THE IMAGES, FIGURES AND PLOTS IN THE PARABLES OF JESUS AND THEIR BACKGROUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

by

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The thesis attempts to establish a link between the Parables of Jesus and that portion of Jewish Sacred literature that is included in the Old Testament in the area of images, figures and plots presented in the parables. As such it includes a definition of parable and allegory as well as a review of the principle way in which the details in the parables have been interpreted at selected points in history.

PREFACE

The parables of Jesus deserves a much fuller treatment than is possible in one thesis. It has been necessary to limit the scope and content of the thesis in every area of investigation undertaken. For instance, one could write an entire thesis on the definition of a parable or on the contributions to New Testament studies concerning the parables of any one of, Origen, Trench, Julicher, Dodd or Jeremias.

It is with some difficulty, therefore, that we have limited the study basically to the way in which the images, figures and plots in the parables were understood by Jesus' audience.

In as far as possible, the sources for information have been indicated through footnotes and bibliography. Even so, there are books, conversations and lectures over the past several years that have unconsciously influenced the argument in the thesis that shall go unheralded.

I am indebted to Dr. J.R.C. Perkin who gave invaluable assistance in the writing of this thesis. His patient criticism, sound advice and encouragement were greatly appreciated.

I owe words of appreciation also to Dr. E.P. Sanders who carefully read and corrected the thesis offering suggestions at many points.

Finally I must express my gratitude to the Department of Graduate Studies for allowing me to write on this topic.

It is hoped that the reader might find some of the joy in reading this thesis that the author has experienced in writing it.

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INTRODUCTION

Familiarity breeds contempt. It seems reasonable to expect that serious discussion of the parables of Jesus might soon come to an end, therefore, because we are more familiar with them than with any other collection of stories. The imagery employed, figures involved, and situations depicted furnish our modern vocabulary with a host of colourful and incisive expressions. We talk about the 'prodigal son' who indulges in 'riotous living'; we are concerned for those who 'hide their light under a bushel' or fail to use their 'talents'; we identify people as 'eleventh hour' men, as 'good Samaritans' or as 'the salt of the earth'. These idioms are etched into our minds so deeply that we continue to quote them in the picturesque language of the King James Version in spite of the existence of excellent modern translations of the New Testament.

Yet, although the parables are familiar to us we look in vain for anyone who holds them in contempt. Over-zealous interpreters have forced them to say more than they were intended to convey, but even this unfortunate circumstance testifies to the importance ascribed to the parables. Elsewhere the parables of Jesus have been praised for their clarity, appealed to as excellent examples of pedagogy and accepted as the most reliable source we have of historical information about Jesus' teaching and environment.

The proportion of the Synoptic Gospels taken up by the parables illustrates their centrality in the teaching ministry of Jesus. They

constitute about one third of his recorded words. If we are to understand the Gospel we cannot possibly ignore this body of material. Furthermore, that the parables provide us with insights into domestic, agricultural and economic customs of the day has already been well attested (See C.H. Dodd, Parables of the Kingdom). But the possibility that the parables refer to actual current events of Jesus' lifetime has not been explored with the seriousness it deserves.

Jesus often taught by referring to things in his immediate experience or environment -- for example, the parable of the 'Child in the Midst' (Mk. 9:33-37), or the comment about the temple stones, (Matt. 24;2, Mk. 13:2 and Lk. 19:44). Therefore, discovery of an incident which helped to determine the imagery of a parable might be one useful guide to its meaning. For instance, if Jesus and his listeners were watching a farmer in the act of sowing his grain, there would be no reason to try to understand what Jesus wanted to teach by reference to so much wasted seed; he was just reporting what was taking place, (Mk. 4:3-9). Also, if Jesus was referring to an actual wedding festival to which some unprepared and consequently late guests were refused admittance, we would not be embarrassed by his failure to criticise the selfish action of the five wise maidens (Matt. 25:1-13).

Discovering or supposing an actual current event beind many of the parables of Jesus makes the parables more forceful. It seems altogether likely that somewhere in the countryside of Palestine there stood a half finished tower, a fitting monument to a man's naive lack of foresight and a topic of street corner gossip (Lk. 1f:28-30). The references to burglary could have been prompted by news that a man had

been robbed in the small hours of the morning (Matt. 24:43 and Lk. 12:39) or that a robber had been thwarted because the householder, a stronger man than he, awoke and successfully defended his goods (Lk. 14:15-24).

We could cite more illustrations of probable references to current events, but we are dealing with suppositions and we must recognize the limitations of this kind of inquiry. Yet this discussion is not without point, and when pursued intelligently and maturely it can enrich the parables and enlighten the readers by providing the possible historical background for the situations they depict.

Although we cannot always reconstruct concrete historical background for the parables, it may be possible in another way to connect them directly with the life of the people of first century Palestine. The hearers of the parables knew the Jewish Sacred Scriptures. If the parables can be related to that literature, a new insight into their original meaning might be gained.

In this thesis we are concerned to show that a relationship between the parables of Jesus and Jewish religious literature does indeed exist. Although we recognize that Jewish religious literature in the time of Jesus included more than our present Old Testament we shall refer primarily to the Old Testament because this much at least we share in common with Jesus' audience. Since the Law and the Prophets had a clearly prominent place in Jewish literature in Jesus' day we will refer mainly to them. We shall make occasional references, however, to other writings that later became canonical as well as some that did not enter the Old Testament canon.

We shall examine the imagery, figures and situations present in the parables which might have an added sharpness because the hearers were familiar with their sacred writings. No attempt has been undertaken to prepare a comprehensive bibliography because the primary aim was to deal with parables and the Old Testament background at first hand.

But no inquiry of this kind can be undertaken in complete independence of previous studies of the meaning and background of the parables. Therefore some brief account of the history of interpretation will be given with special reference to the elements of image, figure and situation. One of the most constantly used methods of interpretation of the parables has been that of allegorization -- there is even evidence of this within the Gosples themselves. We shall therefore seek to define the terms 'parable' and 'allegory' in our first chapter, thus providing the basis for later discussion.

CHAPTER ONE

BY WAY OF DEFINITION

Although numerous scholars have dealt with the distinction between parable and allegory, there is no unanimity in their conclusions. Their deliberations have produced statements ranging from assertions that parable and allegory are mutually exclusive forms of expression to claims that they differ in degree but not in kind.

In an article on communication in the New Testament, T.F. Torrance deals with a definition of a parable.[1] He arrives at his definition by analyzing how certain writers (Dodd, Jülicher and R.S. Wallace) have defined a parable and then defends his own definition by showing how and why Jesus used them.

Torrance claims that the question whether there is a natural or a sacramental relation between a parable and what it seeks to teach is crucial for an understanding of New Testament communication. He believes that for Dodd the relation is a natural one. Dodd insists that the parables are comprehensible because there is a close affinity between the natural and divine orders, so close that the "divineness of the natural order is major premise of all parables."[2]

When Dodd says that the parables vividly suggest one idea,

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1. T.F. Torrance, "New Testament Communications", Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. III (1950) pp. 289-313

2. C.H. Dodd, The Parables of The Kingdom, (London: Clear Type Press, 1961), p. 20

Torrance interprets him to mean that each parable yields one idea. Then he argues that "to say a parable yields one idea is to make it as much an allegory as if it yielded a series of ideas".[3]

He criticises Dodd further on the grounds that to say there is an inward affinity between the natural order and the spiritual order is not consistent with the message of the Gospels. He says that

> undoubtedly the divine communication must involve analogy . . . , but the whole significance of the Parable is that it is analogy with a difference, analogy which has at its heart an eschatological event which, until it actually overtakes us, nothing in the natural of historical order can begin to reveal.[4]

The relationship, therefore, between the parable and the truth it teaches is sacramental. Understanding the parable does not depend upon either the affinity between natural and divine orders or upon the clarity of the parable, but upon the mystery of the Kingdom expressed in Matt. 16:17, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven".

Torrance defines a parable as

> a story designated as a means of confronting men with Himself, the Word, in such a way that men can choose Him in love and yet not be overwhelmed by His divine majesty . . . . In the Parable, so to speak, the Kingdom of God comes into the midst and throws a man into the crisis of decision, and yet by its veiled form the Word of the Kingdom holds man at arm's length away in order to give him room and time for personal decision.[5]

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3. Torrance, op.cit., p. 301

4. Ibid., pp. 299-300

5. Ibid., pp. 303-304

One problem presents itself with this definition. Allegory too could be used as a means of confronting man with a truth about which a decision must be made. Torrance has described the manner in which a parable teaches but has not distinguished it clearly from other techniques a teacher might use. This problem arises as a result of the approach he has taken. His primary concern is with communication in the New Testament, and so he defines a parable with respect to how it communicates. This is proper. But instead of looking at parables themselves, he has been content to re-examine what others have said about them. In defining a parable one should look rather at those stories that are called parables and see what is their nature and substance.

