

Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels

I. Introduction

Thus far in our study of biblical interpretation, we have encountered three different genres or forms of literature, all of which require different hermeneutical approaches. The epistles of Paul consist of exposition and exhortation. The *Psalms*, prophetic books, and wisdom literature—*Proverbs*, *Job*, *Ecclesiastes*, etc.—consist of poetry. Some of the prophetic literature contains historical narrative which would be interpreted quite differently from the major poetry sections of the prophets. The Synoptic Gospels are more diverse than any of the literature we have treated thus far. They contain not only historical narrative—and not necessarily in chronological order—but also the exposition/exhortation of the Law (e.g. Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ instructions to His disciples in Matt. 10), poetry (the author’s and Jesus’ frequent quotations from the Old Testament, including the prophets), and parable. Because parables take up such a major portion of the Synoptic Gospels, and because their interpretation can be difficult, we will treat them first.

II. Interpreting Parables

In our study of parables, we will be following Bernard Ramm (*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 276-287) and Milton S. Terry (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 276-301), with additional analysis from Knox Chamblin (*Matthew*, unpublished class syllabus, pp. 95-96). We will also be drawing from various NT commentaries on *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*.

A. Components of Parables

1. Similes and Metaphors

A *simile* is a comparison using the word “like” or “as”. Generally the comparison made deals with a *similarity* between two ideas. Jesus makes much use of similes when speaking about the kingdom of God. We often encounter His words, “The kingdom of God [or heaven] is *like*...” Notice that He does not make an equation of the kingdom of God with the thing compared to it. He does not say, “The kingdom of God *is*...” but “the kingdom of God is *like*...” (See Matt. 13: 24, 31, 44, 45, 47; 20: 1; 22: 2; 25: 1; Mk. 4: 26, 31; Lk. 13: 18, 20.)

A *metaphor* is also a comparison but it is not introduced as a comparison; that is, it does not use the words “like” or “as”. Furthermore, there is an intertwining of the subject with the thing with which it is compared. For example, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life,” and “you are the light of the world.” The subject and the thing it is compared with are considered as one but the words are not to be taken literally. Jesus is not literal bread and Christians are not literally light. One main point is stressed by the comparison. In the first metaphor mentioned, Jesus presents himself as the sustenance of our spiritual lives and Christians are characteristically the models of how life should be lived (Virkler, p. 158-159).

2. Allegories

Allegories are *extended metaphors* in which the comparison between the subject and the thing compared to it is not explicitly expressed (there is no “like” or “as”). Furthermore, the subject

and the thing compared to it are intermingled together within the allegory, and “the story and its application are intermingled [mixed] and proceed together (Virkler, pp. 159-160).

Ecclesiastes 12:3-7 is an allegory about the deterioration of the body during old age (See Tremper Longman III, who presents other alternatives but still opts for the allegorical approach; *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 268-273. See also Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 306-309; Charles Bridges, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 283-298, and Franz Delitzsch, pp. 405-428). As we would expect from the context of *Ecclesiastes*, it is about old age bereft (deprived) of a vital relationship to God—something Qohelet certainly did not have (cf. my class notes on *Eccelesiastes*). It is not, as Milton Terry says, “a good old age” which is described in Prov. 16: 31 and Ps. 92: 12-14, but a sorrowful and tragic old age which suffers the ultimate consequences of a life lived without the knowledge and worship of God. It is the old age of a “sensualist”, one who lived his life for pleasure but now is too old to enjoy such pleasure (Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 306-307).

Many metaphors appear in these few short verses which form an extended metaphor or allegory. The light of the sun, moon, and stars may be understood generally as the *light of life* which recedes gradually behind the *dark “clouds” of old age* (v. 2; cf. 11: 7 which speaks of light being “pleasant” or “sweet”). The “watchman [or keepers] of the house tremble” (v. 3) is a phrase which refers to the hands and the arms which in more youthful days served as the defenders of his house. In old age, they tremble and are helpless to keep out intruders. The “mighty [strong] men” which “stoop” refer to the legs which lose their muscular strength and elasticity in old age and become bowed and crooked. The “grinding ones” are the teeth which fall out in making it difficult for old people to eat. Thus, they “stand idle” as the aged person eats less and loses weight because he can no longer eat some of the food he enjoys. “Those who look through windows grow dim” is a reference to dwindling eyesight, and the “doors on the street” are the ears which can no longer hear the normal sounds of everyday life (like the grinding mill), but are often alarmed at the sharp, shrill sound of a bird (v. 4). The phrase, “the daughters of song will sing softly” is most likely a reference to all the organs of sound including the lungs and voice used in singing. These are now weak and unable to make the joyful noises which they once made. When a person gets old, even his voice is affected, and he can’t sing as well as he once did (Bridges, pp. 290-291).

In v. 5, the Qohelet (the preacher) makes note of the extreme difficulty of any kind of movement in old age. When a man is young, he can run up stairs or hills with the slightest of ease, but now in old age climbing stairs and slight embankments must be done with great care for fear of falling. Even the simplest obstacles in his path are cause for alarm (v. 5a—“afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road”; Bridges, p. 291). “The almond tree blossoms” refer to the white hair which is falling out, and the grasshopper which “drags himself along” is a metaphor for the old man who has “lost the spring in his step” and gets around only with great difficulty. Qohelet really gets personal when he mentions the ineffectiveness of the caperberry, widely used as an aphrodisiac, a drug which increases one’s sexual desire. But the old man gets no help from it and no longer has any interest in sex (Longman, p. 272).

The end of his life is near at hand, “For man goes to his eternal home....” When he dies, professional mourners (according to Jewish custom—Bridges, p. 292) “go about in the street” to make an insincere, public display of grief for an old man they don’t even know or care about—a cultural practice which adds to the tragedy of the moment. The “silver cord and the golden bowl” may refer to a golden lamp suspended by a silver cord as a chandelier in a palatial hallway (Terry, p. 309). The

silver cord breaks; the lamp falls and is dashed to pieces, quite likely a metaphorical reference to the light of a man's life being extinguished. The "pitcher by the well" and the "wheel at the cistern" refer to the elaborate machinery which some wealthy people possessed for drawing water (Terry, p. 309). These are now all shattered, so that the old, dying man has neither *light nor water*, both symbols of life (Longman, p. 273). Eventually his body will return to the dust from which it came and his spirit will return to God. This is a reference to man's creation in *Genesis* and his accountability before God but not a reference to heaven. Qohelet has already given too much evidence of his skepticism of the afterlife to now credit him with a belief in heaven. As Longman observes, "This is not an optimistic allusion to some kind of consciousness after death, but simply a return to a prelife situation. God temporarily united body and spirit, and now the process is undone. We have in this verse no affirmation of immortality. According to Qohelet, death is the end" (p. 273).

