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THE ROLE OF JESUS' PARABLES IN LUKE'S
GOSPEL: LUKE 15:11-32

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DR. LORIN L. CRANFORD

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BY
TONY LATHAM

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CHAPTER 1 THE ROLE OF JESUS' PARABLES IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

The word παραβολή appears seventeen times in Matthew, thirteen times in Mark, and eighteen times in Luke. In the rest of the New Testament it appears only in Hebrews 9:9 and 11:19.¹ The number of parables is not as easily identified as the simple counting of the use of the word παραβολή might indicate. In fact, scholars are not agreed on the exact number of parables because not all agree on what form constitutes a parable.²

Definition of Parables

Establishing a definition for parables carries complications. Even if a definition could be determined for parables as understood in biblical times, not all agree that this solves the problem of how to understand and use the word today.

¹Brad H. Young, Jesus and His Jewish Parables: Rediscovering the Roots of Jesus' Teaching, Theological Inquiries: Studies in Contemporary Biblical and Theological Problems, ed. Lawrence Boadt (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 5,7. Young (7) notes that the triple tradition uses the word παραβολή seven times in parallel; Matthew and Mark three times together; and independently, "Matthew five times, Mark one time, and Luke eleven times." For a list of those places in the New Testament where the term παραβολή is used, see Robert H. Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 22-23. Pages 24-26 contain further lists of stories that are clearly parables; extended comparisons with "like," "as," or "as if"; and possible parables.

²See appendix 1 for a listing of parables found in the Synoptic Gospels as indicated by Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds. Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), s.v. "Parable" by K. R. Snodgrass.

M. I. Boucher suggests that the definition of the word παραβολή was "undefined and in flux" in biblical times and there was no one way to correctly use the term. Therefore, she believes that "the term 'parable' is not, and indeed *should not* be, used in the same sense in scholarly discussion today as it was in antiquity."³ For Boucher, the modern-day use of the term should be

reserved for those stories which are drawn from ordinary, everyday life, which convey a religious or moral lesson, quite indirectly, and which are intended to convince or persuade, to bring the hearer to decision or action.⁴

While it may be true that modern-day usage of the term parable tends to be more restrictive in meaning than it was in biblical times, it is still necessary to gain a biblical understanding of the term, especially as it was used in New Testament times.

Birger Gerhardsson believes that the evangelists used the word with the same meaning as the Hebrew *mashal* (---), which

could be an aphorism, a proverb, a wise saying, a byword, a song of mockery, an example, a parable, an allegory, a fable, a riddle, a pregnant prophet statement, and many other things.⁵

³ Madeleine I. Boucher, The Parables, vol. 7, New Testament Message: A Biblical-Theological Commentary, ed. Wilfrid Harrington and Donald Senior (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1981), 13. Boucher (13-14) points to five different uses of the word parable in the New Testament: (1) As a proverb (Lk 4:23), (2) as a wisdom saying (Mk 7:15), (3) as "a slightly developed comparison" (Mk 13:28-29; Mt 24:32-33; Lk 21:29-31), (4) as "'symbol' and 'figurative speech'" (Heb 9:9; 11:19), and (5) as "the Gospel stories which we today commonly call 'parables,' the more or less extended stories such as the Sower, the Mustard Seed, the Lost Sheep, the Great Feast."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15. Boucher (14) believes the use of the word in biblical times generally referred to "any language that was somehow striking or out of the ordinary."

⁵ Birger Gerhardsson, "The Narrative Meshalim in the Synoptic Gospels: A Comparison with the Narrative Meshalim in the Old Testament," New Testament Studies 34 (1988): 340.

Since *mashal* can have such wide meaning, Gerhardsson suggests that two main divisions be used "aphoristic *meshalim*," which are terse and pithy statements, and "narrative *meshalim*," which tell a story. These terms correspond to the more general division between "logia" and "parables." The parable of the Prodigal Son belongs to the narrative *meshalim*.⁷

Peter Rhea Jones returns to the composition of the word *parable* for a definition that clarifies the intent of the parable as contrasted with the wider definition of *mashal*. The word *parable* derives from the verb βάλλω (to throw) and a preposition παρ- (alongside). The point of comparison within the story occurs when "the story (picture part) and the intended application (object) coincide." Jones calls this point "*internal juxtaposition*." Thus, Jones states that "the point of a parable should be sought internally in a juxtaposition."⁸

C. H. Dodd's definition of a parable is one commonly found in books on the parables:

¹ ⁷Ibid., 341.

² ⁸Peter Rhea Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 29-30. This excellent work on the parables goes beyond the academic discussion of the subject to the homiletical side of preaching the parables. The definition of parable provided by John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 15-16, gives fresh insights into the literary nature of the parable: "Metaphor can appear as either parable or myth. For our present purpose the difference may be underlined by borrowing a famous line from Marianne Moore and using it rather out of context. A *parable* gives us "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." A myth gives us imaginary gardens with imaginary toads in them. A parable tells a story which, on its surface level, is absolutely possible or even factual within the normalcy of life. . . . Parable is a metaphor of normalcy which intends to create participation in its referent. It talks of A so that one can participate in B, or, more accurately, it talks of x so that one can participate in X and so understand the validity of x itself. Its structural pattern is X-in-x, and the hyphens are not dispensable."

At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.⁹ Dodd is aware that a blending of classes takes place in comparing parabolic forms. The total impact of the parable does not wait upon its classification but is designed to "catch the imagination" of the listener and to lead him or her to the "one single point of comparison."¹⁰

Classification of Parables

Introduction

The classification of the parables of Jesus is not a matter of exact agreement among scholars. Peter Rhea Jones describes the parables of the gospels as "parabolic sayings," "simple parables," and "narrative parables."¹¹ While somewhat simplistic, covering over a multitude of questions of a literary nature, the classification does enable *mashal* of similar kind to be joined together for comparison and discussion.

Parabolic Sayings

Parabolic sayings, such as Matthew 5:13-"You are the salt of the earth," are simple metaphors which touch everyday life and are easily applied by the listener. The Sermon on the Mount

³ Charles H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Nisbet & Co., Ltd.: 1935), 16.

⁴ ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18. It has already been noted that not all will agree in this.

⁵ ¹¹ Jones, Teaching of the Parables, 32-33. There are more technical ways to divide the *mashal* into different categories; but the system used by Jones serves well enough to differentiate the basic types and to further the discussion of Luke 15:11-32.

contains a number of these "still picture" sayings (5:13; 6:24; 7:6). These parabolic sayings, Matthew indicated (Mt. 7:29), carried authority with the crowds who heard Jesus speak.¹²

Simple Parables

Simple parables, sometimes referred to as "similitudes,"¹³ are a step beyond a "still picture" saying. The picture adds frames and becomes a simple story. The situations simple parables evoke may still be typical of daily life, but a formula of comparison may now introduce the saying. Jones gives "the paired parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost coin (Luke 15:3-10), the Tower Builder and the Warring King (Luke 14:28-32), and the Treasure and the Pearl (Matt. 13:44-45)" as examples.¹⁴

Narrative Parables

⁶ ¹²Ibid.

⁷ ¹³Rudolf Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 174, agrees with Jülicher's distinction between the Similitude and the Parable. The Parable "does not bring two sets of facts together, but transposes the facts which serve for a similitude into a story, or, to put it in different terms, gives as its picture not a typical condition or a typical, recurrent event, but some interesting particular situation." Bultmann (174-75), however, recognizes the difficulty of neatly dividing the similitude and the parable. He observes that "if the distinction in principle is clear, . . . the boundaries fluctuate. . . . No intelligent person would expect any particular instance to give pure expression to any particular form. This means that there is no point in much debate over any particular example."

⁸ ¹⁴Jones, Teaching of the Parables, 33. Dodd, Parables of the Kingdom, (18) indicates that there is a lack of "precision" in separating parables into "figurative sayings, similitudes, and parables proper." Dodd's "rough grammatical test" for grouping parables is as follows: If we say that the first class [figurative sayings or parabolic sayings] has no more than one verb, the second [similitude or simple parable] more than one verb, in the present tense, and the third [parables proper or narrative parables] a series of verbs in the historic tense, we have a rough grammatical test; . . ."

Narrative parables move beyond the simple story by adding details and progression.

Jones identifies the "parables of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21), the Unjust Steward (Luke 16:1-8), the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), and the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1-9)" as narrative parables.¹⁵ The parable of the Prodigal Son also fits this classification.

Since the narrative parable (or Gerhardsson's narrative *mashal*) is an important vehicle for conveying the message of Jesus in the synoptic gospels, more attention will be given to understanding what this parable type is and how it functioned in the teaching ministry of Jesus.

The core or body of a narrative *mashal* is *narrative*. On occasion in the gospels, such as Luke 16:19-31 (The Rich Man and Lazarus), the narrative stands "without any complementary text elements." However, the usual presentation of a narrative parable or *mashal* includes some kind of "accessories." Gerhardsson lists these accessories as follows:

It can be *preceded* by some sentence or formula, it can itself be *introduced* by a didactic formula of some kind, it can be *ended* with a non-narrative conclusion of some kind, and it can be *succeeded* by interpretative, applicative or complementary words.¹⁶

⁹ ¹⁵Jones, Teaching of the Parables, 33. Jones (33) indicates that Matthew contains many "parabolic sayings", while "Luke contains many narrative parables." Gerhardsson prefers the term "narrative *mashal*" to describe the narrative parable of Jones. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, (188-92) describes characteristics of a *similitude* (and parable) as follows: "*conciseness*" ("only the necessary *persons* appear"); "*law of the single perspective*" (only one series of events happens at the same time); lack of character attributes ("people are characterized by what they say or do, or how they behave"); limited portrayal of "*feelings and motives*"; only describe "*other participants*" when necessary; "complete lack of *motivation* in the exposition"; conclusion is not mentioned if it is "self-evident or not relevant"; "*events and actions*" are described only as necessary to the story; "use of *direct speech and soliloquy*"; "*law of repetition*" operates in the story; and the "*hearers' judgement* is precipitated" in different ways.

¹⁰ ¹⁶Gerhardsson, "Narrative Meshalim in the Synoptic Gospels," 351. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, (192) also discusses the history of a *similitude* (and parable) in which change of form and of application have taken place. He adds, "But to that history we must add that the *similitudes* have been *introduced into a context*, and that they have often on that account been *provided with an introduction*, which does not strictly belong to the *similitude* as

Comparison of New Testament Parables with Other Parables

On the lips of Jesus, parables do not represent a new literary genre. Not only do parables appear in the Old Testament and among Jewish rabbis contemporary with Jesus, they are common enough in the Greco-Roman world. Nevertheless, there are differences, along with some similarities, between the parables of Jesus and those known from the same general time frame. A brief investigation of the relationship between these parables will highlight similarities and differences.¹⁷

Old Testament Parables Compared

There are many meshalim in the Old Testament; but the majority of these are of the short, pithy, proverbial type. No collection of narrative meshalim exists, but Gerhardsson identifies five narrative mashal by which to compare the use of narrative meshalim in the Gospels.¹⁸

A comparison of the Old Testament narrative meshalim with those of the gospels indicates the much greater use made in the gospels of narrative parables. Gerhardsson's count of nar-

such.

¹¹⁷Boucher, The Parables, 11. Boucher (12) comments: "The parables which most closely resemble Jesus' are those in the Old Testament and rabbinic literature. These Semitic parables (as distinct from the classical) are no doubt the predecessors of those we find preserved in the Synoptic Gospels."