PART A

On The Definition of a Parable

We have already suggested that the stories Jesus told are the most famous stories to which the term 'Parable' has ever been applied. These are the stories, therefore, to which we must go in order to find out what a parable is.

When we look at the parables of Jesus, we see stories that are true to human experience. They tell about ways in which men actually do act. They refer to the processes of nature with which men live unquestioningly every day. To prove this, we need only list the titles of a few of the more obvious ones; the Lamp and the Bushel, the Leaven, the Seed Growing Secretly, the Asking Son of the Lost Sheep.[6] Furthermore, we notice that the parables are all credible. In fact, it is difficult

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6. Titles quoted, unless otherwise stated, are those supplied by A.M. Hunter, Interpreting the Parables (London: SCM 1960), pp. 121-2

even to question the truth referred to in the parables. Rational men do not place lighted lamps under bushel baskets. Leaven does create an effect upon the whole lump of dough. The shepherd does not forget about one lost sheep.

Because of the credibility of and peoples' familiarity with the material from which the parables of Jesus are made, they do not need interpretation.

By saying that a parbale needs no interpretation, we are not flying in the face of all tradition, for this fact has already been recognized. I.T. Ramsay says that "a poem is one part against another across a silence".[7] The parable is a form of Oriental poetry, and what is true of poems generally is true of a poem in whatever particular form it takes. What is required for an understanding of a parable or a poem is an awareness of that to which the parable or poem relates.

We shall continue to use the verb 'to interpret' and the noun 'interpretation' in conjunction with parables, but we must be very careful to clarify what we mean. If we mean 'to explain the meaning', then we claim that we possess the truth which the parables are trying to convey. When Buttrick says that "where truth is closest words shall fail,"[8] does he not mean that at a certain point explanation must stop and perception take over?

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7. I.T. Ramsay, Christian Discourses, (Oxford: University Press), p. 18. See also Hunter, op.cit., p. 50 "We judge that Jesus did not need to interpret his parables".

8. George Buttrick, The Parables of Jesus, (New York: Richard R. Smith Inc., 1931), p. XIX

The parable is the final step in demonstrating or presenting a truth; for, after the parable is told, it is either understood or it falls on unperceiving minds. "He who has ears to hear let him hear".

Interpretation, therefore, when used of the parables must mean clarification to the end that a man might become aware of its immediate relevance to his own life. We need only refer to one or two of Jesus' parables to demonstrate this fact. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, there is no interpretation or explanation. The story was constructed in such a way that the question which Jesus directed to the lawyer, "Which of these three do you think was neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" (Luke 10:36), created a situation in which the lawyer was forced to see his involvement in the story. Notice also the parable of the Wicked Vinedressers, (Mk. 12:1-9, Matt. 21:33-44, Lk. 20:9-18). The parable required a judgment by and about the lawyers and priests themselves. Interpretation would have been unnecessary and would have weakened the force of the parable.

It follows from this that the interpretation contained in the New Testament of any parable may be suspect. Mark's gospel includes several instances in which Jesus first tells a parable, then the disciples ask about its meaning and then Jesus explains the parable. (See Mark 4: 1-20 and verses 33-34). May we not be dealing with a literary technique on the part of the Evangelist and not an actual practice of Jesus?

The number of points a parable makes is also a question over which much discussion has taken place. But it is not an essential question in relation to a definition of a parable; since a parable is the final step in demonstrating and presenting truth, the number of points

it makes is determined by the nature of the truth which it underlines.

This factor, therefore, cannot be part of the definition of a parable. It is usually included in order to differentiate between a parable and an allegory, but their difference, as we shall see later, is of a much more fundamental nature.

Before pursuing the question of the definition of an allegory, let us summarize the definition of a parable. It is an inherently understandable story, drawn from real life, as the final step in demonstrating or presenting truth. Interpretation of a parable must take the form of clarification of background and detail so that the application of the truth it emphasizes might become clear. When it is thus perceived a parable demands a judgment by and about oneself.

PART B

On The Definition of Allegory

We have suggested already that a parable and an allegory cannot be distinguished solely on the basis of how many points the story makes. Torrance's criticism of Dodd referred to earlier (Footnotes 2 and 3) forces us to look for a more basic distinction.

C.K. Barrett suggests that allegory is really a method of interpretation -- the means by which we transpose ideas from their origin in our minds to the place where we would like to find them.[9]

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9. C.K. Barrett, The New Testament Background, (New York: Harper & Row, 1961). p. 180

S.G. Sower, however, maintains that allegory is a method of expression. He believes allegory is a manner of saying certain things and meaning something else. He likens allegory to continuous metaphor that requires interpretation in order to understand its hidden meaning.[10]

Lest anyone accuse us with the same argument as we used against Torrance, let us first look at some allegories before proceeding further with their definition.

But where is there an allegory? The word appears only once in the New Testament (Galatians 4:24), and the Hebrew of the Old Testament has one word for parable and allegory. However, we can begin with the allegory which Paul develops in Galatians.

> Abraham had two sons, one by his slave and the other by his free-born wife. The slave-woman's son was born in the course of nature, the free woman's through God's promise. This is an allegory. The two women stand for two covenants. The one bearing children into slavery is the covenant that comes from Mount Sinai: that is Hagar. Sinai is a mountain in Arabia and it represents the Jerusalem of today, for she and her children are in slavery. But the heavenly Jerusalem is the free woman; she is our mother. For Scripture says, 'Rejoice, O barren woman who never bore a child; break into a shout of joy, you who never knew a mother's pangs; for the deserted wife shall have more children than she who lives with a husband.
>
> And you, my brothers, like Isaac, are children of God's promise. Gal. 4:23-28

Presumably every detail in the historical reference can be used

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10. S.G. Sower, The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews, (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965). p. 11

to teach some idea provided that it is consistent with the purpose of the teacher. But there is nothing within the allegory that necessitates this allegorical interpretation. The determining factor is the purpose for which Paul used the allegory. The allegory demands interpretation; without it, it remains the narrative of a piece of familiar history.

It is safe for us to presume also that Mark 4:13-30 is an allegorical interpretation of the parable in Mk. 4:3-9. To say this is not to suggest that we believe the parable of the Sower to be an allegory, not to commit ourselves at this point to say that Jesus did or did not use allegory.

We should note that nothing in Mark 4:3-9 demands that we understand the seed to be the Word nor the different soils to represent people in their various responses to the message of the Word. Nothing demands that we interpret the birds as Satan, the shallow soil as weak character or the thistles as the cares of this world. Such clues are supplied, according to the Gospel of Mark, by Jesus.

It becomes evident from this discussion of allegory that an allegory must be interpreted according to some clue which is not contained within the story itself and as in the illustrations discussed above which is also foreign to the immediate consciousness of the audience.

The difference between an allegory and a parable becomes very clear. It resides not in the number of points made, but in the way in which those points are made. A parable is understood according to its internal credibility; an allegory is understood according to a clue supplied by the interpreter from outside both the allegory and the minds

of the listeners.

We said that to interpret a parable was to clarify it in such a way that a man might become aware of its relevance to his own life. To interpret an allegory is to identify as many of the details in the story as are helpful and add to the lesson the teacher is seeking to teach.

There are other ways that an allegory and a parable have been differentiated. Alan Barr, accepting that the basic difference is the number of points made, writes that as a result of the concentration on a single point the parable is an organic unity. All details are subordinate to the central theme and contribute to it. The parable demands a judgment based on reason to be transferred from the sphere of the parable to an analogous sphere in the life of the listener. The allegory, on the other hand, is a series of pictures, not judgments, which must be identified with a series of truths in another sphere. The forcefulness of an allegory resides not in the cogency of the reasoned judgments but in its power to excite the imagination.[11]

That a parable requires a judgment to be passed whereas the allegory requires identification between two spheres of reference does underly the basic difference discussed above. That there is this clear distinction between reason and imagination in relation to parable and

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11. Alan Barr, "The Interpretation of Parables". Expository Times, LIII, (1942), p. 20

allegory is open to question. In many of the parables of Jesus -- the Tower Builder (Luke 14:28-30), the Two Builders (Matthew 7:24-27, and Luke 6:47-49), or the Divided Realm (Matthew 12:25f, Luke 11:17f and Mark 3:24-6), for instance -- the judgment made might well be the result of a vivid picture which has aroused the imagination.

Matthew Black suggests that allegory is a method of interpretation and that the parable is a method of expression. He means by this that one does not write allegories but that one interprets stories or history allegorically.[12] But he has said nothing more in this distinction than that stories or history treated as allegory must be interpreted according to a key, whereas parables are inherently understandable.

In the discussion in the chapter that follows, we must bear in mind this distinction between a parable and an allegory. But the definition of allegory, stated as it is in terms of how an allegory is used to teach, will be of prime importance for us as we examine the way in which images, figures and situations in the parables were understood. A parable is understood according to its internal credibility; an allegory is understood according to a clue supplied by the interpreter from outside both the allegory and the minds of the listeners.