It should also be said that we are not using the illegitimate hermeneutical principle of *allegorizing* to interpret the above passage. The allegory above is made *by the writer of Scripture himself* and is plain to see within the passage. We may also observe many allegories in the parables of Jesus, the parable of the sower being one notable example in which Jesus identifies each metaphor within the allegory (Matt. 13: 1-23). However, we would not search for allegories in every passage of Scripture. Were we to do so, we would come up with all sorts of fanciful interpretations which actually obscure (hide) the true, grammatical-historical meaning of the texts.

B. The Derivation of the Word, "Parable"

The word "parable" literally means to "place along side of" for the purpose of comparison. Studies as far back as 35 years ago have shown that the word can also mean " 'a saying by the wayside, a proverb, a maxim'" (Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 276). A parable is a metaphor or simile (see above) taken from common, ordinary events of life. There is enough strangeness or interesting material about the parable to stimulate the attention of the hearer and enough information left out to leave the hearer in some doubt about its specific application to life. It is not a fable, myth, or legend which is taken from popular folklore—that is, it is not some fanciful story which is unbelievable. Although Jesus uses an element of the supernatural in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, most parables, as I indicated above, use ordinary events from everyday life to accomplish their purpose.

C. The Importance of the Parables

Parables represent a major section of the teaching in the gospels which makes their proper interpretation very important for the student of the Bible. Furthermore, their content is didactic (instructional) and includes teaching about "the progress of the gospel in the world, the results of its propagation [its spread], about the end of the age, the dealings of God with the Jewish people and the Gentiles, and the nature of the kingdom of God. Any doctrine of the kingdom or eschatology [future things] which ignores a careful study of the parables cannot be adequate (Ramm, p. 277). Ramm indicates that parables teach the Christian "not to be depressed at the apparent failure of the gospel or the corruption of the gospel; others tell him not to be ambitious beyond which the gospel promises; and still others tell him not to be discouraged because the success of God is secure" (p. 278).

D. The Purpose of the Parables

The purpose of parables is given by Christ in Matt. 13: 11-17; Mk. 4: 10-12; and Lk. 8: 8-10. ***First, Christ uses parables to instruct the responsive disciple, the one who listens well with the purpose of learning and obeying, the one who has “ears to hear”*** (Ramm, pp. 277-278). According to Lk. 8: 10, knowledge of God and His kingdom is a gift which is bestowed upon some by grace and withheld from others because of their persistent unwillingness to hear. Christ did not begin His ministry by teaching in parables. The Sermon on the Mount was not in parables, but straight-forward ethical teaching. He begins to teach in parables because of the unwillingness of the multitudes to hear the straight-forward truth. Chamblin draws attention to the distinction between the audience, the condition of the audience, and Jesus’ response to the audience.

There is, first of all, a distinction between the “crowds” and the “disciples” (cf. Matt. 13: 2, 10). Secondly, the disciples are in a favored condition in comparison to the crowds because they have responded favorably to what they have heard so far, resulting in a firm commitment to Jesus as their master. Not so with the crowds who have listened to His teaching with much resistance.

Thirdly, Jesus responds to the disciples and to the multitudes differently ***on the basis of their response to Him***. “For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.” The disciples have responded favorably to His teaching, and now they will be given more. For them, the parables will serve to illustrate and deepen the truth they have already believed. They not only hear the parables but also the explanation of the parables (Matt. 13: 18-23; 13: 36-43). On the other hand, parables only obscure or hide the truth from the crowds who have resisted the plain-spoken truth of Christ earlier. What they may have had will now be taken away as a means of judgment (*Matthew*, unpublished class syllabus, p. 97).

The second purpose of parables, then, was to hide the truth from those who were unresponsive to what they had already heard. The parables, in part, are a judgment for unbelief consisting of the judicial hardening of men’s hearts much the same as God hardened Pharaoh’s heart following his stubbornness in refusing the nation of Israel to go free (See Ex. 7: 3; 8: 15, 19, 32; and 9:12). The reader will notice from these passages that Pharaoh hardened his own heart before God hardened it. Thus, the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart by God came as a judicial judgment upon Pharaoh. However, this does not remove the difficulty of the passage since it had always been God’s plan to harden Pharaoh’s heart in order that the power of God on behalf of Israel might be known throughout the world (Ex. 7: 3; 9: 15-16 with Rom. 8: 17-18; see also Prov. 29: 1). Once again we are faced with the difficulty of the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.

In Matthew, Christ quotes Isaiah 6: 9-10 which is directed toward unbelieving Israel before their defeat by the Babylonians. Just as Pharaoh had hardened his heart, Israel had hardened their own hearts against the continuing messages and warnings of the prophets (See Isaiah 5: 1-7; Jer. 7: 12-15, 25-34; 13: 8-14; 29: 19, 20; 35: 16, 17). Christ now faces the same opposition and hardness of heart. He quotes Isa. 6 not from the Hebrew but from the Greek translation of the OT called the Septuagint (LXX) (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p.556-557). It is worthy of note that the passage in Matthew emphasizes the responsibility of the people in hardening their own hearts while the passage in Isaiah emphasizes the sovereignty of God in hardening their hearts. In this there is no contradiction. It is

precisely because the people have hardened their own hearts to the truth that God will continue to harden them. God is simply giving them what they wanted from Him—nothing. By understanding this, we can understand Jesus’ statement in 13: 12, “For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.” In other words, those who have already received Christ’ teaching, repented, believed, and begun to obey, will receive more and more understanding. But those who continue to hear Him and refuse to accept His teaching, even the understanding they have will be taken away from them. Their light will be turned into darkness. The judicial hardening which we find in Matthew is the fulfillment of the prediction of the hardening in Isaiah which became a “terrible reality” during Jesus’ ministry (See Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp.554-556, including footnotes.)

For many months, Jesus had been preaching about the kingdom of God and the righteousness of His kingdom, but for the most part, the people had continued in persistent unbelief. So the question is, if they refused to receive His plain teaching, what use was it to give them any more? Christ was simply practicing what He had preached in the Sermon on the Mount, not to throw what was holy to dogs and swine [unbelievers who are entrenched in unbelief] lest they simply trample it under their feet (Matt. 7:6). Consequently, He begins to teach the multitudes only in parables, partly as a judgment against them and partly as a special measure of His common grace to all sinners so as not to increase the guilt of their unbelief and their punishment in hell (Lk. 12: 47-48). The true disciples of Jesus, on the other hand, would from time to time receive the additional instruction which came through Christ’s interpretation of the parables.

