

Among the oldest and most important of the UNCIAL manuscripts of the NT are the CHESTER BEATTY PAPYRI and the BODMER PAPYRI. Chester Beatty Papyrus 45 is dated to the early 3rd cent. CE and preserves portions of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. The Chester Beatty Papyrus 46 originally contained ten epistles of Paul and is dated to ca. 200 CE. Note that the Pastoral Epistles were probably not part of this papyrus codex. Chester Beatty Papyrus 47 dates to the mid to late 3rd cent. CE and preserves portions of the book of Revelation. Bodmer Papyrus 66 preserves portions of the Gospel of John and dates to ca. 200 CE. Bodmer Papyrus 72 is the oldest copy of Jude and the two Epistles of Peter. In addition, however, it also contains the *Nativity of Mary*, Melito's *Homily on the Passover*, and the Apocryphal Correspondence of Paul to the Corinthians. This papyrus dates to the 3rd cent. CE.

The OXYRHYNCHUS PAPYRI have also proved to be of enormous importance for the fields of NT studies, because they contain some fragments of NT books (e.g., the Gospels and Revelation), early witnesses to the texts of Apollonius Rhodius, Aristophanes, Demosthenes, and Euripides, unknown texts of Menander, and various additional texts providing evidence for legal practices, economy, and society in general of Hellenes and Egyptians during the Roman and Byzantine empires. Of course, the NAG HAMMADI TEXTS constitute one of the most important collections of gnostic texts, including works such as the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *The Gospel of Truth*, and the *Gospel of Thomas*. The Greek Magical Papyri also factor prominently in many discussions of the NT world. See EGERTON PAPYRUS; GnosticISM; INSCRIPTIONS; INSINGER, PAPYRUS; TEXT, NT; WRITING AND WRITING MATERIALS.

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PARABLE pair'uh-buhl [משל mashal; παραβολή parabolē]. The term *parable* is a transliteration of the Gk. parabolē, which signifies a comparison; literally it is something cast (ballō βάλλω) alongside (para παρά). Aristotle (4th cent. BCE) describes parabolē as "comparison," one of two types of examples used in argumentation (*Rhet.* 2.20.1–3; 3.19.5). In a 1st-cent. BCE Latin handbook of rhetoric, the *similitudo* (the equivalent of parabolē) is described as a type of speech

that carries over a similarity or **likeness** from one thing to another and is used in **argumentation** to embellish, clarify, prove, or vivify (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.45.58). In the literature of the Middle Ages the term *exemplum*, "example," designated a short story having a moral; thus the story was **conceived** as an example of proper or improper behavior.

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A. Parable in the Ancient World

1. Old Testament

The OT uses the term *mashal* for literary units whose meaning is not immediately clear or easily understood (e.g., Pss 49:4 [Heb. 49:5]; 78:2; Prov 1:6). The LXX regularly translates *mashal* as "parable" (**parabolē**). In general, *mashal* is used to designate **narratives** (Ezek 17:2-10), brief figures (Ezek 24:3-5), traditional proverbs (1 Sam 24:13; Ezek 18:2), laments cast as brief narratives (Ezek 19:1-9), and sayings (Mic 2:4; Hab 2:5-6). *Mashal* is also used as a parallel to the **RIDDLE** (*khidhah* חִידָה; compare Ezek 17:1-2; Pss 49:4; 78:2; Hab 2:6), which is also a type of obscure or enigmatic speech. In Num 12:8 *khidhah* is contrasted with clear discourse. In Judg 14:12-18 and 1 Kgs 10:1 *khidhah* describes language that is purposely obscure and deliberately enigmatic.

A few narratives in the OT are similar to the stories Jesus told. Ezekiel 17:2-10 ("The Eagles and the Vine") is an allegory (*mashal*) spoken to the house of Israel (17:2), followed by an explanation (17:11-21).

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Ezekiel 17:22-24 ("The Allegory of the Cedar") has no literary designation and is not followed by an explanation. Ezekiel 19:1-9 ("The Lions") and 19:10-14 ("The Vine") are narratives described as laments (*qinah* *קִינָה*) rather than *mashal*, but are clearly allegorical. Judges 9:8-15 is a fable, i.e., an unrealistic narrative ("The Olive Tree and the Bramble"). In the immediate context the narrative is explained allegorically (9:16-21), but no literary designation is given.

In their realism the following three narratives are the closest parallels to the stories in the NT. These narratives do not use cryptic language but reflect a mimetic fictional realism. In its literary context, 2 Sam 12:1-4 ("The Ewe Lamb") functions as an allegory (12:5-9) to expose David's mistreatment of Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Sam 11:1-27). In itself, however, the narrative is a realistic but tragic story about the abuse of the poor by the wealthy elite. David is portrayed as thinking it actually happened (12:5-6). Hence the story gives no hint of the use that Nathan will later make of it (12:7-12). Second Samuel 14:5-7 features a fictional narrative ("The Wise Woman of Tekoa") portrayed as having been invented by Joab (14:1-3, 19); the story functions in the context as an allegory of David's own behavior (14:12-13). David does not regard it as an allegory, however, but as the actual social situation of the widow (14:8-11). Hence, the story gives no hint of the use that Joab will later make of it. In itself the story appears to be an actual threat to the survival of a family. Ecclesiastes 9:14-15 is a brief narrative about a tiny city besieged by a powerful king. Lacking the forces to withstand the might of the great king, the city's destruction appeared certain, until a poor wise man by wisdom delivered the city. This portrayal of a rather typical situation in the ancient world is followed by the brief moral: "Wisdom is better than might" (Eccl 9:16).