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12. Matthew Black, "The Parables as Allegory". Bulletin of the John Rylanos Lybrary, XLII (1960), p. 278. "the principle of interpreting the parable as allegory may be sound".

CHAPTER TWO

PRINCIPAL PATTERNS OF INTERPRETATION OF THE PARABLES

Establishing the central meaning of the parables is not our primary concern in this chapter, but we will be tempted at times to follow such a diversion. Our main objective is to observe the way in which the imagery employed, the figures involved, and the situations depicted in the parables have been interpreted.

Such observation can be carried out only as we look more widely at the process of interpretation of the parables themselves. Since it is impossible to treat the parables exhaustively, and because clarity and continuity are desirable, our discussion will focus on the parable of the Money in Trust (Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:12-22, Dodd's title). We shall refer, however, to many other examples of points similar to that under examination.

PART A

Interpretation That Is Reflected In The N.T.

The settings supplied for the parable of the Money in Trust by the two Evangelists illustrate different interpretations, probably on the part of the authors. Matthew placed the parable after the triumphal entry along with other material that was intended to teach the disciples about the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven.[13]

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13. Matthew 24:1-25:46 includes material that is all related to the teaching about the coming of the Kingdom, i.e., warnings about false messiahs, parables of the Waiting Servants, the Ten Virgins, and an account of the coming Judgment scene.

In this context, the parables emphasized the immediacy of the coming of the Kingdom and taught the disciples how they were to conduct themselves throughout the uncertain time of waiting.

Luke, however, evidently placed the parable in that part of the ministry of Jesus just prior to the triumphal entry, when Jesus was in Jericho. Jericho, as the setting for the parable, was inferred quite possibly from the material in Luke's version of the parable which is not included by Matthew. A tabulation of the details in the two accounts of the story will point out the extra material in Luke.

Matthew	Luke
a man	a nobleman
going abroad	going on a long journey to be appointed King and return
called his servants	called ten of his servants
gave gifts of five, two, and one bag of gold to three servants	gave a talent to each of 10 servants
each according to his capacity	commanded them to trade with the gift till he returned
an account of the activity of each servant	an account of the delegation of citizens who opposed his coronation
the man returned	the nobleman returned as King
the accounts were settled; rewards were the same, a promise for greater responsibility and an invitation to share in the master's joy; the punishment was the loss of the gift and expulsion from the presence of the master	the accounts were settled; rewards were given in proportion to the amount of increase; the punishment was the loss of the original loan
	the enemies of the King were destroyed.

Luke speaks about a nobleman who went to the Emperor to receive the appointment as King but whose coronation was opposed by a delegation of his subjects. When he returned, he rewarded his faithful subjects and punished his opponents with death. Jesus' audience would very likely have thought of the historical incident in 4 B.C. in Jericho. Archelaus had gone to Rome for such an appointment and had met with similar opposition. He was not appointed King, but rather he returned as Ethnarch and ruthlessly murdered his opponents.[14] It has been suggested that this information peculiar to Luke's gospel, constitutes a separate parable of the Crown Prince.[15] Logically, this parable would have been told in Jericho, the city in which Archelaus built his palace.

The inclusion of the reference to the parable of the Crown Prince represents a major change in the story line of the parable of the Money in Trust and is probably evidence of interpretation that preceded the work of the author. The parable of the Crown Prince suggests that there will be an extended interval of time before the return of the nobleman. This idea is inconsistent with the point of the parable of the Money in Trust as it appears in Matthew. Reason would suggest that Matthew is more original since it is unlikely that

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14. Joachim Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, (London: SCM 1963), p. 59. Jeremias relies on Josephus Bell. Jud., 2. 80: Anr., 17. 299f. for this historical information.

15. Ibid., p. 59

the author would delete references to the parable of the Crown Prince and thereby alter the meaning of the parable. Furthermore, we can conclude that in the tradition which Luke represents the parable of the Money in Trust must have been interpreted to suggest a delay in the return of the nobleman before the conflation of the two parables could have taken place.

Many of the differences in the details may be the result of this conflation of the two parables in Luke, but some at least represent different interpretation on the part of the authors. In an effort to teach faithfulness to the Christian life in the light of Christ's imminent return, it is conceivable that the author of Matthew introduced the variety in the sizes of the trusts. By this, he may have intended to illustrate that each man has a different amount of ability and that more is expected of a 'talented' man. In Luke, on the other hand, the intention of the parable seems to be to teach faithfulness to the Christian life in the knowledge that the Kingdom of God would be delayed in coming. The size of the trusts is immaterial for this purpose and the author would not have changed this detail. A difference in the size of the rewards, however, illustrated that the more faithful one is the greater his reward will be.

We are now able to isolate two questions that must be asked when studying the parables of Jesus. The first is: How long was the original utterance? The second is: What was the original setting for the word.

In terms of the parable of the Money in Trust, the first question

asks whether or not the parable of the Crown Prince should be treated separately. The fact that Matthew does not appear even to know of the parable of the Crown Prince suggests that Luke has made an addition to the story of the Money in Trust. A further illustration of this question is found in the parable of the Great Supper (Matthew 22:1f., Luke 14:16f). In Matthew, there is mention of one guest who did not have a wedding garment. Luke omits this detail of the parable -- in fact it does not appear in his gospel. Has Matthew added this comment to emphasize the eschatological significance of Jesus' words, or has Luke omitted part of the original parable? A third possibility is that Matthew has conflated two separate parables -- the Great Supper and the Man Without a Wedding Garment -- much as Luke did the parables of the Money in Trust and the Crown Prince.[16]

The second question involves an attempt to decide whether either Matthew or Luke provides the proper historically accurate setting for the parable of the Money in Trust. We have seen the different turn given to the parable in Matthew and Luke by the respective settings. Similarly we should note that the parable of the Judge and Widow (Luke 18:2-5), Luke tells us, was intended to encourage the disciples to pray without losing heart (cf. vs. 1). Yet it may be doubted whether this is the point of the parable. It may be that the lesson to be derived is that if an unjust judge can be force to act justly, will not

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16. Ibid., p. 65

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a loving God act justly without being pestered.

We are not obliged to answer these questions in this thesis nor to determine what the parable does mean. However, from the foregoing discussion we can comment on the way in which images, figures and situations in the parables were understood. Such details were used to exhort the reader to live a responsible life of service in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. As in the case of the variety of talents given, the details may actually have been given allegorical interpretations.

PART B

The Fathers of the Early Church

Once the canon of the New Testament had been decided, interpretation became a more exacting science. Scholars had an established text with which to work. The question which came to the fore was no longer related to the length or the setting of the parables because these were 'givens'. The primary question for the interpreter was related directly to the imagery: how were the details in the parables to be understood? Let us illustrate this conclusion.

Origen occupies a significant place in the history of the Church because any discussion of New Testament exegesis would be incomplete without a consideration of his contribution. His approach to scripture is characterized by two beliefs: that scripture is a unity and that it is inspired. Consequently, for Origen, the interpreter must reconcile

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17. Hunter, op.cit., p. 69 makes this point regarding the parables, so too Jeremias, op.cit., pp. 153-157

apparent discrepancies in the text and defend the truth and value of all of scripture. Origen conducted this defence by means of an allegorical interpretation of any point that disrupted the unity of inspired scripture. Tollinger wrote that Origen's "whole exegesis rests upon the principle that scripture says one thing and means another".[18]

His view of scripture led him to assert that Matthew 25 and Luke 19 represent separate parables of Money in Trust. Yet, although unrelated sayings of Jesus in their literal form, the spiritual (allegorical) and most important sense of the parables was the same. He understood the parables to teach that

> Unto every one that hath shall be given, and be added. By which it is established, that to those who possess in this life a kind of outline of truth and knowledge, shall be added the beauty of a perfect image in the future[19]

Irenaeus had followed this method of interpretation, but arrives at different conclusions. The parable, instead of being a promise that those who are faithful in this life will be rewarded in the future, is a challenge to use responsibly the gifts God has given us. The gifts of talents or pounds represent the image of God that is in each of us.[20]

Given their understanding of inspiration, Origen and Irenaeus could not ask questions related to the setting or the content of the original parable. Their concern lay in interpreting the imagery, figures,

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18. R.B. Tollinger, Selections from the Commentaries and Homilies of Origen, (London: SPCK, 1929) p. xxvi

19. Origen, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Roberts and Donaldson, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903, IV), p. 298

20. Grenaeus, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. Roberts and Donaldson, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903, I), p. 445

and situations presented in the parables, and they chose the allegorical method to do so.