E. The Elements of a Parable

A parable consists of four parts (Ramm, pp. 278-279).

1. Earthly element. Parables are about “farming, marriages, kings, feasts, household relationships, business arrangements, or customs of the peoples.” Every parable paints some kind of familiar visual picture in the minds of the audience, which makes them particularly effective for instructional purposes. (e.g. a garden seed)

2. Spiritual element. The spiritual counterpart to the earthly element. (e.g. seed —————> gospel)

3. Analogical element. There is always a relationship between the earthly element and the spiritual element. This analogical relationship gives the parable the ability to illustrate and to argue a certain theological position. (e.g. the seed is thrown on good soil —————> the gospel is believed in the heart)

4. Interpretive element. Every parable has two levels of meaning which requires its interpretation. The different earthly elements of the parable (the people, actions, etc.) must be identified if the parable is to make sense. Much care must be taken in this identification to avoid “allegorizing” the parable. When a parable is allegorized, it is made to mean far more than it was ever intended to mean. However, it must be admitted that ***all parables have an allegorical element or they would not be parables. It must also be admitted that sometimes many parts of the parable represent significant elements of the story.*** For example, in Jesus’ parable of the sower (Matt. 13: 3-9), there are several key elements in the story which involve allegory. The seed is the “word of the kingdom”; the “evil one” represents the birds who snatch away the word; the rocky soil represents those who

receive the word at first but quickly fall away in unbelief when affliction or persecution comes; the soil with thorns represents those hear the word but become unfruitful because their lives become entangled in worldly living and the deceitfulness of riches; the good soil represents true believers who receive the word and persevere in it, producing various degrees of Christian fruit (Matt. 13: 18-23).

F. Limitations of allegorical elements in parables

The question arises: How far may the interpreter go in discerning the meaning of each separate element in the parable? For example, in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25: 1-13), who are the ten virgins and where is the bride? Should we see some significance in the fact that they all went to sleep or that there were ten? No answers to these questions are forthcoming from the text, and the meaning of the parable may be sacrificed if we try to force answers to these questions. At the same time, there may well be some significance in the oil which may represent the Holy Spirit and the fact that the oil may not be transferred from one person to the next—the sovereign working of the Holy Spirit in the individual heart. Considerations of this sort—which are reasonably drawn from other clear texts—actually enhance the meaning of the parable rather than obscuring it.

In the parable of the tares and the wheat (Matt. 13: 24-30; explained in 13: 36-43), Jesus gives no special significance to the men who were sleeping, the yielding of fruit, the landowner's slaves or their questions. These elements are only incidental (minor) to the overall story. We may observe closely how Jesus interprets this parable and the parable of the sower to determine how we should go about the interpretation of all the parables (Terry, p. 284). Nevertheless, as Terry suggests, there are other lessons which Jesus does not mention which are worthy of note. The seeds which have no sufficient root in the first parable (13: 21) and those which are in danger of being rooted up with the tares in the second parable (13: 29) may offer important insights to the interpreter. Chamblin notes that the parable of the wheat and the tares “makes a prohibition against rigorism in church discipline....(J. Knox Chamblin, quoting Gundry, *Matthew*, unpublished syllabus, p. 100). Even though many in the church may show little proof of regenerating grace, unless they are guilty of serious, unrepented offense, they should not be disciplined out of the church (Matt. 18: 15-20).

Determining which elements have significance, and which do not, will not always be easy, and even an experienced interpreter like Terry admits the difficulty (p. 286).

No specific rules can be formed that will apply to every case, and show what parts of a parable are designed to be significant, and what parts are mere drapery and form [that is, those which merely fill out the story]. Sound sense and delicate discrimination are to be cultivated and matured by a protracted [long] study of all the parables, and by careful collation [gathering together] and comparison. Our Lord's examples of interpretation show that most of the details of his parables have a meaning; and yet there are incidental words and allusions which are not to be pressed into significance. We should, therefore, study to avoid, on the one side, the extreme of ingenuity [cleverness] which searches for hidden meanings in every word, and, on the other, the disposition to pass over many details as mere rhetorical figures. In general it may be said that most of the details in a parable have a meaning, and those which have no special significance in the interpretation, serve, nevertheless, to enhance the force and beauty of the rest....We may also add, with Trench, that “it is tolerable evidence that we have found the right interpretation of a parable if it leave none of the main circumstances unexplained.

Knox Chamblin cautions the interpreter not to force Jesus into a rigid parabolic method to the

exclusion of allegories when it is evident that he used allegories extensively in his parables.

While it is helpful to distinguish “parable” from “allegory,” we must be careful not to separate them as though a speaker or writer (especially one so free, creative and subtle as Jesus) is prohibited from interlacing them in his teaching. What we find, in fact, is that Jesus uses allegorical features as expressions of his pedagogical [teaching] artistry and within the framework and under the control of his chosen parabolic medium (*Matthew*, p. 96, an unpublished class syllabus).

[The following is a further analysis of the “interlacing” of parable and allegory found in Jesus’ parables adapted from Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished class notes, pp. 95-96. Additional comments are provided for illustration.]

A parable is an extended simile in which the word “like” is used. “The kingdom of heaven is *like* a mustard seed” or “The kingdom of heaven may be *compared to* a man who sowed good seed in his field.” The noun, *parabole*, is composed of the preposition *para* (“beside, alongside”) and *bole* (“to cast or throw”). Thus, in order to illustrate spiritual truth, Jesus cast along side of it tangible pictures to provide concrete explanations. These pictures provide “hooks” on which the spiritual meaning can be “hung” or understood. The allegory, on the other hand, is an extended metaphor which does not use the words “like” or “compared to”. The word *allegoreo* contains the prefix *allo* (“other”) and the base *agoreuo* (“to speak”) implying that when one speaks in an allegory he actually implies something “other” than what is said on the surface. Thus, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life”, a metaphor which implies that Jesus sustains one’s spiritual life, not that he is a loaf of bread. In Gal. 4, Paul treats the story of Sarah and Hagar allegorically, using Sarah as the representative of the New Covenant and Hagar as representative of the Old Covenant. The meaning of Sarah and Hagar is, therefore, hidden beneath the surface of the language.

