Parables

What is a parable?

We need to understand the role and purpose of parables because these were one of the primary ways that Jesus taught His disciples. In fact, there are 38 different parables recorded in the Gospel accounts, many recorded in more than one gospel.

A parable is a story that is used to present an important moral and spiritual lesson. The word parable is a Greek word, which means comparison or illustration. The purpose of the parable was to take an everyday situation and use it to present an important lesson, much like the use of a metaphor. What the parable does is paint a picture that helps the reader to grasp the profound teaching.

Why Jesus Used Parables

The fact that Jesus used so many parables to relay his teachings makes it clear that these stories are important. It was also foretold that he would teach using parables. Matthew 13:34-35 tells us, "**34 All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: 'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.**'"

This prophecy comes from Psalm 78:2. It was a prophecy related to the coming Messiah and how he would help to restore the nation of Israel. Thus, Jesus taught in parables to fulfill the prophecy.

However, that was not the only reason. He also taught in a way that confounded those who did not open themselves to God to understand the parable. In Matthew 13:10-17, the disciples come to Jesus and asked Him why He was teaching in parables:

10 Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" 11 And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. 12 For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. 14 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

"You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. 15 For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

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16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. 17 For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

The parables were used so that those who opened their hearts to God would understand them and see the spiritual significance.

Why You Need to Understand Parables?

Many of the parables are easy to understand. The Parable of the Prodigal Son and the Parable of the Lost Coin are such examples. However, some parables can be far more challenging. This is where your study Bible can assist you in understanding the parable better. Use it!

Each parable is intended to answer important spiritual questions. These include:

- The category of the parable?
- What do the characters and objects represent in the parable?
- What does the message teach us about God?
- What is the spiritual message God wants us to learn?

You understand now that parables are intended to teach you moral and spiritual messages. Now you may be wondering what specific message they are teaching.

Types of Parables

The parables can be categorized in several ways, but we will put them in just four different categories.

The Kingdom of God

Probably the most common theme of Jesus' parables was the kingdom of God. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus told His disciples that they should seek first the kingdom of God. Thus, parables were focused on the kingdom, which Jesus made clear was occurring during his time and continues through today and beyond.

Parables could often be quite short, and Matthew 13:44 is one such example. **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."**

We know the category, but what is the spiritual message God wants us to learn?

If you are having some trouble understanding it, let's look at the next two verses. "**45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.**"

What do you think this parable is teaching?

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What does the pearl represent?

Jesus wanted to present to His disciples that the kingdom of God was more important than anything. Therefore, a person would give up everything he or she had for it.

To Save the Lost

Another very common theme is that Jesus came to save the lost. These parables are taught the most in the Gospel of Luke.

In Luke 15:1-7, the Parable of the Loss Sheep is told. "**1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'**

3 So he told them this parable: 4 'What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.'"

What does this parable teach about God and His desire to save?

Jesus came for the lost (Luke 19:10). This parable makes it clear that this was His ultimate mission.

Jesus Is the Messiah!

For centuries, the Jewish people had been waiting on the Messiah. Jesus made it clear that He was who they were waiting for. He also made it clear that the religious leaders did not really want the Messiah to come. They wanted the power but not the responsibility to represent God well. This is seen in this parable in Matthew 21:33-41:

33 "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. 34 When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. 35 And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. 37 Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' 39 And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" 41 They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable

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death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

What does this parable teach us about the religious leaders of the time?

What relationship did they desire with God?

This parable makes it clear that the religious leaders were well aware that Jesus was the awaited Messiah. However, they did not really want Him to come and, Jesus explained, they would rather kill than accept Him.

The Importance of Obedience to God

Jesus often taught about the need for obedience to God. Matthew 21:28-32 records:

28 "What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. 30 And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

What is the relationship to God?

What is the message of this parable?

It is important for believers to honor God with their obedience. This includes spreading the gospel message. In fact, there are many parables that speak to this truth.

You May Be Confused at Times

Parables provide great metaphors to understand important spiritual lessons. Many of them will be clear to you. However, some will be confusing. If you are confused by one of these parables, this is your opportunity to search and find the answer. Pray to God, use the study notes and references in your Bible, and seek out the advice of your brothers to help you to find the answer.

The next four pages of this lesson provide you with a list of all 38 parables. We encourage you to choose a different parable every day and learn the message.

