
A Study Of



The Parables Of Jesus

Volume Two

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An Introduction to the Parables

The parables comprise more than one-third of the recorded teachings of Jesus. While they contain some of the most profound lessons taught by Him, at the same time they comprise some of His simplest, most easily understood lessons.

The writers of the New Testament, while using allegories and similitudes, do not use the story parable as Jesus did though it is found occasionally in the Old Testament such as the parabolic story of a vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-7 and the parable Nathan spoke to David (2 Samuel 12:1-7). In the New Testament, though, its use seemed to be unique to Jesus which was a fulfillment of prophecy (Compare Matthew 13:34-35 with Psalm 78:2 and Matthew 13:13-14 with Isaiah 6:9-10).

By the time of His ministry which is recorded in Matthew 12 and 13, Jesus' form of public instruction had become principally parabolic. Why? Their leaders and the people as a whole had hardened their hearts against Him and His message because they were filled with prejudice, moral hardness, blindness, and willful ignorance. As opposition to Him grew in intensity, so did His parables in their force, solemnity, and number. His purpose in them reflected the conditions which prompted Him to teach in such a way.

Parable Defined

- A. Many people define a parable as "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning," but such a definition is not broad enough to include all the parables.
 1. Luke 4:23, by the above definition, would have to be called a proverb.
 2. Mark 7:15-17, by the above definition, would be a kind of riddle that would prompt the hearer to ask, "What is there that comes out of me that is more important than what I take in?"
- B. "Literally denotes a placing beside, (akin to *paraballo*, to throw or lay beside, to compare). It signifies a placing of one thing beside another with a view to comparison." (W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 840)
- C. It is derived from the Greek word "*parabole*" that comes from two other Greek words.
 1. "*Ballo*" (verb): "to throw or cast."
 2. "*Para*" (preposition): "alongside of."
 3. "That which is thrown alongside of," thus resulting in a comparison.
- D. Generally speaking, a parable is a comparison or analogy drawn from nature or human circumstances, the object of which is to set forth a spiritual lesson. In the parables of Jesus there are comparisons of spiritual realities and natural occurrences.
- E. A parable is not the same thing as an allegory.
 1. In ancient and medieval times it was customary to treat the parables of Jesus as allegories. Some still treat them that way today.

2. Allegory defined.
 - a. "An allegory in the Gk. came to signify 'to speak so that the facts stated are applied to illustrate principles.'" (Vine, 49)
 - b. "The veiled presentation, in a figurative story, of a meaning metaphorically implied but not expressly stated. That which figuratively stands for something else." (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*)
3. An allegory is like a parable in that it is a story told to make a comparison but their difference lies in the fact that every detail in an allegory has an inner meaning while in a parable the details are not necessarily significant but are often there only to add color to the story.
4. An illustration of the use of allegories is found in Galatians 4:24-31.
 - a. Hagar and Sarah are used to contrast the old and new covenants.
 - b. Every detail in this allegory corresponds to something.

The Purposes of Parables

- A. While the New Testament does not state, in so many words, the exact purpose of the parabolic teaching of Jesus, it implies it in Matthew 13:10-13: "And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.'" (*New King James Version*)
- B. The four goals of parables.
 1. **The revelation of truth.**
 - a. Parables often reveal more truth than a plain statement would.
 - b. Those who, with a proper attitude, were seeking truth would be able to understand more (Matthew 13:11-12) because they had seeing eyes and hearing ears. (Matthew 13:16)
 - c. Christ revealed deep spiritual truths in a way easy for His disciples to understand.
 2. **The concealment of truth.** (Matthew 13:11-14)
 - a. The use of parables did not make Jesus' teaching plain to all who heard it because, having no appreciation for it, some of His hearers would not seek to understand it for they loved darkness more than light. (John 3:19-21)
 - b. The concealment of truth is not inconsistent with God. Consider Romans 1:28 and 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12.
 3. **The preservation of truth.**
 - a. Parables are set forth in a vivid, striking form which commands attention and impresses the memory thus making them easy to recall.