2. Rabbinic parables

Rabbinic parables are considerably more numerous than the number of OT parables. Around 2,000 have been estimated to exist in rabbinic literature. Although the narratives in the OT antedated the time of Jesus, the texts in which rabbinic parables appear date from a much later period—anywhere from 200 to 500 years later. None of the parables in rabbinic literature have been dated in the first half of the 1st cent., although some few have been dated near the end of the 1st cent. Many rabbinic parables feature a king who generally symbolizes God and as a consequence lack the rustic village-life realism that is the hallmark of most of the stories attributed to Jesus. It is difficult to classify the rabbinic parables because of their diverse content, but some few of the stories feature animals, as is also the case with most of Aesop's fables. They are introduced similar to the ways parables in the NT are introduced. For example, "to what may the parable be likened, to ..." or "I will set forth a parable; to what may the parable be likened, to ..." A very few use simply "as"

or "like." In some cases the introduction is simply "a parable" and then follows the story. The majority of the parables were followed by an application making the rabbi's point clear. Rabbinic parables were used in relation to the religious tradition that brought them into existence and concerned some aspect of God's behavior in relation to his people whether in the past or the present. Some few, however, may be described as secular stories. The parable itself was intended to serve as an explanation of the subject being addressed. See RABBINIC LITERATURE.

3. Aesop's fables

Aside from the narratives in the OT, a promising venue for contextualizing the stories of Jesus is the fable collections attributed to Aesop (and others). The FABLE, from the Latin *fabula* (story), is an ancient narrative form that typically, but not always, features a brief moral. Fables circulated widely in the ancient world. Usually, the fable personified inanimate objects or animals, or perhaps better, they portrayed human beings as animals and inanimate objects. The plot and dramatic action of the fable, in spite of this unrealistic characterization (viz. animals treated as human beings), were nevertheless quite realistic in the way the personified animals in the narrative interacted.

B. Parable in Early Christian Literature

1. Synoptic Gospels

In the Synoptic Gospels, narratives, proverbs, simple straightforward discourse, and other sayings with a proverbial character are designated "parable," which generally means for the evangelists that they have a deeper religious significance. Thus early Christian literature appears to designate as "parable" any saying of Jesus whose meaning is not immediately clear in terms of Christian faith and theology. Jesus, being who he was in the faith of the church, simply would not traffic in superficial discourse; therefore what appears to be banal language is judged to be figurative or comparative discourse and is given a deeper significance.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe a variety of Jesus' sayings as parables and sometimes differ among themselves as to what constitutes a parable. For example, a narrative (a story) describing the hazards of farming in 1st-cent. Palestine (Matt 13:3-8//Mark 4:3-8//Luke 8:5-8a) is described as parable and explained as figurative language describing the difficulties of evangelism in the 1st cent. (Matt 13:18-23//Mark 4:14-20//Luke 8:11-15). A saying by Jesus about how to identify a change between two seasons of the year (Matt 24:32//Mark 13:28//Luke 21:29-30) is designated as parable and followed by slightly different explanations (Matt 24:33//Mark 13:29//Luke 21:31), treating what on the surface appears to be common wisdom as a figure with religious meaning. Luke 6:39, which appears to be common sense about one blind man leading another, is identified as a parable, but Luke gives it no appended

explanation. Matthew has the same saying (15:14b), but apparently does not regard it as a parable. Matthew bypasses "the blind leading the blind" and describes a saying about "what comes out of the mouth defiles and not what goes in" as parable (v. 15), as Mark 7:14-15 also does (v. 17). Both Mark and Matthew provide the saying (Mark 7:15//Matt 15:11) with a religious explanation (Mark 7:18-23//Matt 15:17-20). Apparently Matthew neither regards the "blind leading the blind" nor the obscure saying at Matt 15:13 ("Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted") as parables having deeper significance. Luke (4:23) again describes without explanation an ancient proverb ("Doctor, cure yourself") as parable. Luke even describes a longer saying giving sensible advice (compare Prov 25:6-7) about proper etiquette at a banquet (Luke 14:7-10) as a parable, and follows it with an early Christian explanation (14:11; compare the reversal sayings; Matt 23:12; Luke 18:14; Jas 4:10). Luke designates the apparently commonsense advice about a new patch on an old garment and new wine in old wineskins (Luke 5:36-39) as a "single" parable, but provides no explanations for the two sayings. Matthew (9:16-17) and Mark (2:21-22) have the same two sayings but designate neither one as parable and do not offer an appended explanation.

Each evangelist draws theological and moral lessons from the parable for the community of faith. The evangelists' understanding of each parable is clarified by the literary contexts in which the parable is embedded, by the evangelists' revision of the story to suit the context, and particularly by the evangelists' appended conclusions and introductions. Scholars describe this comparative way of reading the text as redaction and narrative criticism (see NARRATIVE CRITICISM; REDACTION CRITICISM, NT). For example, the Lost Sheep story appears in Matt 18:10-14 = Luke 15:3-7 = *Gos. Thom.* 107. Each evangelist has embedded the story in a different literary context. Matthew uses the story in the context of a speech of Jesus (18:1-19:1) on matters relating to discipleship (the "little ones" are disciples, compare Matt 18:6). Matthew's conclusion informs the reader that the story is about God's ability to keep Jesus' "little ones" safe (18:14). Hence the reader is encouraged to read the "straying sheep" in the story as one of Jesus' disciples (one who "believes in him"). Luke, on the other hand, uses the story as Jesus' response to the snide criticism of the Pharisees that Jesus associated with "tax collectors and sinners." In Luke's story the sheep does not go astray but is "lost." Luke's conclusion (15:7) informs the reader that the story is about God's ability to save lost sinners. In Luke's story the shepherd returns home to celebrate with friends and neighbors the finding of the lost sheep (15:6), an allegorical flourish to emphasize the rejoicing in heaven over the redemption of even one lost sinner, an element lacking in Matthew's story. The *Gospel of Thomas* is not a narrative but simply

a collection of sayings and stories arranged for the most part in no easily discernible order. The parable in *Gos. Thom.* 107, hence, has neither literary narrative context nor appended conclusion to suggest how the parable is understood by the compiler of the collection. The concluding line to the story, however, provides a reason why the shepherd left the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness to search for one strayed (or lost) sheep ("I love you more than the ninety-nine"), an element not provided in the stories of Matthew and Luke.

