

Parables

Parables in Gospels

- No parables in Gospel of John
- Approximately 45 parables found in synoptic gospels from all four sources
- p. 194 lists parables and sources in synoptics
- Approximately 16 parables found in Gospel of Thomas

Nature of a Parable

- Greek word parabole, Hebrew word mashal, Aramaic word mathla
- not a metaphor - a comparison made by substituting one object for another (my love is a red, red rose)
- not an allegory - a narrative that involves comparison, where each detail symbolizes something else, thus making several points
- not a simile - a comparison between one object and another linked by words such as "like" or "as" (my love is like a rose)

Parable - definition

- Parable is like a simile extended into a narrative, but unlike an allegory, a parable makes a single point comparing a commonplace object, event, or person, with some less common theological reality as the kingdom of God.

Adaptation of Parables (redaction criticism)

- Although most scholars are convinced Jesus did teach in parables, they raise the question of how the parables have been adapted by the gospel writers:
 - Placement in the gospel (Matt 18:10-14 || Luke 15:1-7)
 - Addition of brief explanatory or hortatory statements (Matt 20:1-16||Mark 10:29- 31||Luke 13:30)
 - Addition of allegorical interpretation (Mark 4:3- 8 with 4:14-20)
 - Alteration of details to make parable more allegorical (Matt 22:2-10||Luke 14:16-24)

Purpose of Parables

- Make teaching more understandable
- Make teaching more difficult to understand (Mark 4:10 ff.)
- Transform life of hearer (e.g., reversal of values)

How Parables Have Been Interpreted

- Allegorically (see p. 201) - parables are primarily for instruction
- As extended similes, making a single instructional point
- As a form of eschatological proclamation (assurance, repentance, how to live in kingdom, etc.)
- As literary works that are primarily metaphorical, not aimed at instruction but transformation, a call to decision, by reversing values and expectations; part of Jesus' kingdom preaching
- Recent scholarship has also pointed to the parables' relationship to aphorisms – short pithy sayings or proverbs
- In light of aphorisms, many scholars are looking at Jesus' teaching as part of Jewish wisdom tradition – Jesus the sage