The practice of allegorical interpretation carried over into the Post-Nicene Church as well. It was used not only as a defence of the unity of the scriptures, but it was believed that in allegory lay the true meaning of the text, the soul of the letter. Augustine is the most noted for using this method. His interpretation of the Good Samaritan, quoted by Hunter, has become the classic illustration of allegorical interpretation of parables.[21] In the parable of the Money in Trust, the Lord looking for profit represents God, who desires our salvation; those who put out money for usury are ministers of the Gospel; those who receive money are the ministers' parishioners; and to 'put money on deposit' is to defend Christ. Augustine interpreted the parable to say

> look after salvation of your own house . . . . This if ye do, ye put out to use, ye will not be slothful servants, ye will not have to fear so horrible a condemnation.[22]

Ambrose too, by his references to the parable of Money in Trust, shows that he sought the allegorical interpretation. His responsibility to write and speak of his faith he calls the five talents with which he was entrusted. The increase that the faithful servants received by investing their gifts represents those people who are converted and receive the Gospel message. He writes in a fervent plea

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21. Hunter, op.cit., p. 7

22. Augustine, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903, VI), p. 406

in Book V of 'Of the Christian Faith'

> Oh that I might safely say of you at that time: 'Lord, thou gavest me five talents; behold I have gained five other talents'; and that I might show the precious talents of your virtues.[23]

Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Irenaeus, Augustine, Ambrose and Gregory the Great stood in the tradition that stemmed from Philo and has been called the Alexandrian School. Allegorical exegesis is the identifying marks of this group of scholars. However, Hunter claims that a rival school existed in the Antiochene Fathers among whom John Chrysostom was the chief spokesman. He quotes Chrysostom from Matt. Homilies, LXIV 3:

> interpret the elements in the parable that are urgent and essential . . . do not waste time on all the details . . . seek out the scope for which the parable was designed . . . . and be not overbusy with the rest.[24]

Chrysostom's interpretations were simple, clear and to a large extent free from allegory. He interpreted the parable of the Money in Trust to mean that a man cannot excuse himself by saying that he has only one talent, because with that one he can improve himself.[25]

That Chrysostom was condemned as a heretic reflects the sentiment of the age. It was an age swayed not by the simple, the clear and the rational, but by the picturesque and the imaginative. The Alexandrian School and their allegorical interpretations appealed to this temperament

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23. Ambrose, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Schaff and Wace, (New York: Christian Literature Co. 1895, X), p. 285

24. Hunter, op.cit., p. 27

25. Chrysostom, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Philip Schaff, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903, X), p. 472

and dominated the field of New Testament exegesis until modern times.

Jerome too, however, used a method of interpretation quite unlike allegory. His approach to the parable of the Money in Trust is direct and he accepted the literal meaning. He says that the parable teaches that there is a difference in rewards and that God, not being satisfied with what we have, constantly desires more of us. He argues that if this were not so, the servant who preserved his one talent would have been praised for his carefulness. Further, the fact that the man who gained ten talents was rewarded highest and received the unfaithful servant's talent as well proves to Jerome that we will be rewarded in proportion as we work.[26]

We have isolated a third question which confronted interpreters of the parables. The authors of the Synoptic Gospels had to deal with two of them: what the content of the original utterance was, and what its setting was in the ministry of Jesus. When once the text of the New Testament was established, the third question became primary: how are we to understand the imagery, figures, and situations in the parables?

With the exception of the Antiochene Fathers and Jerome, scholars in the early Church interpreted the details in the parables allegorically. That is, they understood them to teach lessons that could neither have occurred to the minds of the first audience nor were suggested by the

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26. Jerome, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, ed. Schaff and Wace, (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1893, VI), p. 412

by the parables themselves. For instance, no one in Jesus' day could have even guessed that the servants who invested the talents referred to ministers of the Gospel, nor the borrowers to parishioners. Such classifications as minister and parishioner were foreign to the minds of a first-century Jewish audience. Nor would that audience understand that the increase made from wise investment referred to converts to christianity.

However, allegory remained the dominant factor in the interpretation of the parables until the end of the 19th century,[26a] although as we shall see there were some protests against its most extravagant forms (see ft. 51). It is not necessary, therefore, to discuss in detail the medieval exegesis of the parables. Instead, we will examine R.C. Trench who is one of the last and greatest representatives of this approach to the parables.

PART C

The Mainstream

The American publishers of Notes on the Parables of Jesus by R.C. Trench say of his book:

26a. Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), includes extensive sections in chapter 1, pp. 1-13, and chapter V, pp. 174-218 on the 'letter' and the 'spirit' or the 'literal' and 'spiritual' exposition of the Bible in the Middle Ages. The book traces the antiquity of the method of 'spiritual' exposition from the Platonic allegorical tradition of Philo, through the Fathers to the expositers of the Middle Ages showing that the allegorical method of interpretation did in fact dominate the field of Biblical exegesis.

> In regard to the volume herewith sent forth, the subject of which it treats is of such general interest, and the ability with which it has been prepared is so marked, that the publishers cannot hesitate to believe they are doing a good service to the cause of sound theological learning in making it accessible to a large class of American readers, who in all probability would not otherwise possess it.[27]

Their words reflect a general attitude towards Trench's book and also the approach to the study of parables which he represents. It was believed that Jesus used the parables to set forth the highest moral precepts, to illustrate central doctrines and to prophesy future events concerning himself and the Church. Trench is recognized as the ablest spokesman of this belief which has informed the mainstream of parable exegesis until the present century.

A look at the way in which Trench interpreted the parable of the Money in Trust and a brief survey of several other interpreters will not only illustrate how representative Trench was of his age but will show also how the details in the parables of Jesus are understood by the 'school'.

Trench's exposition of the parable contains the following ideas: Jesus Christ was about to travel into a far country; Pentecost was the time when he most clearly gave gifts to his servants to be used in his absence, and though the gifts refer primarily to spiritual capacities, they refer also to wealth, reputation and natural abilities; each man receives spiritual gifts according to his natural ability because grace

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27. R.C. Trench, Note on the Parables of Jesus, (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1861), p. v.

does not overlook or abolish individual differences in character; the interval while the Lord is on the journey is the interval between the first and second coming of Christ.[28] This is pure allegory. Trench is using information or beliefs which he has to interpret the parable -- clues not contained in the parable and not shared by the first century audience. With the help of these clues he identifies those details which add to or are consistent with what he believes that the parable teaches. However, he shared this approach to the interpretation of the parables with many others.

Matthew Henry, who wrote in the early 18th Century, reflects the same type of scholarship. Writing of this parable, he claims that the master is Christ and the gifts are those good things referred to in Ephesians 4:8 ("when he ascended on high, he gave gifts to man").[29]

The method of exegesis used by Matthew Henry in the 1720's and by Trench in the 1860's represents fairly well the approach that dominated the study of parables from Augustine to the present century. The parables were used to emphasize moral truths. They were relied upon to support doctrinal statements. They were interpreted as prophecies for the Church and for the world.

We can see this also in a glimpse at commentaries that are still widely used. In the International Critical Commentary, Plummer

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28. Ibid., p. 218-232

29. Matthew Henry, Matthew to John, Matthew Henry's Commentary, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 19__, V), p. 373

draws three lessons from the parable of the Money in Trust. First, disciples are to wait patiently and work constantly for the Kingdom. Second, the Jews are warned about their opposition to the coming of the Kingdom. Third, to neglect an opportunity is to lose it and to use an opportunity is to gain it.[30]

The Interpreter's Bible on Matthew and Luke is the most recent commentary that still represents this type of exposition at least in part. P. Scherer, the expositor for Chapters 19-24 of Luke, fixes his attention upon details of the parable as sources for homiletical excursions. He tells us that the parable teaches that the Kingdom of God is our business to trade with until Christ comes and that the parable asks us what we are making of our life.[31] George Buttrick, the expositor for Matthew's Gospel, treats the parable of the Money in Trust as a homily on life. It provides him with an opportunity to talk about the fact that each man is different, that all are bond servants and that God gives us a chance to prove ourselves.[32] Their exposition makes interesting reading but the fact that this is a parable seems to have escaped these writers in their effort to find something helpful to say from each detail in the passage.

It was against this method of interpreting the parables and

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30. A. Plummer, I.C.C. The Gospel According to St. Luke, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 444

31. P. Scherer, The Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1951 VIII), p. 331

32. George Buttrick, Interpreter's Bible, (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1951 VII), p. 559

understanding the images, the figures and the situations presented in the parables that a significant body of scholars reacted in the present century.

PART D

The Crosscurrent

As is so often the case, a new trend is established as the result of a thorough-going reaction. Unfortunately, reactions very often reject in total that against which they are directed.[33] So Jülicher, leading the reaction against the allegorical method of exegesis which had predominated from the time of Origen, perhaps went too far.

