd to his sheep. In standard form:

shepherd: sheep

Notice that when these two pieces are put together with an equal sign to show the analogy, it is important that they be put together in the proper order: e.g., either

God: me = shepherd: sheep (1)

I: God = sheep: shepherd (2)

Orders like:

God: me = sheep: shepherd

are wrong, because we are not shepherding God, he is shepherding us!

Orders like:

God: shepherd = I: sheep

are OK as a true analogy (the same as given in (1) and (2) above), but it mixes the tenor and vehicle, and we don't want to do that in order to avoid confusion.

To continue in the psalm, David now begins to "unpack" the brief statement of analogy by

noting points of resemblance between God as our shepherd and we as his sheep:
"I shall not want"

God: me = sheep: shepherd

with the point of resemblance or analogy that I lack nothing just as the sheep of a good shepherd lack nothing. Using Sider's notation: with respect to having all needs provided.

So:

TENOR

VEHICLE

God: me = sheep: shepherd

with respect to having all needs provided

POINT OF RESEMBLANCE

Let's try some of the other verses of Psalm 23 to see how this works.

Another example: Mal 1:6:

"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?" says the LORD of Hosts to you, O priests who despise My name....

How many vehicles are given here? Do they have the same tenor? What is it?

C. THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

Having looked at usage of מָשָׁל *mashal* in OT and παραβολη *parabole* in NT, we now strike out on our own to locate the same or similar material in OT, whether or not term *mashal* used

[Some of this material based on article "Parable" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 13:72-73]

1. Proverb: skip this category because these are fairly rare in Jesus' ministry and somewhat removed from our concern in this course; they are common in OT Book of Proverbs
2. Paradox: fairly frequent in Jesus' ministry (tho only once called "parable"), but also skip as remote from our concern. These are common in Book of Proverbs
3. Illustration: not mentioned in *EJ* article and apparently not so widely recognized, tho clearly present in NT; probably finds background in illustrative examples in Wisdom

Literature (Prov 1:11-19; 7:6-23; 24:30-34; 31:10-31; Eccl 9:13-16), possibly in case-law approach of Pentateuch (specific cases to illustrate general legal principles, e.g., Ex 21-22).

4. Fable: apparently not used by Jesus, but occasionally in OT (Judg 9:8-15; 2 Kings 14:9-10) and frequently by rabbis.
5. Riddle: "kind of parable whose point is deliberately obscured so that greater perception is needed to interpret it" (see Judg 14:14,18); word for riddle $\square\square\square$ *hiydah* is closely connected with $\square\square\square$ *mashal* in Prov 1:6; Ezk 17:2; Ps 78:2; parable-riddles in Prov 30:15-16,18-31.
6. Similitude: also frequent in OT (Ps 1:3-4; Isa 1:2b-3,5-6; Jer 24:1-10; Hos 7:11-12; Joel 3:13).
7. Story Parable (* indicates interpretation given).
 - *a. Poor Man's Lamb (2 Sam 12:1-4)
 - *b. Widow's Surviving Son (2 Sam 14:5b-7)
 - *c. Escaped Prisoner (1 Kings 20:39-40)
 - *d. Disappointing Vineyard (Isa 5:1-6)
 - e. Farmer's Skill (Isa 28:24-29) [almost riddle]
8. Allegory: especially common in Ezekiel, Zechariah.
 - a. Ezekiel
 - (1) Eagles and Vine (17:3-10)
 - (2) Lament of Lioness (19:2-9)
 - (3) Transplanted Vine (19:10-14)
 - (4) Harlot Sisters (23:2-21)
 - (5) Cooking Pot (24:3-5)
 - b. Zechariah
 - (1) Horsemen (1:8-11)
 - (2) Horns and Craftsmen (1:18-21)
 - (3) Man with Measuring Line (2:1-5)
 - (4) Joshua and Satan (3:1-5)
 - (5) Branch (3:8-10)
 - (6) Lampstand and Olive Trees (4:1-14)
 - (7) Flying Scroll (5:1-4)
 - (8) Ephah and Woman (5:5-11)
 - (9) Chariots (6:1-8)
 - (10) Crowns (6:9-15)
 - c. Dreams Interpreted Allegorically

- (1) Joseph's dreams (Gen 37:6-11)
- (2) Dreams of Pharaoh's servants (Gen 40:9-13,16-19)
- (3) Dreams in Daniel 2,7,8

9. Acted Parables

- a. Ahijah rips cloak (1 Kings 11:29)
- b. Bow and arrows (2 Kings 13:15-19)
- c. Isaiah goes naked (Isa 20:2-6)
- d. Jeremiah smashes jar (Jer 19:1-13)
- e. Ezekiel's sticks (Ezk 37:15-23)
- f. Hosea and wife (Hos 1-3)
- g. Jonah and gourd (Jon 4:6-11)

10. Some Observations from OT Parables

- a. May take the form of realistic story (7c)
or be very contrived, symbolic story (8a1)
- b. Realistic story need not be historical (7a,b,c)
- c. Interpretation may be given (Ezk 37:11) or not (7e),
obvious (9c) or obscure (8b8)
- d. Interpretation may be simple and natural (7d),
or peculiar and complex (8a1)
- e. Parable may be spoken (7,8) or acted (9)
- f. Purpose of parable may be to picture truth vividly,
or to sneak by hearer's moral defenses

D. RABBINIC PARABLES

1. The Rabbinic Literature

oral tradition of Pharisees as later written down

Mishnah c 200 AD

Jerusalem Talmud c 425 AD

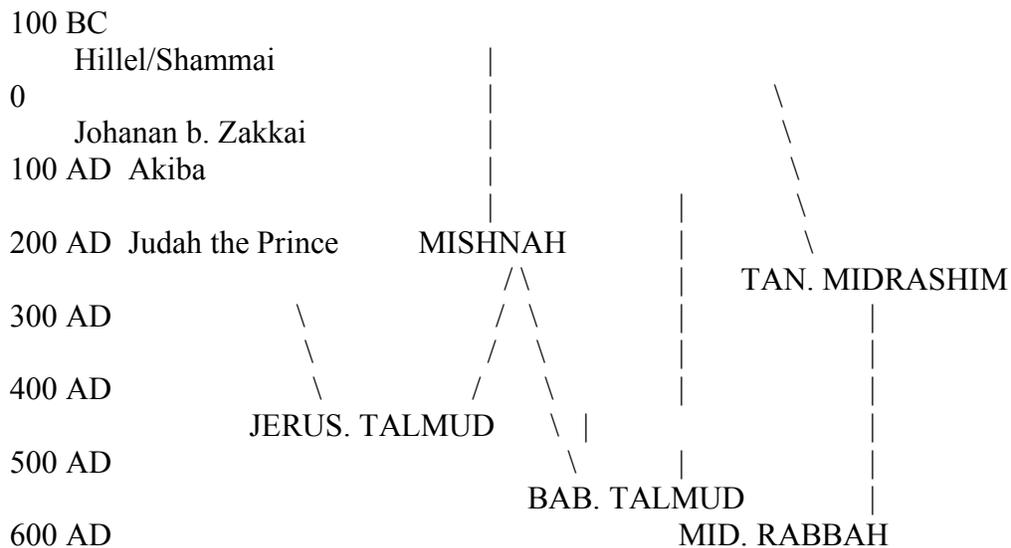
Babylonian Talmud c 550 AD

Midrashim:

Tannaitic from 2nd cen AD

Midrash Rabbah from 6th to 11th cen AD

MAJOR RABBIS & RABBINIC LITERATURE



2. Examples of Rabbinic Parables

#1 from Hillel, pre-Xn period, tho preserved in late source

#3 Joh. b. Zakkai, c70-100, medium source

#10 Tarphon, c100-130, earliest source

[begin sample Rabbinic parables; outline numbering interrupted; J and number in parentheses indicates item number in PhD dissertation by Robert M. Johnston (see course bibliography)]

1. Cleaner of Kings' Statues (J280)

Hillel the Elder, pre-tann, Lev R 34:3

... THE MERCIFUL MAN DOETH GOOD TO HIS OWN SOUL (Pr 11:17). This applies to Hillel the Elder who once, when he concluded his studies with his disciples, walked along with them. His disciples asked him: Master, whither are you bound? He said: To perform a religious duty. They said: What is this religious duty? He said to them: To wash in the bath-house. They said: Is this a religious duty? He said: Yes. If the statues of kings, which are erected in theaters and circuses, are scoured and washed by the man who is appointed to look after them, and who thereby obtains his maintenance through them -- nay more, he is exalted in the company of the great of the kingdom -- how much more I, who have been created in the Image and Likeness; as it is written, FOR IN THE IMAGE OF GOD MADE HE MAN (Gen 9:6).

2. Dog Named for Father (J174)

Gamaliel II, 2nd gen, B Aboda Zara 54b

A philosopher asked R Gamaliel: It is written in your Torah: FOR THE LORD THY GOD IS A DEVOURING FIRE, A JEALOUS GOD (Dt 4:24). But why is He so jealous of its worshippers, rather than of the idol itself? He said: I will parable to you a parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like a king of flesh and blood who had a son, and the son reared a dog to which he attached his father's name, so that whenever he took an oath he exclaimed: By the life of this dog, my father! When the king heard of it, with whom is he angry -- his son or the dog? Surely he is angry with his son!

3. Wise and Foolish Guests (J149)

Johanan b Zakkai, 1st gen, B Shabbath 153a

We learnt elsewhere, R Eliezer said: Repent one day before your death [cf Sirach 5:7]. His disciples asked him: Does one know on what day he will die? He said: Then all the more reason that he repent today, lest he die tomorrow, and thus his whole life is spent in repentance. And Solomon too said in his wisdom: LET THY GARMENTS BE ALWAYS WHITE; AND LET NOT THY HEAD LACK OINTMENT (Eccl 9:8). R Johanan b Zakkai said: A parable. It is like a king who summoned his servants to a banquet without appointing a time. The wise ones adorned themselves and sat at the door of the palace; they said: Is anything lacking in a royal palace? The fools went about their work, saying: Can there be a banquet without preparations? Suddenly the king desired the presence of his servants. The wise entered adorned, while the fools entered soiled. The king rejoiced at the wise but was wroth with the fools. He said: Those who adorned themselves for the banquet, let them sit, eat and drink. But those who did not adorn themselves for the banquet, let them stand and watch. R Meir's son-in-law said in R Meir's name: Then they too would merely look on, being in attendance. But both sit, the former eating and the latter hungering, the former drinking and the latter thirsting, for it is said: THEREFORE THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD: BEHOLD, MY SERVANTS SHALL EAT, BUT YE SHALL BE HUNGRY; BEHOLD, MY SERVANTS SHALL DRINK, BUT YE SHALL BE THIRSTY; BEHOLD,

MY SERVANTS SHALL REJOICE, BUT YE SHALL BE ASHAMED; BEHOLD, MY SERVANTS SHALL SING FOR JOY OF HEART, BUT YE SHALL CRY FOR SORROW OF HEART (Isa 65:13ff).

