

PARABLES

The best way to think of a parable is to consider it an extended simile. Remember that a simile is a comparison of unlike things with one point of comparison. A parable is a story which compares things with spiritual truths and has one point of comparison. A parable has been referred to as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus used parables frequently to illustrate spiritual truths. Usually there are three elements to a parable: the setting, the story, and the application. In some of Jesus' parables the setting is not directly spoken. At other times the application may not be stated. Jesus used parables to truth, and He also use them to conceal truth (see Matthew 13:10-17). The word parable comes from the Greek "para" (beside or alongside) and "ballein" (to throw). Thus, a parable is a story that is "thrown alongside" the truth. When attempting to interpret a parable always look for the point of the story to see what spiritual truth is being illustrated. In the parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15), the point is given by Jesus. "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (7). A careful look at the following two parables in Luke 15 (the lost coin and the lost son) shows that they are illustrating the same truth as the parable of the Lost Sheep. The parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 all illustrate the same principle. During the age between the first and second comings of Jesus, there will be a mixture of good with evil in the "kingdom of Heaven." Mixed with the Matthew 13 parables is one allegory. It stresses the same truth, but there are several comparisons, not just one. The allegory (called a parable) is given in Matthew vs.24-30. It is interpreted in vs. 36-43). There are some parables in the Old Testament but not many. Isaiah 5:1-7 records a parable about the Lord's vineyard (Some people call this an allegory). Nathan's story of a poor man with one lamb (II Samuel 12:1-13) is called parable, although it is not called a parable.

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING PARABLES

1. Determine the situation that prompted the parable. Is there a problem or a question that prompted it?
2. Think of the story's natural meaning. The spiritual truth will be related to the natural meaning.
3. Determine the main truth of the parable. Parables are almost always given to illustrate one truth. Try to identify this truth. If a parable contains more than one truth the story will reveal it.
4. Confirm the meaning of the parable with the direct teaching of Scripture. Parables don't establish doctrine; they illustrate doctrine.
5. Look for manners and customs of the culture it in which it was written when necessary. For instance, in Matthew 22:11-13 a man was put out of the wedding feast because he didn't have a wedding garment. We understand the significance of this when we realize that it was customary for the host to give wedding garments to all the guests. If a person did not have a wedding garment, he was not supposed to be there.