¹²¹⁸Gerhardsson, "Narrative Meshalim in the Synoptic Gospels," 343. The five mashal are: "a. Jotham's mashal of the Trees in Judg 9:7-15 (7-21), b. Nathan's masham of the Poor Man's only Lamb in 2 Sam 12:1-4 (1-15), c. Jehoshaphat's mashal of the Thistle in 2 Kings 14:9 (8-14), d. Isaiah's mashal of the Vineyard in Isa 5:1-6 (1-15), and e. Ezekiel's mashal of the Vine and the Eagles in Ezek 17:3-10 (1-24)."

rative meshalim in the gospels reaches fifty-five -- with five in Mark, twenty-one in Matthew, and twenty-nine in Luke. There is also a difference in form. While plants and animals dominate the Old Testament forms, the synoptic gospels picture human life as central. Forty-three of the narrative meshalim of the gospels include two or more men and/or women in the texts. Function also differs. The Old Testament meshalim introduce concerns which are then expressed in non-parabolic language; but there is no instance of this in the gospels. The narrative meshalim in the gospels serve in an independent way to carry the important message of Jesus.¹⁹

When the Old Testament use of meshalim is compared with the synoptic gospels, it is clear that Jesus mastered the art of the parable. Although it is difficult to know how much reshaping of the parables has taken place between Jesus and the recording of the parables in the gospels, C. H. Dodd sees in them "the stamp of a highly individual mind."²⁰

Rabbinic Parables Compared

At the turn of this century, Paul Fiebig pointed to the *meshalim* of the Rabbis as the proper context for the interpretation of the parables of Jesus. The value of this observation was that it gave more flexibility to understanding the nature of the parabolic forms than did Jülicher's

¹³¹⁹Ibid., 342-60.

¹⁴²⁰Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, 11.

system based on Aristotle's exegetical postulates. Rabbinic *mesalim* included "pure parables, allegories, and mixed-forms, i.e. allegorical parables and parabolic allegories."²¹

More recently, Günther Bornkamm has emphasized the difference between the rabbis' use of parables and Jesus' use of parables. For the rabbis, the parable served as a teaching aid to clarify or to explain points of an authoritative text. Bornkamm continues:

But that is just what they are not in the mouth of Jesus, although they often come very close to those of the Jewish teachers in their content, and though Jesus makes free use of traditional and familiar topics. Here the parables are the preaching itself and are not merely serving the purpose of a lesson which is quite independent of them.²²

The Interpretation of the Parables

Non-allegorical

Allegorizing tendencies crept in early in parable interpretation and dominated the hermeneutical process until the time of the publication of Adolf Jülicher's Die Gleichnisreden Jesu²³ in

¹⁵²¹Paul Fiebig, Altjüdische Gleichnisse und die Gleichnisse Jesu (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1904) as quoted by Jack Dean Kingsbury, The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969) 4.

¹⁶²²Günther Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth, trans. Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 69. See also, Geraint Vaughan Jones, The Art and Truth of the Parables: A Study in their Literary Form and Modern Interpretation (London: S.P.C.K., 1964), 4, who observes concerning the connection with rabbinic parabolic material: "Yet although interesting and often illuminating, these studies have succeeded in disclosing the uniqueness of Jesus' parables rather than their direct indebtedness to rabbinic methods of commentary, teaching, and illustration, though Jesus' method shows clear evidence of participation in traditional parabolic form. In any case, the rabbinic *mesalim* are considerably later than the parables of Jesus; . . ."

¹⁷²³Joachim Jeremias, New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 12-13. See, Adolf Jülicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu, vols. 1 and 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976; reprint of 1910 edition).

the late nineteenth century. At that point the interpretation of parables changed dramatically from the search for multiple hidden meanings in any given parable (allegory), to the search for the one basic meaning of the parable.

While Jülicher's method of interpreting the parables to discover universal truths from Jesus has since given way to other hermeneutical insights,²⁴ (some which return to allegory²⁵) his impact on the study of parables remains formidable.

¹⁸²⁴Among those who disagree with basic conclusions of Jülicher is Robert W. Funk, Language, Hermeneutic and the Word of God (New York: Harper & Row, 1966). Funk (151) does not agree that parables can always be reduced to only one point: "It is thus possible—I say "possible" to indicate that prudence is required—to affirm that the parable, as metaphor, has not one point but many "points," as many points as there are situations into which it is spoken. And that applies to the original as well as subsequent audiences. The emphasis on one point over against the allegorization of the parables was a necessary corrective, but one point understood as an idea valid for all times is as erroneous as Jülicher's moral maxims, even if that idea is eschatological!" Another modern view of the parable is presented by Dan O. Via, The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), who believes the parable can be interpreted independently of its author. Via (77) says, "As autonomous, the literary work is independent of its author. It has links with his life, but these are of no critical importance, because they are fused into the new configuration which the work is. Works of literary art reveal something that cannot be traced to the author's biography or environment. [Vivas, *Creation*, p. x; Wellek and Warren, *Literature*, pp. 66-68." See the bibliography for information on these works.]

¹⁹²⁵Crossan, In Parables, (10) writes of the re-opening of this discussion: "In this book there is no presumption that the term 'allegory' has a pejorative connotation or that allegory is a bad or inferior literary form, for Jesus or for anyone else. The only question is whether Jesus' stories *are* allegories in whole or in part, and if not, what are they?" A strong call for the re-view of allegorical tendencies in parables comes from John R. Donahue, The Gospel in Parable: Metaphor, Narrative, and Theology in the Synoptic Gospels (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 12: ". . . Jülicher and his successors, while understandably wary about the use of allegory to buttress dogmatic principles, were not open enough to the power of allegory. . . . First, one must distinguish between allegorical interpretation of nonallegorical material and the detection and proper interpretation of allegorical material such as OT allusions or common cultural conventions, such as the use of sowing for preaching (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5-9). One must also distinguish between *proper* and *improper* use of allegory in proclamation. In the light of Funk's oft-quoted

Sitz im Leben

Form criticism guided the study of parables into a question of *Sitz im Leben Jesu* and *Sitz im Leben Kirche*. To some degree these two life situations have been set in opposition to one another by form critics. Martin Dibelius suggests that the church had a tendency to look for hortatory and paranetic value in the parables, thus affecting how the parables were handed down by the church. There is no denial that the words of Jesus stand behind the parabolic tradition passed on by the church. There is only the suggestion that the church changed content and application of parables depending on need. Dibelius notes that "the effort to provide the Churches with as many exhortations as possible sometimes occasioned complete misunderstanding of parables."²⁶

Jeremias acknowledges that the parables had a "life" in the primitive church before being committed to writing. He suggests that the Church

collected and arranged his sayings under specific headings, and created settings for them, sometimes modifying their form, expanding here, allegorizing there, always in relation to its own situation between the cross and the second coming of Christ.²⁷

statement that a parable can be interpreted only by a parable, interpretation of parables also by allegories cannot be ruled out.[Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic*, 196.]"

²⁰²⁶Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, trans. Bertram Lee Woolf (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 248. The information summarized in the paragraph is taken from pages 246-60.

²¹²⁷Joachim Jeremias, *Rediscovering the Parables* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 16. In trying to recover the "original tones" of the parables, by placing them in their "original historical setting," Jeremias (17-88) describes ten principles of transformation from the situation of Jesus to the situation of the primitive church: 1. Their translation into Greek; 2. Their change from Palestinian background to Hellenistic environment; 3. "Embellishments"; 4. "Influence of the Old Testament and of Folk-story themes"; 5. "The Change of Audience"; 6. "The Hortatory Use of the Parables by the Church"; 7. "The Influence of the Church's Situation"; 8. "Allegorizing"; 9. "Collection and Fusion of Parables"; and, 10. "The Setting."

Jeremias is confident that the parables of Jesus do stand on a firm historical foundation, as "a fragment of the original rock of tradition."²⁸ Gerhardsson believes that the parabolic material in the synoptic gospels indicates the nature of Jesus' ministry as "a messianic and prophetic teacher (ραββί, διδάσκαλος)" in Israel.²⁹

Clearly, discussion of the *Sitz im Leben* shows that *Sitze im Leben* is more nearly accurate when approaching the subject of parables. The first *Sitz im Leben* belongs to the speaker of the parable, in this case Jesus. Parables were not spoken in splendid isolation, but in the middle of ministry and proclamation. In order to understand the meaning of the parable, it is important to try and gain an understanding of the situations to which the parables were originally addressed.

The second *Sitz im Leben* belongs to the period of time, however long or short, when the parables were circulating orally among the people who composed the growing church. The obvious difficulties of discovering tradition development during this "in-between" period are pointed out by Stein: ". . . one must deal with the presumed words of Jesus as well as the presumed interpretation of those words by the early church."³⁰

The third *Sitz im Leben* belongs to the period of final redaction. Stein refers to this life situation as "the life situation of the Evangelists."³¹ Redaction criticism has cast light on the

²²²⁸Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, rev. ed., trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 11.

²³²⁹Gerhardsson, "Narrative Meshalim in the Synoptic Gospels," 351.

²⁴³⁰Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus, 63.

²⁵³¹Ibid.

forces at work in the writing down of the traditions by the Evangelists. It seems certainly true, as Stein declares:

It is now evident that the Gospel writers were not simply scissors-and-paste editors who glued and pasted various traditions together but rather theologians who interpreted these traditions to meet the needs of their audience.³²

Reconstruction of the Parable

Redaction criticism has raised the question of the shape of the parable. While this is related to its *Sitz im Leben* Jesus or Church, it is a broader question. Crossan actually moves to reconstruct parables and identifies what the parable must have looked like under the repeated title: "The Earliest Version."³³ Bernard Scott serves the following notice of the effect of recent work in this area:

²⁶³²Ibid., 62-63.

²⁷³³Crossan, 43,49,73. Crossan uses the Gospel of Thomas for guidance in his reconstructive work. *Contra* Crossan, see Mary Ann Tolbert, Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978). See, The Gospel according to Thomas, Coptic Text ed. and trans. by A. Guillaumont, H.-Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, W. Till, and †Yassah 'Abd al Masih (New York: Harper & Row, 1959). The following eleven synoptic parables are found in this Gospel, as identified by Jeremias, Rediscovering the Parables, 17: [Note: Log. = *Logion* and is taken from The Gospel according to Thomas. The page numbers are added by this writer to identify the location in the book. The titles are those of Jeremias, Rediscovering the Parables, 17.]

Log. 9:	The Sower (p. 7)
Log. 20:	The Mustard Seed (p. 15)
Log. 21b and 103:	The Buglar (pp. 15-17,53)
Log. 57:	The Tares among the Wheat (pp. 31-33)
Log. 63:	The Rich Fool (p. 35)
Log. 64:	The Great Supper (pp. 35-37)
Log. 65:	The Wicked Husbandmen (p. 39)
Log. 76:	The Pearl (pp. 41-43)
Log. 96:	The Leaven (p. 49)

This discussion allows us to mark one point at which a new paradigm has settled a crisis: regardless of problems any work on Jesus' parables will involve reconstruction. The differentiation of levels in the text is well established and a permanent contribution.³⁴

Kingdom of God

The question of how to interpret the parables has not been settled; but many have come to see the parables of Jesus as intimately connected with his teaching on the kingdom of God.