4. Vestibule (J116)

Jacob b Korshai, 4th gen, M Aboth 4:16

R Jacob said: This world is like a vestibule before the world to come. Prepare thyself in the vestibule that thou mayest enter into the banqueting hall (*triclinium*).

5. Beneficent King (J25)

Anonymous, ?, Mek Bachodesh 5:2ff

I AM THE LORD THY GOD (Ex 20:2). Why were the Ten Commandments not said at the beginning of the Torah?

They parable a parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like a king who entered a province and said to the people: May I be your king? But the people said to him: Have you done anything good for us that you should rule over us? He built the city wall for them, he brought in the water supply for them, and he fought their battles. Then he said to them: May I be your king? And they said to him: Yes, yes!

Likewise, God. He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, sent down the manna for them, brought up the well for them, brought the quails for them. He fought for them the battle with Amalek. Then He said to them: I am to be your king. And they said to Him: Yes, yes!

6. Skillful Vineyard Worker (not in J)

J Ber 2:5

A king had a vineyard for which he engaged many laborers, one of whom was especially apt and skillful. What did the king do? He took this laborer from his work, and walked through the garden conversing with him. When the laborers came for their hire in the evening, the skillful laborer also appeared among them and received a full day's wages from the king. The other laborers were angry at this and said, "We have toiled the whole day, while this man has worked but two hours; why does the king give him the full hire, even as to us?" The king said to them, "Why are you angry? Through his skill he has done more in the two hours than you have all day."

7. Eater of Ripe Grapes (J118)

Jose b Judah, 5th gen, M Aboth 4:20

R Jose b Judah of Kefar ha-Babli said: He that learns from the young, unto what is he like? He is like one that eats unripe grapes and drinks wine from his winepress. And he that learns from the aged, unto what is he like? He is like one that eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine.

8. New and Old Wine Jars (also J118)

Judah ha-Nasi, 5th gen, M Aboth 4:20

Rabbi said: Look not on the jar but on what is in it: there may be a new jar that is full of old wine and an old one in which is not even new wine.

9. Fox and Fishes (J148)

Akiba, 3rd gen, B Berakoth 61b

Our Rabbis taught: Once the wicked Government issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study and practice the Torah. Pappus b Judah came and found R Akiba publicly bringing gatherings together and occupying himself with the Torah. He said to him: Akiba, are you not afraid of the Government?

He said to him: I will parable to thee a parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like a fox who was walking alongside a river, and he saw fishes going in swarms from one place to another. He said to them: Would you like to come on to the dry land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors? They said to him: Art thou the one they call the cleverest of the animals? Thou art not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die!

So it is with us. If such is our condition when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is written, FOR THAT IS THY LIFE AND THE LENGTH OF THY DAYS (Dt 30:20), if we go and neglect it how much worse off we shall be.

10. Short Day (not in J)

Tarfon, 3rd gen, M Aboth 2:15

The day is short, and the work is great, and the laborers are sluggish, and the reward is much, and the Master of the house is urgent.

11. Clean and Dirty Garments (not in J)

Anonymous, ?, B Shab 152b

Our Rabbis taught: "and the spirit return to God who gave it": Render it back to him as He gave it to thee, i.e, in purity, so do thou return it in purity. Parable of a king who distributed regal garments among his slaves. The wise among them folded and stored them in a box. The foolish among them did their work in them. After a time the king demanded the garments back. The wise returned them in a clean condition; the foolish returned them in a filthy condition. The king was pleased with the wise slaves and angry with the foolish. Concerning the former, he ordered that they restore the garments to the treasury and go to their houses in peace. As for the foolish slaves, he ordered that they give the garments to the washer and they be imprisoned. So the Holy One, blessed be He, says with regard to the righteous Concerning the wicked He says

12. Exaggerated Praise (not in J)

Hanina, dc 250?, B Ber 33b

A certain reader went down in the presence of R. Hanina and said, "O God, the great, mighty, terrible, majestic, powerful, awful, strong, fearless, sure and honored." He waited until he had finished, and when he had finished he said to him, "Have you concluded all the praise of your Master? Why do we want all this? Even with these three that we do say [great, mighty, and terrible], had not Moses our Master mentioned them in the Law and had not the men of the Great Synagogue come and inserted them in the Tefillah, we should not have been able to mention them, and you say all these and still go on! It is as if an earthly king had a million denarii of gold, and someone praised him as possessing silver ones. Would it not be an insult to him?"

13. Potter Testing Vessels; Weak and Strong Cows (not in J)

Jonathan, ?, Gen R 32:3

The potter does not test cracked vessels, for he need only knock upon them once and they break; but if he test sound vessels, he can knock upon them many times without their breaking. Similarly the Holy One, blessed be He, does not try the wicked but the righteous; as it is said, "The Lord trieth the righteous" (Ps 11:5) and it is written, "God did test Abraham" (Gen 22:1). Parable of a householder who had two cows, one strong and the other weak. Upon which of them does he place the yoke? Surely upon the strong. In the same manner God tests the righteous.

14. Travellers and Lamps (not in J)

Anonymous, ?, Ex R 36:3

The words of the Torah give light to a man when he occupies himself with them, and whosoever does not occupy himself with them and is ignorant of them stumbles. Parable of a person who is standing in darkness. When he starts out to walk he meets with a stone and stumbles over it; he meets with a drain and falls into it, striking his face against the ground. Why does he do this? Because he has no lamp in his hand. Such is the ignoramus who does not possess words of Torah. He meets with transgressions and stumbles and dies.... They, on the other hand, who occupy themselves with Torah have light everywhere. Parable of a person who is standing in darkness but has a lamp in his hand. He sees a stone but does not stumble over it. He sees a drain but does not fall into it....

15. King and Orchard Tower (not in J)

Jannai, ?, Ex R 2:2

Although God is in the heavens, His eyes behold and search the sons of man. Parable of a king who had an orchard. He built in it a high tower, and commanded that workmen should be appointed to work in the orchard. They who work faithfully shall receive full payment, and they who are slack shall be penalized.

16. King's Unfulfilled Promises (not in J)

Tanhuma, 3rd cen, Lev R 26:1

A human king once entered a city and all the inhabitants came out to applaud him. Their acclamation pleased him so much that he said to them: "Tomorrow I will erect various kinds of baths for you, Tomorrow I will provide you with a water-conduit." He went away to sleep, but never rose again. Where is he or his promise? But with the Holy One, blessed be He, it is otherwise; because He is a God who lives and reigns forever.

17. Small Key (not in J)

J Taan 65d

The Holy One, blessed be He, attached His great name to Israel. It may be likened to a king who had a key to a small chest. Said the king, "If I leave it as it is, it will be lost. Behold, I will make a chain for it, so that if it should go astray, the chain will indicate where it is." Similarly said the Holy One, blessed be He, "If I leave the Israelites as they are, they will be swallowed up among the nations. I will therefore attach my great name to them, so that they shall live."

18. Guarded Orchard (not in J)

Ashi, d 427, B Yeb 21a

[On building a hedge about Torah] To what is the matter like? To a man who is guarding an orchard. If he guards it from the outside, the whole of it is protected; if he guards it from within, what is in front of him is protected and what is behind him is unprotected.

19. Foolish Shipmate (J271)

Simeon b Yohai, 4th gen, Lev R 4:6

It is said, SHALL ONE MAN SIN, AND WILT THOU BE WROTH WITH ALL THE CONGREGATION? (Num 16:22).

R Simeon b Yohai taught: A parable. It is like men who were sitting in a ship. One took a borer and began boring beneath his own place. His fellow travellers said to him: What are you doing? He said to them: What does that matter to you, am I not boring under my own place? They said: Because the water will come up and flood the ship for us all.

Even so did Job say: AND BE IT INDEED THAT I HAVE ERRED, MINE ERROR REMAINETH WITH MYSELF (Job 19:4), and his friends said: HE ADDS TRANSGRESSION UNTO HIS SIN, HE EXTENDS IT AMONG US. [They said to him:] You extend your sins among us.

20. Shorn and Unshorn Lambs (not in J)

School of Ishmael, 2nd cen, B Git 7a

Whoever shears off part of his possessions and devotes it to charity is delivered from the penalty of Gihinnom. Parable of two lambs which are passing through the water, one shorn and the other unshorn. The lamb which is shorn passed over safely, but the unshorn did not.

21. Lame and Blind Caretakers (J170)

Judah ha-Nasi, 5th gen, B Sanhedrin 91a

Antoninus said to Rabbi: The body and the soul can both free themselves from judgment.

Thus the body can plead: The soul has sinned, (the proof being that) from the day it left me I lie like a dumb stone in the grave. And the soul can say: The body has sinned, (the proof being that) from the day I departed from it I fly about in the air like a bird.

He said: I will parable to thee a parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like a king of flesh and blood who had a beautiful orchard (*pardes*) which contained splendid figs. And he placed in it two keepers, one lame and the other blind. The lame man said to the blind: I see beautiful figs in the orchard. Come and take me upon thy shoulder, that we may procure and eat them. So the lame man bestrode the blind, procured and ate them. Some time after, the owner of the orchard came and said to them: Where are those beautiful figs? The lame man replied: Have I then feet to walk with? The blind man replied: Have I then eyes to see with? What did he do? He placed the lame upon the blind and judged them both together as one. Also will the Holy One, blessed be He, bring the soul, replace it in the body, and judge them together, as it is written: HE SHALL CALL TO THE HEAVENS FROM ABOVE, AND TO THE EARTH, THAT HE MAY JUDGE HIS PEOPLE (Ps 50:4). HE SHALL CALL TO THE HEAVENS FROM ABOVE -- this refers to the soul; AND TO THE EARTH, THAT HE MAY JUDGE HIS PEOPLE -- to the body.

22. Lamp Removed (J151)

Anonymous, ?, B Sukkah 29a

Our Rabbis taught: When the sun is in eclipse, it is a bad omen for the whole world.

A parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like a man who made a banquet for his servants and put up for them a lamp. When he became wroth with them he said to his servant: Take away the lamp from them, and let them sit in the dark.

23. Banquet Seats (not in J)

Reuben, ?, Eccl R 3:9

The matter may be likened to a king who arranged a banquet and invited guests to it. The king issued a decree, saying, "Each guest must bring that on which he will recline." Some brought carpets, others brought mattresses or bolsters or cushions or stools, while others brought logs of wood or stones. The king observed what they had done and said, "Let each man sit on what he brought." They who had to sit on wood or stone murmured against the king and said, "Is that honorable to a king that we, his guests, should be seated on wood and stone?" When the king heard this, he said to them, "Not enough that you have disgraced with your stone and wood the palace which was erected for me at great cost, but you dare to invent a complaint against me. The lack of respect paid to you is the consequence of your own action." Similarly in the Hereafter the wicked will be sentenced to Gehinnom and will murmur against the Holy One....