2. Gospel of John

The Gospel of John neither uses the word *parable*, nor does it include any of the stories of Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels. John does designate some of Jesus' discourse as *paroimia* (παροιμία), a word usually meaning "PROVERB" or "maxim" (compare 2 Pet 2:22). In the Gospel of John, however, *paroimia* has the character of obscure language, such as a riddle or figure, containing another more significant meaning (compare Sir 39:3). For example, Jesus' statement about the sheep and the shepherd (John 10:1-5) is described by John as *paroimia* (John 10:6). Such language is enigmatic discourse as opposed to clear or plain language (John 16:25-29).

3. Gospel of Thomas

The *Gospel of Thomas* shares with the Synoptic Gospels a number of the narratives of Jesus and also has narratives not contained in the Synoptic Gospels. But *Thomas* does not designate any of them as parables. *Thomas* also shares other sayings the Synoptic Gospels described as parables, also without describing them as parables; e.g., Luke 6:39//*Gos. Thom.* 34; Mark 7:14-15//*Gos. Thom.* 14; Mark 6:4//*Gos. Thom.* 31; Luke 5:36-39//*Gos. Thom.* 47. Although the *Gospel of Thomas* does not use the word *parable*, the initial saying in the gospel (logion 1) implies that each saying has hidden meanings: "Whoever finds the explanation of these sayings will never die." Whereas the Synoptic Gospels and John find only some sayings of Jesus to be parables or riddles, the *Gospel of Thomas* regards the entire discourse of Jesus to have specific hidden meanings.

4. Apocryphon of James

The *Apocryphon of James* is the only early Christian text to preserve ancient titles of parables, but the stories to which these titles relate are not identified. The titles are: "the Shepherds," "the Seed," "the Building," "the Lamps of the Virgins," "the Wage of the Workman," "the Didrachmae," and "the Woman" (*Ap. Jas.* 8:1-10). It is not certain that any of these titles can be related to the stories known in early Christian literature, even though some of the titles seem well suited to stories narrated elsewhere: e.g., "the Wage of the Workman" (compare Matt 20:1-15), the "Lamps of the Virgins" (compare Matt 25:1-12),

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Parables in Order of Multiple Versions

Parables

The Sower
The Mustard Seed
The Vineyard

Four Versions

Mark 4:3-8//Matt 13:3-8//Luke 8:5-8//*Gos. Thom.* 9
Mark 4:31-32//Matt 13:31-32//Luke 13:19//*Gos. Thom.* 20
Mark 12:1-8//Matt 21:33-39//Luke 20:9-15//*Gos. Thom.* 65

Parables

The Leaven
The Lost Sheep
The Feast

Three Versions

Matt 13:33//Luke 13:21//*Gos. Thom.* 96
Matt 18:12-13//Luke 15:4-6//*Gos. Thom.* 107
Matt 22:2-13//Luke 14:16-24//*Gos. Thom.* 64

Parables

The Unclean Spirit
Settling out of Court
The Two Houses
The Entrusted Money
Good Seed and Weeds
A Merchant and a Pearl
A Net Thrown into the Sea
A Rich Man

Two Versions

Matt 12:43-45//Luke 11:24-26
Matt 5:25-26//Luke 12:58-59
Matt 7:24-27//Luke 6:48-49
Matt 25:14-28//Luke 19:12-27
Matt 13:24-30//*Gos. Thom.* 57
Matt 13:45-46//*Gos. Thom.* 76
Matt 13:47-48//*Gos. Thom.* 8
Luke 12:16-20//*Gos. Thom.* 63

Parables

A Sprouting Seed
A Man Going on a Journey
The Ten Maidens
Settling Accounts with Servants
Laborers in a Vineyard
A Man Had Two Sons
Hidden Treasure
A Man and Two Debtors
An Injured Man on the Jericho Road
The Persistent Friend
Two Farmers and a Fig Tree
A Tower Builder
A Warring King
A Woman Searching for a Coin
The Fired Steward
A Father and Two Sons
A Rich Man and Lazarus the Beggar
Management of Slaves
The Judge and the Widow
A Pharisee and a Toll Collector
A Woman Carrying a Jar
The Killer
Children in a Field
Hidden Treasure
The Date Palm Shoot
The Spike of Wheat
A Grain of Wheat

Single Versions

Mark 4:26-29
Mark 13:34
Matt 25:1-12
Matt 18:23-34
Matt 20:1-15
Matt 21:28-31
Matt 13:44
Luke 7:41-42
Luke 10:30-35
Luke 11:5-7
Luke 13:6-9
Luke 14:28-30
Luke 14:31-32
Luke 15:8-9
Luke 16:1-7
Luke 15:11-32
Luke 16:19-31
Luke 17:7-9
Luke 18:2-5
Luke 18:10-13
Gos. Thom. 97
Gos. Thom. 98
Gos. Thom. 21
Gos. Thom. 109
Ap. Jas. 7:24-28
Ap. Jas. 12:23-27
Ap. Jas. 8:16-23