In the *allegory*, each detail has meaning and importance for the interpretation. For example, in the allegory of old age in Ecc. 12, “the watchman of the house” which “tremble” are the old man’s arms which were once strong defenders of the house but which are no longer any use in defending himself. The “mighty men stoop” is a reference to his legs which are bent from age and the “grinding ones” which “stand idle” are his teeth which are no longer effective in chewing his food. *Each word* of this allegory has a *separate meaning* which must be determined for the complete interpretation of the allegory—the need to worship and serve God in one’s youth rather than waiting until old age when the body has deteriorated. On the other hand, *in a parable the details serve to fill out the story and make it as realistic as possible without requiring an independent hidden meaning for each detail.*

The “merchant seeking fine pearls” (Matt. 13: 45) is an ordinary activity during Jesus’ day. The merchant is no one in particular; he is anyone who truly understands the value of the kingdom. The merchant finds a priceless pearl and is willing to part with everything else to get it. In the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13: 33), the leaven is the kingdom of heaven which spreads imperceptibly (invisibly) but thoroughly throughout the world. There is no separate significance to the three pecks of meal or the woman. We should not allegorize the parable by saying that the three pecks of meal stand for the three persons of the Trinity or that the woman represents the church.

Nevertheless, we must recognize the allegorical elements in Jesus’ parables. In the parable of the sower, several elements in the parable are identified. The seed is the gospel or the words of the kingdom; the different soils represent people who have different responses to the gospel, the thorns

represent the deceitfulness of riches, etc. Thus, in all parables there are *earthly elements* which must be interpreted allegorically to attain the *spiritual element* and the *analogy* between the earthly and the spiritual. Yet, the allegorical elements *do not stand alone by themselves* as they can in an allegory, but contribute to the central meaning of the parable. This is clear from the parable of the sower and the parable of the wheat and the tares in which there are many allegorical elements which exist in a *dependent relationship* to the main story and the central thrust.

If this appears complicated now, perhaps it will become clearer as we begin interpreting parables. One good rule of thumb is that we “should not make parables walk on all four legs”. While all four legs of a four-legged animal are necessary for its well-being, not all the details of a parable have *equal significance* for its interpretation. Any attempt to make all the details equally important will result in a centipede (with 100 legs) which cannot be interpreted at all!

G. Rules for Interpreting Parables (cf. Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 279-286, from which much of the following discussion is taken.)

1. Parables must be understood in relationship to the doctrines of Christ and the kingdom of God.

Parables are intensely Christological in that they are always about Christ who, in turn, is focused on His kingdom—the way He taught His disciples to pray (Matt. 6: 10). We should never limit the teaching of the parable to a simple moral truth. They teach moral truth, but not truth which exists independently of Christ and the kingdom He has inaugurated (brought into being). When reading the parables we should be asking ourselves the following questions: “How does this parable relate to Christ? Are any of the persons in the parable identified as Christ? Does the parable concern the word or teaching or mission of Christ?” (Ramm, p. 280).

To illustrate this principle, consider the parable found in Luke 14: 15-24. To understand the parable, we need to identify the man who is giving the dinner, the slave, and the people who received the invitation to the dinner. It helps us to know the historical and cultural context of this parable. According to the prevailing Jewish idea, when the Messiah came there would be a huge feast prepared to celebrate His coming. The man in v. 15 is an invited guest in the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees. We learn this from the immediate context of this passage (Lk. 14: 1—Remember, the context can never be ignored even when we are studying special literary devices like parables.) This invited guest, who undoubtedly was a Pharisee himself (since he would not have been invited otherwise), thinks that when this feast is prepared he and all respectable Jews will no doubt be the people invited to attend. In response to his statement, Jesus tells this parable which answers the question: Who will attend the Messianic feast when the Messiah comes? (See Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p.392)

Another little bit of historical-cultural context is also helpful. According to custom, when a big feast was given, the initial invitation was sent out in advance. When the time for the feast drew near, the host would send out a servant to remind those who had accepted the first invitation that the feast was about to begin. The host of the dinner in this parable is God who had invited His people, the Jewish nation, to come to the Messianic feast—the kingdom of God—when the Messiah arrived. Repeatedly in the OT God had sent out His messengers the prophets to prepare Israel to participate in His kingdom, but always they had refused His invitation. The feast, then, should be identified as the

kingdom of God and the promises of this kingdom which the prophets had foretold. The first invitation had gone out, and now the feast was ready. Christ represents the servant who is sent out by the host to remind those who had been given the first invitation that the kingdom promised in the OT is now “at hand” and that they must make haste in entering this kingdom.

One by one they make excuses for not coming to the feast. None of the excuses are adequate and are merely pretenses for their lack of interest in coming. No one buys land without seeing it first, and no one buys oxen without first trying them out. The man who had married had probably already been married for some time. The Jewish people as a whole were truly not interested in the message which Jesus Christ is giving them, particularly the religious elite. The host of the dinner (God) gets justifiably angry with them for their disinterest and sends his servant (Jesus Christ in the flesh) to go out and invite those who would not consider themselves worthy to come to such a lavish feast because of their low standing in life. This is why the host tells his servant to “compel” them to come in; otherwise, they would have felt uncomfortable coming to such a rich man’s house. The “poor and crippled and blind and lame” are, of course, the Gentiles—and possibly other Jews of low status—whom the Pharisees considered to be unworthy “dogs” and social undesirables who would not be worthy of the kingdom of God. Instead, Jesus teaches in this parable that the Gentiles, prostitutes, tax-collectors, and other unworthy individuals, will make it into the kingdom of God instead of the Pharisees because they accepted His invitation of pardon for their sins while the Pharisees rejected it (so also Geldenhuys, pp. 393-394).

We can see, then, that this parable is all about Christ and His kingdom. Through Christ, who is acting as the *subordinate servant*—even the *doulos*, “slave”—God is calling out once again to His people the Jews, but just like in OT times, the Jews are not interested in God’s offer of grace. Nevertheless, the feast will not be wasted. The Gentiles will readily accept the invitation and will come to the feast in great multitudes so that God’s house will “be filled” (v.23). Even on the Day of Pentecost after Jesus’ ascension, thousands of Jews entered the kingdom of God (Acts 2—3).

The kingdom perspective in the parable emphasizes two things about the kingdom of God. First, the kingdom *has already come*; it is “at hand” and can be entered by faith. Secondly, the kingdom *is continuing until the end of the age until the return of Christ*. Third, the kingdom *will come*. Even though the kingdom is already here, it has not come in its full power and completeness (consummation) which is reserved for a future time (See Matt. 25 and the parables of the talents and the virgins). Each of the parables includes one or all three of these perspectives.