[end sample Rabbinic parables; return to outline numbering]

I. Introduction to Parables

C. Rabbinic Parables

3. Relation of Rabbinic Parables to Parables of Jesus

a. Four Possibilities

- (1) Jesus borrowed from Rabbis
but all rabbinic sources later than NT; only have record of one pre-Xn rabbinic parable
- (2) Rabbis borrowed from Jesus
not impossible, tho bad feeling among Jews re/ Xy, esp. after 70 and 135 AD, makes this less likely;
yet a clear example of one of Aesop's fables in Rabb lit shows they not adverse to borrowing;
anyway, far more parables in Rabb lit than in NT, and NT implies parables not unheard of in Jesus' time, so probably didn't borrow from Jesus
- (3) Both totally independent
possible, but unlikely in view of similarities
- (4) Both dependent on another source or sources
suggest this most likely, with sources being:
 - (a) use of stock comparisons from OT
 - (b) same culture

b. Some Stock Comparisons in Rabbinic and NT Parables

[many more such comparisons exist; this is just a hint of material here]

- (1) God as king: rabbinic parables ##1,2,3,5,6,11,12,15,(16),17,21,22,23;
Mt 18:21-25; 22:1-14; (Lk 14:31-33); Lk 19:11-27
Definite OT background; corresponding to this is mankind or Israel as citizen/subject;
similar ideas: God as master, man as slave; shepherd/sheep; husband/wife; father/son;
gardener/plant; potter/pot
- (2) Age to Come as banquet: 3,4,(22),23
Mt 22:1-14; Lk 12:37; 14:15-24
Less OT background: Isa 25:6; Ps 23:5-6; 22:25-26
- (3) Man's Life as a day: 6,10; Mt 20:1-16; Jn 9:4?
OT background: Job 14:6; Ps 90:6?
- (4) Lifestyle as clothing: 3,4,11,(23); Mt 22:1-14
OT background: Isa 64:6; Zech 3:1-7

c. Introductory Formulae with Parables

- (1) "To what may this be compared?": 5,7,18,21,22
- (2) "A parable about such and such": 11,(12),13b,15,20
- (3) "Like such and such" ("It may be likened to..."): 4,(12),(17),18,19,(23)

(4) But many have no such formula: 1,2,3,6,8,10,13a,14,16

4. Some Hermeneutical Observations

a. Parables vary considerably in complexity. In some only one basic idea is involved in the comparison. In others the analogy is more detailed. This latter case holds especially for allegories or for parables where there is a natural fit between the story and its interpretation. Where no interpretation is given, the structure of the parable should be studied to see how detailed the fit between story and meaning is likely to be. Probably Jesus' parables (like OT proverbs) trail off at edges to stimulate thought.

b. As oral teaching devices of experienced instructors, the parables of Jesus and the rabbis are not likely to waste words. Presumably all words will have significance either for making the story vivid or for indicating its meaning.

c. The parables of Jesus and the rabbis regularly make use of stock similes, most of which have a background in the OT. Elements of a parable should thus be checked against the OT for figurative use there.

d. These parables likewise use features of everyday life familiar to the original hearers. As we now live in a very different culture, we will need to study the cultural elements to aid in interpreting them. Bailey, Keener, Jeremias and Strack-Billerbeck are helpful here.

e. The formula "A is like B" which often introduces a parable is ambiguous. Sometimes it compares A with B; sometimes it compares A with the whole parable (e.g., 12, 18, 19, 22, 23).

E. THE PURPOSE OF N.T. PARABLES

1. According to Matthew 13 and Parallels (Mt 13:10-17,34-35; Mk 4:10-12,33-34; Lk 8:10,18)

a. Verses 10-17

contrast **YOU** (disciples): granted to know; have => given more

blessed: seeing do see; many prophets & righteous desired to see

THEM (outside): not granted, don't have => taken away

(not blessed): seeing do not see; fulfill Isa 6:9-10 (note context here of hardening judgment)

basically a case of righteous (saved) vs. wicked (unsaved), w/ blessing for former and hardening for latter (must be understood in light of Jesus' whole ministry; note Jesus' warning in Mt 11:20-24 and 12:38-42; note also Paul's remarks in Rom 11:7,11,22)

b. Verses 34-35

Jesus not speaking w/o parable so that Ps 78:2 might be fulfilled; note context of whole psalm: Israel's continued rebellion, God's faithfulness

[also a hint here of a 2nd purpose; will follow up below]

c. Summary

PURPOSE 1: To teach those willing to obey while mystifying those in opposition.

2. Other Purposes

a. Matthew 13 is not the first time Jesus uses parables (note IIA on parable locations); a number given before this point in His ministry; presumably, then, parables have other purposes besides the one listed above.

b. Taking a hint from OT usage, Purpose 1, above, would be analogous to that of riddles.

c. The first 3 story-parables (B7a,b,c in outline) suggest another:

PURPOSE 2: To slip by hearer's defense mechanism so he will commit himself to a principle before he realizes it will be used against him.

examples of this in NT parables:

Mt 21:40-41: Vineyard Workers

Lk 7:42-43: Two Debtors

Lk 15:4: Lost Sheep

this is important and pervasive feature in parables; possibly it is related to Mt 13:35 (since Ps 78:4,6 speaks of telling it to children); cp also Song of Moses, Deut

31:16-21

- d. Yet when meaning of parable is obvious or explained, then neither of above purposes applicable. This is case with many of Jesus' parables. Suggest two other purposes in such cases:

PURPOSE 3: To teach a truth vividly
e.g., Mt 3:10: Axe at roots; 5:13: Salt of earth

PURPOSE 4: To argue by means of analogy
e.g., Mt 5:25-26: Opponent at law; 7:9-12: Son asking bread

F. SUMMARY

1. "Parable" is a broader term or category in OT and NT usage than in English literature or common usage today. The common feature in nearly all biblical examples appears to be analogy.
2. Even removing "proverb" and "paradox" from consideration, "parable" still includes the illustrative story, which does not fit the description "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning."
3. The liberal claim C that Jesus did not use allegorical parables C does not fit the NT data; it is most unlikely in view of rabbinic and OT practice (see Boucher in bibliography).
4. To interpret Jesus' parables correctly, we will need to consider:
 - a. The nature of the analogy involved.
 - b. Grammatical exegesis of the Greek text;
 - c. Context in the Gospels, incl. parallel passages;
 - d. Allusions to OT figurative usage;
 - e. Culture of the period.

II. EXEGESIS OF PARABLES

A. LIST & CATEGORIZATION OF NEW TESTAMENT PARABLES

No complete agreement; we suggest the following list:

1. CHRISTOLOGICAL PARABLES

Strong Man Defeated	Mt 12:29; Mk 3:27; Lk 11:21-22
Rejected Stone	Mt 21:42-44
Door of the Sheep	Jn 10:1-9
Good Shepherd	Jn 10:1-5, 11-16
Father the Vinedresser	Jn 15:1-2

2. PARABLES OF LOST & FOUND

Lost Sheep	Mt 18:12-14; Lk 15:3-7
Lost Coin	Lk 15:8-10
Lost Son	Lk 15:11-32

3. PARABLES OF FORGIVENESS & MERCY

Unmerciful Servant	Mt 18:21-35
Day Laborers	Mt 20:1-6
Two Debtors	Lk 7:36-50
Unprofitable Servants	Lk 17:7-10

4. PARABLES ON PRAYER

Son Asking Bread	Mt 7:9-12; Lk 11:11-13
Friend at Midnight	Lk 11:5-8
Unjust Judge	Lk 18:1-8

5. PARABLES OF TRANSFORMATION

New Patch	Mt 9:16; Mk 2:21; Lk 5:36
New Wine	Mt 9:17; Mk 2:22; Lk 5:37-39

6. PARABLES OF STEWARDSHIP

Lamp & Bushel	Mt 5:15; Mk 4:21; Lk 8:16; 11:33
Crooked Business Manager	Lk 16:1-9
Unfaithful Upper Servant	Mt 24:45-51; Lk 12:42-46
Talents	Mt 25:14-30
Pounds	Lk 19:11-27

Day Laborers Mt 20:1-16
Vineyard Workers Mt 21:33-46; Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19

7. PARABLES OF INVITATION & REJECTION

Children in Market Place Mt 11:16-19
Two Sons Mt 21:28-32
The Great Supper Lk 14:15-24
Marriage of the King's Son Mt 22:1-14

8. PARABLES OF THE SECOND COMING

Vultures & Carcass Mt 24:28; Lk 17:37
Fig Tree Heralds Summer Mt 24:32-33; Mk 13:28-29; Lk 21:29-31
Householder & Thief Mt 24:42-44; Lk 12:39
Porter Mk 13:34-36
Waiting Servants Lk 12:35-38
Wise & Foolish Virgins Mt 25:1-13

9. PARABLES OF WARNING & JUDGMENT

Axe at Roots Mt 3:10
Fan in Hand Mt 3:12
Tasteless Salt Mt 5:13; Mk 9:50; Lk 14:34-35
Fire, Salt & Peace Mk 9:49-50
Settle out of Court Mt 5:25-26; Lk 12:57-59
Eye Light of Body Mt 6:22-23; Lk 11:34-35
Blind Leading Blind Mk 4:24; Lk 6:39
Speck & Log Mt 7:3-5; Lk 7:41-42
Wise & Foolish Builders Mt 7:24-27; Lk 6:47-49
Empty House Mt 12:43-45; Lk 11:24-26
Every Plant not Planted Mt 15:13
Barren Fig Tree Lk 13:6-9
Tower Builder Lk 14:28-30
King at War Lk 14:31-33
Wicked Tenants Mt 21:33-45; Mk 12:1-12; Lk 20:9-19
Sheep & Goats Mt 25:31-46

10. PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

Sower Mt 13:3-8; Mk 4:4-8; Lk 8:5-8
Tares Mt 13:24-30
Seed Growing Secretly Mk 4:26-29
Mustard Seed Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19
Leaven Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21

Hidden Treasure	Mt 13:44
Pearl	Mt 13:45-46
Dragnet	Mt 13:47-50
New & Old Treasures	Mt 13:52

11. ILLUSTRATIVE PARABLES

Good Samaritan	Lk 10:30-37
Rich Fool	Lk 12:16-21
Lowest Seats	Lk 14:7-11
Dinner Invitations	Lk 14:12-14
Rich Man & Lazarus	Lk 16:19-31
Pharisee & Tax Collector	Lk 18:9-14

12. ACTED PARABLES

Cursing the Fig Tree	Mt 21:18-22; Mk 11:12-14, 20-24
Cleansing the Temple	Jn 2:13-22; Mt 21:12-17; Mk 11:15-19; Lk 19:45-48
Jesus at 12 in Temple	Lk 2:41-50
Jesus' Baptism	Mt 3:13-17; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22; Jn 1:29-34
Healing on Sabbath	e.g., Mk 3:1-6
Use of Clay in Healing	Jn 9:1-7
Writing on Ground	Jn 7:53-8:11
Triumphal Entry	Mt 21:1-11; Mk 11:1-11; Lk 19:29-40; Jn 12:12-19
Anointing Jesus	Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Jn 12:1-8
Foot-Washing	Jn 13:1-11

Of these headings, 11 and 12 are different subgenres, the rest are topical categories

We will discuss categories 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12 in this course.