Charles H. Dodd's The Parables of the Kingdom popularized the concept of Jesus' parables as messages on the Kingdom of God. While Dodd's interpretation of Jesus' ministry as "realized eschatology" has received criticism, his clarion call to see kingdom teaching in the parables has a continuing influence in the study of parables.³⁵

Joachim Jeremias is convinced that the parables of Jesus bring us "into immediate relation with Jesus," but the difficult problem of how to recover their original meaning remains. Jeremias called the interpretation of parables to new directions in the twentieth century with his insistence that recovering the "definite historical setting" of each parable in order to "hear again"

Log. 107:	The Lost Sheep (pp. 53-55)
Log. 109:	The Treasure (p. 55)

²⁸³⁴Bernard B. Scott, "Parables of Growth Revisited: Notes on the Current State of Parable Research." Biblical Theology Bulletin 11 (January 1981): 7.

²⁹³⁵Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, 51. Dodd (51) defines realized eschatology as "the impact upon this world of the 'powers of the world to come' in a series of events, unprecedented and unrepeatable, now in actual process."

the "authentic voice" of Jesus "is the task before us." Like Dodd, Jeremias suggests that the parables have kingdom significance.³⁶

Birger Gerhardsson forcefully continues the argument that parables relate to kingdom issues. He first observes that narrative parables (*meshalim*, to use his term) of Jesus are absent from the rest of the New Testament and from early missionary preaching. This leads to the hermeneutic conclusion that the "elementary kerygma, *that which he wanted to proclaim to his people first of all*," was expressed in plain language. Parables, of whatever kind, were commonly used to speak to the problems of life, whether "personal, moral, social, political, religious or whatever;" the contrast to this common usage is sharp in the synoptic gospels. Not a single narrative *mashal* can be said to concern itself directly with a general life-problem.³⁷

With what then are the parables of Jesus concerned? Gerhardsson's answer is that the "synoptic writers relate the *meshalim* of Jesus to ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐρανῶν, the Kingdom/Rule of God/Heaven (Mark 4.10-12 *parr.*)." This theme is the theme of all narrative *meshalim* in the synoptic gospels, without exception. The Kingdom or Rule of God belongs to the parables from the beginning. It is not a secondary accretion. Gerhardsson believes that the illumination of some aspect of teaching concerning the Kingdom or Rule of God belongs as purpose to all narrative parables.³⁸

³⁰³⁶Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 22.

³¹³⁷Gerhardsson, "Narrative Meshalim in the Synoptic Gospels," 359-60.

³²³⁸*Ibid.*, 361. Bornkamm, Jesus of Nazareth, (70) agrees with the parables as kingdom pieces when he writes, "They become parable and preaching only by the fact that the kingdom of God, which is by no means familiar and commonplace, is related thereby to everyday life."

Gerhardsson recognizes that many areas of daily life pressed themselves into the ministry of Jesus and of his followers. This makes it all the more evident that Jesus chose the theme of his narrative meshalim "*very consciously*." Gerhardsson concludes:

He and early Christianity have with fullest intention concentrated their teaching in narrative meshalim on the subject which was to them 'the one necessary thing', the Kingdom of God and his righteousness (cf. Matt 6.24-34; Luke 10:38-42).³⁹

Mark 4:11-12 and the Purpose of the Parables of Jesus

Interpreting the parables of Jesus must eventually lead to an understanding of the purpose behind the use he made of parables. Answering this question leads to one of the most problematic texts related to parable studies: Mark 4:11-12 (par. Mt 13:11-13; Lk 8:10). Mark 4:11 posed a problem for Jülicher. He suggested that two alternatives existed concerning the text: either Jesus taught in parables to keep the public in the dark or that the evangelist was mistaken. Jülicher brought it down to this: "Dies Entweder-Oder geht tief: entweder die Evangelisten oder Jesus."⁴⁰ Since the time of Jülicher much attention has been given to the problem of this choice.

Peter Rhea Jones identifies the three obvious sections of Mark 4:1-20:

Section One: The Parable (vv. 1-9)

Section Two: The Purpose of Parables (vv. 10-12)

³³³⁹Gerhardsson, "Narrative Meshalim in the Synoptic Gospels," 362.

³⁴⁴⁰Jülicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu, vol. 1, 148. Jülicher (148) continues after this challenge to choose either the Evangelist or Jesus by saying: "Wer Jesus höher stellt, wer ihm nicht den Diamanten aus seiner unvergänglichen Ehrenkrone ausbrechen will, der bricht ein Steinlein aus dem Mauerwerk der Tradition und bekennt, dass der Zweck der Parabelrede trotz Mc und den andern Evangelisten ein noch einfacherer ist als diese Rede selber."

Section Three: The Interpretation of the Parable (vv. 13-20)⁴¹

Section two seems to indicate that Jesus spoke in parables so that "outsiders" would not understand the message of the parables. The quotation (Mk 4:12) taken from Isaiah 6:9-10 has given to this statement on the purpose of parables an interpretation often referred to as the "hardening theory." This view interprets the passage as a reflection of the theological understanding of the early church's view of salvation history, which according to Donahue

explained Israel's nonacceptance of Jesus as having been willed in advance (cf. Rom. 9:16-29; 10:16-21; 11:7-10; John 12:37-41; Acts 28:25-28). Mark is thus seen to be adopting this perspective and applying it to the parables of Jesus.⁴²

According to Jeremias this theory "led to the predominance of the allegorical method of interpretation."⁴³

Donahue also mentions the effort of redaction criticism to connect this passage with Mark's own purpose in writing, rather than with early church tradition. The messianic secret in

³⁵⁴¹Jones, Teaching of the Parables, 74. Jones recognizes his debt to Jeremias for the divisions of the chart. See Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 13-18.

³⁶⁴²Donahue, The Gospel in Parable, 41. See Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, 14-15. Dodd (15) agrees that the origin of this saying was with the primitive Church in their failure to win the Jewish people to Christ. Dodd, however, responds to their understanding as follows: "But that He desired not to be understood by the people in general, and therefore clothed His teaching in unintelligible forms, cannot be made credible on any reasonable reading of the Gospels."

³⁷⁴³Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 13.

Mark is extended to the "nondisclosure" in parable. So, there is by this understanding no problem with the idea that outsiders will not understand the parables.⁴⁴

Jeremias himself believes that Mark has wrongly placed a very early logion concerned not "with the parables of Jesus, but with his preaching in general," into the text.⁴⁵ So, concludes Jeremias:

Then the passage affords no criterion for the interpretation of the parables, nor any warrant for seeking to find in them by means of an allegorical interpretation some secret meaning hidden from the outsiders.⁴⁶

A fourth way of trying to solve the problem of a text that seems to go against "the essential nature and obvious purpose of Jesus' parables"⁴⁷ is based on understanding Mark's use of *ifā* with a causal sense, rather than a sense of purpose. This solution involves a comparison of

³⁸⁴⁴Donahue, The Gospel in Parable, 42. Donahue does not think redaction criticism solves the problem by referring to the Messianic Secret in Mark since this is a widely debated issue also. Still, Donahue (42) does provide other references to hiddenness to which Mark 4:10-12 may be compared, as follows: Places where Jesus forbids demons to reveal his identity (1:25,34; 3:11-12), where he prohibits publicity after miracles (1:43-45; 5:43; 7:36; 8:26), where he forbids Peter's confession to be made public (8:30; cf. 9:9), and where Jesus remains hidden (7:24; 9:30) or gives private teaching to his disciples (esp. 4:10-12,34; 7:17-22; 13:3-37).

³⁹⁴⁵Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 17-18.

⁴⁰⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 18. Jeremias' reasons for this conclusion are lengthy. In essence, he sees the passage in Mark 4:11-12 as a quotation from the Targum of Isaiah 6:9-10, resulting in the following translation: "To you has God given the secret of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are without everything is obscure, in order that they (as it is written) may "see and yet not see, may hear and yet not understand, unless they turn and God will forgive them" (17). However, Donahue (41) has spotted a serious problem with Jeremias' solution: "The problem with such a reconstruction is that while absolving the historical Jesus of a deterministic purpose, it leaves us with a picture of the Markan Jesus (also the "canonical" one) who articulates such a theology."

⁴¹⁴⁷Millar Burrows, Jesus in the First Three Gospels (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), 119.

the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. While Mark and Luke both use ἵνα to introduce the quotation from Isaiah, Matthew uses the phrase διὰ τοῦτο . . . ὅτι, which suggests a causal trans-
lation of the Isaian text: "because seeing they do not see." Burrows then understands the mean-
ing to be that

Jesus used parables not to prevent people from understanding but because they did not understand. His reply to the disciples' question then amounted to this: "God has given you the ability to understand the secret of his kingdom; but these poor people cannot comprehend it unless it is put in the simplest possible form. I use stories to make things clear to them."⁴⁸

Peter Rhea Jones interprets the problematic passage in light of the context of parable, purpose, and interpretation by asking, "Could it be that Jesus had Isaiah 6 in mind as he developed his parable about the sower? It may well be that the parable is a kind of kingdom comment or midrash." Reception is then the focus of the parable. But with reception, comes great rejection.⁴⁹

Farmer observes the close relationship of Mark 4:1-9 and Matthew 13:1-9. However, he notes that Mark 4:10-12 fails to include Matthew 13:12 and the Isaiah 6:9-10 quotation of Matthew 13:14-15. Farmer adds, "This is very interesting because it also defines the relationship of

⁴²⁴⁸Ibid., 120. Burrows (120) adds the following explanation: "The Aramaic language expresses purpose and cause by the same conjunction, which also serves as a relative pronoun. The same words may mean "so that they may not understand," "because they do not understand," or "who do not understand." Mark and Luke have taken the conjunction in one sense, Matthew in another. Either rendering is literally correct, but Matthew's expresses the meaning Jesus probably intended; See also Kingsbury, The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13, 48-49.

⁴³⁴⁹Jones, Teaching of the Parables, 75. Jones (76) ties the Marcan idea of "the mystery of the kingdom of God" (Mk 4:11 - τὸ μυστήριον; Lk 8:9 - τὰ μυστήρια) together with the parables and indicates that both "were a mystery perceived only by a faith to see in tiny beginnings and in a veiled Messiah, God's presence."

the Lucan parallel to Matthew 13:10-15 found in Luke 8:9-10."⁵⁰ The more lengthy quotation by Matthew of Isaiah 6:9-10 probably is meant to explain that "the people were developing hardness of heart by human choice (Matt. 13:15)."⁵¹

⁴⁴⁵⁰William R. Farmer, The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Approach (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1976), 239.

⁴⁵⁵¹Jones, Teaching of the Parables, 74.

Understanding the Genre of the Parable

Identify the Problem Areas for a Parable Genre

By now it is clear that there is no easy understanding of the parables. Since the term "parable" covers so many kinds of literary forms whose rhetorical impact and reading strategies differ, Thomas Long questions whether "it is meaningful to speak at all of a 'parable genre.'"⁵²

A literary genre needs a unifying element to hold it together so that there is some sense of sameness in reading strategy when approaching the literary texts. The study of parables seems to have attracted outside solutions for internal problems. Definitions of what a parable is or isn't are developed from external sources beyond the body of literature itself and then applied in evaluation of the literature. By this external criteria, the literary unit is judged to be a true parable or not.⁵³

This process can be glimpsed throughout scholarly works on parables. To some degree, as is now frequently pointed out, Jülicher fell victim to this pattern.⁵⁴ By insisting on the one central truth around which the parable formed, he automatically shut out any allegorical possibilities for the genre of parable. This meant that some New Testament texts, which contained "parables" but also included "allegorical tendencies," would have to be stripped of the "allegory" to

⁴⁶⁵²Thomas G. Long, Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 90.