Nevertheless, a very distinct crosscurrent in New Testament studies concerning the parables was established by A. Jülicher, C.H. Dodd and J. Jeremias. The tradition stemming from Alexandria still has its followers, but the Antiochene Fathers and Chrysostum, insofar as they opposed allegorical interpretation, also have modern counterparts. Jülicher set the brakes on allegorization; Dodd and Jeremias started to move in another direction.

Jülicher asserted that Jesus never used allegory and that the parables did not permit allegorical interpretation.[34] Consequently, he said, for example, that the parable of the Wicked Vinedressers was invented by the early Church.[35] He also said that the interpretation

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33. Adolf Jülicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu, (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1910.) Unfortunately this book is not found in English translation. All references, therefore, are to other scholars' comments about it.

34. Hunter, op.cit., p. 37

35. Ibid., p. 116

of the parable of the Sower was not part of the words of Jesus.[36]

Jülicher established an approach which would find a good deal of support among modern scholars. Even the particular conclusions he drew with respect to the two parables above are accepted by many as correct. What is seriously questioned in his approach is that he reduced the parables to lessons in general moral truths that can only be understood by finding their broadest possible application to life.

By following Jülicher's lead we would be forced to conclude that Jesus had nothing new to say; he merely said things in a new way. Instead of saying that though much effort on the part of Christian teachers and preachers would be wasted, a great harvest would be reaped, Jesus told the parable of the Sower. Instead of saying that a man must be faithful in every trust, Jesus told the parable of the Money in Trust.[37]

The strength of Jülicher's work is that he maintained that the parable was intended to make one particular point. But James S. Stewart, while recognizing the great service which Jülicher performed for New Testament studies, points out very clearly the central weakness in his work as well.

> He saw that each parable was concerned to convey one particular aspect of Truth. What Jülicher failed to see was the essential nexus between the message of the parables and the crises of the Messianic ministry. Not to be a preacher of general religious truths did Jesus come to earth, nor was the word made flesh to burress the platitudes of a prudential ethic . . . .

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36. Ibid., p. 50

37. Ibid., p. 96

> when He told such stories . . . (He) placed and still places the hearers in an urgent crises of decision.[38]

Stewart goes on to say that "it was the great service of C.H. Dodd's book that it corrected Jülicher so radically at this point."[39] Dodd also realized the significance of Jülicher's work in freeing the parables from the abuses of allegorization but corrected him at one vital point. Dodd believed Jesus was saying something new which could be understood only as the parables were heard in the light of their true setting in the unique ministry of Jesus. Hunter compliments both Dodd and Jeremias for putting

> The parables of Jesus back into their true setting, which is the ministry of Jesus seen as the great eschatological act of God in which he visited and redeemed his people.[40]

We are able to understand the parables because "the Kingdom of God is intrinsically like the process of nature and of the daily life of man . . . . The sense of the divineness of the natural order is major premise of all the parables."[41] In other words, no clue exterior to the parable is required for its interpretation. Because the parable is true to life and because there is a natural relationship between the divine and human orders, we are able to read divine truth through human stories.

Dodd argues that parables are not to be interpreted allegorically

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38. James S. Stewart, In a review of "The Parables of Jesus, Joachim Jeremias", Scottish Journal of Theology, 8-2-55, p. 189

39. Ibid., p. 189

40. Hunter, op.cit., p. 39

41. Dodd, op.cit., p. 20 (sic)

because parables make only one point. The details in a parable are to be understood only as information necessary for the telling of the story. However, at this point we must be very cautious. Although he insists that there is only one point in each parable, in the area of application he interprets some of the imagery, figures and situations allegorically.

In the parable of the Money in Trust Dodd argues that Jesus wanted the audience to identify with the one talent servant.[42] This is not allegory because the audience could have made this identification without the help of some clue not contained in the parables or not already present in their own minds. But when Dodd suggests that the talents were to be related to the responsibilities which God had placed upon the chosen people, he is asking the audience of the first century to interpret the figure of the talents as an image which only subsequent generations would understand. This is allegory. The image of the talents which we so readily use had no value as an image when Jesus spoke this parable; it was simply a measure of currency. The image was created for us out of continual allegorical interpretation of this parable.

In all recent works on the parables of Jesus the name of Joachim Jeremias appears beside those of Jülicher and Dodd. This is as it should be. In a very real sense Jeremias had added one further step in the direction Dodd took by outlining and demonstrating the use of

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42. Dodd, op.cit., p. 112

concrete principles to be applied in recovering the original setting and, therefore, the sense of the parables.

He accepts the work of Jülicher and Dodd as conclusive, yet one cannot help but feel that in Jeremias the circle has come full round. Concerning the parable of the Money in Trust he says,

> Jesus' hearers would have thought, in the first place, of their religious leaders, especially of the scribes . . . much had been entrusted to them. The Word of God; but like the servants in the parable, they would shortly have to render account of how they had used that which had been committed to them . . . .[43]

Jeremias does not indulge in the far-fetched fabrications of an Augustine, but nevertheless he is using allegory. Nothing in the parable or in the minds of the audience would have caused them to interpret the talents as the Word of God. Furthermore there is no reason why the hearers should identify the servants with their scribes, unless, of course, they were simply unwilling to apply the parable to themselves. In any case, both these suggestions by Jeremias are based upon an allegorical interpretation. His reason for interpreting the figures of the servants and the trusts lies outside both the parable and the minds of the audience.

It is little wonder when we see allegorization in Dodd and Jeremias that everyone has not heard the words of caution with respect to allegorizing the parables.[44] For Barclay, the useless servant is

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43. Jeremias, op.cit., pp. 61f

44. Black, op.cit. In this article, Black pens a sharp criticism of Dodd and Jeremias who, he points out, while denying there is allegory in the parables retain all the essential features of allegory. He accuses them of trying to "run with the allegorical hare, as it were, and still hunt with the Jülicher hounds". p. 283

the scribes and Pharisees.[45] Wallace interprets the nobleman to be Jesus. We are the servants whom he has charged to be faithful until he returns.[46]

We can conclude, therefore, that the question of how the imagery employed, the figures involved and the situations depicted in the parables of Jesus are to be understood is still unanswered. The standard approach to the question has been that of trying to decide whether there is allegory in the parables or not.

Did Jesus use allegory? Matthew Black argues that this is the wrong question.[47] Because he believes that allegory is a method of interpretation rather than expression, the question must be -- did Jesus tell stories which he intended to be understood allegorically? That Jesus did so he claims is undeniable.

Black points out that Jülicher, Dodd and Jeremias all admit that Jewish parables of the time of Jesus did contain allegory and says that

> On purely a priori grounds there does not seem to be any reason why there should not be allegory in the teaching of Jesus.[48]

We must notice, however, that Black's distinction between parable and allegory really lies in the number of points each makes. Regarding the

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45. Wm. Barclay, Daily Bible Study Series the Gospel of Matt., (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1960 II), p. 357

46. R.S. Wallace, Many Things in Parables, (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1955), p. 127

47. Black, op.cit., p. 275

48. Ibid., p. 275

parable of the Wicked Husbandman, he says Jülicher believed that the parable was a judgment against Israel and that Jeremias thought the parable referred to temple authorities. Then he says, "it seems unnatural and illogical to deny a meaning to the remaining two 'details', the 'servants' and the 'only son'".[49] He also quotes A.H. McNeile with approval when he says

> When more than one truth is illustrated (in a parable) the picture approaches an allegory, and it is not always certain which details are intended to illustrate something, and which are merely part of the scenic framework.[50]

However, the basic distinction between parable and allegory is not in the number of points each makes. The distinction lies in the fact that an allegory requires a clue to interpretation from outside both the story and the immediate consciousness of the audience whereas a parable needs no such clue. If this is the true case then we may concede that there is not allegory in the teaching of Jesus. Any allegorical interpretations of the parables we have seen have depended upon some key to interpretation supplied by the expositor of which Jesus' audience would have been ignorant; consequently they could not have understood the parables.

But they were not ignorant of the meaning of the parables or of the significance of many of the images, figures and situations presented in the parables. For instance, after the parable of the Wicked Vinedressers (Mark 12:1-9) we see that they were well aware of

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49. Ibid., p. 282

50. Ibid., p. 287

the point of Jesus' words. "Then they began to look for a way to arrest him, for they saw that the parable was aimed at them" (Mark 12:12 NEB).

How then did Jesus' audience understand the imagery employed, figures involved and situations depicted in the parables if not as allegories? In the final chapter we will show that what is now the Old Testament provides the background against which Jesus' audience would have understood many of the details in the parables.

CHAPTER III

Jesus' hearers understood many of the images, figures and situations in the parables because they had stock meanings that the people would rmember. Interpreting the details according to a stock meaning, however, must be clearly differentiated from interpretating the same detail allegorically. In the former, the key to interpretation lies within either the story or the minds of the hearers; in the latter it must be supplied from without.

Recognizing that the term is almost tautologous, we can call some of the details in Jesus' Parables "allegorical imagery". They are concepts or objects that, because of constant use in a particular context, have acquired a meaning beyond their primary meaning that is recognized and understood by all those who share the same historical tradition.