- b. Their use is especially beneficial to those who are just beginning to study spiritual things because it enables them to feed upon simpler things and to retain the stories more easily than just plain facts.
- 4. **The elicitation of truth from those otherwise reluctant to acknowledge it.**
 - a. Nathan's parable to David caused David to condemn himself. (2 Samuel 12:1-7)
 - b. The parable of the wicked husbandmen spoken by Jesus to the Jews caused the Jews, in effect, to admit that God would be just in destroying them for their wickedness. (Matthew 21:23-46)

Understanding Parables

- A. It is impossible to lay down strict rules for understanding parables.
 - 1. For example, in some parables small details have significance while in others details are not important.
 - 2. "The primary lesson or lessons of a parable must be grasped but not each and every detail is always to be forced to yield a distinct lesson. Parables are like pictures, in that they require details to make up the general picture but without each detail having of necessity a special and separate lesson. It may or may not be so." (G.H. Lang, *The Parabolic Teaching of Scripture*, 17)
- B. In general, a parable has one central meaning.
 - 1. In most cases, the details or incidents of the parable are merely "drapery," i.e., they serve as the background for the main thought or lesson.
 - 2. Some incidents, though, have meanings which are given by Jesus Himself.
- C. "In understanding the parables of Jesus, there are at least six points that we need to remember. (1) 'The material of parables may be real or fictitious.' (2) 'The material of parables may be borrowed from nature or from human life.' (3) 'The purely fanciful details of a parable may correspond accurately to the men who are instructed, and to their doings.' (4) 'Parts or the whole of a parable may be prophecy.' (5) 'The essential lesson taught is the main matter; details may or may not have separate significance.' (6) 'Application of details not explained must be on the lines of explanations given; then they will be sober and valuable, not fanciful or idle. Then also they will harmonize naturally with the whole picture, will add to its completeness, heighten its effect, and will not be foreign to it or irrelevant to the main lesson.'" (Lang, 17-18)

Conclusion

A very careful reading and study of the parables of Jesus will prove to be a great blessing to you. Giving serious consideration to their lessons will allow you to gain much knowledge and wisdom.

Lesson One: The Parable of Cloth and Wineskins

Lesson Texts: Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39

1. Which of the texts identifies this teaching as a parable?
2. Who came asking a question of Jesus?
3. What prompted Jesus to teach this parable?
4. What did fasting represent to the Jews?
5. Why would the disciples of John fast?
6. How often did most Pharisees fast? (See Luke 18:12)
7. What would be the usual attitude of the friends of a bridegroom while he is with them?
8. What would be the typical attitude of the friends of the bridegroom once the festivities of the wedding celebration is over and he is no longer with them?
9. Who is the bridegroom in this parable?
10. Why would one not put a the piece of a new garment that had not shrunk on an old garment?
11. Why would one not put new wine into old wineskins?
12. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

Lesson Two: The Parable of the Divided Kingdom

Lesson Texts: Matthew 12:22-30; Mark 3:22-27; Luke 11:14-23

1. Which of the texts identifies this teaching as a parable?
2. What had Jesus done for a demon-possessed man who was both blind and mute?
3. What was the reaction of the multitudes to Jesus' action on the demon-possessed man?
What question did they ask?
4. What was the reaction of the Pharisees to what Jesus had done?
5. What was the reaction of the Scribes to what Jesus had done?
6. What did some who were testing Jesus seek from Him?
7. Who is Beelzebub?
8. What happens to a kingdom that is divided against itself?
9. What happens to a house that is divided against itself?
10. What, according to Jesus, must one do and be in order to enter and plunder a strong man's house?
11. What is one who is not "with" Jesus?
12. What do you think is the main lesson of the parable?

Lesson Three: The Parable of the Mustard Seed

Lesson Texts: Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19

1. To what does Jesus liken a mustard seed in this parable?

2. After the mustard seed has been sown, what, according to the parable:
 - a. Is it greater than?

 - b. What does it become?

3. Is the mustard seed really “smaller than all seeds on earth?” If not, why do you think Jesus would say it was?

4. In Luke 17:6, Jesus referred to faith as a “mustard seed.” Why did He mean by describing it that way?

5. What indicates how large the tree becomes?

6. What do birds do in relation to the tree?

7. Read Daniel 2:34-35. What relation, if any, does it have to this parable?

8. What do you think is the main teaching of this parable?

Lesson Four: Parables of the Kingdom

Lesson Texts: Matthew 13:33, 44-50; Luke 13:20

The Parable of the Leaven (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20)

1. What is leaven?
2. To what is leaven likened in this parable?
3. What did a woman do with leaven? What was the result?
4. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

The Hidden Treasure (Matt. 13:44)

5. To what is a treasure hidden in a field likened in this parable?
6. What did a man do when he found that treasure?
7. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

The Pearl of Great Price (Matt. 13:45-46)

8. What was a merchant seeking? What did he find?
9. What did he do after he had found what he was looking for?
10. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

The Parable of the Dragnet (Matt. 13:47-50)

11. What is the purpose of a dragnet?
12. How is it comparable to the kingdom of heaven?
13. What did Jesus say was the meaning of this parable?