Figure 1: Parables in order of multiple versions

“the Didrachmae” (compare Luke 15:8-9), and “the Woman” (compare Matt 13:33//Luke 13:21//*Gos. Thom.* 96, 97). In the *Apocryphon of James*, two narratives (not specifically called parable in the introductory comparative frame) are treated as figures: the “Date Palm Shoot” (7:24-28) is given an allegorical explanation that is both cryptic and obscure (7:29-35). The “Spike of Wheat” (12:23-27) is cryptically explained (12:27-30) as an admonishment to “reap an ear of life and be filled with the kingdom.” “A Grain of Wheat” (8:16-23) is so heavily allegorized that it is difficult to see a realistic narrative at the base of it. Its interpretation (8:24-27) suggests that people receive the kingdom through knowledge.

C. An Inventory of Narrative Parables Attributed to Jesus

There are no standardized titles to the narrative parables, but they have traditionally been titled on the basis of readers’ responses to the parable. The following inventory will retain enough of the traditional title to identify the parable and will list parables in the order of their multiple versions in early Christian literature.

In those cases where multiple versions of a story exist, variations exist in the way the story is told. They are never identical, although in some cases the differences may be slight. For a story that is nearly identical in all versions, compare the story of “The Leaven” (Matt 13:33//Luke 13:21). Compare also the multiple versions of “The Sower.” In Mark 4:3-8 and Matt 13:3-8 the versions are quite close but Luke’s version is much shorter (Luke 8:5-8). In other cases, such marked and stylized differences change the story remarkably. For example, by comparing versions of the “Lost Sheep,” we see that Luke ends the story with the shepherd bringing the previously lost sheep home to celebrate its finding with friends but leaving the ninety-nine in the wilderness to fend for themselves (15:4-6), a feature lacking in the versions in Matthew (18:12-13) and the *Gospel of Thomas* (107). In some cases the differences are so great that the versions appear to be different stories. Compare the story of “A Rich Man” in Luke 12:16-20 and the *Gospel of Thomas* (*Gos. Thom.* 63). In Luke the protagonist is already a farmer who has a bumper crop he must care for, but in the *Gospel of Thomas* he is a man who intends on becoming a farmer as a good investment. Compare also the remarkably different versions of “The Entrusted Money” in Matt 25:14-28 and Luke 19:12-27. The version in Mark 13:34 is a different story in its present form.

Scholars account for these differences with reference either to performance or interpretive variations made to the stories during their transmission through the oral period of the Jesus traditions, roughly from 30 CE (the public career of Jesus) to around 70 CE (the approximate date for the composition of the earliest extant Gospel), or to variations that occurred when the Jesus tradition reached written form. Many scholars

think that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source for their Gospels, as well as another text called Q (see Q, QUELLE), meaning “source,” that no longer exists in manuscript form. Hence narrative parables that Matthew and Luke share with Mark are later than Mark, and the differences between them are likely due to the editing of Mark’s version by Matthew and Luke. Where Matthew and Luke share a story not in Mark, the differences are due to dependence on the earlier hypothetical source Q. Scholars disagree on how the *Gospel of Thomas* and the synoptic tradition are related (see SYNOPTIC PROBLEM; THOMAS, GOSPEL OF).

D. Why Did Jesus Speak in Parables?

Why would Jesus have spoken in such indirect language? Early Christian literature offers three different explanations. Mark, around 70 CE, provides the earliest explanation. Jesus spoke in parables in order to ensure that the secret of the kingdom of God would only be understood by his disciples (4:10-11); for those outside the circle of his followers everything is presented in parables so that “they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven” (4:12, taken from Isa 6:8-10 LXX). Mark says that Jesus always addressed the crowds with parables (4:34) to keep them from understanding, but 4:33 seems to leave open the possibility of limited understanding on the part of the crowds (i.e., “as they were able to hear”). And Mark does portray the religious authorities understanding that the parable of the Vineyard was directed at them (12:1-12). This breakdown of the theory of parables in Mark suggests to some that Mark may have inherited the idea from earlier tradition (Carlston).

In a parallel passage in Luke the disciples ask Jesus “what this parable [i.e., the story of the Sower] meant” (8:9). Jesus replies that the disciples have been given the ability to know the secrets of the kingdom of God but these secrets are presented to the crowds in parables, “so that ‘looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand’” (8:10b); Mark’s offensive last phrase (“so that they may not turn again and be forgiven”) is omitted. Presumably in Luke parables about things other than the kingdom of God might be understood by the crowds.

Matthew explains that only the disciples have been given the ability to know the secrets of the kingdom (13:11), and if the crowds even have an inkling of understanding, they will lose it (13:12). Jesus speaks to the crowds in parables, because “seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand” (13:13; again Mark’s offensive last phrase is omitted). The crowds do not understand Jesus’ parables because Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa 6:8-10) is fulfilled in them: they have deliberately hardened their hearts and closed their eyes (Matt 13:14-15; but compare Matt 13:11, where the crowds were not given the ability

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to understand). Scholars disagree on whether any of these explanations describe the actual circumstances of Jesus' public career.

E. Narrative Parables and Literary Types

In modern study the term *parable* is frequently used as an inclusive term to describe the entire corpus of Jesus' "parabolic discourse," i.e., to include under the designation all the different literary units referred to as "parable" in early Christian literature. In a narrow sense, however, the term only designates the stories Jesus told, which are more specifically described as "narrative parables" in order to distinguish them from other literary units called "parable." The story, a narrative having a beginning, middle, and end (i.e., having a plot; see Aristotle, *Poet.* 7.1-7), is the classic form of the parable in early Christian literature (see NARRATIVE LITERATURE).