⁴⁷⁵³Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵⁴Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus, (54) states: "The first major limitation of Jülicher was that he overreacted against the former emphasis on the allegorical interpretation of the parables and denied the presence of any allegorical element in the parables of Jesus."

become a true parable. The fallacy of this process, if not its danger, can easily be seen. The text is no longer foundational to the interpretive process. It must yield to the "key" by which, and only by which, its truth can be opened.⁵⁵

Is there, then, a unifying factor in the parabolic material? Long answers this question the following way:

What holds these disparate verbal expressions together is their common capacity to generate two satisfactory levels of interpretation: the literal and the symbolic. A *mashal* or a *parabole* can be read both at face value and as representative of some deeper, less obvious, reality. This is true of virtually every biblical text which bears the parabolic label.⁵⁶

Bildhälfte und Sachhälfte

E. Linnemann, among others, points out that

die Begriffe '*Bildhälfte* [picture part] *und Sachhälfte* [reality part]' bzw., *Bild und Sache*' dienen der *Unterscheidung* zwischen dem, was die Gleichniserzählung vor Augen stellt, und dem, was sie bedeutet, was das Gleichnis sagen will.⁵⁷

⁴⁹⁵⁵Ibid., 90-91.

⁵⁰⁵⁶Long, Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible, 91.

⁵¹⁵⁷Eta Linnemann, Gleichnisse Jesu: Einführung und Auslegung, 2d ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 32. This work by Linnemann is also in English translation: Idem, Jesus of the Parables: Introduction and Exposition, trans. John Sturdy from Gleichnisse Jesu: Einführung und Auslegung, 3d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 24. However, the German terminology is often used when referring to the two parts of a parable, i.e., *Bildhälfte* [picture part] *und Sachhälfte* [reality part] or *Bild* [picture] *und Sache* [reality]. The English translation in the brackets is taken from the translation by John Sturdy of Linnemann's book.

Returning to the emphasis by Jülicher on the "tertium comparationis," Linnemann notes that "dieser Vergleichspunkt . . . ist der Angelpunkt . . . oder . . . 'Bildhälfte [picture part] und Sachhälfte [reality part]' miteinander verbindet."⁵⁸

John D. Crossan identifies the two levels of the parable as "a literal level and a metaphorical level." The literal level is the surface meaning of the story, i.e., how it makes sense in daily life; while the metaphorical teaching is on a deeper level and "appears in a mysterious dialectic with the former point."⁵⁹

The Literary Genre of Parable and Luke 15:11-32

It is important to gain an understanding of how parables function before approaching Luke 15:11-32. Long correctly notes that "preaching on a parable is a novice preacher's dream but often an experienced preacher's nightmare."⁶⁰ As will be shown, this is especially true for the parable commonly known as the Prodigal Son.

This parable has several points that can be loosely referred to with Long's term, "narrative snares." The story itself contains enough details of life to entangle the exegete in the process of clarifying the pieces of the narrative puzzle: Was the father right to treat the younger son with such abandonment? Did the father show proper consideration for the complications that could occur in the family's financial picture with the return of the younger son?

⁵²⁵⁸Linnemann, Gleichnisse Jesu, 32.

⁵³⁵⁹John Dominic Crossan, In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), 64.

⁵⁴⁶⁰Long, Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible, 87.

Parables function on two levels. The prodigal son can be received as a simple story of family conflict; but it is not meant to be taken only that way. E. Linnemann describes the parable as a bridge in the following statements:

Der Erzähler schlägt mit der Parabel eine Brücke über den Abgrund des Gegensatzes. Ob der Zuhörer diese Brücke betritt und zu ihm hinüberfindet, hat er allerdings nicht in der Hand. . . . Er kann der Hörer zwar zu einer Entscheidung nötigen; wie aber die Entscheidung ausfällt, liegt bei jenem.⁶¹

Linnemann reminds the readers of parables that the concrete situation is developed to lead the hearer to decision. This insight is especially applicable to the Luke 15:11-32 passage.

If the story is heard only as a tale, it might be interesting to listen too, but it does not do what the speaker wants it to do: offer the listener a new understanding of the situation.⁶² The parables of Jesus are not just instructional of some issue or other, nor are they for learned argument. While parables are often focused on opponents, "they do not intend to reduce the opponent *ad absurdum*, but make it their aim to win his agreement.⁶³ The goal of Jesus in using parables seems to have been to win his audience over to his point of view. As a speech-act, the parable involved a genuine dialogue between the speaker of the parable and the audience.⁶⁴ So, one sees that the ending of the parable of the prodigal son gives a plea for those who refuse Jesus' friendship with sinners to change their minds.

⁵⁵⁶¹Linnemann, Gleichnisse Jesu, 30.

⁵⁶⁶²Linnemann, Jesus of the Parables, 20.

⁵⁷⁶³Ibid., 22.

⁵⁸⁶⁴Boucher, The Parables, 35-36.

Critical issues of the *Sitz im Leben* of Luke 15:11-32 will be discussed at the point of exegesis of the text. There is much debate about the real author of the parable and of the audience to which it was addressed. These issues will also be discussed later in the paper.

CHAPTER 2

EXEGESIS OF LUKE 15:11-32

Introduction

One of the most beloved parables is also one that is often mispreached. How many times in sermons has the youngest son become instead an only child! No mention is made of the older son; he remains forgotten by both the preacher and the congregation. And as far as the message is concerned, he remains forgotten by the father. Or if he is mentioned, it is with some sense of embarrassment on the part of the preacher. After all, the older son is the good son. Who can blame him, really, for how he felt? And so the prodigal son goes forth and comes back again in many a sermon, but his brother remains out in the field; or sermonically speaking, if mentioned at all, pushed to the last few minutes of the message, a "by the way" clause to the more important points. What really does this parable say? The purpose of this exegesis is to try and answer that ques question.

Translation

11) A certain man had two sons. 12) The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the estate." So, the father divided the estate between the two sons. 13) Not long thereafter, the younger son gathered his portion of the estate and left home for a distant country. When he arrived there, he wasted his share of the estate, living for pleasure only. 14) When he was down to nothing, a severe famine struck the country, and he began to be in real need. 15) So he found a job working for one of the citizens of that country. He was sent by his employer into the country to feed pigs. 16) Things got so bad he wanted to eat the food the pigs were eating; but no one gave him permission to do so. 17) He finally saw the foolishness of his chosen situation and thought about the hired workmen at his father's house, they had more than enough to eat, while he was starving. 18) He determined to get up and go back home to his father's place. He planned to confess to his father that he had acted foolishly toward God and toward his father and to ask his father to receive him back as a hired laborer, since he was no longer worthy to be considered a son. 20) Having made up his mind, he began his journey back home. When he

was still a long way off from his father's house, his father spotted him. Filled with a father's love, his father ran that long way, fell upon him with a warm embrace and kissed him repeatedly on the cheeks. 21) Remembering his need to confess, he spoke to his father and acknowledged his foolishness before God and his father. He also shared his lack of right to be called his son any longer. 22) But the father rejected the last argument, and instead ordered his servants to bring the best robe and clothe his son, to put the family ring again on his finger, and to place shoes on his feet. 23) Still more, he ordered that the calf in the stall be butchered and a feast of joy be prepared. 24) The reason for all of this rejoicing was the return to life, as it were, of a son he had thought might be dead and to celebrate finding a son who had too long been lost. They all began to celebrate with joy.

(25) The older son, however, was not home. He was out in a distant field working. When he finally headed toward the house, he heard the sounds of music and dancing while still outside the door. 26) So he called one of the nearby workers and asked him what all of this meant. 27) The worker replied, "Your brother has made it back and your father ordered the calf in the stall to be butchered and a feast begun, because he returned safe and sound. 28) But the older brother really got angry and refused to enter in to the party. When his father learned he was just outside the house, he came out and warmly encouraged the older son to come on in. The reply the older son gave was one of self-justification. He strongly reminded the father that for all these years he had slavishly worked for the father and tried to obey the father's commands. And he had not even gotten so much as one goat in return so that he and his friends could have a party. Continuing he said, "Talk about this son of yours. He consumed your things which you gave him on some prostitutes. But what do you do upon his return? You kill the special calf. The response of the father was to remind the older son that they did have a special relationship with each other since the older son had always been with him and would have everything that belonged to the Father. Nonetheless, it still remained important to have a feast of celebration because his brother had been dead to them, but was now alive to them, he had been lost but was now found.

Establish the Text

There are some textual variants in Luke 15:11-32 at verses 16 and 21. The first variant results in a choice that makes little or no difference in the final meaning of the text. The second variant carries hermeneutical or interpretive weight. It does make a perceptual difference in the story if the father stopped the younger son's confession before the son was able to say, "Make me one of your hired hands."

Verse sixteen's inclusion of the reading χορτασθῆναι ἐκ is a choice between that reading or one of the following: a. χορτασθῆναι ἀπό, b. γεμίσαι τὴν κοιλίαν αὐτοῦ ἀπό, and c. γεμίσαι τὴν κοιλίαν καὶ χορτασθῆναι ἀπό. The choice of A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament is {C}.⁶⁵

The textual critical question of verse twenty-one is a decision where to end the verse. Two choices exist: The first is to conclude with υἱός σου. The second is to add the following phrase υἱός σου. ποιήσόν με ὡς ἓνα τῶν μισθίων σου. The choice of A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament is {B}.⁶⁶

Charles E. Carlston disagrees with the interpretation of the evidence of omission. He suggests instead their omission is a revision due to an early scribal failure to recognize that Luke has a tendency to repeat himself.⁶⁷ However, Carlston's argument is weak, since the other repeated lines are maintained; both at verse twenty-one and at verse thirty-two, which repeats verse twenty-four almost (but not quite) word for word.

⁵⁹⁶⁵Bruce M. Metzger, Kurt Aland, and others, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, 3d ed. cor. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975), 164. The committee made their decision based on the "age and diversity of text-type of witnesses. See appendix four for an evaluation of the evidence.

⁶⁰⁶⁶Ibid., 164, states "While recognizing that several good manuscripts () B D 700 *al*) combine to support the reading ποιήσόν με ὡς ἓνα τῶν μισθίων σου, the Committee thought it more probable that the words were added (from ver. 19) by punctilious scribes than omitted, either accidentally or deliberately." See appendix four for an evaluation of the evidence.

⁶¹⁶⁷Charles E. Carlston, "Reminiscence and Redaction in Luke 15:11-32," Journal of Biblical Literature 94 (September 1975): 374.

Preliminary Matters

Setting in the Gospel of Luke

I. Howard Marshall believes that chapter fifteen forms a self-contained unit with a single theme: "the joy which is experienced by a person who recovers what he has lost."⁶⁸ Few questions can be raised against the idea that Luke 15 draws the picture of "lost and found." If Luke 19:10 - ἦλθεν γὰρ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ζητῆσαι καὶ σῶσαι τὸ ἀπολωλός, highlights one of the purposes of Luke's gospel, i.e., evangelistic, then Luke fifteen stands at the parabolic heart of that purpose.