2. Determine the cultural setting or context of the parable

The parables are drawn from the real-life experiences of common people living in the land of Palestine. In general, most of the examples and illustrations are drawn from the lives of poor, agricultural peasants; and we will get much help in the interpretation of the parables if we spend time learning the cultural setting employed by the parable. For example, the “measure” in Matt. 13: 33 is about one-fourth of a bushel or eight quarts. Three such measures were 24 quarts or six gallons. Ramm informs us that one tiny speck of leaven was sufficient to make bread to feed 162 people (p. 282). This gives us a better idea of the “penetrating power” of the kingdom of God even in light of its small, insignificant beginnings.

This parable was told in conjunction with the parable of the mustard seed in 13: 31-32. The mustard seed illustrates the *outward* growth of the kingdom of God while the leaven illustrates the *inward* growth of the kingdom (Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 565; also Geldenhuys, *Luke*, pp. 377-378). The mustard seed is one of the smallest agricultural seeds which grows quickly into a tree which reaches ten to fifteen feet. Hendriksen observes that the two parables must be understood as a pair and not separated from one another. "...one might say that it is *because of the invisible principle of eternal life*, by the Holy Spirit planted in the hearts of the citizens of the kingdom and increasingly exerting its influence there, that this kingdom also expands visibly and outwardly, conquering territory upon territory" (Hendriksen, p. 565, emphasis mine).

3. Determine the one central truth of the parable

This is the "golden rule" of the interpretation of parables. The *typical* parable gives us one single point of comparison, not two, three, or four. Notice we are saying one "central" point. Other lessons may be learned (see below) but generally the parable is spoken with one central purpose in mind, usually determined by the context [See (3) below.] Further, note the word "typical". Some parables are far too complex to reduce the meaning to one central point. Nevertheless, I am still willing to be "old fashioned" by holding to this rule. Even extensive parables like the Good Samaritan have one *main* point—in this case, everyone in need is my neighbor, regardless of cultural distinctions (see below). The parable of the sower has one main point—not everyone initially responding to the gospel is genuinely converted, some will fall away eventually, thus proving that they never truly understood it.

If I may be excused for repeating myself, all the details of the parable are important to a parable's effectiveness, but not all the details are equally significant for its interpretation. Think of the less important details of a parable as the accessories of a bicycle. The bicycle cannot operate without the tires and the handle bars, but it can operate effectively without the reflectors and the horn.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan in Lk. 10: 30-37, the main point is found at the end with Christ's own application. The occasion of the parable was the question, "And who is my neighbor?" (v.29) Jesus answers the question with this parable, and at the end He asks this question, "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" The answer to this question, and the application, was beyond dispute: "Go and do the same." In other words, "Go and become a true neighbor to *anyone who needs your help*, not just someone of your own race, religious or social stripe." This is the main point, but the main point is enhanced by the details given. For example, the man beaten beside the road was bypassed by two Jews—a Jewish priest and a Levite (of the tribe of Levi—those who served in the temple but were not priests). The man who came to his rescue was a despised Samaritan. While the two Jews were afraid of getting involved because of fear or for fear of inconveniencing themselves, the Samaritan expended heroic efforts to save the man's life with no consideration of the victim's ethnic or religious background or repayment. The important thing was that the man needed help, not whether he was a Jew, Gentile, or a half-breed Samaritan like himself.

We can see from this parable that the individual details, while important to the whole parable, cannot stand alone as having an importance all by themselves; they merely contribute to the whole. Interpreted in this way, the Jewish priest and the Levite may very well be singled out as representing

the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders and experts in the Mosaic Law, among whom this lawyer was numbered. Knowledge of the law is nothing without obedient application.

In the parable of the Prodigal Son (or the Elder Brother) in Lk. 15, it is clear that Jesus is telling the parable to rebuke the Pharisees and scribes for their hardness of heart and lack of compassion for sinners who repent (See your notes on this parable in Hermeneutics, pp. 19-20). The Pharisees and scribes are represented by the elder brother. If we press the individual details of this parable too much, we would have to conclude that the kingdom of heaven still belongs to them even in their unbelief, for in v. 31 the father says to his eldest son, "...all that is mine is yours." Obviously, this is a conclusion not warranted from the parable. It does not teach that hard-hearted Pharisees like the elder brother will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Although the central purpose of this parable was to rebuke the self-righteousness of the Pharisees, other important truths must not be ignored. It also teaches the true nature of repentance (the prodigal son) and the unrestrained love of the Heavenly Father who is eager to forgive us when we repent. It also teaches us that the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents, and so should we. The same can be said of the parable in Lk. 18: 9-14 which teaches both the condemnation of self-righteousness and the forgiveness which follows from genuine repentance—both of which really constitute one central idea. At the risk of rigidity, I would recommend following Ramm's recommendation to look for the once central truth of the parable (See also Terry, p. 282).

4. Determine whether Jesus provides an interpretation of the parable.

Sometimes He does so for the sake of His immediate disciples. The parable of the sower is interpreted by the Lord in Matt. 13: 18-23. The parable of the tares (weeds) among the wheat is explained in 13: 36-43. We should take note of the fact that in His explanation, Christ makes a one-to-one correspondence of the symbol and the thing symbolized. The one who sows the seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seed refers to the sons of the kingdom and the tares or weeds to the sons of the devil. The one who sowed the weeds is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. All of these details are essential to the parable. However, Christ assigns the parable one primary meaning: at the end of the age, Christ will send His angels to weed out unbelievers from the field to reveal the glory of His people (v.40-43).

Some expositors have interpreted the field in this parable as the church, an interpretation which would lead us to believe that our *definition* of the church should include unbelievers. While it is certainly true that there are unbelievers who are members of the church, this parable does not sanction the notion that unbelievers are part of the church *by definition*. *Ekklesia* (the Greek term for "church") means "called-out ones"—that is, those who are *called out of the world*. Nor does the parable eliminate the responsibility of believers to "weed out" those members who are living in open disobedience to covenantal obligations (See 1 Cor. 5; Matt. 18: 15-20). Jesus does not say that the field is the *church*; He says that the field is the *world*. Nevertheless, the church exist *in* the world. Chamblin's comments lend credibility to the idea that Jesus has the church in view (*Matthew*, unpublished syllabus, p. 99).