B. PARABLES OF LOST AND FOUND

1. The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin (Lk 15:1-10)

a. Occasion (1-2)

tax-collectors, sinners attracted to Jesus
Pharisees complain he receives & even eats with them
these parables (plus Lost Son) constitute Jesus' answer

b. Story of Lost Sheep (4-6)

man has 100 sheep, loses 1, searches until he finds it;
carries it back, calls friends to rejoice

c. Interpretation of Lost Sheep

shepherd = God or Jesus?

yes and no; note v 4: "what man of you?"

significance of "until he finds"?

story: shepherd does not give up easily

interpretation: can't mean universalism; might relate to election

"99 righteous"? angels? men already saved? ironic of Pharisees?

prob last of these, in view of Lost Son

probably a parable-story where not all details are to be transferred;

main points: natural to look for lost property,

rejoice in finding (cp. God's remark in Jonah 4:10-11)

d. Story of Lost Coin (8-9)

woman loses 1 of 10 coins; lights lamp & sweeps, searching house until found;

calls neighbors w/ news

drachma = denarius = day's wage for common laborer (Mt 20:2);

not trivial, but not earth-shaking either

is the money part of woman's dowry? jewelry?

speculative suggestions w/o evidence; probably argument is from lesser to greater

thorough search conducted in manner consistent w/ setting

(probably a small house w/ dirt floor, little light inside)

"rejoice" doesn't need to be formal celebration, just sharing w/ neighbors

this and previous parable both reflect gregarious middle eastern culture

e. Interpretation of Lost Coin

same general message as last parable

any significance to woman? Holy Spirit? church? wisdom?

perhaps to identify w/ women in audience?

any significance to coin? man in image of God?

different types of sinners in 3 parables? foolish, ignorant, willful?

these, as before, speculative; but perhaps designed to make audience think

2. The Lost Son (Lk 15:11-32)

[very nice discussion in Kenneth Bailey, *Poet & Peasant*]

a. The Story

Split inheritance before death?

Plummer thinks poss common in Jewish society, but no clear evidence

Thiele finds numerous co-regencies in Hebrew kingship (see 1 Kings 1:30,35),
which has some parallels

Ben Sirach (c200 BC) seeks to discourage practice (Ecclus 33:19-23), so not
unheard-of

Bailey thinks this equiv to wishing father dead based on trad (recent) ME culture

Presumably property split is 1/3:2/3, in accordance w/ Deut 21:17

"pods" (keration) from carob tree; edible, not great staple; source of health-food

substitutes for chocolate
 "see afar off" (20) how? surely couldn't recognize clothing; perhaps walk?
 more likely some advance notice
 running of older man virtually unheard-of in modern Arab culture
 kiss = reconciliation, ring = recognition as son;
 Bailey suggests meeting him outside village protects son from abuse;
 note references to son: "this son of mine" (24); "this son of yours" (30);
 "this brother of yours" (32)
 brother's complaints:
 slaved, never broke command, vs. devoured wealth w/ prostitutes
 never given goat to celebrate w/ vs. fattened calf
 father's answers:
 always with me
 all I have is yours (certainly true in story; does it have a parallel in interpretation?)
 have to celebrate brother's "resurrection" & "finding"

b. Interpretation

- (1) Main theme same as two previous parables: joy at finding lost.
- (2) Pictures repentance (though Bailey feels initial repentance is very partial).
- (3) Father's love and forgiveness vividly portrayed:
 runs to boy, restores as son.
- (4) Brother's (Pharisees') unforgiving spirit shown in true colors,
 prob designed as appeal to them
- (5) Problem: how far to press parallels?
 Father = God; elder son = Pharisees;
 younger son = tax-collectors, etc.
 but "all I have is yours"? perhaps translated only in terms of plea to elder son
- (6) Note that parable has ending left open: what will the elder son/Pharisees do?

3. Some Suggested Lessons from Parables of Lost and Found

- a. We should expect God to care for lost people; we care for our lost possessions.
- b. If we rejoice when we recover a lost possession, we should even more rejoice when a sinner turns to Christ.
- c. If we search diligently for something we have lost, we should all the more seek those who have gotten away from God.
- d. If it is not wrong for us to concentrate on finding what is lost to the relative neglect of what is not, shall we blame God (or his servants) for doing so?
- e. If we care this much for lost things, how much more for lost people?
- f. As this father's love was unusually strong and forgiving, so is God's love; and so ought ours to be.
- g. We should beware lest the attitude of the elder brother (hating to see others receive grace) arise in our hearts.

C. PARABLES OF FORGIVENESS

1. The Unmerciful Servant (Matt 18:21-35)

a. The Occasion (21-22)

Context of church discipline & restoration
Peter asks how often he should forgive a brother
Jesus answers: 77x (or 70x7 times)

b. The Story (23-34)

slave owes king 10,000 talents, can't pay,
about to be sold w/ family when king relents & forgives;
later same slave refuses to forgive 100 denarius debt;
when story gets back to king, he cancels his forgiveness
δουλος lit. = slave, but in eastern usage often metaphorical for (even high-ranking)
govt. officials as under the king
talent = 3,000 shekels, c 60 lb (w/ some problems of variations in value over history)
bullion value (silver) @ \$7 /troy oz = \$5,000
wage value @ denarius/day = 12,000 days (c 33 yr)
(or with today=s wage of \$50/day, \$600,000)
so 10,000 talents = \$50 million (bullion scale) = \$6 billion (wage scale)
denarius = day's wage for common laborer (Mt 20:2)
by bullion value above = \$.80, wage value = \$50.
so 100 denarii = \$80 (bullion) or \$5,000 (wage)
βασανιστης, *basanistes* = jailer, torturer; see Smith, *Dict GkRom Ant*, 57:
used of officers who took testimony from slaves thru torture; some suggest this to
encourage friends to pay for him; slave here unlikely to get any such help

c. Interpretation

see vv 21-22: not 7 times, but 77x
v 35: Athus God will do to you if you do not forgive@
relative sizes of debts presumably represent relative sizes of sin against God & sin
against man (cp Ps 51:4)
problem of revoking forgiveness of debt:
will God revoke forgiveness of His people?
probably intended to represent God's anger
& contrast of professing believer w/ real believer

d. Some Lessons from Unmerciful Servant

- (1) A necessary characteristic (though not a cause) of regeneration is a forgiving spirit toward others.
- (2) This forgiving attitude is based on the great forgiveness we have from God thru Christ.
- (3) If we must have everyone pay back all they owe us, then we in turn must forever

be in torment trying to pay back what we owe God.

2. The Two Debtors (Luke 7:36-50)

a. The Occasion (36-40)

Jesus invited to banquet at home of Simon, a Pharisee

Woman known as sinner comes in, bringing vial of perfume;
breaks down weeping, wipes Jesus feet, etc.

(in this culture, could easily crash feast to watch; cp Ps 23:5 and Rabbinic Parable #3)

Simon thinks he has found test showing Jesus not prophet

Jesus (really a prophet!) responds with this parable

b. The Story (41-42)

2 debtors owe money to same δανιστης = moneylender, creditor

1st owes 500 denarii = 1½ yrs wages

2nd owes 50 denarii = 2 mos wages (1/10 as much)

neither can pay, he forgives both (doesn't sound like professional moneylender!)

Jesus: which loves him more?

Simon: presumably one forgiven more

Jesus: (positive reinforcement) you're right!

c. Interpretation

God = creditor; man = debtor

2 debtors here = Simon & woman

debt = sin, or unkept responsibility to serve God

d. Application by Jesus (44-48)

which loves more, Simon or woman?

answer: woman

evidence:

wash feet (cp Gen 18:4; 19:2; 24:32; 43:24 etc.)

anoint (cp Ps 23:5; in Egypt, host anointed guests on arrival)

kiss (affectionate salutation; Gen 29:13; 33:4; 45:6)

BOX SCORE	Simon	Woman	Justification
Invitation	1	0	obvious
Wash Feet	0	4	wash, self, tears, hair
Kiss	0	3	kiss, continually, feet
Anoint	0	3	anoint, feet, perfume
TOTALS	1	10	

(note same ratio as debts of two debtors!)

Since woman loves more, must have been forgiven more
 Jesus assures her of forgiveness

e. Lessons of Two Debtors

(1) Contrary to what verse 47a seems at first sight to teach (her sins forgiven *because* she loved much), the lesson of the parable and its context is that love is a result of forgiveness; that a truly forgiven (i.e., regenerate) person will show real love. Thus, v 47a should be understood, "For this reason I can *say* to you that her sins have been forgiven, for she loved much." (i.e., love is an evidence of being forgiven).

(2) Ingratitude, on the other hand, is an evidence of being forgiven little (and so, presumably, unregenerate).

D. PARABLES OF STEWARDSHIP

1. The Talents (Matt 25:14-30)

a. The Story

slaveowner departing on journey entrusts property to slaves:

three entrusted in proportion of 5 talents, 2 and 1

recall talent c60 lb (here silver) = \$5000 bullion value = 12,000 denarii

= 12,000 days wages = \$600,000 wage value

two immediately begin to trade with them, third goes & buries his

master returns "after a long time" & settles accounts:

those who have gained an equal %age are rewarded just about equally (except for 25:28), both being praised and given much greater responsibilities

the lazy or fearful slave seeks to excuse self by condemning master, but is shown to be self-condemned by own actions; he loses talent and is thrown into "outer darkness"

b. The Interpretation

(1) Note context:

24:29-31: return of Lord

24:32-44: parable of fig tree, uncertainty of exact time; be ready!

24:45-51: parable of faithful & unfaithful slaves

25:1-13: parable of ten virgins

[our passage]

25:31-46: the sheep & goat judgment (saved and lost)

(2) Some inferences from context:

(a) subjects related to return of Lord

(b) all parables from 24:45 on seem to be related to faithfulness of one sort or another

(c) our parable and 2 preceding seem to involve at least professing believers only, though this is not the case with following parable

(3) Some interpretive suggestions:

(a) slaveowner = Christ

slaves = those who profess to serve Him

(b) money = abilities He gives to serve with? include time? wealth? spiritual gifts?

(c) bankers (27) more difficult, probably some sort of indirect, low-risk use

(d) judging from terminology used (outer darkness, weeping, gnashing; cp Matt 8:12; 24:51), lazy slave is unsaved

c. Some Lessons from the Talents

(1) The Lord has given each who profess His name certain abilities, wealth, time, opportunities to serve Him.

(2) Those who use these for Him will be rewarded in proportion to how they use what they have.

(3) Those who do not use them will show they do not really love or fear Him.

(4) Those who use God's gifts properly will receive more. Those who don't will lose even what they have.