In early Christian literature Jesus is portrayed as regularly using figurative language—a type of discourse saying more than what was meant, or not meaning what was said, but rather something else entirely. Modern scholars have aimed at defining his discourse more precisely and have described it in the following ways.

1. Simile and similitude

A simile is a brief comparison using "like" or "as" (Matt 23:27; Luke 11:44), although this form appears very few times in the Gospel literature. More typical is the similitude, a comparative form using "like" or "as" in which the comparison is extended with more detail (see Matt 13:33, 44-46). Many scholars also identify SIMILITUDES as brief narratives used in a direct comparison with "like" or "as" (e.g., "the kingdom of heaven is like . . .") because what is being compared to the kingdom is not a simple brief statement but a minimal narrative having the basic elements of plot. In the case of Matt 13:33, 44-46 the narratives are quite brief but in other cases the narrative is rather lengthy (e.g., Matt 20:1-15). Certain other narratives are not introduced by a comparative frame but are nevertheless treated comparatively by the evangelists (e.g., Luke 18:1-8). Another form is the aphorism, a terse, somewhat puzzling statement of a principle or precept (e.g., Matt 10:16b; Luke 6:39; 9:60). In some cases scholars describe as aphorisms (Mark 2:21-22) sayings that seem better identified as proverbs (a short pithy statement summarizing some aspect of traditional community wisdom).

2. Allegory

Early Christians explained these stories in a variety of ways. In some cases they regarded them as elaborate allegories. An ALLEGORY deliberately composed as an allegory is a narrative whose various elements are created by the author to signify something different from what they are. But allegory has also become a hermeneutical strategy for reading non-allegorical narratives

as if they were allegories. For example, the Sower (Mark 4:3-8) on its surface is a narrative about farming, but Mark explains it (4:14-20) as if it were describing Christian evangelism. In other words, the elements of the narrative are not what they appear to be on the surface, but rather they are ciphers representing something else. A sower is not a farmer but a preacher, the birds are not birds but Satan, the seed is not seed but God's word, the soils are not dirt but kinds of hearers, the hazards faced by the seed are in the allegorical reading difficulties facing 1st-cent. Christians. Besides the Sower, only two other narrative parables in the Gospels are given extensive allegorical interpretations, both in Matthew: "Good Seed and Weeds" (Matt 13:24-30, 37-43) and "A Net Thrown into the Sea" (Matt 13:47-50).

3. Example stories

One of the narrative parables ("An Injured Man on the Jericho Road," Luke 10:30-35) is explained as an example story (compare the context in which Luke embeds it: 10:25-29, 36-37) in which the Samaritan's behavior demonstrates what it means to love the neighbor. Some modern scholars have argued there are also other example stories in the corpus (e.g., Luke 12:16-21; 14:7-14; 16:19-31; 18:9-14).

4. Exhortation

Other narrative parables are explained in the Gospels as teaching Christian morality and practice, or are used for purposes of exhortation. An example of a parable understood to exhort Christians to watch for the absent Lord's return is Matt 25:1-13. Luke used a story about a farmer with an unexpected abundant harvest (12:5-21) to make the moral point that materialistic Christians are fools, for true "wealth" is spiritual (12:21).

5. Parables and the kingdom of God

Many of the narrative parables are compared to the kingdom of God/Heaven/Father. The introductory comparative frame to the story is usually translated "the kingdom of God is like . . ." The word *kingdom*, *basileia* (βασιλεία), was used in antiquity to describe the reign, or rule, of a king, i.e., the sphere of his influence, rather than the geographical boundaries of the king's realm. Applied to God the term designates God's sphere of influence rather than a specific location, like heaven, e.g. Hence the comparison should be understood as follows: "as things go in this parable, so they go under the reign or authority of God." Out of a database of forty stories only fifteen are compared to God's reign in all extant versions. Four are compared to other things: the "Man" (*Gos. Thom.* 8), one who hears and does the words of Jesus (Matt 7:24//Luke 6:47), the return of the Son of Man (Matt 25:13-14, 31), the disciples (Luke 19:11-12), the Word (*Ap. Jas.* 8:16). Nineteen stories lack an introductory comparative frame and fifteen of the stories do not have

an appended explanation. Seven of the stories have neither introductory comparative frames nor appended explanations (Hedrick).

F. Realism and the Parables

In general the parables realistically portray 1st-cent. village life in Palestine. If the stories are read for themselves rather than for underlying religious or moral significance, they are found to present such ordinary matters as, e.g., the hiring and paying of day laborers (Matt 20:1-15), dishonest employees (Luke 16:1-7), a dysfunctional family (Luke 15:11-32), two men praying in the Temple (Luke 18:10-13), a lost coin (Luke 15:8-9), how invited guests treat their invitations to a dinner party (*Gos. Thom.* 64), the risks involved in farming (Mark 4:3-8), a hidden treasure found in a field (Matt 13:44), and two farmers debating what to do about a fig tree in a vineyard (Luke 13:6-9). Since the latter half of the 1st cent., the realism of the stories has been generally ignored in favor of pursuing religious meanings in essentially secular stories.