The *word* "church" (*ekklesia*) does not appear in the passage; but the *concept* of the church is present, as the community in which the Rule of God is realized during the time between the advents of Christ. Moreover, the church is here represented as a *mixed* company, consisting of true believers ("the sons of the kingdom") and false ("the sons

of the evil one”). It is not enough to think of “the sons of the evil one” as standing in the world, outside (or alongside) the church; for the picture speaks of the sowing of tares *among* the wheat, and the explanation speaks of the angel’s *weeding out of his kingdom* “all who do evil.” (emphasis his).

John Calvin also includes the church within the scope of Jesus’ words, and with his characteristic wit, offers this application (*Harmony of Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. 2, pp. 121-122):

All that he [Christ] intended was to exhort those who believed in him not to lose courage, because they are under the necessity of retaining wicked men among them; and, next, to restrain and moderate the zeal of those who fancy that they are not at liberty to join in the society with any but pure angels.

[For other examples of interpreted parables, see the parable of the dragnet (Matt. 13: 47-48; explained in 13: 50-51), and the parable of the vineyard owner (Mk. 12: 1-9; explained in 12: 10- 12).]

5. Study the context of the parable to determine whether the context provides clues for interpreting the parable.

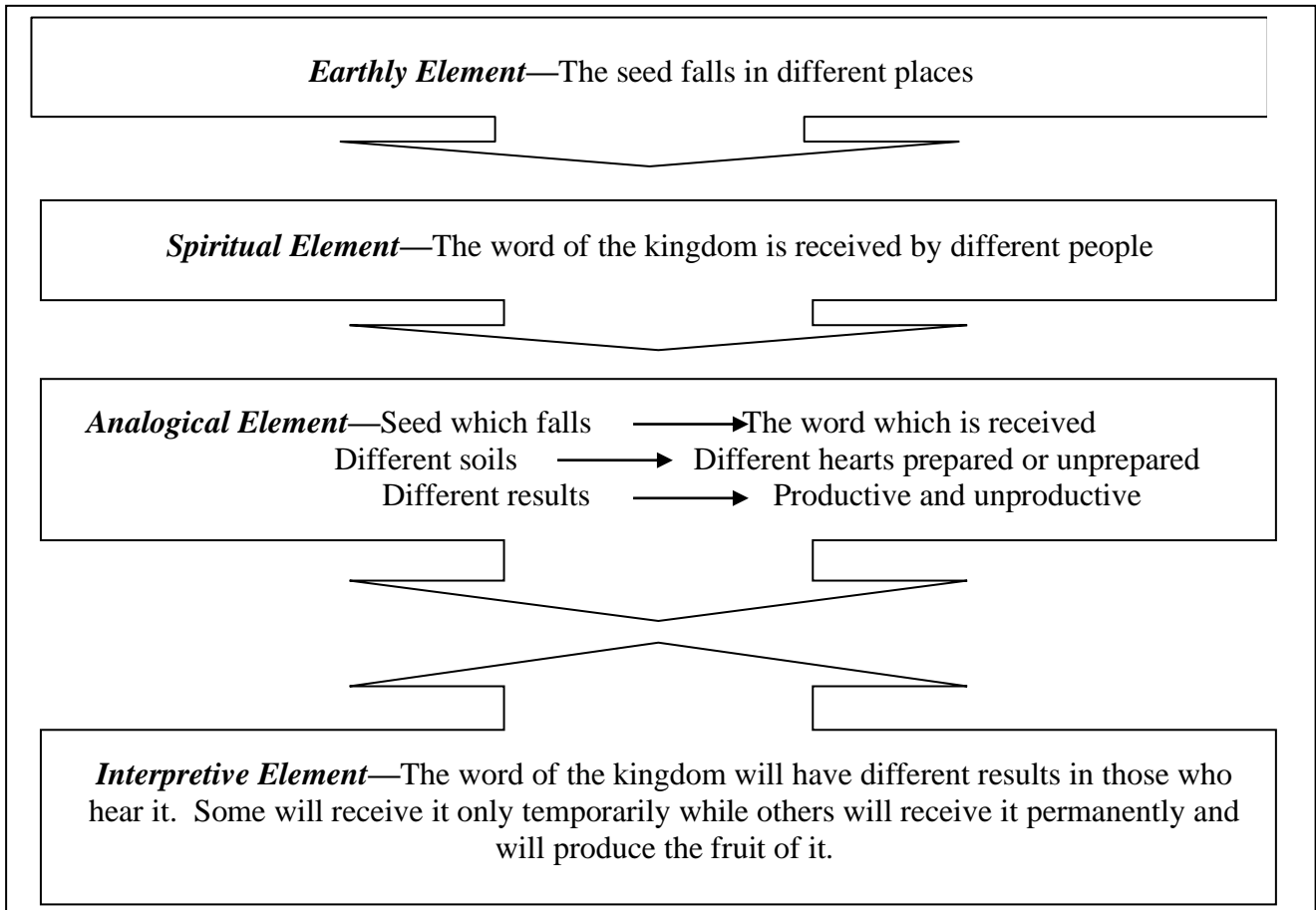
We can never escape from the importance of the context. Just as we must read the context to determine whether Christ interprets the parable for us, we must also read the context for the occasion or reason why Christ tells the parable in the first place. As we have seen, the parable of the Prodigal Son is told because some of the scribes and Pharisees were murmuring about Jesus’ association with and acceptance of sinners (Lk. 15: 2). The story of the Good Samaritan is presented to the expert in Mosaic Law who was wishing to excuse his own apathy (Lk. 10: 25-29). The parables of the fig tree (Matt. 24: 32-34), the thief (Matt. 24: 43-44), the slaves (Matt. 24: 45-51), the ten virgins (Matt. 25: 1-13), and the talents (25: 14-30) are interwoven within the fabric of Jesus’ teaching on His second coming in judgment (See Matt. 23: 37-24: 31; Matt. 24: 34-42; Matt. 25: 31-46; this last reference is also given in parabolic form). Their purpose is the same—to encourage readiness and alertness. The parable of the wedding feast (Lk. 14: 8-11) is given in response to the Pharisees seeking to exalt themselves by picking out the places of honor at the host’s house (14: 7). Likewise, Jesus told the parable of the big dinner in response to the self-satisfied Pharisee seated with Him who probably believed that no respectable Jew would be left out of the celebrations when the Messiah came (Lk. 14: 15-24). Jesus warned him that the Messiah had already come, but Jews like him would be left out of the celebrations because they failed to recognize Him as their Messiah. The rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16: 19-31) is told in the presence of the Pharisees who were “lovers of money” (16: 14). These same Pharisees were also demanding that Jesus produce a sign so they could believe in Him (Lk. 16: 31 compared with Lk. 11: 16, 29; Jn. 2: 18; 6: 3).