We shall show in this chapter that Jesus uses many alegorical images which are rooted in the Old Testament. An awareness of the meaning of the image in the Old Testament, therefore, is indispensible to a proper understanding of the parable.

Not all of the figures involved in the parables, however, can be called allegorical images. Some have no secondary meaning beyond their primary one. We can, if we choose, accept Calvin's suggestion that to inquire after the meaning of such details is an "absurd mode of philosophizing"[51], but to do so would be to miss, possibly, one element in Jesus' teaching which made it so attractive. These figures appear also in the Old Testament, and because of their Old Testament associations they have been infused with certain very specific implications. Indeed, we may call them "impregnated figures".

Impregnated figures can be easily differentiated from allegories and from allegorical images. The figures are precisely what they say they are. Their Old Testament association does not alter their meaning nor the meaning of the parable in which they are contained, therefore, they are not images. Being aware of the association, however, gives an added sharpness to the parable. It is quite conceivable that Jesus' audience did recognize some of the details in the parables as imprenated figures.

Finally, we shall show that some of the situations depicted in the parables of Jesus reminded his first century audience of similar situations related in the Old Testament. Some parables, in other words, "share synonymous plots" with incidents narrated in the Old Testament.

The fact that a parable shares a plot with an Old Testament story does not alter the meaning of the parable. Furthermore, one could understand the parable without being aware of the Old Testament link. But, as in the case of an impregnated figure, an awareness of the synonymous plot greatly enhances the parable by suggesting its application.

We shall look first at parables that do contain allegorical images:

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51. John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh Printing Co., 1845), p. 177.

PART A

Allegorical Imagery

THE VINEYARD

There are some allusions to the Old Testament in the parables of Jesus that have been recognized for centuries. Many of these are allegorical images. Probably the most familiar are found in the parables of the Wicked Vinedressers (Matt. 21:37f, Lk. 12:1f and Luke 20:9f) and the Lost Sheep (Matt. 18:12-14 and Lk. 15:3-7).

We have already referred briefly to the parable of the Wicked Vinedressers. The Old Testament passage which supplies the background for the parable is Isa. 5:1f. "Let me sing to my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He digged it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it, and he looked for it to yield grapes but it yielded wild grapes ... For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold a cry". Isaiah 5:1, 2,7. (RSV).

Jeremias questions the theory that Jesus did refer to Isa. 5:1f. or Ps. 80:8-13. Rather, he argues that, because Luke and the Gospel of Thomas contain neither the description of the construction of the vineyard

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52. Jeremias Op. Cit., p. 31.

found in Isaiah and mentioned in Mark and Matthew nor the question in Isaiah 5:4 which is suggested in Mark 12-9, one must question the originality of these sayings on Jesus' lips. He points out also that the quotations in Matthew and Mark are from a Greek text of Isaiah - not from a Hebrew text. On these grounds he feels justified in maintaining that the Old Testament references did not form part of the original parable of the Wicked Vinedressers.

Jeremias's argument appears convincing. In Matthew and Mark there is an obvious example of the Evangelists' elucidating a story by adding quotations from Jewish sacred literature. But his suggestion only strengthens the case for allegorical imagery in the parable. Even if all the explicit quotations of Isaiah 5:1f. are excised from the parable, it remains true that the story would immediately remind the first hearers (just as it did the authors of Matthew and Mark) of the Song of the Vineyard. They would readily identify the vineyard image as indicating Israel. Hence we still have the allegorical image.

The suggestion that later writers added quotations from Isa. 5 shows that this image was recognized - the connexion was made. Jeremias has attempted to purge this parable of allegory, and rightly so: but it cannot be purged of its allegorical imagery. To remove this element would be to destroy the parable. Apparently, Jesus wanted the people to understand the parable in the light of the Old Testament passage and the stock value which the idea of 'vineyard', 'husbandman' and 'only son' had for the people. The vineyard was a metaphor for Israel - the people of God; the husbandman was a term for God.

Suggestions have varied as to the meaning of the 'only son'. Black would interpret this as a reference to Jesus, but this is to interpret the story as an allegory.[53] Dodd, however, points out that the only son is as much "a stock figure of folktale as the third son or the seventh".[54] He suggests the idea stems from Isaac. Dodd is talking at this point about allegorical imagery, an image with stock value recognized by everyone who stands in the tradition from which the image stems. The only son was the sone of promise, the name bearer; and the slaying of an only son was a most contemptible murder. The figure of the only son is, in fact, an allegorical image which emphasized as in no other way possible the outrageous action of the tenants.

What are the implications of this allegorical image for an understanding of the parable? First, that the setting in Matthew, Mark and Luke is probably correct. The parable is cited after Jesus has been questioned as to why he taught in the Temple. This was a very logical question because Jesus was not a priest or a levite or a scribe. He was asked by what authority he taught in the Temple. Instead of a straight answer, Jesus told the parable of the Wicked Vinedressers. He pointed out that the Jewish leaders had failed in their responsibility to tend God's vineyard. By implication they would understand Jesus to say 'I teach the good news because you do not'. This parable belongs to the context in which Jesus is justifying his ministry.

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53. See footnote 49 above.

54. Dodd, Op. cit., p. 47 n. 23.

THE LOST SHEEP

At first reading, the parable of the Lost Sheep seems to underline the fact that God is one who searches for anyone who is lost. In Matthew the parable is closely connected with Jesus' dramatized parable of the Child in the Midst (Matt. 18:1-4). In this setting it is used to teach that one should not despise little ones because it is not God's will that any one of them should perish. Psalm 23 seems to be the logical background against which the allegorical image of the shepherd comes to life.

However, if the imagery of the sheep and the shepherd reminded Jesus' audience of Ezekiel 34, the parable would have been much more poignant.

> Then the word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophecy against the shepherds of Israel, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ho, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ... I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed ...
>
> Ezekiel 34:1-2, 15-16a. (RSV)

In Ezekiel, the shepherd is not God but the leaders of Israel or the Israelite nation. The sheep are either the masses of Israelites or the peoples of the world. The prophet is telling his audience that it has failed in its God given responsibility to be the shepherd to others and have looked after private, selfish interests. He says that God will by-pass such a shepherd and will do the work of a shepherd Himself.

The parable in Luke's gospel, associated as it is with the parables of the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son, can be understood to teach the same point as the prophet Ezekiel taught. But, regardless of the conclusion as

to which of the two settings is correct and, therefore, which meaning was intended. The fact that 'sheep' and 'shepherd' are allegorical images recognizable by Jesus' audience because of its acquaintance with the Old Testament is certain.

THE SEED GROWING SECRETLY

Psalm 126:6 suggests that the idea of the harvest symbolized the coming of the New Age. Joel 3:13 also speaks of the dawn of the New Age, the day of the Lord - "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full". This verse from Joel is quoted in Revelation 14:15 - evidence that the image of the harvest was recognized as an indication of the dawn of the New Age. Surely Jesus could not have used the picture of the harvest as often as he did without being aware, as his audience probably was, of this connotation.[55]

To give only one instance, in the parable of the Seed Growing Secretly (Mark 4:26-29) the Hebrew text of Joel 3:13 is quoted, in the workds "put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe". We must leave the possibility open that the evangelist added or at least modified a statement in the parable to make it conform with the Old Testament, but by admitting this we are strengthening the case for allegorical imagery in the parable. We are not reading something back into the parable but underlining something that the first audience recognized.

THE NEW WINE

Wine was also used a s a symbol for the New Age, or of an age of salvation (see again Joel 3:13). Unless Jesus wanted it interpreted as as such, then one would expect a teacher of his ability to have avoided using the image.

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55. Some of these parables are: The Farmer and his Man, the Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Harvest and Labourers, the Tree and its Fruit, the Budding Fig Tree, the Seed Growing Secretly, the Sower and the Rich Fool. In several cases the harvest image is not the central image of the parable, but this is not necessary for an allegorical image. If it has stock value in the minds of the audience it need merely be mentioned to create a response.

Joel 3:13 is not the only example of the use of wine to symbolize a new age. After the flood, the first action of Noah was to plant a vineyard, Gen. 9:20. In Genesis 49:11-12, Jacob prophesies to his sons of the days to come. He pictures the deliverer of the people "Binding his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to a choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes: his eyes shall be red with wine". The evidence of plenty in the Land of Promise brought back by the spies sent out by Moses was a cluster of grapes so large that two men carried it (Numbers 13:23). Wine would be associated in the minds of Jesus' audience with the idea of salvation and a New Age. The mention of new wine in Mark 2:21-22 would very likely call forth this association. We should note in passing that the interpretation which the fourth Gospel put upon the creation of wine from water was that in this act Jesus manifested his glory (see John 2:11).

