

PARABLES

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The first mention of the word "parable" in the Old Testament is found in Numbers 23:7 while the first mention of this word in the New Testament is found in plural form in our passages above. The Hebrew word for parable in the King James Old Testament is found 38 times, but is translated, not only as "parable," but also "proverb" and once as "byword" (Psalms 44:14). In the King James New Testament, the Greek word for parable is found 50 times, translated as "parable" or "parables," but also once as "comparison" (Mark 4:30), once as "proverb" (Luke 4:23), and twice as "figure" (Heb. 9:9; 11:19).

The definition of this word in the Old Testament reads, "In some original sense of *superiority* in mental action; properly a pithy *maxim*, usually of a metaphorical nature; hence a *simile* (as an adage, poem, discourse)."

The definition of this word in the New Testament reads, "A *similitude* ("parable"), i.e. (symbolic) *fictitious narrative* (of common life conveying a moral), *apothegm* or *adage*." It's taken from a compound word which means, "To *throw alongside*, i.e. (reflexive) to *reach* a place, or (figurative) to *liken*."

Look again at the definition from which the word parable is taken, meaning, "To *throw alongside*." Consider the following from Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament.

Parables (παραβολαῖς)

From παρά, *beside*, and βάλλω, *to throw*. A parable is a form of teaching in which one thing is *thrown beside* another. Hence its radical idea is *comparison*. Sir John Cheke renders *biword*, and the same idea is conveyed by the German *Beispiel*, *a pattern* or *example*; *bei*, *beside*, and the old high German *spel*, *discourse* or *narration*.

The word is used with a wide range in scripture, but always involves the idea of *comparison*...

Now, let me share with you an excerpt from J. Preston Eby's "Echoes from Eden" and his explanation of parables.

"And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:8-9).

The story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is the greatest parable in the Bible. It is supremely important because it explains the real nature of our life here on earth. It tells us about ourselves, about our state of being, and how we bring about the conditions in which we live. It is the blueprint of man's experience on earth and his destiny in God. When you thoroughly understand the Garden of Eden you will understand the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of Satan. This parable is placed at the beginning of human history, because it is the foundation upon which the whole plan of purpose of God is built. The entire revelation of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, assumes an understanding of the great principles and characteristics in the Garden of Eden.

Don't let it disturb you that I call the Garden of Eden a parable. What is a parable? Your dictionary or Bible Concordance will tell you that a parable places one thing alongside another for a variety of reasons. There are quite a number of English words which sound a little like parable; in fact they all start with the same four letters, P-A-R-A. This prefix "para" means "by the side of." One word I would like you to think of is the very common word parallel. It's a word they use a great many times in school. In the Art Department, in the Geography Department, in the Mathematics Department, even in the Music Department, as music is written on five parallel lines, and, of course, in the English Department. If you look at the edges of this paper you'll find they are parallel with each other. If you are sitting at a table it is most likely to have parallel sides. The edges to the door of your room should be parallel; the floor and ceiling ought to be parallel; the edges of the window frames should be parallel, too! So now I've got you thinking about this word parallel perhaps it would help if we wrote the two words down like this:

P A R A B L E
P A R A L L E L

Now we can ask another question: If a parable is only a story, why not call it a story? Why use an unusual word like parable, if an ordinary word like story will do? The answer is simple: A parable is more than a story. It is a story plus, it has a bonus added to the story. It has two things that run side by side – the lesson and the reality!

So that's where a parable is different; it's more than a story – it has a story line and then a parallel line – a new idea, concept, or meaning to comprehend! Also – parables may be based upon actual events. For instance, when Jesus begins His parable by saying, "A sower went forth to sow..." if there were no such things as actual farmers, soil, and seed we would miss His point altogether. The natural and outward corresponds in principle to the spiritual and inward – the one is set along side the other. That's just what makes it a parable! So do not be distressed by the representation of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden as a parable!

There is one thing about which God's people must be perfectly clear. The Bible is not primarily intended to teach history or biography. It is intended to teach **THE PURPOSES OF GOD** and **SPIRITUAL REALITIES**. It deals primarily with states of being and the laws of spiritual activity; and anything else is only incidental. Each of the principal characters in the Bible represents a kind of nature, character, or state of being that any of

us may experience and walk in; and the events that happen to the various characters illustrate the consequences to us of walking in such realms of nature and character, either good or bad. Some of the Bible characters, such as Adam and Eve, Moses, Elijah, and Paul, are indeed historical figures. They were real people who lived on earth and did the deeds attributed to them; nonetheless they represent kinds of natures and states of being revealed in their varying hues as their lives unfolded. Other Bible characters, such as the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, or the Great Harlot in Revelation are, of course, fictional and never lived on earth as actual persons; but as parables and allegories they express inner conditions and states of being too, and always in a most effective and graphic manner.

You cannot with brush and canvas paint a picture of fear for instance; but you can paint a picture of a human being, and create terror on his countenance. You cannot take a pencil and draw sensuality, rebellion, hatred, or spiritual bondage as such; but you can take a pen and write about great crises in men's lives, about the emotional trauma, inner torment, and excruciating pain caused by tyranny, brutality, hatred, bigotry, immoral conduct, hopelessness, despair, darkness, and death men execute and perpetrate upon one another. You can describe the righteous judgments of God brought into men's lives by all these evils, as does the Bible, with the symbolic term "hell fire." And the carnal mind and natural understanding is certain to think that you mean a literal human body being tortured in a physical flame! On the other hand, you cannot picture a soul abiding in the perfect peace, joy and harmony of the glorious presence of God, adoring and worshipful; but you can speak of a great choir of rapturous beings playing music upon perfectly tuned harps, and again the carnally minded people will think that redeemed souls are to spend eternity literally playing harps! The Spirit of God uses this method to impart understanding to our minds and hearts. The Spirit uses outer concrete things to express inner spiritual realities. As Paul says, "These things are an allegory" (Gal 4:24).