H. The Parables of Jesus

1. Parables in Jesus’ Third Great Discourse in Matthew

a. The Parable of the Sower—Matt. 13: 3-9; 18-23; Mk. 4: 3-9, 13-20; Lk. 8: 4-15

The diagram below is given to help you visualize the various elements which must be identified to properly interpret a parable.



With any attempt to interpret parables, it would be helpful to list the earthly elements of the parable on one side and then attempt to identify the spiritual elements and analogical elements on the other side. In the following two parables, Jesus has identified the spiritual elements for us.

- Earthly Elements***
- Sower
 - seed
 - birds which eat the seed
 - hard ground beside the road
 - rocky ground
 - sun
 - ground infested with thorns
 - thorns
 - good soil
 - fruit

- Spiritual-Analogical Elements***
- the one who brings the word
 - the word of the kingdom
 - the evil one (the devil) that snatches away the word.
 - a person’s heart receiving the word
 - a person’s heart receiving the word
 - affliction and persecution
 - a person’s heart receiving the word
 - the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth
 - a person’s heart receiving the word
 - the results of genuine belief

Notice in this parable that there is no difference in the seed which fell in different places. The difference lies in the *kind of soil* upon which it fell. Therefore, God is not only sovereign in His control of where the word of the kingdom is heard, but over the preparation of the human heart receiving the word. Some hearts will be prepared to receive the word, but others will not be prepared. Note also that without the constraints of other texts teaching total depravity and salvation by grace, we may be tempted to believe that the good soil represents the person who was “good enough” to believe the truth without divine initiative and help (cf. Matt. 16: 16-17; Jn. 1: 12-13).

b. The parable of the wheat and the tares—Matt. 13: 24-30, 36-43

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • man who sowed good seed • field • good seed • tares • the enemy • his men (slaves) • sleeping • tares among the wheat • wheat sprouted and bore grain • then the tares became evident also • the enemy has sowed tares • gather the tares up • uproot the wheat • wheat • grow together • harvest • reapers • burn • my barn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ, the Son of Man • world • sons of the kingdom (believers) • sons of the evil one (the devil) • the devil • Christ’s disciples (believers) • (Jesus does not mention “sleeping” in His interpretation, therefore not important) • sons of the evil one living among sons of the kingdom • the sons of the kingdom bear the fruit of righteousness • sons of the evil one bear the fruit of unrighteousness • the devil uses unbelievers in the world among believers • remove unbelievers from among believers • harm believers along with unbelievers • believers at the end of the age • believers and unbelievers living together in the world • end of the age • angels • the final judgment—a furnace with fire • the kingdom of the Father

Jesus does not devote any interpretation to the fact that the slaves are *sleeping*; therefore, we shouldn’t either. We might be able to deduce from this that whether the church is diligent in receiving new members into the church *or not*, the mixture of believers and unbelievers within the congregation is inevitable (note: “all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness”, Matt. 13: 41; cf. Matt. 18: 6-7; Matt. 7: 22-23; both texts support the interpretation that the parable refers to believers existing within the church, a church that exists in the world). This inevitability is also taught in the parable of the sower. Some people receive the word with joy only to fall away later. They should be received into the church by profession of faith, but their profession does not guarantee continued faith and perseverance (see notes on *Synoptic Gospels*)

**c. The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven—Matt. 13: 31-33; Mk. 4: 30-32
Lk. 13: 18-21.**

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
Matthew	Matthew
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mustard seed • man • sowed • field • smaller than all <i>other</i> seeds • full grown • larger than the garden plants • becomes a tree • THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES. (cf. Dan. 4: 10-12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • kingdom of God • Christ (God) • inaugurated (began) • the world • appearance of the kingdom of God in comparison to other things in the world • the consummation or completion of the kingdom • the kingdom of God becomes larger than any other kingdom in the world • the kingdom of God becomes shelter • believers find protection in the kingdom of God
Mark	Mark
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mustard seed • sown upon the soil • smaller than all the seeds • it grows up • becomes larger than all the garden plants • forms large branches • THE BIRDS OF THE AIR can NEST UNDER ITS SHADE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the kingdom of God • inaugurated or introduced into the world • appearance of the kingdom of God in comparison to other kingdoms in the world • the kingdom gets bigger in the world • the kingdom gets larger in comparison to other kingdoms in the world • the subjects of the kingdom (believers) find rest and protection in the kingdom
Luke	Luke
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mustard seed • man • threw into his own garden • grew and became a tree • THE BIRDS OF THE AIR NESTED IN ITS BRANCHES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the kingdom of God • Christ (God) • inaugurated or introduced into God's world • the kingdom grows in the world • the subjects of the kingdom (believers) find rest and protection in the kingdom

Note the differences between *Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*. In *Matthew*, the kingdom becomes “full grown”, implying the consummation or completion of the kingdom of God at the end of the age. However, *Mark* and *Luke* only say that the kingdom “grows up” or “grew”. Could it be, then, that while Matthew sees the kingdom in its consummated (finished) state, Mark and Luke see the kingdom of God as simply growing in the world in comparison to all other kingdoms? I have

interpreted the other garden seeds as the other kingdoms of this world based on the *allusion* to Dan. 4: 10-12. In that text, the “tree” is interpreted by Daniel as the kingdom of Babylon. In the ancient Middle East, vain kings thought of their kingdoms as the “tree of life” which provided shelter and protection for their subjects (whether such kingdoms accomplished this noble myth was another matter. Most of the time they were oppressive.). On the other hand, Daniel envisions another kingdom cut out of the mountain without hands which will replace all other kingdoms and will fill the whole world (Dan. 2: 34-35). Although the kingdom of God will reach its fulfillment in the return of Christ, there is also reason to believe that even now the kingdom of God has become the largest kingdom on earth in comparison to all other kingdoms. It is still inconspicuous or insignificant in the eyes of the world, but its effect of changing lives and providing shelter and protection for its subjects is evident all over the world for those who have the eyes to see. Thus, the kingdom of God has now become a large tree that is still invisible to the world, but visible to its citizens.

At any rate, by comparing the Synoptics with one another, we will often get a slightly different perspective on the parable. The important thing, hermeneutically, is to compare all the elements side by side with one another.