THE MAN WITHOUT A WEDDING GARMENT

Jeremias refers to the parable of the Man Without a Wedding Garment (Matt. 22:11-13), and points out that there is a parable with a similar plot attributed to Rabban Johanan ben Zackai.[56] In this story a king issued an invitation without a date and time. The wise prepared themselves by putting on clean clothes and waited but the foolish went on about their work. When the date was announced the foolish were unprepared and were left out of the festivities. The period from which this parable comes is uncertain, but 80 A.D. is most probable. The parable could not, therefore, have provided a background for Jesus' words. Yet the fact that a man's preparedness depends upon what garment he wears is an allegorical image common to both parables. It is found also to the Old Testament. In Isaiah 61:10, the garment refers to salvation, "he has clothed me with the garment of salvation". Throughout apocalyptic writings there are allusions to 'eschatological' clothing as white garments (see Rev. 4:4).

THE MUSTARD SEED

Jeremias, T.W. Manson and Dodd each point out the Old Testament background for the parable of the Mustard Seed. Jeremias argues that the parable provides one sure instance of Jesus' direct use of the Old Testament. Mark and the Gospel of Thomas reflect a free translation of Dan. 4:9 and Ezek. 17:23 in the words 'large brances and shelter for birds'. Only Matthew and Luke refer to a mustard tree. Jeremias

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56. Jeremias, Op. Cit., p. 188.

suggests that this comes from Dan. 4:17 and is a detail supplied by the writer.[57]

Manson points to the Ethiopic Enoch 90:30, 33, 37 and the Midrash on Ps. 104:12, to show that birds symbolize the Gentiles seeking refuge with Israel.[58]

Dodd's exegesis of the parable provides an excellent example of how an allegorical image suggests the application of a parable.

> The emphasis on the smallness of the seed is in Mark alone, and is probably intrusive. If we neglect it, then the main point of the parable is not the contrast between the small beginnings and great results. In both forms the prevailing idea is of growth up to a point at which the tree can shelter the birds. There is a clear reference to O.T. passages (Dan. 4:12; Ezek. 31:6, 17:23), where a tree sheltering the birds is a symbol for a great empire offering political protection to its subject-states. Since this element belongs to the earliest tradition to which we can hope to have access ... we shall do well to assume that it is a clue to the application originally intended ... that the time has come when the blessings of the Reign of God are available to all men ... The Kingdom of God is here: the birds are flocking to find shelter in the shade of the tree.[59]

We have discussed six parables that in all contain ten images. We have seen how each image has in
We have seen how each image has influenced the meaning of the parable; understanding the image is indispensable to a clear understanding of the

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57. Ibid., p. 147.

58. T.W. Manson, The Teaching of Jesus, (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), p. 133.

59. Dodd, op. cit., p. 142.

parable; in each case the Old Testament is the background that provides the stock meaning for the image; the audience could have been aware of and recognized the image without external clues. According to our definition these are allegorical images in the parables of Jesus, and because they are there, we must take the Old Testament into serious account when attemtping to interpret the parables.

But this is only one way in which the details in the parables were understood by Jesus' audience. We turn now to some discussion of what we have called "impregnated figures".

PART B

Impregnated Figures

THE RAVEN

The figure of the raven in Luke 12:24 is most intriguing when seen in the light of certain Old Testament background. An awareness of this background is not necessary to an understanding of the parable. Indeed we must note that in Matthew the figure is missing altogether. In Matthew 6:26 the parable is about the fowls of the air - TIETEIVA - and not about ravens - KOPDKES. It is possible that the author of Luke changed the word because he was himself aware that he would then be using an impregnated figure. It is also possible that in Matthew's gospel the word became simply 'fowls' because the evangelist was not aware of the special picture the figure of the raven would draw. Whether Luke is original in this respect or not, the fact remains that if we recognize the Old Testament background for the figure he uses, the parable is greatly enhanced.

According to Leviticus 11:13, 15, the raven was an unclean bird. "And these you shall have in abomination among the birds ... every raven according to its kind". Certainly a people so scrupulous about laws of cleanliness would have known this fact. The temple was believed to be defiled if ravens sat upon its roof; this indicates that the law was known and taken seriously. The audience may have remembered also that in at least two instances, Job 38:41 and Psalms 14:19, this unclean bird was singled out as the object of God's love and care. They may also have remembered that in 1 Kings 17:4-6 the raven was believed to have carried

out a particular mission for God in providing food for Elijah. It may not be coincidental that Jesus asked the disciples, in the light of their anxiety, to "consider the ravens of the field ... God feeds them". Even if it was, his audience would very likely remember the associations of the figures.

THE KISS

The parable of the Prodigal Son, to which we will refer later under another topic, contains one item that may well be an impregnated figure. There are at least four cases in the Old Testament in which a kiss is the sign of forgiveness and/or acceptance. In Genesis 29:13 Laban kisses Jacob and accepts him - a total stranger - because he had helped his daughters. In Genesis 33:4 Esau embraces and kisses his brother Jacob to show Jacob that he had not enmity for him. In Genesis 45:15 Joseph shows his forgiveness for his brothers by kissing them. In II Samuel 14:13 David demonstrates his forgiveness and acceptance of Absolom by kissing him.

Ordinarily the kiss is an act of affection or, as is often the case in the Old Testament, of reverence for a superior (Ps. 2:12). It is enough for us to understand the act of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son as an expression of love, but if we understand that kiss in the light of this further Old Testament background the Father's love takes on a new and more significatn nature.

We will seek to demonstrate that there are other affinities between the parable of the Prodigal Son and the story of David and Absolom later. Suffice it to say now that probably when Jesus told this parable his audience

was reminded of II Samuel 19. If this contention is correct then the kiss is an impregnated figure.

We should note in passing, also, that Paul in I Corinthians 16:20, II Corinthians 13:12, and I Thessalonians 3:26 and the author of I Peter 5:14 mention a practice which must have been fairly widespread in the early Church, that of greeting one another with a kiss. Because of its background the kiss had acquired a richness and significance which would have been remembered when Jesus told of the father's reception of his wayward boy.

THE RING AND SHOES

In Genesis 41:42 we read of Pharoah's display of gratitude to Joseph who interpreted his dreams and told the King how to prepare Egypt for the coming famine. Pharoah issued three orders to be carried out concerning Joseph. He was to be given a robe, a ring, and shoes. All three items are tokens of distinction; they signify promotion or reinstatement. As we have already discussed above, the robe or garment is an allegorical image indicative of the New Age. The giving of a ring, according to I Macabees 6:15, indicates the bestowal of authority. "He gave him the crown and robe and the signet, that he might guide Antiochus his son and bring him up to be King".[60] Shoes, Jeremias points out, were worn by free men and not by slaves or prisoners. The figures of the ring and the shoes, therefore, are impregnated figures.

The fact that the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son issued precisely the same order with respect to the returned Prodigal as did Pharoah concerning Joseph must be significant. In Luke 15:22 we read

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60. Jeremias, op. cit., p. 130.

"Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him: and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet".

Besides providing us with another illustration of allegorical imagery (the robe or garment), this parable contains two further instances of Jesus' use of impregnated figures of which previous use in the Old Testament had already established some particular content.

LEAVEN

In both the Old and New Testament Leaven is used in association with the idea of evil. Jesus used it in this way Himself when he cautioned the disciples to "beware of the Leaven of the Pharisees" (Matt. 16:6, 11, MK. 8:15 and Lk. 12:1). Paul, in I Cor. 5:6-7 and Gal. 5:9, also used the figure to illustrate the contrast between the old and the new nature, between what was evil and what was good. In Exodus and Leviticus, several instances occur in which Leaven is strictly forbidden in burnt offerings (Exod. 12:15-19, 13:7 and Lev. 2:11, 6:17, 10:12).

Because of this association, leaven was an impregnated figure. When Jesus used it in the parable in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:21, therefore, he told a most startling parable. The impregnated figure makes the parable unforgettable. We should note that this is not the only instance in which Jesus used illustrations of a most unexpected nature to attract people's attention to the real point of His teaching (see also the parable of the Unjust Steward).

SALT

It is possible that the figure of salt may have been an

impregnated figure for Jesus' audience.

In Leviticus 2:13 it is recorded that "You shall season all your cereal offerings with salt; you shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be lacking from your cereal offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt". Numbers 18:19 also speak of a "Covenant of Salt" between God and His people. The practice of sealing a covenant with another man was carried out by sharing a meal with him - by sharing a man's salt. Salt was, therefore, linked to the idea of a covenant relationship between two parties.

In the parable of the Savourless Salt (Matthew 5:13, Mark 9:50 and Luke 19:34) one did not need to know this background to understand what Jesus was trying to teach about the citizen of the Kingdom. But if the background was known the parable was given another dimension. The audience would have reflected, not only upon the everyday truth that salt flavours and preserves, but upon the idea of fellowship and covenant relationship suggested by the impregnated figure.