Lesson Five: The Parable of the Defiled Person

Lesson Texts: Matthew 15:10-20; Mark 7:14-23

1. What prompted the teaching of this parable? (Matt. 15:1-2)
2. What was the reaction of the Pharisees to this parable?
3. Which of the disciples specifically asked Jesus to explain the parable?
4. What, according to this parable, does not defile a person?
5. What, according to this parable, does defile a person?
6. Where do those things which defile originate?
7. What are some things listed by Jesus that defile a person?
8. From where, according to Jesus, do evil things come?
9. Who does Jesus want to hear this parable?
10. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

Lesson Six:

Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

Lesson Text: Matthew 20:1-16

1. To what did Jesus liken the kingdom of heaven in this parable?
2. What did the landowner do:
 - a. Early in the morning?
 - b. At the third hour of the day?
 - c. At the sixth and ninth hours of the day?
 - d. At the eleventh hour of the day?
3. What is a denarius?
4. What did the landowner have his steward do at evening of the day?
5. How much was given to each laborer?
6. Who complained when they received their wages? Why did they complain?
7. What was the landowner's response to those who complained?
8. What is meant by the phrase, "So the last shall be first, and the first last?"
9. What is meant by the phrase, "For many are called, but few chosen?"
10. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

Lesson Seven: The Parable of the Wedding Feast

Lesson Text: Matthew 22:1-14

1. What prompted the teaching of this parable? (Matt. 21:43-45)
2. In the parable, what had a certain king arranged?
3. What did the king have his servants do? How did the people respond to them?
4. What did the king have other servants do?
5. What were the reactions to the message of these servants?
6. What was the king's response to this?
7. Where did the king now send his servants? What were they to do? What was the result?
8. What did one guest at the wedding feast lack? What did the king say to him? What was his response?
9. What happened to that guest?
10. What is the meaning of the phrase, "For many are called, but few are chosen?"
11. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

Lesson Eight: The Parable of the Fig Tree

Lesson Texts: Matthew 24:32-35; Mark 13:28-31; Luke 21:24-33

1. What prompted Jesus to teach this parable? (See Luke 21:20; Matt. 24:1-3)
2. According to this parable, when does one know summer is near?
3. Jesus said, “When you see these things, know that **it** is near—at the doors.” What is **it**?
4. What did Jesus say about the generation that was living at that time?
5. What in this parable lets one know that Matthew 24 is not referring to the end of the world?
6. What in this parable did Jesus say would pass away?
7. What in the parable did Jesus say about His words?
8. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

Lesson Nine: The Parable of Two Servants

Lesson Texts: Matthew 24:45-51; Luke 12:42-48

1. What prompted the teaching of this parable? (See Matt. 24:32; Luke 12:40)
2. What was the initial responsibility of the faithful and wise servant or steward? For what was he to make provision?
3. When his master returns, what will he do for the servant who has been faithful in doing what the master had commanded?
4. What will an evil servant do if his master is delaying his return?
5. When, according to the parable, will the master of the evil servant return?
6. What will the master of the evil servant do to him when he returns?
7. With whom will the master appoint the portion of the evil servant?
8. What will the master do with one who knew his will but did not do it?
9. What will happen to the one who was ignorant of his master's will but still committed things deserving of stripes?
10. Of whom will much be required?
11. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

Lesson Ten: The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Lesson Text: Matthew 25:1-13

1. To what is the kingdom of heaven likened in this parable?
2. What did the ten virgins do in relation to a bridegroom?
3. Why were five virgins wise? Why were five virgins foolish?
4. What did the virgins do when the bridegroom was delayed?
5. When told of the bridegroom's coming, what did the five foolish virgins ask of the five wise ones? What was their response?
6. Where were the five foolish virgins when the bridegroom arrived? What did they find when they finally returned?
7. What was told the five foolish virgins on their return?
8. What warning did Jesus give at the end of the parable?
9. Who do you think is represented by:
 - a. The five foolish virgins?
 - b. The five wise virgins?
 - c. The bridegroom?
10. What do you think is the main lesson of the parable?