In chapter fourteen Luke issues a compelling invitation through the parable of the Great Banquet for "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" (v. 21; repetition of those in v. 13) to come to the Messianic Banquet. This guest list reverses normal expectations for those who share in that eschatological feast. Prophetic word and warning go out to those who think they will sit at the head of the table on that day. Then chapter fifteen begins with mention of another meal. This time the meal is taking place in a this-world setting (15:1-2), and Jesus is being rebuked for his friends around the table. The word that goes forth this time is of a different order. By means of three stories, it places the grumbling listeners into a dilemma of choice. In the end there is no way, but to choose.⁶⁹

⁶²⁶⁸I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 597.

⁶³⁶⁹David L. Tiede, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Luke (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 272.

Setting in Chapter Fifteen

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. The setting of the Luke 15:11-32 parable within the chapter itself is the subject of much continuing discussion. E. Earle Ellis gives a probable decision that the parables of the lost sheep (vv. 4-7) and the lost coin (vv. 8-10) formed a single unit to which "the Evangelist appended the 'parable of the two sons' to reinforce the theme and bring it to a climax."⁷⁰ The insight that the chapter mathematically heightens the effects of the three stories in the order they now appear, has escaped no one's attention: "The lost sheep was one out of one hundred; the lost coin was one out of ten; the lost son was one out of two."⁷¹

John D. Crossan represents one who removes chapter 15:1-2 from the study of the Prodigal Son. He goes further by declaring that though the picture of Jesus accepting sinners as lost ones (sheep, coin, son) makes a compelling picture in this chapter, "the seeker of the lost sheep and the lost coin is *not* Jesus and/or God but the one who is open to and seeking the Kingdom's advent."⁷² In the final analysis, for Crossan, the Prodigal Son, as placed in chapter 15, represents the work of the tradition's literary activity. Its significant message should be considered apart from its placement in the chapter.

⁶⁴⁷⁰E. Earle Ellis, The Gospel of Luke, New Century Bible (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, Inc., 1966),1968.

⁶⁵⁷¹Ray Summers, Commentary on Luke: Jesus, the Universal Savior (Waco: Word Books, 1972), 182.

⁶⁶⁷²Crossan, In Parables, 74. Crossan (74) sees Luke 14 and Luke 16, along with Luke 15, as "the tradition's literary combinations and interpretations."

Luke Timothy Johnson suggests that evidence points to the pen of Luke as creator of the three-parable chapter: "Luke has Jesus tell three stories."⁷³ Johnson admits to the difficulty brought about in disentangling tradition from redaction. An important part of Johnson's stand on the capacity of Luke to cover his redactional work centers on the use Luke makes of the parable of the lost sheep. Matthew 18:12-14 also shares a story of a lost sheep; but Luke has altered the apparently common source, fitting the Lost Sheep into a similar pattern to the other two stories of chapter 15.⁷⁴

Luke 15:1-3. One of the most difficult problems concerning the setting of Luke 15:11-32 in this chapter is the relationship of verses one through three with the parable.⁷⁵ No certain answers can be given to that relationship. Not only is the question raised of literary relationship, but the authorial question is also major. Do the setting and the parable belong to Jesus, to Luke, to both?

One position is that Luke himself created in a literary sense the setting for the narrative parable of Luke 15:11-32. Luise Schottroff observes:

⁶⁷⁷³Luke Timothy Johnson, The Gospel of Luke, Sacra Pagina Series, vol. 3, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 239.

⁶⁸⁷⁴Ibid. See, Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, 600, for a contrary opinion. Marshall (600) does not think Matthew and Luke are directly dependent on a common source. For Marshall, (600) the solution of similarity and, yet, differences may go back to the use Jesus made of parables: "There is no reason why Jesus himself should not have used the same basic parable more than once and for different purposes."

⁶⁹⁷⁵It will be noted that this writer placed Lk 15:1-2 in the exegetical outline as necessary information in understanding the parable of Lk 15:11-32. This is not an automatic decision in New Testament scholarship, as will be seen.

Lukas hat in Lk 15:1-3 der Erzählung einen 'Sitz im Leben' Jesu gegeben, oder besser: sie in eine ihm aus der christlichen Tradition bekannte Situation Jesu (die Mahlgemeinschaft mit Zöllnern und Sündern) hineingezeichnet.⁷⁶

Schottroff does not believe Luke's setting is accurate to the historical condition or theological conceptions that actually existed in the day of Jesus. Instead, Schottroff says that this is "ein Zerrbild, eine Karikatur des Judentums" that would not have been recognizable in the life-setting of Jesus. The Pharisee would not recognize himself in the older son of the parable. Schottroff adds:

Dieses Zerrbild des Pharisäismus hat bei Lukas insofern nicht die volle Schärfe, als der Pharisäer für ihn nicht ausschließlich Repräsentant eines Teiles des jüdischen Volkes ist, sondern daneben der 'Pharisäer' schon zum religiösen Negativtypus im ausgeweiteten Sinne geworden ist. Lk 15:1-3 kann keinesfalls zutreffend den Sitz im Leben Jesu für das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn bezeichnen.⁷⁷

I. Howard Marshall recognizes the difficulty of discounting Luke's touch in the introduction verses; but he stresses the continuing possibility that Luke used existing materials. One suggestion is that the introductory verses of the chapter (vv. 1-2) may have formed the original setting for the parable of the prodigal son, with the parables of lost sheep and lost coin being added at some later time.⁷⁸

⁷⁰⁷⁶Luise Schottroff, "Das Gleichnis vom verlorenen Sohn," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 68 (1971): 49.

⁷¹⁷⁷Ibid., 51. Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus, 123, agrees that verses one and two were written by Luke for an introduction to the following parables; but he states, "Nevertheless it seems reasonable to conclude that Luke 15:1-2 is an accurate portrayal of the situation in which this parable was originally uttered, in the light of the second half of the parable."

⁷²⁷⁸Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, 599.

Authorship and Literary Unity of the Parable

One critical issue concerning the parable is its authorship. The question of origin carries the question of unity with it. Three basic positions are common: (1) the parable is an original parable of Jesus, handed down by Luke in much the same form it now has; (2) the parable is in the first part from the ministry of Jesus, and in the second half the work of Luke ; and (3) .the entire parable is a creation of Luke.

Charles E. Carlston, among others, supports the position that the parable "originated with Jesus in substantially its present form and that its original sharpness has been blunted and shifted slightly in transmission and redaction."⁷⁹

J. Wellhausen was an earlier proponent for dividing the parable into two parts:

Es kommt aber noch ein zweiter hinzu (15:25-32), wo vom älteren Bruder des verlorenen Sohnes die Rede ist.

Dieser zweite Teil ist eine spätere Fortsetzung des ersten. Der Übergang wird mit dem letzten Satz von 15:24 (κ. ἤρξ. εὐφ.) gemacht, der über die Moral überhängt. Die Moral 15:24 bildet den Schluß des ersten Teils.⁸⁰

Jack Sanders returned to the position of Wellhausen, stressing the point that there is no other parable in the New Testament parable which is *zweigipfelig*. The two conclusions of the parable (v.

⁷³⁷⁹Charles E. Carlston, "Reminiscence and Redaction in Luke 15:11-32," Journal of Biblical Literature 94 (September 1975): 368. Joachim Jeremias, "Tradition und Redaktion in Lukas 15," Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 62 (1971): 181, shares a similar view and especially rejects a later development for the older son portion of the parable: "Das Gleichnis vom Verlorenen Sohn ist vom Evangelisten nur ganz leicht stilistisch überarbeitet worden. Es kann keine Rede davon sein, daß der zweite Teil redaktioneller Zusatz wäre. Vollends scheidet die Hypothese, Lukas sei der Verfasser des ganzen Gleichnisses, am sprachlichen Befund."

⁷⁴⁸⁰Julius Wellhausen, Das Evangelium Lucae: Übersetzt und Erklärt (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1904), 83.

24 and v. 32) actually allow the first part of the parable to stand without the second part. Therefore, Sanders believes the second half of the parable is a later addition, "perhaps by the author of the Third Gospel himself."⁸¹

Michael Goulder suggests that the parable is in its entirety a creation of Luke. Drawing on a supposed Lucan development of this parable from Matthew 21:28-32, Goulder stresses two clear Lucan doctrines as its focus: "first the necessity of repentance, and secondly the contrast between God's joy in the acceptance of sinners and (? Christian) Pharisaic stand-offishness."⁸²

The evidence does not seem convincing for dividing the parable into two parts, from two sources. While the literary character of chapter fifteen does argue for a redactionalist's smoothing of the presentation of the stories, there is no compelling reason to assign the two pieces of a unified story to various authors and time frames. And certainly there does not seem any overriding reason to assign this parable to Luke's creation, to his editorship, perhaps; but that is all.

Character Introduction

The Father

The father's love is an often mentioned characteristic of the father figure of the parable.

E. Earle Ellis notes that "in it the father's love represents God's attitude toward both religious Ju-

⁷⁵⁸¹Jack T. Sanders, "Tradition and Redaction in Luke XV.11-32," New Testament Studies 15 (July 1969): 433. I. Howard Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, 605, points out the problem of declaring a two-part parable as an original parable plus a later addition: "while the parable has two parts, it has one point."

⁷⁶⁸²Michael D. Goulder, Luke: A New Paradigm, vol. 2, part 2 (cont.), Commentary: Luke 9:51-24:53; Journal for the Study of the New Testament, no. 20 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 616.

daism (the elder son) and the non-religious Jew (the prodigal)."⁸³ Eduard Schweizer also focuses on the role of the father in the parable and observes that "the whole parable turns totally on him. It begins with him, it ends with him; he alone unites both portions."⁸⁴

The observation by Schweizer that the parable is not an effort on the part of Jesus the Teacher to define God through the parable is an important one. The truth of the parable is pictured in the ministry of Jesus. As Schweizer says, ". . . whenever the parable truly comes to life, God uses it to show the significance of Jesus, to 'define' him."⁸⁵

The Younger Son

One early interpretation of the younger son featured him as a representative of converted pagans, while, of course, the older brother pictured Jews. Marcion apparently knew this kind of interpretation and removed the parable from his list of acceptable writings. Marcion "was unable

⁷⁷⁸³E. Earle Ellis, The Gospel of Luke, New Century Bible (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, Inc., 1966), 196. Ellis (197) points out, however, that "the father in the parable is not God. And it is a mistake to allegorize the parable to find a 'universal fatherhood of God.'"

⁷⁸⁸⁴Eduard Schweizer, The Good News According to Luke, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 248.

⁷⁹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 252. See also, Gerhard Schneider, Das Evangelium nach Lukas: Kapitel 11-24, Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament, vol 3/2, ed. Erich Gräber and Karl Kertelge (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1984). Schneider (328) observes: "Das Gleichnis ist implizit christologisch, insofern es beansprucht, daß *Jesu* Handeln die Liebe *Gottes* zum Sünder aktualisiert."

to allow that vv. 29 and 31 could describe the attitude of the Father of Jesus Christ to the people of the Old Covenant."⁸⁶

If the introduction of Luke 15:1-2 is allowed to stand as part of the story itself by introducing the listening audience, then it seems clear that the younger son represents the tax collectors and sinners. R. Summers is certainly correct in pointing out that the account of the prodigal son is not meant to be used in a debate concerning security of salvation. The interpretation of the role of this younger son in the story does not go in such direction.