2. The Pounds (Luke 19:11-27)

a. The Story

very similar to Matt's "Talents" but some important differences

nobleman goes to distant country to receive kingdom:

action, enemies & their embassy very similar to incident in life of Herod Archelaus:

see Josephus, *Ant* 17.9 & 17.11; *War* 2.2 & 2.6

before leaving, entrusts equal portions of wealth to each of 10 slaves;

mina (Heb *maneh*) = 100 denarii = 1/60 talent, roughly a pound weight

on return, slaves report; narrative singles out 3 of them:

1st: 1 mina => 10 minas more; commended; put over 10 cities

2nd: 1 mina => 5 minas; put over 5 cities

3rd: 1 mina hidden, no growth; rebuke based on own excuse, loses mina to one w/ 10
reaction of bystanders (25)
enemies brought before king and slain

b. The Interpretation

(1) Note context:

ch 18: unjust judge; Pharisee & publican; rich young ruler; blind Bartimaeus

ch 19: Zacchaeus; [our passage]; triumphal entry; cleansing temple

(2) Observations from context:

(a) Not same as "Talents"; slightly earlier in ministry, assuming Matt & Lk both following chronological order here

(b) Context is mostly action rather than teaching

(c) Context dominated by Jesus' claims & varied reactions;
same reflected in our parable

(3) Explicit indicators

note v 11: disciples thought kingdom to appear "immediately"

(4) Some interpretive suggestions:

(a) clearly nobleman = Christ

(b) going to receive kingdom & return = ascension & 2nd coming

(c) implied Emperor = God the Father

(d) slaves = professing Christians

(e) citizen/enemies = open unbelievers (in context, presumably unbelieving Jews)

(f) embassy = prayers not acknowledging Christ? killing Christ? killing His servants? (would not press this detail here)

(g) cities (not uncommon for such rewards)

= rule in Millennial kingdom? (cp Lk 22:30; Rev 2:26-27)

(h) slay them = judgment on unbelievers at Lord's return

[extent of correlation between story & interp so multifaceted that parable is clearly allegorical type]

c. Some Lessons from the Pounds

(1) The kingdom is not going to come right away. There will be a substantial delay in which Christ's servants await His return.

(2) He who will one day rule all the earth (all creation) has given His servants small responsibilities of service while He is absent.

(3) Those who fulfill these responsibilities will be rewarded in proportion to their diligence & effectiveness with far more significant areas of service in Christ's coming kingdom.

- (4) Those who neglect these responsibilities will lose even the small opportunities they now have.
- (5) Those who hate and oppose Christ & His reign will face a fearful judgment when He comes.
- (6) Comparing "Talents" and "Pounds," it appears that our reward is based on what we do with what we have, not on what we have originally. Those with great gifts are not intrinsically favored.

E. PARABLES OF INVITATION & REJECTION

1. The Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24)

a. The Story

moderately wealthy man gives big feast, many invited
 when ready, servant sent to call those (previously) invited (cp Est 5:8; 6:14; Prov 9:3?)
 all invited excuse themselves *απο μιας* - alike, unanimously

3 samples of rejection given:

- (1) see newly purchased land
- (2) try newly purchased oxen
- (3) recently married

householder angry, sends servant thru city to invite poor, etc.;

πλατεια - wide street; *ρουμη* - narrow street

still room, so servant sent outside city to fill hall

οδος - path, road; *φραγμος* - fence, wall, hedge

none (previously) invited will taste of supper

b. Interpretation

(1) Context:

eating at Pharisee's on Sabbath (14:1)

heals man with dropsy (14:2-6)

illustrative parables of guests (14:7-14)

comment of guest (14:15): blessedness of feasting in kingdom of God

(2) Remark of master in parable (14:24): none will taste

(3) clearly master = God or Jesus

orig. invited = Pharisees? "righteous" Jews?

others in city = publicans, harlots, etc.?

outside city = Gentiles?

(4) significance of three excuses?

at least 1st two seem ridiculous

c. Lessons from the Great Supper

- (1) Many talk like they want to go to heaven, but in fact some relatively trivial thing is really more important to them & will ultimately keep them out.
- (2) God will not be thwarted by their disinterest and refusal. He will fill heaven with those the nominally religious despise.

2. The Marriage of the King's Son (Matt 22:1-14)

a. The Story

[rather similar to previous parable, but several important differences]

- (1) host is king instead of moderately wealthy man
this makes for other differences since a king is not a private citizen
- (2) affair is wedding feast instead of dinner party
so rejection is even more serious
- (3) double invitation to first guests emphasizes graciousness of host, esp for king
- (4) their reaction much more rude:
instead of excuses, disregard invitation, mistreat or kill slaves
- (5) king's reaction (naturally) stronger:
destroys murderers, burns city (cp 2 Sam 10; 2 Kings 10:19)
- (6) additional sub-parable: guest w/o wedding garment
 - (a) garment provided?
cp rab par #11; 2 Kings 10:22; Gen 45:22; Judg 14:12,19; 2 Kings 5:22; Est 6:8; 8:15
 - (b) not provided?
cp rab par #3; Judg 14:10ff; Est 5:4ff; 6:14ff
 - (c) perhaps intentionally left ambiguous

b. Interpretation

- (1) Context:
 - parable of tenant-farmers (judgment on Israel)
 - challenge to Jesus' authority
 - rejection of his Messianic claims
- (2) OT & rabbinic background
 - king = God (so son = Christ, tho only a hint given here)
 - wedding feast = Messianic age
 - "burn city" turns out to be literal
 - garment?
 - righteousness? Isa 64:6; Zech 3:1-7; Rev 19:8
 - other? (* indicates God is one clothed)

Isa 61:10: righteousness, salvation
*Ps 104:1: spender, majesty
*Isa 59:17: righteousness, salvation, vengeance, zeal (cp Eph 6:11ff)
1 Pet 5:5: humility
2 Cor 5:2-4: physical body
1 Cor 15:53: immortality
so garment could be either X's righteousness, our salvation or our sanctification

c. Lessons from Marriage of King's Son

- (1) Those who reject the Gospel really do so because they don't care about God or even actively hate Him.
- (2) God will not leave such attitudes unpunished.
- (3) As God cut off those of Israel who rejected His Messiah, so will He cut off those professing Christians who despise (a) His provision of righteousness in Jesus Christ, or (b) His call to sanctification.

F. PARABLES OF THE SECOND COMING

1. The Ten Virgins

- a. The Story (Matt 25:1-13)
 - 10 virgins go out to meet bridegroom
 - all have *λαμπας* - lamp or torch
 - 5 foolish don't take oil (any? additional?)
 - 5 wise take oil in containers, *αγγειον*, *angeion* - flask, vessel, container

EXCURSUS: WORD STUDY on *αγγειον*, *angeion*

see Num 4:9 - oil *containers* among accessories for temple lamps

Josephus, *War* 3.272: "In this critical situation Josephus... ordered boiling oil to be poured upon this roof of close-locked shields. His men had it ready & at once from all quarters deluged the Romans with large quantities, flinging after it the *vessels* still scalding hot."

Josephus, *Ant* 9.48: "But the prophet bade her go and borrow from her neighbors many empty *vessels* and then shut the doors of her chamber and pour some of the oil into all of them..."

Conclusion: the *angeia* seem to be separate flasks rather than bowls of lamps

bridegroom delayed, all fall asleep

shout awakens them, they fix lamps

κοσμεω, *kosmeo* - put in order, trim (of lamps); apparently the lamps have been burning all this time

foolish find lamps going out: σβεννυμι, *sbennumi* - go out, extinguish

wise refuse to share their oil for fear it won't last

foolish go to buy oil, miss procession

returning later, they are refused admittance to hall where feast going on

b. The Interpretation

(1) Context

Lord's Return (24:29-31)

Fig Tree Parable (24:32-33)

Unknown Time (24:36-41)

Parable of Faithful & Wicked Slaves (24:42-51)

[our passage]

Parable of Talents (25:14-30)

Sheep & Goats (25:31-46)

[note that all are related to second coming]

(2) Explicit Indicators

"Be awake; you don't know day or hour" (25:13)

(3) Identifications

bridegroom = Christ

feast = kingdom

(bride not mentioned, presumably because church here represented by virgins, divided to show differences)

virgins = professing believers?

Symbolism of lamps, oil?

oil = Holy Spirit? (Zech 4:1-14, esp v 6)

(problem here with σβεννυμι, have and lose HS?)

also oil may signify plenty (Deut 32:13), luxury (Prov 21:17), joy (Ps 45:7),

hospitality (Ps 23:5), lack of may signify God's displeasure (Joel 1:10),

smoothness (Prov 5:3); but none of these relate to oil in lamps

lamp:

lighted = joy, peace, abundant life (Ps 18:28), witness (Rev 1:20; cp Matt 5:14-16)

going out = dying, gloom, desolation (2 Sam 21:17; Job 18:5; 21:17; Prov 13:9;

20:20; 24:20), end of witness (Rev 2:5)

two basic models for interpretation:

(1) "Holy Spirit" model

wise = regenerate

foolish = unregenerate

point: must have HS to get in kingdom

problem: fit with 25:13?

(2) Delay model

oil = witness, illumination, joy?

wise = regenerate

foolish = unregenerate

point: only wise prepared for delay of Lord's coming, hold out till He comes

this does fit 25:13

foolish more or less = rocky or thorny ground of Sower Parable

I favor latter alternative, suggesting this parable forms pair with previous (cp 24:48):

(1) some unregenerate expect longer delay or no return, fall into sin (Faithful & Wicked Slaves)

(2) other unregenerate fall away when delay longer than expected (Wise & Foolish Virgins)

c. Some Lessons from Ten Virgins

(1) Not everyone who is awaiting the Lord's return will be ready when He actually comes (cp Luke 18:7-8).

(2) Some will foolishly expect Him to come right away and will not be prepared for the long haul (perhaps end-time persecution?).

(3) We must be alert to our own spiritual condition and make preparations while we can for needs which may lie before us.

2. The Vultures and Carcass

a. The Story (Matt 24:28 and Luke 17:37)

Not actually a story, but more like a similitude, or (even better) a proverb
Some confusion on proper translation, which makes saying more obscure than necessary: "Wherever the body/corpse is, there the eagles/vultures will gather."

The proper translation of the first word *πτῶμα*, *ptoma* is "corpse, carcass," i.e. a specifically **dead** body, so that the more general translation "body" may be misleading (e.g., body of Christ, etc.).

The second word *αετός*, *aetos* may properly be translated either "eagle" or "vulture," but context here of a dead body (not necessarily human) favors the latter.

Thus: "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather"; this sounds like a proverb, i.e., a typically true statement which conveys a general lesson by means of a very specific wording.

b. The Contexts

Differ in Matthew and Luke, though both are eschatological discourses of Jesus.