Unlike the rabbinic parables, only a few stories treat the actions of kings and the elite class: a marriage feast is given by a king (Matt 22:2-13), a nobleman departs to receive a kingdom (Luke 19:12-27), a king goes to war against another king (Luke 14:31-32), a rich man in Hades dialogues with Father Abraham (Luke 16:19-31). When compared to the realistic stories about Palestinian village life, these stories lack realism. More likely they have been enhanced or changed in order to make them more suitable to allegorical interpretation. For example, the story of "The Vineyard" (Mark 12:1-11) is a thinly disguised allegory about God (//the vineyard owner) and Israel (//the vineyard, compare Isa 5:1-7). God sent the prophets (//the servants) to the people of Israel. They were mistreated and killed. But last of all the owner sent his beloved son (//Jesus). The tenants (//Israel's leaders) killed him, as well, and cast him out of the vineyard. The owner of the vineyard (//God) will take his judgment on the tenants (//Israel's leaders). Interestingly, these allegorical features are not found in the version of the story in the *Gospel of Thomas* (65), where the story appears as an everyday matter of leasing property and collecting rent previously agreed to.

Even in the realistic stories describing Palestinian village life one meets with unusual features, or figurative language. For example, in the story of "A Father and Two Sons" (Luke 15:11-32), the narrative unambiguously uses figurative language when it describes the prodigal son as wasting his livelihood in loose living (15:13) and characterizes him as dead/alive (15:24) and lost/found (15:32). Such figurative language is rare in the stories. In the story of "The Mustard Seed," at the end of the growth process the mustard seed is said to have become a tree in Matthew (13:32) and Luke (13:19), rather than the more realistic large shrub (Mark 4:32). The exaggeration may be due to the

story's adjustment to fit Ezek 31:2-6 and Dan 4:10-12. Even Mark (followed by Matt 13:32) turns the mustard plant into the greatest of all shrubs (Mark 4:32). In the story of "The Leaven" (Matt 13:33//Luke 13:21) a woman hides a little yeast in what is equivalent to three bushels of flour. The excessive amount of flour seems almost a caricature when one thinks of a Palestinian woman baking daily bread for her family. The intrusion of the voice of God (Luke 12:20) into a story about a wealthy farmer with a bumper crop (Luke 12:16-20) is completely unexpected in such secular stories, since unambiguous religious features play a role in only four stories out of forty (Luke 10:30-35; 12:16-20; 16:19-31; 18:10-13).

G. Contemporary Hermeneutical Strategies for New Testament Narrative Parables

Extant texts from the middle 1st cent. (Paul and Josephus) provide only scanty historical information about Jesus, and neither author describes Jesus speaking in parables. The earliest extant Gospels (the last half of the 1st cent.), however, describe his language as figurative, and most describe him as one who used narrative parables in his discourse (the Gospel of John does not). Although there is no extant evidence before 70 CE that Jesus spoke in parables, the judgment of modern scholarship is that Jesus did compose and use narrative parables in his public discourse. Nevertheless, there is no way of knowing for certain what hermeneutical use he made of his parables. The first auditors of the parables made sense of them, or not, as 1st-cent. Palestinian Jews, but certainly not as post-70 CE Christians.

How the parables were treated during the period from Jesus' death (ca. 30 CE) to the earliest Gospels, shortly after the mid-1st-cent. (ca. 70 CE), is likewise unknown, again because of the lack of sources. But scholars postulate the existence of an oral period between the public career of Jesus and the writing of the earliest extant Gospels in which the Jesus traditions survived in the memories of his earliest followers and were passed on to others by word of mouth (*see* TRADITION, ORAL). During the period of their oral transmission the narratives were modified by both deliberate changes and the inevitable but unintentional changes that are a part of any repeated oral performance. The stories were expanded, condensed, and enhanced; in some cases they gained introductions and conclusions. The process of translating them from the indigenous language of the Palestinian peasant, Aramaic, into Greek, the language of the broader Greco-Roman world, also involved adjustments to the parables to accommodate the shift from one ancient culture to another (Jeremias). During the forty years or so of oral migration of the parables from one language to another, from one culture to another, the essentially secular stories of Jesus did not suit the changed circumstances of his followers; explanations were necessary to accommodate the stories for a post-resurrection community of

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faith. That accommodation has been going on since the latter half of the 1st cent. All of the strategies described below are currently being practiced simultaneously both in the scholarly guild and ecclesiastical circles.

1. Allegorical interpretation

Allegory is an ancient way of reading a text by ignoring its literal surface meaning and finding new meanings that are not stated as such in the text. The ancient Greeks, e.g., allegorized the Homeric epics in an attempt to protect the poet and the ancient classics from the charge of impiety. The attempts to explain away the myths were condemned by Plato as trivial (*Phaedr.* 229e-230a) and injurious to the youth, for they deceived the youth as to the true nature of the poets' compositions (*Resp.* 376e-378e). Nevertheless, allegorical interpretation persisted into the NT period and beyond. As a method, it enabled the allegorist to ignore the problems of the simple surface meaning of the text and give it a reading sympathetic to the views of the allegorist. Philo, a 1st-cent. Jew writing in Greek, explained Torah by means of allegory to make it more acceptable to the Greek mind. Paul used the method in argumentation (Gal 4:21-31) as did Matthew (1:18-23; compare Isa 7:14) and Mark (compare 4:3-9, 14-20). Reading the stories of Jesus as allegories (i.e., as narratives whose various elements are cryptic ciphers for concealed Christian truths) has remained in Christian exegesis the popular way of explaining the stories since the second half of the 1st cent.