In the Garden of Eden many people seem to think that Eve symbolizes woman as a sex and that Adam somehow stands for man as a sex. The truth goes far beyond this! Adam and Eve in the Garden represent the whole of humanity in the first Adam. They represent you and me and every man and woman who has ever lived or shall live. What happened to him happens to us. What he was we are. His experience is our experience. His destiny is our destiny. May the mighty spirit of wisdom and revelation from God give enlightenment to the eyes of your understanding that you may see and know of a truth that what was happening to Adam in the Garden speaks of spiritual realities even in the beginning of history, before history, beyond history and yet in history; it is we ourselves of whom the Garden speaks, it is we ourselves who are confronted, intended, addressed, accused, expelled, instructed, and redeemed.

What an excellent explanation of parables from J. Preston Eby! Wouldn't you agree?

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Following our passages above in Matthew 13, we find the Parable of the Sower. After the Lord shared this parable with the "great multitudes," His disciples came to Him and asked Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" (Matt. 13:10) Valid question.

Matthew 13:11-17 (NKJV)

¹¹ He answered and said to them, "**Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.**" ¹² For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. ¹³ Therefore I speak to them in parables, **because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.** ¹⁴ **And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled,** which says: *'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive;'* ¹⁵ *For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'* ¹⁶ "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; ¹⁷ for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Why did the Lord speak to them in parables? Because it was given to His disciples "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them," the multitudes, it was not given. Furthermore, "I speak to them in parables, because *seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled*" (Isa. 6:9-10). According to the Lord, the hearts of His people had "grown dull," and due to this fact, their "eyes" and "ears," *spiritually speaking*, were incapable of receiving what Jesus taught. These statements set a precedent which we will consider throughout this study.

So think about this. According to Matthew 12, verses 39 through 45, Jesus declared that His wisdom was greater than that of Jonah and Solomon. This being true, He expressed this wisdom to the multitudes in parables. As it states above, "All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; *and without a parable He did not speak to them*, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: *"I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world"* (Matt. 13:34-35; Psalms 78:2).

John 6:63 (NKJV)

⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. **The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.**

John 8:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and **I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him.**"

John 8:38 (NKJV)

³⁸ **I speak what I have seen with My Father**, and you do what you have seen with your father."

John 12:49-50 (NKJV)

⁴⁹ For **I have not spoken on My own *authority***; but **the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.** ⁵⁰ And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, **whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.**"

These passages leave no doubt. Jesus spoke the words of our Father, words of wisdom that proceeded from God Almighty Himself. And I don't believe anyone would argue with me when I say that there is no greater wisdom. Know my friend that the words of Jesus are "spirit" and "life," therefore they must be received "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). This too explains why the multitudes did not understand His teachings. Few in Jesus' day were able to receive "in spirit."

It should come as no surprise that Jesus used parables to illustrate the mysteries of the kingdom of God, for the Old Testament is written in the same fashion. From Genesis to Malachi, the Word of God uses parables, symbols, analogies, metaphors, as well as what is known as "types" and "shadows."

"Types" are a person or thing in the Old Testament which foreshadows (shadow) a spiritual reality in the New Testament. For example, the flood of Noah's day in Genesis, Chapters 6 and 7, is used as a "type" of baptism in I Peter 3:20-21. The word for type that Peter uses is "figure."

Think of "shadow" or "shadows" in the same way we see it today. The "shadow" of a tree is not the tree, however, the fact that it is cast by the tree points to its reality.

Finally, we should realize that even today, human speech often involves literal and figurative elements. How often do we find ourselves speaking in such terms as, "My feet are killing me," yet none of us would picture someone's feet actually rising up to do bodily harm to someone.

In agreement with Eby, it is my opinion that the story of Adam and Eve is presented as a parable; *it is a story with an added bonus*. One thing has been "*thrown beside* another" for the sake of comparison, "not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (I Cor. 2:13). The Garden of Eden, along with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life, is not a literal garden or trees. And by no means would the serpent be a literal, talking snake. When we recognize this fact, then we should also realize that those things presented to us in Genesis require diligent research, consideration, and a humble heart to arrive at an understanding of what these things truly mean.

Revelation 1:1 (KJV)

¹ The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and **signified** *it* by his angel unto his servant John...

We will get into the book of the Revelation in this study, so it's important to understand that this book is the most symbolic book of the Bible. In agreement with this thought, consider our passage above and the word "signified." The definition of this word from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words reads, "To give a sign, indicate," and "to signify," and finally, "Where perhaps the suggestion is that of expressing by signs." In other words, the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to John was in keeping with the rest of scripture,

presented in symbolic form. That being said, some of the symbols are interpreted within Revelation itself (Rev. 1:20; 19:8), however, much of it is not. So how do we come to understand it? By seeking out the meaning in other areas of scripture, for rest assured that the meaning of the symbols in Revelation are found in both the Old and New Testaments when we are willing to study and search it out.

So why parables? Because they are like a wheel with spokes in that many things can be connected in scripture to give a greater understanding of the subject at hand. Think about it. When Jesus said, “The seed is the Word of God” (Luke 8:11), doesn’t that open up something about the Word of our Maker which can be better explained and understood by comparing it to a natural seed? And when we do, we get a better grasp of the intricacies of His divine truth. Allow me to share with you an illustration to provoke you to thought.

The Word and Wisdom of God