Answer the four questions you were asked earlier in relation to each parable. You may not have an answer for each question in every parable, but you should always understand the spiritual message and how it relates to God.

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The Parables of Jesus

Pick at least one parable to read over each of the next six days. What lesson was Jesus teaching in the parable?

Parable Title	Bible Verse(s)	Meaning
The Purpose of the Parables	Mt 13:10-17; Mk 4:10-12; Lk 8:9-10	Explains why Jesus uses parables to teach
The Sower	Mt 13:1-9, 18-23; Mk 4:1-9, 13-20; Lk 8:4-8, 11-15	Seed growth depends on the condition of the heart.
The Weeds/Mustard Seed	Mt 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Lk 13:18-19	The Kingdom of God starts small and grows large.
The Leaven	Mt 13:33; Lk 13:20-21	The Kingdom of God grows pervasively from small beginnings.
The Hidden Treasure	Mt 13:44	The Kingdom of God is worth everything one has.
The Pearl of Great Value	Mt 13:45-46	Finding the kingdom of God surpasses all else.
The Net	Mt 13:47-50	The kingdom of heaven gathers all, sorted at the end.
Owner of the House	Mt 13:52	The Kingdom is like a householder who begins out his treasure.
The Lost Sheep	Mt 18:12-14; Lk 15:3-7	God rejoices over the repentance of one sinner.

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Parable Title	Bible Verse(s)	Meaning
The Unforgiving Servant	Mt 18:23-35	Forgive others as God has forgiven you
The Two Sons	Mt 21:28-32	Action speaks louder than words
The Tenants	Mt 21:33-41; Mk 12:1-9; Lk 20:9-16	Judgment against those who reject God's messengers.
The Wedding Feast	Mt 22:2-14; Lk 14:16-24	Many are invited to the kingdom, but few are chosen.
The Ten Virgins	Mt 25:1-13	Be prepared for the coming of the Kingdom.
The Talents	Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:12-28	Use God's gifts wisely.
The Good Samaritan	Lk 10:30-37	Love your neighbor as yourself.
The Rich Fool	Lk 12:16-21	Life doesn't consist of an abundance of possessions.
The Barren Fig Tree	Lk 13:6-9	Repent or face judgment.
The Lost Coin	Lk 15:8-10	God values each individual.
The Prodigal Son	Lk 15:11-32	God welcomes repentant sinners
The Dishonest Manager	Lk 16:1-13	Use worldly resources to gain eternal friends.

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Parable Title	Bible Verse(s)	Meaning
The Rich Man and Lazarus	Lk 16:19-31	A warning against ignoring the suffering and poverty of others.
The Persistent Widow	Lk 18:1-8	Persist in prayer and seeking justice.
The Pharisee and the Tax Collector	Lk 18:9-14	Humility is valued over self-righteousness.
The Sheep and the Goats	Mt 25:31-46	Jesus separates people like sheep and goats based on their acts of kindness and speaks of the afterlife.
Lamp Under a Bowl	Mt 5:14-16; Mk 4:21-22; Lk 11:33	Believers should shine a light on the world.
Wise and Foolish Builders	Mt 7:24-27; Lk 6:47-49	Build life on Jesus' teachings
New Cloth on an Old Coat	Mt 9:16; Mk 2:21; Lk 5:36	Jesus' new teachings don't fit old traditions completely.
New Wine in Old Wineskins	Mt 9:17; Mk 2:22; Lk 5:37-38	Jesus' message needs new forms.
Master and His Servant	Lk 17:7-10	No person should think that he or she is worthy of God's praise or reward.
Fig Tree	Mk 11:12-14, 20-25	Faith and prayer can move mountains.
The Watchful Servants	Mk 13:34-37; Lk 12:35-40	Be ready for the coming of the Lord

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Parable Title	Bible Verse(s)	Meaning
Cost of Discipleship	Lk 14:28-33	Consider the sacrifices of following Jesus
The Two Debtors	Lk 7:41-43	Greater forgiveness leads to greater love
Growing Seed	Mk 4:26-29	The Kingdom of God grows mysteriously.
Workers in the Vineyard	Mt 20:1-16	God's generosity is given according to divine will, not human ideas of fairness
Importunate Neighbor	Lk 11:5-8	Persistence in prayer is rewarded.
Strong Man	Mt 12:29; Mk 3:27; Lk 11:21-22	Jesus' power is beyond every evil force in the world.

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