(1) Matthew context:

Olivet Discourse just after leaving temple for last time (parallels in Mark 13, Luke 21)
Jesus is warning of danger of being misled by claims of 2nd coming by false Christs and false prophets.
If they tell you he has already come, don't believe it.
The coming of the Son of Man is compared to lightning, flashing in east but visible in west.
[Our proverb about vultures]
The second coming described

(2) Luke context:

During Perea ministry, sometime before Jesus' triumphal entry
Timing of this discourse left vague (17:20)
The kingdom of God within/among you
Though longing for coming of Son of Man, don't believe reports he has already come.
Coming of Son of Man like lightning
But first he will suffer & be rejected
Coming like events in time of Noah and Lot
Remember Lot's wife!
One taken, another left
"Where, Lord?"
[Our proverb about vultures]

c. The Interpretation

Suggest that a proverb (either invented by Jesus or already existing but used by him) is used in two different ways on two different occasions, as we will frequently apply the same proverb to different situations

(1) Matthew:

Proverb is used in parallel with lightning statement
Won't need to have someone tell you when second coming occurs:
-- like lightning, don't need to be looking in right direction
-- like vultures indicate the location of a corpse at considerable distance, so the signs of his coming will be unmistakable

(2) Luke:

Proverb is not used in parallel with lightning statement

Rather in answer to "where?" question

Here *που, pou* - where, in what place, to what place, is probably to be translated "to what place" in this context, asking where the ones will be taken to.

The proverb probably functions to say that they will be taken to "where the action is," i.e., just as vultures gather to a carcass.

This could still picture either the unsaved being gathered to judgment or the saved to safety, though the latter is probably to be favored on the basis of Jesus' remark in Matt 24:31 about gathering the elect.

d. Some Lessons from the Vultures and Carcass

- (1) The second coming of Christ will be absolutely unmistakable. If someone tells you He has come, you can be sure he is mistaken. His candidate is certainly a false christ.
- (2) There are some details of the second coming that we don't have to get right, since it is not up to us to cause them to come about. Whether the taking is good and the leaving bad in Luke 17:34-35(36) or vice versa, what really counts is our relation to Jesus. He will take care of the rest. There will, in any case, be no security outside of knowing Him in that day.

G. THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM (MATT 13, MARK 4, LUKE 8)

1. We could well have started here in our tour of the parables:
 - a. Grouping of interpreted & uninterpreted parables
 - b. Connected with Jesus' purpose for teaching in parables
 - c. A sort of key to other parables: Mk 4:13
2. Background: Growing opposition to Jesus' ministry
 - a. Jesus heals demonized man (blind & dumb) (12:22-37)
 - (1) Pharisees counter Messianic suggestion by claiming His power Satanic (24)
 - (2) Jesus responds, warns of judgment (25-37)
 - b. Pharisees demand sign (12:38-50)
 - (1) Jesus points to their sinfulness (prefer a god of their own choosing?); offers only sign of Jonah, warns of judgment (39-42)
 - (2) Parable of evil spirits (43-45)

When sin is not replaced by righteousness, one is left open for the entrance of greater evil.
3. Overview: Seven to nine parables, most in Matt 13

- a. Sower (13:1-9); interpreted 13:18-23 [also Mk 4, Lk 8]
 - b. Weeds (13:24-30); interpreted 13:36-43 [no parallels]
 - [c. Seed Growing Secretly (Mk 4:26-29); no interpretation or parallels]
 - d. Mustard Seed (13:31-32); no interpretation [also Mk 4, Lk 13]
 - e. Leaven (13:33); no interpretation [also Lk 13]
 - f. Hidden Treasure (13:44); no interpretation or parallels
 - g. Valuable Pearl (13:45-46); no interpretation or parallels
 - h. Dragnet (13:47-48); interpretation 13:49-50 [no parallels]
 - [i. Head of Household (13:51-52); no interpretation or parallels]
4. The Interpreted Parables of the Kingdom
 Methodology: start from known, move to unknown

a. The Sower (13:1-9)

(1) The Story (13:3-8): allegory or story parable

Broadcast method of planting seed

Possibly plowing follows sowing

Roadside and birds

Stony ground and sun:

thin soil over bedrock allows faster sprouting

warms soil faster but also dries it faster

plants wiped out when sun dries surface soil

Competition from thorns

prob wide-leaved sort common in Palestine

Variable yield even in good soil

(2) Jesus' Interpretation (13:18-23)

Sower not explained (perhaps Christ, 13:37, or anyone spreading Gospel)

Seed = the word (20,22; Mk 4:14; Lk 8:11)

Various soils = different types of persons or diff types of reception for Gospel

Roadside = one who does not understand (19)

birds devouring = Satan preventing later understanding by removing word (19)

Stony ground = one who receives w/ joy (believes, Lk 8:13),

but no root in self (20)

Sun = affliction, persecution (21)

Thorns = worry of world, deception of riches (22)

Good soil = one who hears, understands (23) (accepts, Mk 4:20; holds fast, good heart, Lk 8:15)

(3) Some Lessons from the Sower

(a) Though the Gospel is good news, not everyone is going to jump on the bandwagon (or stay on).

(b) Some who hear will not understand, nor make any positive response, nor even

remember the message.

- (c) Some will respond eagerly but not really be saved; persecution will show the true situation. A person may "believe" in some sense without being regenerated.
- (d) Others will begin to grow, but this world will seem more important, and they will never reach maturity. Are these really saved?
- (e) Others will show their salvation in their lives. But even here there will be real differences.

b. The Tares (Weeds & Wheat; 13:24-30)

(1) The Story (24-30): allegory or story-parable

Owner of large farm (has servants) plants wheat-seed.

At night, an enemy scatters weed-seeds over them.

Not clear just how similar wheat & weeds are, but difference recognizable when wheat puts on grain [by their fruits you shall know them?].

Although slaves want to remove weeds immediately, this would upset wheat also (at critical stage of development? roots intertwined?).

Instead, both are allowed to grow together until harvest.

Then weeds gathered, bound, burned; wheat put in barn [order significant?].

(2) Jesus' Interpretation (37-43)

Sower/owner is Christ, the Son of Man (37).

Field is world (38)

Seed here is not word (as in 1st parable) but people (38):

good seed (wheat) = sons of kingdom

bad seed (weeds) = sons of evil one

Sleeping of men not explained

Enemy is Devil (39)

Slaves & their suggestion not explained

slaves = angels? believers?

suggestion = destruction of wicked

Grow together not explained, but pretty obvious in context

Harvest = end of age (39,40)

Reapers = angels (39,40)

Tares burned = stumbling blocks/lawless cast into furnace (42)

Wheat gathered = righteous shine forth in kingdom (43)

(3) Some Lessons from the Tares

(a) Not only will disciples have to contend with problems of 1st parable, they will also find competing gospels arise. These find their source in Satan.

(b) Although [as we learn elsewhere] we have a responsibility to exercise

church discipline, such false believers and their gospels will continue to the end of the age. It will not be possible to destroy them w/o the sort of dislocation of society that will characterize the Lord's return.

(c) Though such false believers may entrap many and seem to get away with much wickedness, there will be no escape for them when the Lord comes to judge. Their fate will be terrible: burning, weeping, grinding of teeth.

(d) Though true believers may seem to get lost in all the confusion of competing religions and false Xns, though their desire to be honest and do right seems to go unnoticed, yet they will one day "shine forth" in God's kingdom.

c. The Dragnet (13:47-50)

(1) The Story (47-48): a similitude

Regular way a dragnet (or seine) is used; having floats and weights it covers whole depth of water from surface to bottom.

Set out by boat or by wading to enclose an entire volume so that nothing larger than net mesh escapes.

Fish must then be sorted into marketable & worthless.

(2) Jesus' Interpretation (49-50)

Fishermen = angels (49) [contrast Lk 5:10]

Fish = righteous & wicked (49)

Drawing net = end of age (49)

Sorting fish = separation of righteous & wicked (49)

Good into containers not explained, but parallel to wheat gathered into barn.

Bad thrown away = wicked into fire, weeping (49,50).

(3) Some Lessons from the Dragnet

(a) There will be no escape from judgment at the end of the age.

(b) There will be a complete and accurate separation of wicked & righteous.

(c) The fate of the wicked is terrible: burning, weeping, being thrown away.

5. The Uninterpreted Parables of the Kingdom

Methodology: with interpreted parables now studied, move on to uninterpreted

a. Problems of Interpretation

(1) Various Competing Views

(a) Mustard and Leaven

some see both predicting growth of Xy; **both good**

others see a prediction of unnatural growth and corruption; **both bad**

we will suggest a third alternative: **one bad, one good**

(b) Treasure and Pearl

Some see treasure/pearl as X or Gospel, for which believer gives up all.

Others see treas/pearl as church and/or Israel, for which Christ gives up all.

(2) Some considerations which may help

(a) OT & NT background: pre-existing symbolism and later interpretation w/in NT

(b) Immediate context: use of symbolism elsewhere in these parables? chronological structure?

b. The Mustard Seed (13:31-32)

(1) The Story: similitude

Mustard plant starts from very small seed but forms enormous herb (even small tree), big enough to support birds.

(2) Interpretation

Context: looking at interpreted parables,

Sower - planting

Tares - planting, growth, harvest

Dragnet - harvest

Not unreasonable to think this parable shows a stage in kingdom chronologically following planting.

Botany: although growth of mustard plant is unusual, it is certainly not unnatural.

OT background: growth of trees (and birds resting in them) used figuratively several times.

Ezk 17:23 - growth of Israel?

Ezk 31:6 - greatness of Assyria (vv 3-5,7-9); birds = nations? height = pride?

Dan 4:12 - greatness of Nebuchadnezzar

Other background: birds used figuratively several places: closest is Mt 13:4; similar in dream-allegory of Gen 40:17.

c. The Leaven (13:33)

(1) The Story: similitude

A very common practice, making leavened bread by sourdough method.

Amount of flour (about bushel) seems large, but same as in Gen 18:6 and Judg 6:19.

(2) Interpretation

(a) OT & NT background: symbolic significance of leaven elsewhere always bad.

OT: liturgical use of unleavened bread

Jesus: beware leaven of Pharisees & Sadducees (Mt 16:6,11)

= teaching (16:12)

Pharisees & Herod (Mk 8:15)

Pharisees (Lk 12:1) = hypocrisy

Paul: a little leaven leavens whole lump

immorality in church (1 Cor 5:6-8)

false doctrine in church (Gal 5:9)

(b) Context: parallel to Mustard Seed & Leaven

Is this parallel synonymous or antithetical?

Having planting of good and bad seed in 1st two parables, harvest of good and

bad in 2nd and last, why not growth of good (Mustard) and bad

(Leaven) here? i.e., **one good, one bad**

d. Some Suggested Lessons from Mustard and Leaven

(1) Despite a small start, varied reception and false believers, the church will commonly grow until it begins to dominate the society into which it has been introduced. (mustard seed growing into tree)

(2) After it has come to dominate, people will start to join the church for reasons other than its message, e.g., prestige, possible advancement. (birds)

(3) False teaching will then be able to work within the church far more effectively than before, until it thoroughly permeates the church. (leaven working in dough)

e. Hidden Treasure and Valuable Pearl

(1) Story of Hidden Treasure: story-parable

Common for money to be hidden this way in ancient near east due to political instability, taxes.