An allegorical reading essentially works in the following way. A reader brings a different (usually Christian) story to the parable and in the reading finds points of similarity between the story brought to the reading and the parable itself. Mark's interpretation of the parable of "The Sower" (4:14-20) is a good example of the method. Craig L. Blomberg has sought a theoretical basis rehabilitating allegory as a plausible way of reading the parables. He argues for a restrained and limited allegorizing by citing certain standardized metaphors in OT and rabbinic literature, which he finds in Jesus' parables, and uses them as controls to limit excessive allegorizing. Jesus' story about "Two Farmers and a Fig Tree" (Luke 13:6-9) is therefore an allegory. The vineyard symbolizes Israel, the owner of the vineyard is an image for God, and the fig tree represents the leaders of Israel. Read against Luke's literary context (13:1-5), the parable makes two points: imminent judgment hangs over the heads of Israel's leaders, and God's mercy is extended for only a short time. "The announcement of judgment [on the tree] becomes a call to turn to God." People hearing the parable must individually make their own personal response.

2. Single moral point

No alternatives to allegory as the way of understanding the parables emerged until the late 19th cent. Adolf Jülicher argued that the essential idea of parable was

comparison rather than allegory or metaphor, both of which he regarded as essentially enigmatic and indirect speech. As comparison was basic to the parable, so metaphor was basic to allegory, he argued. He sorted the parables into three types: similitude, which was a briefly expanded simile; fable (i.e., the narrative parable), which was a similitude extended into narrative; and example story, a freely invented story illustrating the truth the parable addressed. Parables comprised two parts: a picture part (the parable) and a "matter" part (the unspoken "issue," which was the real subject of the picture part). Something learned in the picture part could be applied to the unspoken "matter" part. Hence the parables were essentially instructional in nature. The stories worked by a single point of comparison between the picture part and the matter part. The single point of comparison is where the two parts came together, and it should be expressed in a universal moral of the widest and broadest generality. For example, Jülicher's "moral" for the parable of "Two Farmers and a Fig Tree" (Luke 13:6-9) is that all who do not repent will perish.

3. Metaphor

In 1935 C. H. Dodd argued that parables were metaphors. A metaphor is a way of describing one known thing in language appropriate to another known thing so as to suggest an essential similarity between them, or put another way, one thing is described as if it were the other. For example, Robert Frost, in his poem "Bereft," describes swirling leaves as a coil that hisses and strikes. In this metaphor a snake is described in language appropriate to swirling leaves on a windy day. Or put another way, the subject of the metaphor was the snake; the vehicle carrying the image of the snake was language about leaves and wind. Parables introduced by the comparative frame "the kingdom of God is like . . .," as well as many others not so introduced, were thought to cast light upon the meaning of the concept "kingdom of God." In other words, the subject of the metaphorical story was the kingdom of God and the vehicle was language about life in Palestinian villages; or put another way, the kingdom is described in language appropriate to Palestinian village life. Hence, as things go in the story so go things under the reign of God. Exactly how the parable relates to the kingdom is never stated, however. The specifics of the comparison are left for auditors/readers to fill in. Dodd explains that the parable of the Sower, a story not introduced by a comparative frame relating the story to the kingdom, illustrates the arrival of the kingdom of God in Jesus' ministry in the vehicle of harvest. John Dominic Crossan describes the difference between allegory and metaphor in this way: allegory instructs by referencing correct information, but metaphor reveals by bringing the inexpressible into language. Robert Funk argues that the parable "An Injured Man on the Jericho Road" (Luke 10:30-35) invites readers to take up a position by

the victim in the ditch, and the "meaning" depends on how readers put themselves in the story.

4. Existential narrative

In 1967 Dan O. Via Jr. argued that the narrative parables do not function as allegory, metaphor, or image. They are instead freely invented fictions and they work as any narrative does. As literary art they can be appreciated for what they are in themselves, just like any other art form. He described the parables as "literary objects," which do not reference but instead bring attention to focus on themselves. Hence they are autonomous from their creator. This meant that whatever Jesus had intended with the parables is of no consequence, since what he intended is no longer available to us today. All we have are the parables, the products of his creative activity. These brief stories dramatize how Jesus understood human existence and essentially describe different ways of being human. The different ways of being human are both positive and negative, which Via calls authentic existence (i.e., existence in faith) and inauthentic existence (i.e., existence in unfaith). In the "Laborers in the Vineyard" (Matt 20:1-15) the grumbling workers understand life only in terms of merit. They want to be responsible for their own security, and are not willing to accept the risk of relying on God's grace.

5. Stories for social reform

In 1994 William R. Herzog II argued that the parables were not figurative. Rather they were stories typifying the oppressed situation of Palestinian peasants at the hands of the wealthy elite. The stories mirrored the oppressed conditions under which the peasants lived and were intended to teach. Herzog argues that this understanding of parables posits a historical reason for the crucifixion of Jesus. He asks, why would anyone want to crucify a teacher who told charming stories encouraging morality? Herzog's answer is that Jesus was a threat to the state precisely because he sought to inform the peasants about their oppression and lead them to transform society. Thus informed, peasants are empowered to remake and humanize society. His strategy is to read the parables in the context of the social and economic world of agrarian peasants and wealthy elite. His reading of the "Laborers in a Vineyard" (Matt 20:1-15) reflects his understanding of the clash between wealthy elite and disenfranchised peasant. The owner of the vineyard is far from being a generous man; rather he takes advantage of the unemployed workers standing in the marketplace late in the day by offering them work without a wage agreement. At day's end he pays them all the same wage in the reverse order of their hiring to show the first hired how little value he placed on their full day's work. The denarius he paid to all was not a living wage, for day laborers do not work every day. When the owner is challenged by one worker about the basic unfairness of the pay,

the owner banishes him, thus depriving him of future employment. The dismissal is intended to intimidate the other workers, whom he blames for the situation (Matt 20:13).