Peter R. Jones is nearer the mark in suggesting that "perhaps the segment on the repentance of the sinner was particularly illuminating to the Pharisees who may have had no awareness that any of these sinners at Jesus' table had repented."⁸⁷

The Older Son

If the insights provided by Luke 15:1-2 were absent, the figure of the older son would be more difficult to understand. Wellhausen recognized that the story of the younger son could exist without the story of the older son; but it could not be the other way. In his remarks on the comparison of the two brothers in the story, Wellhausen said:

Der Vergleich der beiden Brüder, der in 15,25ss. angestellt wird, deutet einen Zug aus, auf den in 15,11-24 gar kein Gewicht fällt. Dort wird nicht verglichen und nach der Stimmung des älteren Bruders so wenig gefragt, wie nach der Stimmung der neunundneunzig Schafe und der neun Groschen.⁸⁸

⁸⁰⁸⁶John Martin Creed, The Gospel According to St. Luke: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices (London: Macmillan and Co., 1953), 196.

⁸¹⁸⁷Summers, Commentary on Luke, 184; and, Jones, The Teaching of the Parables, 179.

⁸²⁸⁸Wellhausen, Das Evangelium Lucae, 83. See also, Creed, The Gospel According to St. Luke, 196.

Yet, the older son is made integral in the telling of the tale; and the story in written context does place in close proximity the initial verses of the chapter and the story. While it may be true that ". . . la seconde partie de la parabole n'est pas en harmonie parfaite avec la première . . .",⁸⁹ the presence of opposition figures in parables is not unknown to Luke.⁹¹

As the story stands, the historical group affected by the presence of the older son would have been the Pharisees and scribes. The fact that this representation can be stretched to include all who stand in self-righteousness does not rule out an original audience. E. Earle Ellis says,

The meaning for Luke's readers is simply that God loves the world-- the common, mixed-up, moral-immoral, devil-may-care world. Jesus mission expresses that love.⁹²

Naming the Parable

The parable in Luke 15:11-32 is popularly known as the parable of the Prodigal Son. For many reasons, this title does not seem to adequately convey the content of the story. Caird is cor-

⁸³ Alfred Loisy, *L'Évangile selon Luc* (Paris:np, 1924; reprint, Frankfurt: Minerva G.M.B.H., 1971), 402, reprint used. Loisy does not believe the parable's story of the two sons is an original unity.

¹ See Crossan, *In Parables*, 74-75, for a discussion of Luke's use of contrasting figures in parables, e.g., priest, levite and Samaritan, Pharisee and Publican, first-seated and last-seated, invited guests and uninvited guests.

² Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, 196.

rect in remarking that the traditional title "does less than justice to the purpose of the parable, as the opening sentence makes clear. '*There was a man who had two sons.*' . . ." ⁹³⁹⁴

Many different names have been suggested for the parable. Geldenhuys believes the parable should be called the "'Gospel within the Gospel' because in it so many Gospel truths are proclaimed in such a beautiful and graphic manner." ⁹⁵ This title seems too ambiguous. While R. Summers thought the parable should be called the "Lost Son," Marshall suggested that the word son should be made plural; so, "the parable of the lost sons." Peter R. Jones offers a title based more squarely on an exegesis of the text as it now stands, "the parable of the Compassionate Father and the Angry Brother because it compares two ways of receiving the lost." Jeremias thinks "das Gleichnis von der Liebe des Vaters heißen sollte (Lk. 15,11-32)." ⁹⁶

Exegesis of the Text ⁹⁷

I. Luke established the audience for the parable (15:1-2)

^{3 93}G. B. Caird, The Gospel of St Luke, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries, ed. D. E. Nineham (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), 182.

^{1 95}Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Foreword by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), 406.

^{2 96}Summers, Commentary on Luke, 184; Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, 604; Jones, The Teaching of the Parables, 175; and Joachim Jeremias, Die Gleichnisse Jesu (Göttingen: Vandenoek & Ruprecht, 1962), 128. This author agrees with the title of the "Parable of the Lost Sons."

^{3 97}The exegesis of the text will follow the format of the exegetical outline found in appendix three. Issues of form, source, redaction, and canon will be raised in the context of the exegesis at pertinent points.

The tax collectors and sinners were those who were considered by the Pharisees as unable to keep the laws of ritual purity. A person's vocation was often sufficient reason to be placed in this category, e.g., shepherds, tanners, peddlers, and donkey drivers. While the term "sinner" could describe a person who chose a life of unrighteousness, it does not automatically evoke pictures of "grave immorality" in a person's life. The common person, who did not keep the law, could fall under the category of sinner."⁹⁸

The crowd of people gathered around Jesus included Pharisees and teachers of the law. They were murmuring because Jesus not only welcomed sinners, but he also shared table fellowship with them. This was a known characteristic of his ministry. The issue of table fellowship does not go away in the life of the early church, as is clear from Acts as well. It is known that some groups of Pharisees "brought the rules of ritual purity expected in the Temple into their common meals."⁹⁹

The value of the framing provided to the parable of the lost sons by these two verses can be easily seen. As has already been discussed, not all are in agreement that there is a connection or what the connection might be; but as the final text stands, the introduction does now color how one reads the parable.

II. Jesus introduced the characters in the story (15:11)

⁴⁹⁸Jones, The Teaching of the Parables, 169.

⁵⁹⁹Ibid.

Luke 15:3 indicates that Jesus spoke a parable to the people who gathered around him. The fact that three parables follow the mention of only one has led to discussion of the format of the chapter as a whole. This was earlier discussed. It should be kept in mind that the early readers, and the author himself, had no trouble apparently with a singular introduction of three recorded parables.

The words of introduction to the story of the lost sons are simple:

Εἶπεν δέ, " Ἀνθρώπος τις εἶχεν δύο υἱούς. If these words are accepted at face value, then the message of the story cannot stop with the younger son's story, no matter how compelling it may be. Jeremiah's reminder that "Der Vater, nicht der umkehrende Sohn, steht im Mittelpunkt,"¹⁰⁰ is worth taking.

Part I

I. The story began with the younger son's choices (15:12-13)

This parable is full of choices made. The younger son, whose age probably did not exceed twenty-years, the age of marriage, asked for his share of the father's property. This was his first choice. If Duncan Derrett is correct,

This is where the prodigal sinned. Not in his dissipation, though waste of assets is a sinful act, for this may be attributed to youth and inexperience; but in his forgetting that his father had a moral claim on his property, that his father, so long as he lived, had a right to call, in case of necessity, upon the son's labour and his savings.¹⁰¹

⁶ ¹⁰⁰Jeremias, Die Gleichnisse Jesu, 128, n. 2.

⁷ ¹⁰¹J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Parable of the Prodigal Son," New Testament Studies 14 (October 1967): 64.

The text is clear that the division of the estate was made with both sons in mind:

ὁ δὲ διεῖλεν αὐτοῖς τὸν βίον. It is not likely that the younger son received one-third of the estate, an amount that would have come to him at his father's death. Instead, the estate could be about two-ninths for him at this time. Since parables draw as few lines as possible in their telling, it is not critical for the modern day audience to know exactly how much the younger son received. It may or may not have been known by the hearing audience of the parable, either. At any rate, E. Linnemann stands convinced that "to Jesus' listeners the words of the younger son really did sound like a request, not like an impertinent demand."¹⁰²

Shortly after the younger son received his share of the estate, he apparently converted it to some form of cash or merchandise. Was this a defiant act? Commentaries seem to generally think so, but again, Linnemann says, No. Jeremias gives the following information on Jewish populations during the New Testament time frame: "Die Größe der Diaspora, die man auf über vier Millionen schätzt gegenüber einer jüdischen Bevölkerung Palästinas von höchstens einer halben Million. . . ." If this figure is correct, emigration may have been common enough to provide a well-known background for the details, as few as there are, of the story.¹⁰³ At any rate, the younger son has made a second choice.

⁸ ¹⁰²Eta Linnemann, Jesus of the Parables: Introduction and Exposition, trans. John Sturdy from Gleichnisse Jesu: Einführung und Auslegung, 3d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), 75. If Linnemann is correct, of course, she ruins lots of sermons that stress the impertinence of this request, the "generation gap," "dysfunctional families," and so forth.

⁹ ¹⁰³Schweizer, The Good News According to Luke, 248; Linnemann, Jesus of the Parables, 75; and Jeremias, Die Gleichnisse Jesu, 129.

A third choice has now been made that takes the younger son away from his father and his father's land εἰς χώραν μακρὰν καὶ ἐκεῖ διεσκόρπισεν τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ ζῶν ἀσώτως (v. 13). The "loose living" of the younger son may or may not have included the sin charged against him later by the older brother: οὗτος ὁ καταφαγὼν σου τὸν βίον μετὰ πορνῶν (v. 30). Such sin is not specifically included, nor excluded in the New Testament context. The noun form of ἀσῶτης appears at Eph. 5:18; Tit. 1:6; and 1 Pt. 4:4. It is not associated with positive values for life, but with negative choices leading away from obedience to God. Summers says that this is "a graphic way of agreeing that the tax collectors and sinners had gone away from the way of God."¹⁰⁴

The younger son chose to waste all the resources at his disposal. The Old Testament story of the wanton disregard showed by Esau of his birth right probably provides enough background for the listeners to react negatively to this choice on the part of the boy. To this point the younger son has been in charge of his choices; but circumstances are about to change.

II. The story continued with the younger son's circumstances (15:14b-16)

As the story unfolds in simplicity of detail, the listening audience is reminded that choices often lead to unexpected circumstances. In a terse oral (or written) stroke circumstances take over: ἐγένετο λιμὸς ἰσχυρὰ κατὰ τὴν χώραν ἐκείνην καὶ αὐτὸς ἤρξατο ὑστερεῖσθαι (14). The famine was a severe one. This would automatically push the people on the edge of society's care into dire circumstances. When resources are scarce the periphery of society suffers first and most. The younger son, as a penniless foreigner experienced great need.

¹⁰⁴Summers, Commentary on Luke, 184-85.

At this point in the story, the listener may wonder if the story can get much worse. It can and does. The younger son is forced to work for a citizen of the country to which he had journeyed. His job is to feed swine. There was a Jewish proverb to cover this work: "Verflucht der Mann, der Schweine züchtet. . . ." ¹⁰⁵ To make matters worse, the pigs' diet appeared better to this Jewish young man than his own. It is not likely that a Jewish audience could have a more severe picture drawn of the crisis circumstances that now surrounded this young man's life. As E. Schweizer points out, the hunger is not all that is involved in the circumstances of the young man; "he suffers loss of religious identity. Swine have been unclean since Leviticus 11:7; only Gentiles eat their flesh (Isa. 65:4; 66:17). . . ." ¹⁰⁶¹⁰⁷

Circumstances, which followed his earlier poor choices, now brought the younger son into a hunger for pig's food:

καὶ ἐπεθύμει χορτασθῆναι ἐκ τῶν κερατίων ὧν ἤσθιον οἱ χοῖροι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδίδου αὐτῷ (v. 16). The food supply of the pigs, which he desired to eat, was composed of "the hornlike bean pods of the carob tree which contained not only seeds but a sweet gelatinous substance adding to the food value." ¹⁰⁸ Every word (or pen stroke) that tells the tale is designed to focus on the folly of the younger son and on his serious plight.