Laborer or tenant farmer accidentally discovers hoard.

Can get clear title to money only by buying land and "rediscovering" money.

Sells all to get (or keep) treasure.

(2) Story of Pearl: story-parable

Another treasure found, but here fellow is looking for it.

Recognizes its worth, sells all to get it.

(3) Interpretation

What is treasure? Christ? Gospel? redeemed?

Haven't found any real OT background here; closest is Prov re/ wisdom, price far above rubies (Job 28:18; Prov 3:15, 8:11).

(a) Treasure = redeemed?

Apart from redemption, sinners have no particular value.

Doesn't fit suggested chronological scheme in series of parables.

(b) Treasure = Christ or Gospel?

Can't buy salvation; true, but can give up all to follow Him (see Lk 14:26-33).

Note: in both parables, person thinks he is getting great bargain.

NT background: Gospel as hidden treasure (2 Cor 4:7).

I favor this alternative: treasure is Gospel.

(4) Some Suggested Lessons from Treasure and Pearl

(a) When false teaching has done its work in the church, the Gospel may become so obscured as to be very difficult to find.

(b) Nevertheless, some will find it. Some will not be looking for it, but will find it by accident (God's providence). Others will be looking for it (God has put a longing in their hearts).

(c) Both will recognize its surpassing value when they discover it. They will be willing to give up everything to have and keep it, realizing they have gotten an unbelievable bargain.

6. Overview of Parables of Kingdom

By these seven parables, Jesus gives us a series of pictures of the progress of the Gospel and of Satanic opposition to it in the time period before His second coming. These pictures probably are to be understood as representing the cycle of struggle as the Gospel enters a society and is opposed by Satan, rather than a straight-line history from 1st coming to 2nd.

I suspect the cycle starts over in some sense when the Lord brings revival to a society. These phenomena appear in American church history in a somewhat more fragmented form because we have had no state church.

H. ILLUSTRATIVE PARABLES

1. What are Illustrative Parables?

A separate subgenre within the genre "parable"

Not covered by phrase "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning," since story itself is already theological.

Madeline Boucher considers these "extended synecdoches" in contrast to regular parables, which are extended similes or metaphors; synecdoche = part for whole; here a story that gives a **sample** of sorts of behavior, attitudes to be either followed or avoided.

If we call these "illustrative parables," other types (similitude, story-parable, allegory) could be called "translation parables," since they translate an earthly story to a heavenly one.

2. Examples of Illustrative Parables

- a. Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37)
- b. Rich Fool (Lk 12:16-21)
- c. Lowest Seats (Lk 14:7-11)
- d. Dinner Invitations (Lk 14:12-14)
- e. Rich Man & Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)
- f. Pharisee & Publican (Lk 18:9-14)
- [g. Wounded Soldier (1 Kg 20:35-43)]
- [h. Unclean Spirits (Mt 12:43-45)]

These appear to be analogies also, though they function somewhat differently than our so-called translation parables.

Instead of an earthly vehicle for a heavenly tenor, both vehicle and tenor function in the same realm; e.g.

Good Samaritan:

should lie in Abraham's bosom [and you not]?"

Phrase seems to picture Lazarus feasting at banquet on couch beside Abraham (in place of honor).

This suggests that our parable presents a contrast:
In this life: RM feasting, Laz begging in torment.
Beyond grave: Laz feasting, RM begging in torment.

b. Interpretive Problems

Relation of riches, poverty & salvation
Literal vs. figurative elements in description of intermediate state

c. Some Lessons from Rich Man & Lazarus
(generalizing from specific features of parable)

- (1) Our condition in this life does not indicate our condition beyond the grave. Our standing with men here may be quite different than our standing with God.
- (2) The condition of men between death and the resurrection is conscious. For the saved there is comfort; for the lost, only torment.
- (3) There is no second chance for the lost beyond this life.
- (4) God's revelation in the Bible is sufficient to leave people without excuse for ignoring God's claim on their lives and His provision for salvation.

3. Pharisee & Publican (Lk 18:9-14)

a. Some details

- (9) Note the intended recipients of the parable: those who thought themselves righteous & despised others.
- (10) tax-collector not = *publicanus*; latter a wealthy tax-farmer, usually Roman; Zacchaeus prob one of these, but fellow in this parable prob lower level. Roman taxes incl: head tax, land tax, import & export duties, tolls on roads, bridges, markets...
Tax collectors considered hated renegades.
- (10) Pharisee: described in Josephus, *Ant* 18.1.3;
Prob best illustrations of this parable from rabbinic lit., J, Ber 13d: R. Simeon b. Yohai: "I have seen the children of the world to come and they are few. If there are 3, I and my son are of their number. If there are 2, I and my son are they." [acc to Gen R 35, 64b: if only one, it is Simeon rather than his son!]

- (11) Stood (a pose?) by himself (note text variant)
separation from others, esp tax collector?
- (11) I thank you; cp B, Ber 28b, Nehonia b. Hakana praying (c AD 100): "I thank thee, O Eternal, my God, for having given me part with those who attend this school instead of running thru the shops. I rise early like them, but it is to study the Law, not for futile ends. I take trouble as they do, but I shall be rewarded and they will not; we run alike, but I for the future life, while they will only arrive at the pit of destruction."
- (12) fast twice a week: OT only required once a year; in Zech's time, app 4 yearly fasts (7:3,5; 8:19); this 'twice a week' is addition of rabbinic piety, fasting on M and Th (M, Baba Kama 82.1); cp Didache 8: "Let not your fastings be w/ the hypocrites, for they fast on the 2nd & 5th day of the week [M and Th]; but do ye keep your fast on the 4th and preparation day [W and F!!]."
- (12) tithes of all I acquire: OT requires tithes of grain, wine, oil, livestock (Dt 14:22,23) but Pharisees added to this (Mt 23:23) and tithed purchases also.
- (13) far off: from Pharisee or Holy Place? note tendency today for Orthodox Jews to put prayer requests in cracks in Wailing Wall to get them as close to God as possible.
- (14) justified: declared righteous (i.e., by God)

b. Interpretive Problems

- Relation of impiety, piety and salvation
- Way of salvation?
- Beware of dismissing Pharisees as mere hypocrites

c. Some Lessons from the Pharisee & Publican

- (1) He who trusts in his own righteousness before God will be humiliated in judgment, but he who confesses his sin and trusts in God's mercy will be declared righteous.
- (2) The most pious person who seeks to do more than the Bible requires will fall short. The most wicked person who repents and seeks God's forgiveness will find it.
- (3) We must beware of attitudes like those of this Pharisee arising in ourselves. Such attitudes deny the heart of the Gospel message.

4. Some Principles for Interpreting Illustrative Parables

- a. Illustrative parables are recognized in being basically non-figurative, teaching by example rather than by figure. Of course, such parables may contain figures. It is still desirable to identify the analogy.
- b. Knowledge of the cultural background may be very important in discovering the point of such parables.
- c. As these parables are concrete examples, one must study the context to see how far

- they may be generalized.
- d. As with ordinary parables, there is a tendency for the author to simplify details to focus attention on particular points.
 - e. The boundaries of the category "illustrative parable" may fade into those of regular teaching and exhortation.

I. ACTED PARABLES

1. The Cursing of the Fig Tree (Matt 21:18-22; Mk 11:12-14,20-24)

a. The Incident

Jesus is coming to Jerusalem from Bethany
 hungry, sees solitary fig tree w/ leaves
 checks for fruit, finds none

EXCURSUS ON FIGS & FIG TREES

Fig tree in Palestine has 2 crops:

Winter figs ripening May-June

Summer figs ripening Aug-Sept

Winter figs appear in Feb, leaves in April (cp Song 2:13)

Edersheim suggests it is unusual to see leaves on a fig tree on Mt. of Olives at Easter time.

Figs often eaten green, so lack of figs implies the tree will have no fruit that year.

Jesus pronounces curse: no fruit again "forever" εις τον αιωνα, *eis ton aiona*.

fig tree withers "immediately" [παραχρημα, *parachrema* - usually "right away" (Lk 1:64; 4:39; 5:25; 8:44,47,55; 13:13; 18:43), but sometimes more like "soon" (Lk 19:11; Acts 12:23); Moulton & Milligan give a papyrus where = month's delay]. In our context (cp Mk), this prob means "unnaturally suddenly."

Jesus' further remarks seem to be addressed to *how* this occurred rather than *why*, though emphasis on faith may relate to reason also.

b. Its Meaning

(1) Context (both Mt and Mk)

Triumphal Entry

Looks over Temple

EVENING

F.T. cursed

Cleansing Temple

EVENING

F.T. withers

Authority Questioned

So follows Triumphal Entry.

Apparently brackets Cleansing of Temple.

Precedes challenge to Jesus' authority by priests & scribes.

(2) NT Symbolism of Fruit and Trees

Preaching of John B. (Mt 3:10) - axe at roots

Parable of Tenant Farmers

warning to unrepentant Jews (individually? collectively?)

Sermon on Mt. (Mt 7:16-20)

how to recognize false prophets (cp 12:33)

Parable of Fig Tree (Lk 13:6-9)

illustration of "repent or perish"

Olivet Discourse (Mt 24:32-33)

illustration of signs of 2nd coming

Jude's Warning (Jude 12)

picture of false Christians

End-Time Disasters (Rev 6:13)

stars fall like unripe figs

Israel as Olive Tree (Rom 11:16-24)

(3) OT Symbolism

Figures of prosperity: 1 K 4:25; 2 K 18:31 (Isa 36:16); Joel 2:22; Mic 4:4; Hag 2:19; Zech 3:10

Figures of disaster: Isa 34:4; Jer 5:17; 8:13; Hos 2:12; Joel 1:7,12; Amos 4:9

Good/bad fruit: Jer 24; 29:17

Righteous like fruitful tree: Ps 1:3; 92:12-14; Jer 17:8

Israel as plant (usually vineyard): Isa 5:1-7; 27:2-11; 60:21; Jer 12:10; Ezk 19:10-14

Fall like figs: Isa 34:4; Nah 3:12

(4) Some Suggested Identifications

fruitlessness = lack of real righteousness, or not doing what God intended

leaves (for fig tree in spring) = pretensions to fruit

Jesus cursing = God's curse

fig tree = unbelieving Israel (by context more than by symbolic connections)

drying up = judgment (like olive branches broken off?)

forever (literally for tree) = long time (on basis of OT and NT prophecy) for Israel

c. Some Lessons from the Cursing of the Fig Tree

(1) God hates hypocrisy. Those who are hypocrites face His terrible judgment.

(2) God made man to serve Him. Those who do not live the kind of life God intended can only look forward to His judgment.

(3) Israel was selected to be a light and blessing to the nations. Because of her disobedience, particularly in rejecting Christ, she was put under a curse (until the time of Christ's return).