We may very well be dealing with an example in which an impregnated figure has become an allegorical image. If this is the case, then Jesus' parable would mean - "You are the sign of the New Covenant for all the World to see".

PART C

Synonymous Plots

Matthew Black has drawn attention to another way in which the Old Testament provides background for the parables of Jesus, and consequently one further way in which the audience would have understood the details in the parables. Though he does not use the term, he suggests that because the parable of the Good Samaritan shares a "synonymous plot" with II Chronicles 28:5f, the audience would have been reminded of the historical incident and would have applied the parable in its light. He believes that Jesus must have intended this to happen.[61]

We believe also that the parable of the Prodigal Son shares a synonymous plot with at least two Old Testament incidents which give a clue to the way in which Jesus intended the parabfle to be applied. But first let us look at the parable of the Good Samaritan and the suggested Old Testament parallel.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

In its present context the parable is told to a lawyer who asked the question, "who is my neighbour". If we accept this setting, then Jesus is simply being sarcastic with the lawyer by introducing the Samaritan in contrast to the priest and the Levite. Black rejects the

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61. Black, op. cit., p. 285

setting. Instead, he suggests that the parable belongs in the context of Luke 4:27 where Jesus is speaking about love for one's enemies. The Samaritan who helped an enemy Jew stands in sharp contrast to the priest and the Levite who did not help even their own kinsman.

In the Old Testament incident by which Black is being influenced, the characters are also Israelites, Judeans and Samaritans. The Israelites defeated and captured Ahaz, King of Judah, and carried the spoils and captives to Samaria. The Ephraimites would not allow the Israelites to bring the captives into Samaria and thereby make them guilty as well. So the Israelites left the Judean captives and their spoils; but the men of Ephraim clothed them, anointed them, placed the feeble on asses and took them to their kinsfolk at Jericho.

Black points out that the Samaritans were the descendants of the Ephraimites. This passage of historical narrative would not be the most popular in Jewish synogogues, but when Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan it is most probable that he was thinking of II Chronicles 28:5f and that the audience remembered it as well. The characters and situations are too similar to be coincidental. The Samaritan carried out the same merciful actions as the Ephraimites; he clothed the injured man, anointed him and transported him on an ass. The victim in both cases came from Jerusalem and the city of Jericho figures in both the history and the parable.

The parable and the historical narrative share a synonymous plot. The audience needed no prompting for some of them at least to recognize and make the connection between Jesus' words and II Chronicles 28:5f. Jesus

must have known that they would do so, for if he had not wanted them to, then he would have chosen a 'neutral' plot. It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that Jesus wanted the audience to understand and apply the parable in the light provided by the Old Testament background.

The implication of the background is more significant then Black allows. In the setting which he suggests, the parable is an exhortation to love one's enemies, even Samaritans. But does this not belong, rahter, in the setting of Jesus' defence of His ministry to publicans, sinners and Gentiles?[62] The passage in II Chronicles must have been an embarrassment to every Jew in the light of Jewish-Samaritan relations because they were in debt to the Samaritans for their very existence. The parable does not say merely "love your enemies"; it says that you are neighbour to those whom you fancy are your enemies. As neighbour you can provide them with what they need. Jesus could not make a more fitting accusation of failure in their God-given responsibility as a chosen people.

THE PRODIGAL SON

The parable of the Prodigal Son also shares a synonymous plot

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62. Mark 12:28f and Luke 10:25-28 very likely refer to the same incident. A lawyer came to Jesus and asked about eternal life and the law. Jesus' answer in both cases is a quotation of the first and second commandments ending with "Love your neighbour as yourself". Only Luke proceeds with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable (if it belonged in this setting at all) would be more appropriate in Mark where the original question was not about eternal life but about order of priority in the law.

with at least two stories or situations in the Old Testament - the David-Absalom-Joab story and the Jonah tract. Let us look first at the parable and the story of David, Absalom and Joab in II Samuel 19.

To see the possible connection between the parable and the story in the Old Testament it is necessary to sketch some of the background. Absalom had killed his half brother Ammon for the rape of Tamar and then fled, fearing David's anger. Later he led a rebellion against David, but David forgave him and mourned over his death. Joab was made bitter by David's show of grief over an unfaithful son.

When we set this story beside the parable of the Prodigal Son some striking parallels appear. In both cases, the estrangement between the father and son was one-sided; the son returned in humility but the father received him with a kiss; Joab and the elder brother were jealous and the father could see no reason for jealousy. Joab accused David of playing favourites: "You love those who hate you and hate those who ove you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you; for today I perceive that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased" (II Sam. 19:5-6). How very like the surly elder brother: "You know how I have slaved for you all these years; I never once disobeyed your orders; and you never gave me so much as a kid, for a feast with my friends" (Luke 15:29).

The history of David was well known to every Jew. When Jesus told the story of the Prodigal Son it is quite conceivable that both He and His audience had David, Absalom and Joab in mind. If this is the case, then the parable should be understood as one told in the conflict

of Jesus' ministry with the established ministries. The point of the parable is what we suggested earlier with respect to the Lost Sheep that the Jewish leaders and people had failed in their ministry to the world and that God continues to act not like Joab or the elder brother but like David or the waiting father.

We suggested also that the parable may share a synonymous plot with the incident surrounding the Jonah tract. Again this is necessary to sketch some background.

The background is best understood if we begin by recalling the Ezra-Nehemiah reforms and the attitude reflected in these reforms to non-Israelites. Ezra 9:1-3 tells of a report brought to Ezra to the effect that the Israelites had intermarried with other races so that the "holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands" (vs. 2). Ezra's reaction is told in vs. 3: "When I heard this, I rent my garments and my mantle, and pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat appalled". The result was that he issued an order that all Israelites had to separate themselves from their foreign wives (Ezra 10:11).

The narrow religious nationalism of the Jews after the exile is further displayed in the book of Nahum. This book is an ode to the fall of Nineveh that ends with great rejoicing over the destruction of the Assyrians.

The Jonah tract is best appreciated against the background of this nationalistic spirit of exclusivism. The spirit of the book of Jonah stands in sharp contrast to the spirit of Nahum or Ezra, showing the difference between the universal love of God and the provincialism

of the Jewish people. Jonah the prophet is resentful that God should express a concern for Ninevites. He is glad when he learns that the message to Ninevah is one of doom but sulks when the Ninevites repent and are fogiven by God. God tries to teach him, with the object lesson of the gourd, that it is very natural for him to want to love and save those whom Jonah despises.

Compare this now the the plot in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The fact that the father should love and welcome home the prodigal is cause for jealousy and resentment in the elder brother - he has been the true son and does not want to share his father's love with one like his brother. The exchange of words between Jonah and God, on the one hand, and the elder brother and his father, on the other, are quite similar. God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry ... You pity the plant, for which you did not labour ... And should not I pity Ninevah, that great city, in which there are a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left ...?" (Jonah 3:9-11). The father said to the elder brother, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:31-32).

This Old Testament background in the form of a synonymous plot underscores even more clearly what must be the point of the parable. Jesus is trying to convince the Jews that they like Jonah and the elder brother, do not understand the love of God nor their mission of responsibility to the world. They have been trying jealously to hoard the grace of God which

is for all men - be they rebellious Absaloms, wicked Ninevites or prodigal sons. There are three ways, therefore, in which Jesus' audience probably understood the details in the parables: as allegorical imagery, as impregnated figures, and as synonymous plots. In each instance it was the acquaintance with the Old Testament on the part of the hearers that ensured that the image, the figure or the plot was recognized. Though we cannot very often point to an experience in the life of Jesus' audience that supplied background to enlighten the parables, the Old Testament did provide a way in which the parabfles touched down, as it were, in the life of a first century Jewish audience.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the enquiries pursued in this thesis we may conclude that definite links exist between the parables of Jesus and Jewish religious literature. We have defined the areas of dependence by use of the terms, allegorical imagery, impregnated figures, and synonymous plots.

This dependence is an illustration of one way in which the parables were grounded in the experiences of first century Jewish audiences. Sometimes we may suspect that an actual event, well known to Jesus and His hearers, provided the basis for a parable. Much more frequently and with a much greater degree of certainty we may perceive allusions to the Jewish religious literature which would strike a chord in the minds of the hearers.

We may also conclude that a proper understanding of the parables of Jesus depends upon a recognition of this possibility, especially as it relates to what we have called allegorical imagery. For Jesus' audience this recognition was automatically forthcoming; for us it will be the result of careful study of the Old Testament.

Finally, we may conclude that many of the figures and plots will come to life for us, as it were, only if we are so familiar with the Old Testament that the mere mention in a parable of a certain object or circumstance recalls to our mind previous uses of the same in an Old Testament context. The 'colour' and 'sharpness' that a knowledge of the Old Testament adds in this way to the parables of Jesus is reward enough for a careful study of its contents.

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