Lesson Eleven: Parables of Feasts

Lesson Text: Luke 14:7-24

The Parable of the Lowly Place (Luke 14:7-14)

1. What prompted Jesus to teach this parable?
2. Why should one not sit down in “the best places” when invited to a feast?
3. Where should one choose to sit at a feast? Why?
4. Who will be humbled? Who will be exalted?
5. According to Jesus, who should one not invite to a dinner or supper? Why?
6. Who, according to Jesus, should one invite? Why?
7. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

The Parable of the Great Feast (Luke 14:15-24)

8. What was the general response of those who were invited to a great supper?

9. What were the specific excuses of:
 - a. The first person?

 - b. The second person?

 - c. The third person?

10. What was the reaction of the master when told of these excuses? What did he have his servant do?

11. Since there was still room at the supper, what did the master now command his servant to do?

12. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

Lesson Twelve: Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

Lesson Text: Luke 16:19-31

The story of the rich man and Lazarus is recognized by some as a parable while others consider it a story from real life. No matter how you consider it, its lessons are of great value thus it is worthwhile to study it. R.L. Whiteside said of it, "The story seems to be its own message, one that uniquely comes from beyond the grave. We conclude that it is both history and a special sort of parable" (*Bible Studies*, Vol. 4, 424)

1. What may have prompted Jesus to teach this parable? (Luke 16:14)

2. What are some indications of the extent of the wealth of the rich man?

3. Who was Lazarus?
 - a. What reveals his health or lack of it?
 - b. Where was he to be found?
 - c. What did he desire?
 - d. What seemed to be the only comfort he had in life?

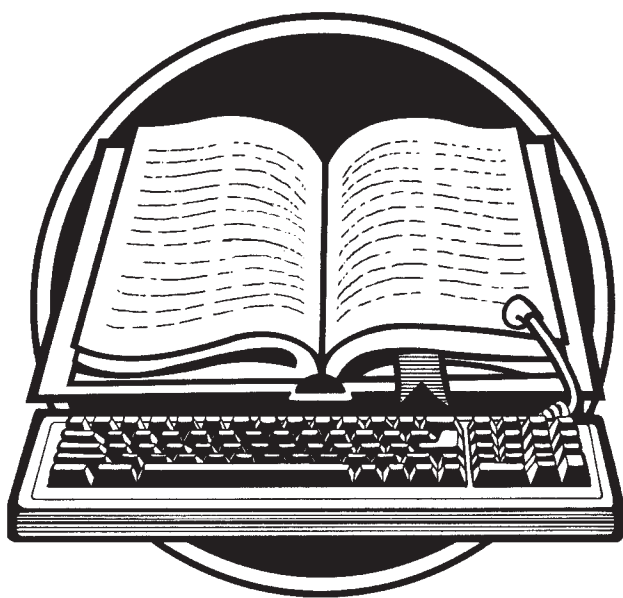
4. What happened to Lazarus when he died? Where did he ultimately end up?

5. What happened to the rich man when he died? Where did he ultimately end up?
6. What did the rich man request of Abraham?
7. What was Abraham's response to the rich man's request?
8. What did the rich man "beg" of Abraham? Why?
9. What was Abraham's response to this further request?
10. What did the rich man say would cause his brothers to repent?
11. What did Abraham say in response to the rich man in this case?
12. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?

Lesson Thirteen: The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Text: Luke 18:9-14

1. Why did Jesus speak this parable?
2. What two men went to the temple to pray?
3. To whom did the Pharisee think he was praying? To whom was he really praying?
4. For what did the Pharisee thank God?
5. Who did the Pharisee list as “other men?”
6. What did the Pharisee list as his positive qualities?
7. Where was the tax collector standing?
8. What did Jesus say of the tax collector’s attitude?
9. What request did the tax collector make of God?
10. Which of the two men went justified to his house?
11. According to the parable, who will be humbled? Who will be exalted?
12. What do you think is the main lesson of this parable?



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