(4) May we be faithful to the Lord that we not fall under his condemnation.

2. The Cleansing of the Temple (John 2:13-22; Mt 21:12-17; Mk11:15-19; Lk 19:45-48)

a. The Incidents

two cleansings, very similar, though some significant differences:

JOHN	SYNOPTICS
First visit of Jesus= ministry	Last visit of Jesus= ministry
At Passover	At Passover
Whip of ropes used	Not mentioned
Casts our animals	Casts our buyers & sellers
Overturns tables	Overturns tables
Tells dove-sellers to remove doves	Overturns dove-sellers seats
Says: Take things out; don=t make Father=s house a market.@	Cites God=s intention for temple (Isa 56:7) and their use of it (Jer 7:11).
Immediately asked for a sign+	Next day challenged
Disciples recall Psalm 69 re/ zeal	Not mentioned

b. Their Meaning

(1) Most connect both w/ Mal 3:1-3 (though prob basically eschatological):

- Messianic claim
- warning of judgment
- promise of cleansing

(2) Obviously Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 must be considered

(Matt 21:13 and parallels)

- (a) Isa 56: promise of blessing to obedient, even tho eunuch or foreigner;
- warning against leaders of Israel

(b) Jer 7: warning of judgment on Israel, which in Jer's time was doing wickedness but expecting God's protection; esp warns of destruction of Jerusalem temple

- (3) Probably Ps 69:9 should also be considered (cited in John 2:17)
Messianic, Davidic
rejected by powerful enemies, who charge him unjustly
(4,8,11-12,14,18-19,20)
smitten by God (7,26), but calls on Him for deliverance (throughout)
curse on enemies (22-28)
salvation for humble, trusting (6,32-33)

(4) Some Interpretive Suggestions

Jesus as Messiah = God, appears suddenly in temple
those buying & selling = unbelieving of Israel, misusing their commission from God
presumably this activity is in court of Gentiles (not enough room elsewhere),
so also tends to crowd out Gentiles, making God look bad to them
Jesus' actions = God's reaction to unbelieving Israel, both disapproval and
(prophetically) driving them away

c. Some Suggested Lessons

- (1) Jesus came to God's people in his day and found them treating their God-given privileges as commonplace. We must beware of doing the same today.
- (2) Jesus drove them from the temple, predicting their dispersion and cutting them off from God to give an opportunity to the Gentiles. We Gentile Christians must beware lest we are cut off because of unbelief and others receive our blessings.
- (3) Just as Jesus came suddenly to the temple of his day, so he will return suddenly one day. Those who continue in disobedience will be caught unprepared and suffer loss. His own people will be refined.

3. Some General Observations on Acted Parables

a. Though there are many acted parables in OT, there are only a few clear examples in Jesus' ministry. Besides two above, some other possibilities:

- (1) Incident in temple at age 12
(2) Baptism by John (taking our judgment on self?)
(3) Healing on Sabbath
(4) Use of spit & clay on occasion (creation?)
(5) Writing on ground when asked to judge adulteress

- (6) Triumphal entry
- (7) Anointing Jesus
- (8) Foot-washing

b. Closely related to acted parables are certain other types of activities:

- (1) Jesus' miracles, which reveal something (both directly and symbolically) about himself, his mission and God the Father (esp emphasized in John),
- (2) Liturgical actions
 - (a) Baptism
 - (b) Lord's Supper

c. Such symbolic actions are to be recognized by their unusual character or apparent symbolism.

d. Once identified, the meaning of each is to be derived (like other parables) from context and background (both OT and NT).

e. Some dangers:

- (1) wrong interpretation
- (2) overlooking symbol
- (3) finding symbol where none intended

APPENDIX

Rabbinic Parables

Parables are "short fictitious stories that illustrate a moral attitude or religious principle." Normally they have two levels of meaning, popularly the "earthly story" and the "heavenly meaning."

1. Frequency
2. Variety
3. Parables as Analogies
4. Parables as Mini-Dramas
5. Caricature
6. Stock Metaphors
7. Function and Audience
8. Comparison with Jesus' Parables

1. Frequency. In the ancient Greco-Roman world parables occur frequently in the teaching of Jesus and the rabbinic literature, but only rarely elsewhere. Over 1500 rabbinic parables survive, though only 324 of these date before AD 200. These earlier parables are given in Johnston (1977). Only three date before the time of Jesus, from R. Hillel in the generation immediately preceding. Thus the 60 parables of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels are among the earliest known. Yet Jesus' audience realized he was speaking in parables (Mt 13:10), so the form was apparently well-known at that time. Perhaps parables were common in the synagogue sermons of Jesus day, as they were later. We have too little information from this early period to be sure.

2. Variety. In Jewish usage, the Greek word *parabole*, like its Hebrew counterpart *mašal*, is broader in meaning than our English word "parable." Both also include proverb and paradox, and *mašal* can mean by-word or prophetic poem as well. Here we confine ourselves to parables in the narrower sense, illustrative stories ranging in length from a sentence or two (a "similitude"), to a short story of a few hundred words ("story parable"). These may make a single point or several; they may be rather allegorical or not. To conserve space here, the parables quoted are the shorter ones.

3. Parables as Analogies. Most parables have two levels of meaning. As Sider notes, parables typically make their points by means of analogy or proportion, using some situation in everyday life to picture something in the moral or spiritual realm. "R. Jacob said: This world is like a lobby before the world to come. Prepare yourself in the lobby that you may enter the banquet hall." (J116; *m. 'Abot* 4:16) Here the analogy is:

this world: the world to come = lobby: banquet hall.

The left side of the equation is the reality part (tenor, *nimšal*); the right side is the picture part (vehicle, *mašal*). The speaker is making one or more points of comparison through this

proportion. His main point here is (1) we need to get ready in the first before we enter the second. Some other points are probably implied: (2) you have to pass out of the first to get into the second; (3) the second is far more important than the first, or even (3a) the second is what the first is all about.

4. Parables as Mini-Dramas. Young notes that many parables have a structure like that of a miniature drama. They often begin with an introductory formula, followed by the presentation of the main characters and setting. A crisis is developed and then resolved. Finally, the parable is applied. "Judah ha-Nasi said: 'Unto what is the matter like? It is like a king who was judging his son, and the accuser was standing and indicting him. When the tutor of the prince saw that his pupil was being condemned, he thrust the accuser outside the court and put himself in his place in order to plead on his behalf. Even so, when Israel made the Golden Calf, Satan stood before God accusing him, while Moses remained without. What then did Moses do? He arose and thrust Satan away and put himself in his place.'" (J267; *Ex. Rab.* 43:1)

5. Caricature. Parables are typically stories drawn from everyday life, but often they have some unusual character or exaggerated action designed to draw attention to a particular point. The best ones are short and memorable creations of experienced story-tellers. "It is said, 'Will you be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?' (Num 16:22). R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: A parable. It is like men sitting in a ship. One took a drill and began boring beneath his seat. His fellow-travelers said, 'What are you doing?' He responded, 'What does it matter to you? It's my seat I'm boring under!' They said, 'The water will come in and drown us all!'" (J271; *Lev. Rab.* 4:6)

6. Stock Metaphors. Parable stories often have characters and actions that are based on common metaphors. Many of these are drawn from the OT, and they help the listener understand what the point is. Among Johnston's 324 early rabbinic parables, by far the commonest metaphor is that of a king (161 times), nearly always standing for God. Other common pictures for God are husband and father. For Israel, the stock metaphors are son, wife, daughter, and servant. Moses is often pictured as a friend, steward or tutor. A banquet is used with some variety, but a common meaning is the age to come. Inheritance sometimes pictures the promised land, sometimes Israelites, and once the future reward. The skillful parable-maker would often weave together a consistent set of these motifs into a story to teach a lesson. "A philosopher asked R. Gamaliel, 'Why is your God jealous of idol-worshippers rather than of the idol itself?' He answered, 'I will tell you a parable. To what is the matter like? It is like a king who had a son, and his son raised a dog whom he named for his father. Whenever the son took an oath, he said, "By the life of this dog, my father!" When the king heard of it, with whom was he angry, his son or the dog? Surely his son!'" (J174; *Mek. Bachodesh* 6:113ff)

7. Function and Audience. Among the rabbis, parables are commonly used in two ways C as illustrations and as arguments. The rabbi's audience might be his disciples in a teaching situation, a congregation listening to a synagogue sermon, or some outsider in an encounter or debate. We see the last of these in the parable cited in #6, above. The teaching situation is

probably the occasion for ##4-5, which are explaining Scripture passages, and the setting of #3 is likely to have been sermonic.

8. Comparison with Jesus' Parables. The sorts of parables used by the rabbis are often similar to those used by Jesus, and each can cast some light on the interpretation of the other. In fact, most of what has been said above applies to the parables of Jesus.

8.1. Fables. One type of rabbinic parable not found in the Gospels is the fable, a story featuring animals or plants acting in human ways. When one rabbi warned R. Akiba for violating the Roman decree against studying the Torah, the latter responded, "Unto what is the matter like? It is like a fox who was walking alongside a river, and he saw fish going in swarms from one place to another [fleeing the fishermen]. He said to them, 'Would you like to come on to the dry land...?' They said to him, '... If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die!' So it is with us.... If we go and neglect the Torah [which is our life], how much worse off we shall be." (J148; *b. Ber* 61b) This type of parable is occasionally found in the OT (e.g., Judg 9:8-15), but is best known in the collection ascribed to Aesop (6th c. BC).

8.2. Sample Parables. A type of parable used by Jesus but not (apparently) by the rabbis is the sample (or paradigm) parable. In these, the story operates only on a single level, being already a moral or religious story without the use of analogy. Instead, a sample of the sort of behavior to be approved or condemned is given (e.g., the parables of the Good Samaritan, Lk 10:30-36, and the Rich Fool, Lk 12:16-21), and the recipient is expected to generalize the lesson from this concrete example. These have a background in the case law of the OT, and in the sample stories of the Proverbs (e.g., Prov 7:6-23).

8.3. Similar Parables. Stock metaphors (#6) are used by Jesus as well as the rabbis, and in a few cases, a similar cluster of such metaphors results in a very similar parable. Compare R. Tarfon's saying, "The day is short, the task is great, the laborers are idle, the wage is abundant, and the master of the house is urgent" (*m. 'Abot* 2:15), with Jesus' "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Lk 10:2). Or consider the following parable: "A king had a vineyard for which he engaged many laborers, one of whom was especially apt and skillful. What did the king do? He took this laborer from his work, and walked through the vineyard with him. When the laborers came for their hire in the evening, the skillful laborer also appeared among them and received a full day's wages from the king. The other laborers were angry at this and said, 'We have toiled the whole day, while this man has worked but two hours; why does the king give him the full hire, even as to us?' The king said to them, 'Why are you angry? Through his skill he has done more in two hours than you have all day.'" (*y. Ber.* 2:5) The story is very similar to that of Jesus in Mt 20:1-16, but the lesson is very different.

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