¹¹⁰⁵Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, vol. 1 (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Oskar Beck, 1922), 493.

¹²¹⁰⁶Schweizer, The Good News According to Luke, 248.

¹¹⁰⁸Summers, Commentary on Luke, 185. The nature of this food which he desired also has a proverbial statement connected with it: "Wenn die Israeliten Johannisbrot . . . nötig haben,

The phrase which tells the reader/listener that the young man received no help from anyone, may be meant to remind the parable's audience that the young son had taken himself out of his father's care. His own choices had taken him from his father's care.

III. The story arrived at the younger son's change of choices
(15:17-20a)

I. Howard Marshall, among others, points to the important fact that the phrase εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν, which may be translated in a literal fashion as "'to come to one's senses,' represents a Semitic phrase 'to repent.' . . ." ¹⁰⁹¹¹⁰ Interestingly, Wellhausen states that "'Er kam zu sich selbst' . . . ist wol griechisch, die Juden sagen: zu Gott zurückkehren." ¹¹¹

Peter R. Jones identifies the monologue of the younger son as "interior monologue." The stance of the one who tells the tale must be one of omniscience. It is not to be assumed that someone heard this son talking to himself or even that he later reported what he had been thinking in this time of personal crisis. The monologue furthers the story. Jones recognizes three speech patterns for the younger son in his part of the story: "a request; a decisive, interior monologue; and a confession." In the center piece of the story, when the wayfaring son returns to the father, the father never dialogues with the younger son. Instead, the father speaks to servants on

dann tun sie Buße . . ." Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, vol. 2 (München: C. H. Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Oskar Beck, 1924), 214. See the earlier section of this paper for information on the textual variant of verse 16.

² ¹⁰⁹ Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, 609.

¹ ¹¹¹ Wellhausen, Das Evangelium Lucae, 84.

the son's behalf. It is to the older son dialogue takes place. As Jones points out, "The only person to speak in both movements is the father, who speaks with authority at the climax of each."¹¹²

The message of the young man is known:

ἔφη, Πόσοι μίσθιοι τοῦ πατρός μου περισσεύονται ἄρτων, ἐγὼ δὲ λιμῶ ὧδε ἀπόλλυμαι (v. 17). The father's hired servants are "feasting," while he is in "famine." The μίσθιοι are hired workers, as opposed to slaves. The father's household apparently included both classes of workers (see v. 22). The son would be content to be the servant.

The son is shown rehearsing the speech he will make before his father. This speech of repentance contained four points:

- (1) ἥμαρτον εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ
- (2) [ἥμαρτον] ἐνώπιόν σου,
- (3) οὐκέτι εἰμὶ ἄξιος κληθῆναι υἱός σου·
- (4) ποίησόν με ὡς ἓνα τῶν μισθίων σου.

The distinction mentioned earlier that is maintained between God and the father must not be forgotten. As Schweizer says in part, "The father is not simply the allegorical equivalent of God."¹¹³ The speech of the son indicates this. The recognition of sin is made before heaven and

² ¹¹²Jones, The Teaching of the Parables, 175.

³ ¹¹³Schweizer, The Good News According to Luke, 248.

before the father. Wellhausen points out that in "15:18. Himmel, geradezu für Gott, findet sich in den Evv. nur an dieser Stelle."¹¹⁴

If ἀναστὰς πορεύσομαι (v. 18a) does represent an Aramaic phrase meaning "I will go at once," then the younger son may have rehearsed his four point speech again and again on the way home.¹¹⁵ The young man has made a new choice that takes him to the father and to public confession of sin that has to this point only been private.

IV. The story climaxed with the welcome of the father (15:20b-24)

The parable is about to take another unusual turn that will bring it to a climax. While the returning son is a far distance away, just a speck on the horizon, the father sees him, is filled with compassion toward him, and runs to greet him. The waiting father is replaced by the running father. Schweizer, among many others, points out that the race to the son "is contrary to all custom; in the near East, a mature man loses all his dignity when he runs."¹¹⁶ Upon meeting the son, the father embraced him and kissed him--signs of warm welcome.

At that point the younger son begins to deliver his well-rehearsed speech:

- (1) ἥρατον εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ
- (2) ἐνώπιόν σου,
- (3) οὐκέτι εἰμί ἄξιος κληθῆναι υἱός σου.

^{4 114}Wellhausen, Das Evangelium Lucae, 84.

^{5 115}Marshall, The Gospel of Luke, 609.

^{6 116}Schweizer, The Good News According to Luke, 249.

The fourth point becomes a textual question as was earlier seen. Did the son deliver it? No, the father interrupted when his son for whom he had longed indicated that he was no longer worthy to be called his son. Although, the manuscript support for the fourth point is strong, Caird is almost certainly correct in calling for discarding it as the work of "a copyist who did not realize that the carefully rehearsed speech was interrupted by the impetuosity of the father."¹¹⁷

The father's response is swift and immediate. He orders the servants to bring the signs of sonship: the best robe, the signet ring, and the shoes of a freeman or household master. Not only are the visible signs of sonship restored, but the celebration of great joy is planned. While verse six of the parable of the lost sheep and verse nine of the parable of the lost coin both speak of a party for friends, it is only in this last parable that the party preparations and the party sounds are given full detail.

The fatted calf was not the meal of common celebration, but of special celebration, often associated with a special guest. The father celebrates with the younger son, the restored sonship, the restored life, and the restored relationship.

The joy found in the parable of the lost sheep (v.6) and in the lost coin parable (v. 9) over the recovery of one sheep and one coin now comes to the parable of the lost sons (vv. 23-24). One son, the younger one, is in the center of the father's joy and celebration.

As pointed out, there are several scholars who want to finish the parable with the celebration of the father and his lost younger son. But the story is not finished here. It is possible that the original audiences might well have thought that the story was through also. But a surprising direction to the story is shortly to be taken.

^{7 117}Caird, The Gospel of St Luke, 184.

Part II

I. The story now focused attention on the older son (15:25-30)

The older son was absent from the house when the father began the celebration. He was working. Upon his return to the house, he heard music and dancing coming from the house. A servant gave the older brother news of joy, but the older brother would not accept it. The servant identified the one who had returned as "your brother," not as "your father's son."

The response was one of anger and rejection. Once again the father is pictured as leaving the house to meet with a son. The father pleads with the older son to join the celebration.

Again, the father hears the speech of a son. This speech sounds just as rehearsed as that of the younger son. However, the nature of the speech is drastically different. David Tiede describes it as follows:

And it is a bitter speech ("I have slaved for you all these years and never disobeyed"), a resentful speech ("Yet you never gave me even a kid so I could have my own party with my friends"), and a self-justifying speech ("but when this so of yours came, you killed the fatted calf"). He not only refuses to join the joyful celebration, he also is cutting himself off from his brother and his father.¹¹⁸

The older brother refused to be brother to his brother. He only labeled his brother as ὁ υἱός σου οὗτος. He would not acknowledge his relationship to the brother. The one who would be made a hired hand had been restored to sonship; the one who should be son, declared himself as slave. There has been a reversal in the parable. This is not uncommon in parables.

II. The story ended with the unanswered plea of the father (15:31-32)

The word used to refer to the older brother by the father is one of affection. The father reminded the son that he was always in the father's presence. If the older brother worried about

possessions, the father reminded him that the sonship he possessed included the father's possessions.

There was, however, a reaffirmation of the need for celebration. The father repeated virtually the same words as those of verse 24; but this time he changed the words, "my son," to "your brother."

The story ends with the special plea of the father to the one who was always in the home to come join him at the celebration table. The results of that plea go untold. The older son represents the tragedy of one who stands on the verge of shutting out the father by shutting out the brother. He is unwilling to celebrate with the kind of father who will celebrate with a sinner. He does not acknowledge the repentance of the younger brother; and stands in danger of shutting himself out from the father's banquet.

Conclusion

The parable of the lost sons needs to be reevaluated for preaching ministries. Is it necessary to preach both "parts" of the parable? Or can only one or the other of the two-part story be preached? It is the exegetical contention of this paper that the parable needs to be preached in both its parts. It really is not the parable of the prodigal son. That title is too restrictive of the total message offered in the parable.

The parable does describe how God receives sinners. But it also describes how sinners receive God. Peter R. Jones has found a helpful outline on the latter process from this parable. What are these stages of repentance?

⁸¹⁸Tiede, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, 279-80.

First, repentance is *a great awakening* (v. 17). . . .
Second, repentance is *a returning to the Father* (v. 18a)
Third, repentance is *a confessing of sin* (vv. 18b-19,21)
[Fourth], repentance then is also *entering the joy of the kingdom* .¹¹⁹

^{9 119}Jones, The Teaching of the Parables, 181-82.

APPENDIX 1

PARABLES IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

The following lists of parables are taken from the Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels.¹²⁰

Parables Found in the Triple Tradition:

	Mark	Matthew	Luke
Bridegroom's Guests	2:19-20	9:15	5:33-35
Unshrunk Cloth	2:21	9:16	5:36
New Wine	2:22	9:17	5:37-39
Strong Man Bound	3:22-27	12:29-30	11:21-23
Sower	4:1-9,13-20	13:1-9,18-23	8:4-8,11-15
Mustard Seed	4:30-32	13:31-32	13:18-19
Wicked Tenants	12:1-12	21:33-46	20:9-19
Budding Fig Tree	13:28-32	24:32-36	21:29-33

Parable Parallels in Matthew and Luke

	Matthew	Luke
Wise and Foolish Builders	7:24-27	6:47-49
Father and Children's Requests	7:9-11	11:11-13
Two Ways/Doors	7:13-14	13:23-27
Leaven	13:31-32	13:20-21
Lost Sheep	18:12-14	15:1-7
Wedding Banquet	22:1-14	14:15-24
Thief in the Night	24:42-44	12:39-40
Faithful and Unfaithful Steward	24:45-51	12:42-46
Talents and Pounds	25:14-30	19:11-27

Parable Parallels in Mark and Luke

	Mark	Luke
Lamp and Measure	4:21-25	8:16-18
Watchman	13:34-36	12:35-38

Parables Only in Matthew

	Matthew
Good and Bad Trees	7:16-20
Fishnet	13:47-50
Wheat and Tares	13:24-30,36-43
Treasure	13:44
Pearl	13:45-46
Unmerciful Servant	18:23-35
Laborers in the Vineyard	20:1-16
Two Sons	21:28-32
Wise and Foolish Maidens	25:1-13
Sheep and Goats	25:31-46

Parables Only in Mark

Seed Growing Secretly	4:26-29
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Parables Only in Luke

	Luke
Two Debtors	7:41-50
Good Samaritan	10:25-37
Friend at Midnight	11:5-8
Rich Fool	12:13-21
Barren Fig Tree	13:6-9
Tower Builder	14:28-30
Warring King	14:31-33
Lost Sheep	15:1-7
Lost Coin	15:8-10
Prodigal Son	15:11-32
Unjust Steward	16:1-8
Rich Man and Lazarus	16:19-31
Humble Servant	17:7-10
Unjust Judge	18:1-8
Pharisee and Tax Collector	18:9-14