6. Parables as poetic fictions

In 1994 Charles W. Hedrick argued that the parables were invented narrative fictions, the products of Jesus' creative imagination and observation of the world about him. They realistically portray aspects of Palestinian antiquity. Successful narrative fiction works by calling attention to itself and not by being deliberately referential. Realistic fictions are designed to pull the auditor/reader into their fictional worlds, in which discoveries about self and world may be made. Readers work out discoveries for themselves (or not) in the nexus between the narrative and what they bring to it. The narrative voice of the parables does not guide readers to a specific resolution of the narrative's complications. In fact, the stories do not conclude; they simply stop with complications left unresolved. Hence parables are open-ended, leaving resolutions up to readers. Because of their polysemy (that is, the story is capable of a diversity of meanings) and what different readers bring to the parable, they are capable of a wide range of plausible readings, as the history of parables interpretation attests. In the story of "A Pharisee and Toll Collector" (Luke 18:10-13) the auditor/reader is presented with two flawed characters praying in the Temple. The Pharisee is genuinely grateful to God that he has followed Torah and been saved from a life of sin. He believes his obedience to Torah has brought him God's approval and absolution. Thus for the Pharisee God is totally predictable and must accept him as righteous. The toll collector is cast as a penitent sinner seeking God's mercy because of his sins. But oddly, he confesses no sins, makes no offer of restitution to those he has offended, and does not resolve to follow Torah in the future. He expects God to act graciously toward him on the basis of his contrite attitude alone. The complication facing the reader is this: which flawed hero will be acceptable to God? Whom might the narrator of this story pick to be the one God accepts? Hedrick says neither one; rather the design of the story suggests that God would likely pick those who can recognize the absurdity in their own cherished religious convictions that presume on the divine prerogative—something neither man in the story was able to do. See BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION, HISTORY OF; LITERARY INTERPRETATION, NT; METAPHOR IN THEOLOGY; READER RESPONSE CRITICISM.

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CHARLES W. HEDRICK

PARACLETE pair'uh-kleet [παράκλητος paraklētos]. The word *paraclete* comes from the Gk. verbal adjective paraklētos, and means "someone called in assistance" or "advocate," from the verb parakaleō (παρακαλέω), meaning "give comfort or counsel." The word does not occur in the OT and is found in the NT only in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1, translated as "advocate." Biblical scholars and theologians use *paraclete* as a technical term for the spiritual form that Jesus's presence will take in and among the Johannine community after his death and resurrection, to comfort and counsel them (John 14:16). See COMFORT.

Attempts to trace back the concept of "paraclete" or "advocate" to Gnostic or Jewish antecedents have largely remained inconclusive. The *Yawar* of the Mandean texts is a helper, and so are angels like Michael in the Qumran texts. This is not the primary function of the Paraclete in the Gospel of John.

An ancient tradition sees in Jesus the "advocate" of his faithful with the Father (attested in 1 John 2:1). If the faithful have sinned, Jesus Christ will be an advocate for them with the Father. Similar texts are found in Rom 8:34 and Heb 7:25; 9:24. There are reasons to assume that the author of 1 John avoided explicitly the idea of the Spirit being the advocate of the faithful due to his reserve toward charismatic tendencies of his adversaries.

In John 14:16, the "Spirit of Truth" is introduced as "another Advocate." The wording seems to imply that the HOLY SPIRIT will be sent in assistance of the faith-

ful besides or after Christ as the advocate of his believers (see above for 1 John 2:1). In fact, the Spirit will be sent as a new form of the presence of Christ after his departure, together with a new eschatological coming of Christ himself (v. 18; 20:19, 26), alone or with the Father (v. 23). That the Spirit-Paraclete will be given (v. 16) may be inspired by the prophecy of Ezek 36:26 in reference to the new covenant.

In John 14:26 the function of the Paraclete is clarified with regards to his role for the community: he will remind the disciples of the words of Jesus and introduce them into their meaning. In this way, he assures the continued presence of Christ in his community also in the period after the hour of Jesus. The same function of the Paraclete is described in John 16:13-15. In John 15:26; 16:7-11, the Paraclete assists the disciples in their lawsuit with the world and inspires their witness. (John 15:26 seems to be influenced by Mark 13:11 and Matt 10:20). In John 16:7-11, the Paraclete is presented as an accuser of the world. He will convict the world of sin, justice, and judgment. See JOHN, GOSPEL OF.

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JOHANNES BEUTLER, SJ

PARADISE pair'uh-dis [פֶּרְדִּיזַּיַּם pardes; παράδεισος paradeisos]. *Paradise* is a Persian loanword (pairidaeza) in Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Greek, and other languages. In Old Persian, the noun denoted an enclosure; it developed to signify a beautiful garden, like a king's garden. The concept of paradise evolved so that it symbolized streams flowing with crystal-clear and healthful water, and trees blooming constantly beside multicolored flowers. There is no sickness in this blessed place, and the temperature is always ideal for humans.

The concept "paradise" does not appear in the OT (but in the LXX of Gen 13:10, Lot sees "the paradise [paradeisos]" of God). In the LXX, the noun does appear with the meaning of forest (Neh 2:8), park (Eccl 2:5), and orchard (Song 4:13).

In the biblical world, the concept "paradise" probably first appeared in early Jewish literature sometime in the 3rd cent. BCE (see 1 En. 32:3; 77:4). Paradise became associated with the older, well-known concept of a primordial garden, the Garden of Eden (see EDEN, GARDEN OF). This garden was defined by a river with four branches, the tree of life, trees abounding in fruit, and peaceful relations between humans, the creator, and all creation. This garden was eventually closed to humans because of their disobedience to God.

A barrier also separates humans from paradise, either in time (the present from the future age) or space, the distance on earth from the person to the far-distant garden, and from earth to one of the heavens.