APPENDIX 2
BLOCK DIAGRAM OF LUKE 15:11-32

- 15:11 δέ
(A) *Εἶπεν,*
- (1) *Ἀνθρώπος τις εἶχεν δύο υἱούς.*
- 15:12 καὶ
(2) *εἶπεν ὁ νεώτερος αὐτῶν τῷ πατρί,*
/-----|
Πάτερ,
δός μοι τὸ ἐπιβάλλον μέρος τῆς οὐσίας.
- δὲ
(3) *ὁ διεἴλεν αὐτοῖς τὸν βίον.*
- 15:13 καὶ
μετ' οὐ πολλὰς ἡμέρας
συναγαγὼν πάντα
(4) *ὁ νεώτερος υἱὸς ἀπεδήμησεν*
εἰς χώραν μακράν
- καὶ
ἐκεῖ
(5) *διεσκόρπισεν τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ ζῶν*
ἀσώτως.
- 15:14 δὲ
δαπανήσαντος αὐτοῦ πάντα
(6) *ἐγένετο λιμὸς ἰσχυρὰ*
κατὰ τὴν χώραν ἐκείνην,
καὶ
(7) *αὐτὸς ἤρξατο ὑστερεῖσθαι.*
- 15:15 καὶ
πορευθεὶς
(8) *ἐκολλήθη ἐνὶ τῶν πολιτῶν τῆς χώρας ἐκείνης,*
καὶ
(9) *ἔπεμψεν αὐτὸν*
εἰς τοὺς ἀγροὺς αὐτοῦ
βόσκειν χοίρους,
- 15:16 καὶ
(10) *ἐπεθύμει χορτασθῆναι*
ἐκ τῶν κερατίων
ᾧν ἤσθιον οἱ χοῖροι,
- καὶ
(11) *οὐδεὶς ἐδίδου αὐτῷ.*

15:17
(12) δὲ
εἰς ἑαυτὸν
ἔλθων
ἔφη,
Πόσοι μίσθιοι τοῦ πατρὸς μου περισσεύονται ἄρτων,
δὲ
ἐγὼ λιμῶ ὥδε ἀπόλλυμαι.

15:18
ἀναστὰς
πορεύσομαι
πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου
καὶ
ἐρῶ αὐτῷ,

Πάτερ,
ἡμαρτον
εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν
καὶ
ἐνώπιόν σου,
15:19 οὐκέτι εἰμι ἄξιος
κληθῆναι υἱός σου·
ποίησόν με
ὡς ἓνα τῶν μισθίων σου.

15:20
(13) καὶ
ἀναστὰς
ἦλθεν
πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ.

(14) δὲ
ἔτι
αὐτοῦ μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος
εἶδεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ

(15) καὶ
ἐσπλαγχνίσθη

(16) καὶ
δραμῶν
ἐπέπεσεν
ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ

(17) καὶ
κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν.

15:21
(18) δὲ
εἶπεν ὁ υἱὸς αὐτῷ,

Πάτερ,
ἡμαρτον
εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν
καὶ
ἐνώπιόν σου,
οὐκέτι εἰμι ἄξιος
κληθῆναι υἱός σου.

15:22
δὲ

(19) εἶπεν ὁ πατήρ
πρὸς τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ,

15:23 Ταχὺ
ἐξενέγκατε στολὴν τὴν πρώτην
καὶ
ἐνδύσατε αὐτόν,
καὶ
δότε δακτύλιον
εἰς τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ
καὶ
---- ὑποδήματα
εἰς τοὺς πόδας,
καὶ
φέρετε τὸν μόσχον τὸν σιτευτόν,
θύσατε,
καὶ
φαγόντες
15:24 εὐφρανθῶμεν,
ὅτι οὗτος ὁ υἱὸς μου νεκρὸς ἦν
καὶ
----- - ---- ἀνέζησεν,
----- - ---- ἦν ἀπολωλὼς
καὶ
----- - ---- εὐρέθη.

(20) καὶ
ἤρξαντο εὐφραίνεσθαι.

15:25 δὲ
(21) Ἦν ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ πρεσβύτερος
ἐν ἀγρῷ·

(22) καὶ
ὡς ἐρχόμενος ἤγγισεν τῇ οἰκίᾳ,
ἤκουσεν συμφωνίας καὶ χορῶν,
15:26 καὶ

(23) προσκαλεσάμενος ἕνα τῶν παιδῶν
ἐπυνθάνετο
τί ἂν εἶη ταῦτα.

15:27 δὲ
(24) ὁ εἶπεν αὐτῷ
ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἦκει,
καὶ
ἔθυσεν ὁ πατήρ σου τὸν μόσχον τὸν σιτευτόν,
ὅτι ὑγιαίνοντα αὐτὸν ἀπέλαβεν.

15:28 δὲ
(25) ὠργίσθη
καὶ

(26) οὐκ ἤθελεν εἰσελθεῖν,
δὲ

ἐξελθὼν

(27) *ὁ πατήρ αὐτοῦ...παρεκάλει αὐτόν.*

15:29

(28) *δὲ
ὁ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν
τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ,*

*Ἴδὸν
τοσαῦτα ἔτη
δουλεύω σοι
καὶ
οὐδέποτε
ἐντολήν σου παρήλθον,
καὶ
οὐδέποτε
ἐμοὶ...ἔδωκας ἔριφον
μετὰ τῶν φίλων μου
ἵνα...εὐφρανθῶ.
δὲ*

15:30

*ὅτε ὁ υἱός σου... ἦλθεν
οὗτος
ὁ καταφαγὼν σου τὸν βίον
μετὰ πορνῶν,*

ἔθυσας αὐτῷ τὸν σιτευτὸν μόσχον.

15:31

(29) *δὲ
ὁ εἶπεν αὐτῷ,*

*Τέκνον,
σὺ πάντοτε μετ' ἐμοῦ εἶ,
καὶ
πάντα τὰ ἐμὰ σὰ ἐστίν·
δὲ
εὐφρανθῆναι καὶ χαρῆναι ἔδει,
/-----|
ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφός σου οὗτος νεκρὸς ἦν
καὶ
ἔζησεν,
καὶ
ἀπολωλὼς --
καὶ
εὐρέθη.*

15:32

APPENDIX 3
EXEGETICAL OUTLINE

- I. Luke established the audience for the parable (15:1-2)
 - A. Tax collectors and sinners gathered to hear Jesus (15:1)
 - B. Pharisees and teachers of the law muttered at Jesus (15:2)
 - 1. They muttered because Jesus welcomed sinners (15:2)
 - 2. They muttered because Jesus ate with sinners (15:2)
- II. Jesus introduced the characters in the story (15:11)
 - A. Jesus introduced one character as "a certain man" (15:11)
 - B. Jesus introduced two characters as sons of the man (15:11)

Part I

- I. The story began with the younger son's choices (15:12-13)
 - A. The younger son requested his share of the estate (15:12)
 - 1. The father gave part of the estate to the older son (15:12)
 - 2. The father gave part of the estate to the younger son (15:12)
 - B. The younger son gathered his part of the estate (15:13)
 - C. The younger son departed to a distant country (15:13)
 - D. The younger son lived his life for pleasure's sake (15:13)
 - E. The younger son squandered all of his estate (15:14a)
- II. The story continued with the younger son's circumstances (15:14b-16)
 - A. Famine arrived in the distant country (15:14b)
 - B. The younger son experienced great need (15:14c)
 - C. The younger son hired himself out to a foreigner (15:15-16)
 - 1. The younger son fed pigs (15:15)
 - 2. The younger son hungered for pig's food (15:16)
 - D. The younger son received help from no one (15:16)
- III. The story arrived at the younger son's change of choices (15:17-20a)
 - A. The younger son remembered his father's hired hands (15:17)
 - 1. They had plenty of food (15:17)
 - 2. He had a starvation diet (15:17)
 - B. The younger son rehearsed his arrival speech (15:18)
 - 1. He said, I sinned against heaven (15:18)
 - 2. He said, I sinned against you (15:18)
 - 3. He said, I am not worthy to be your son (15:19)
 - 4. He said, I want to be your hired hand (15:19)

- C. The younger son returned to his father (15:20a)
- IV. The story climaxed with the welcome of the father 15:20b-24)
- A. The father glimpsed the younger son at a great distance (15:20b)
 - B. The father was filled with compassion for this son (15:20c)
 - 1. The father ran to meet his son (15:20d)
 - 2. The father embraced his son (15:20e)
 - 3. The father kissed his son (15:20f)
 - C. The younger son delivered as much as possible of his planned arrival speech (15:21)
 - 1. He said, I sinned against heaven (15:21)
 - 2. He said, I sinned against you (15:21)
 - 3. He said, I am not worthy to be your son (15:21)
 - D. The father responded before the speech was finished (15:22-24)
 - 1. The father gave his servants urgent directions for restoration of the younger son (15:22)
 - a) He ordered, Bring the best robe and clothe him (15:22)
 - b) He ordered, Put the signet ring on his finger (15:22)
 - c) He ordered, Place the shoes on his feet (15:22)
 - 2. The father gave his servants urgent directions for celebration of the younger son (15:23)
 - a) He ordered, Prepare the fatted calf as food (15:23)
 - b) He ordered, Let us have a feast and celebrate (15:23)
 - 3. The father provided a reason for the celebration (15:24)
 - a) He wanted to celebrate sonship (15:24)
 - b) He wanted to celebrate the life of a son given up as dead (15:24)
 - c) He wanted to celebrate the return of a lost son (15:24)
 - 4. The father began **the celebration without** the older son (15:24)

Part II

- I. The story now focused attention on the older son (15:25-30)
 - A. The older son was working in the field (15:25)
 - B. The older son returned to the house (15:25)
 - 1. He heard music coming from the house (15:25)
 - 2. He heard the sound of dancing coming from the house (15:25)
 - 3. He called one of the servants (15:26)
 - 4. He asked information concerning the sounds of celebration (15:26)
 - a) The servant said, Your brother has returned (15:27)
 - b) The servant said, Your father has killed the fatted calf (15:27)
 - (1) He did this because your brother is safe (15:27)
 - (2) He did this because your brother is sound (15:27)
 - C. The older son responded to the servant's news (15:28)
 - 1. He responded with anger (15:28)
 - 2. He responded with refusal to attend the celebration (15:28)
 - a) The father went out to the older son (15:28)

- b) The father pleaded with the older son to join the celebration (15:28)
- D. The older son responded to the father's pleading (15:29)
 - 1. He said, I've been slaving for you all these years (15:29)
 - 2. He said, I've never disobeyed your orders (15:29)
 - 3. He said, You never gave me even a goat for a celebration with my friends (15:29)
- E. The older son responded to the father's celebration (15:30)
 - 1. He refused to identify his younger brother as a brother (15:30)
 - 2. He rebuked the supposed past lifestyle of the father's younger son (15:30)
 - 3. He rebuked his father for providing a celebration (15:30)
- II. The story ended with the unanswered plea of the father (15:31-32)
 - A. The father emphasized the older son's position as son (15:31)
 - 1. The sonship included the father's presence (15:31)
 - 2. The sonship included the father's possessions (15:31)
 - B. The father reaffirmed the necessity of a family celebration (15:32)
 - 1. The father wanted to celebrate the return of a brother (15:32)
 - 2. The father wanted to celebrate the life of a brother given up as dead (15:32)
 - 3. The father wanted to celebrate the return of a lost brother (15:32)

(Appendices 4 & 5 omitted)

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