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<i>Matthew</i>	<i>Matthew</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leaven • woman • hid in three pecks of flour • until it was all leavened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • kingdom of heaven • Christ (God) • the kingdom of heaven hidden in the world • the whole world penetrated and influenced by the kingdom of heaven
<i>Luke</i>	<i>Luke</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leaven • woman • hid in three pecks of flour • until it was all leavened 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the kingdom of God • Christ (God) • the kingdom of God hidden in the world • the whole world penetrated and influenced by the kingdom of heaven

The parables of the mustard seed and the leaven are twin parables presenting the ideas of the external and internal growth of the kingdom of God (see notes on *Synoptic Gospels*). There is very little difference between Matthew’s account and Luke’s account, but notice the difference between the “kingdom of heaven” and the “kingdom of God”. Dispensationalists once made a distinction between the two, but exegesis will not bear the weight of this distinction. The two expressions are interchangeable and represent the same thing from a different perspective. The *central idea* of the parable is that the kingdom of heaven (or kingdom of God), hidden to the world and invisible in the world except to believers, continues its penetrating influence in every area throughout human history until the whole world is changed by its presence. Of course, this brings up

the question of eschatology. *To what extent* will the world be changed when Christ returns? This parable alone will not answer this question; other texts will be necessary in forming one's opinion.

d. The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price—Matt. 13: 44-46

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<i>Hidden Treasure</i>	<i>Hidden Treasure</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • treasure hidden in the field • a man found and hid <i>again</i> • from joy over it • he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the kingdom of heaven hidden to the world • a person who recognizes the value of the kingdom • the joy experienced when one understands the message of the kingdom of heaven • the willingness to sacrifice everything one has for the sake of possessing (belonging to) the kingdom
<i>Pearl</i>	<i>Pearl</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a merchant seeking fine pearls • upon finding one pearl of great value • went and sold all that he had and bought it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a man looking for the most important thing in life • the man recognizes the value of the kingdom of heaven when he hears about it • his willingness to part with every valuable thing he has for the sake of owning (belonging to) the kingdom

The **central truth** of this parable is that the kingdom of heaven has value which cannot be fully estimated. It is more valuable than anything else we possess and is worth parting with anything else in order to possess it. Notice, that when one assesses (determines) the value of the hidden treasure or the pearl of great price, his actions follow this assessment of its value. He does not wait to purchase the land or the pearl, but does so immediately.

e. The Parable of the Dragnet—Matt. 13: 47-50

<i>Earthly Element</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dragnet cast into the sea • they (fishermen) • gathering <i>fish</i> of every kind • it was filled • gathered the good <i>fish</i> into containers • the bad they threw away 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the kingdom of heaven preached in the world • angels • believers and unbelievers responding to the message of the kingdom • the number of people in the kingdom complete at the end of the age • believers separated and saved at the end of the age • unbelievers separated and punished at the end of the age

There is striking similarity between this parable and the parable of the wheat and the tares, in which the wheat is gathered into the barn and the tares are burned up (note: “furnace of fire”, Matt. 13: 42). Again, although the “field” and the sea (implied in the text) are the world, the church exists in the world side by side with unbelievers, many of which profess faith in Christ. Their true identity will not become clear until the end of the age when the angels separate the true from the untrue (see also Matt. 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats).

Note also that Jesus provides the interpretation to His own parable. At the end of the age, the final judgment, the angels will separate unbelievers from believers, casting unbelievers into hell where there will be much weeping and torment (Matt. 13: 49-50).

2. Parables in Luke’s Travel Narrative

a. The Parable of the Rich Fool—Lk. 12: 16-21

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The land of a rich man was very productive • I will tear down my barns and build larger ones • Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years <i>to come</i> • take your ease, eat, drink <i>and</i> be merry • This <i>very</i> night your soul is required of you • who will own what you have prepared? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abundant prosperity of the unbelieving rich • presumption of the unbelieving rich that their security can be storied up with increasing wealth • false identity between future security and increasing wealth • plans to enjoy his wealth selfishly and the false presumption that he will be able to do so • suddenness of judgment • inability of the unbelieving rich man to keep his riches after the judgment

This is yet another of Jesus’ self-interpreted parables. There is one central point: “So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” (Lk. 12: 21). Jesus never condemns the possession of riches or the rich man. He condemns trust in one’s riches and the selfish use of riches. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ encourages us to store up treasures—not on earth and not for selfish indulgence—but in heaven through the generous use of riches (cf. 1 Tim. 6: 17-18).

b. The Parable of the Fig Tree—Lk. 13: 6-9***Earthly Elements***

- man
- fig tree
- planted in his vineyard
- he came looking for fruit
- did not find any
- three years
- vineyard-keeper
- Cut it down!
- Let it alone,
- if it bears fruit next year, *fine*

- but if not, cut it down

Spiritual-Analogical Elements

- God
- Israel
- the world
- God expected spiritual fruit from Israel
- God did not find spiritual fruit in Israel
- the whole history of rebellious Israel
- Christ (?)
- Judgment for failure to produce spiritual fruit
- Christ's intercession/ God's patience (?)
God gives Israel more time to repent (40 years)
- Israel's destruction in 70 AD

c. The parable of the wedding feast—Lk. 14: 7-11***Earthly Elements***

- Invitation to a wedding feast
- wedding feast
- someone
- do not take the place of honor

- someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him
'Give *your* place to this man'
- then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place
- But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place

- 'Friend, move up higher'
then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you.

Spiritual-Analogical Elements

- Invitation to enter the kingdom of God
- heaven/salvation
- the bearer of the invitation (God)
- do not exalt yourself as spiritually superior to others
- someone more spiritually worthy than you has been invited by God to take your place

- God will humble proud, unrepentant sinners before men by sending them to hell
- Be humble in estimating your worthiness to enter heaven by acknowledging that you really deserve hell
- When God sees your humble repentance, He will exalt you before men

Once more interpreting His own parable, Jesus says, "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." The concluding statement is chiasmic:

For everyone who *exalts* himself
 will be *humbled*
 and he who *humbles* himself } Center point and emphasis of the parable
 will be *exalted*.

Upon examination of the parable, we find that the whole story is also chiastic.

A—The invited guests picking out the places of honor at the table (v. 7)

B—The warning not to honor yourself, lest the host humble you in front of the others (vv. 8-9)

B¹—The advice to humble yourself by going to the last place at the table (v. 10a)

A²—The host picking out a higher place for you, thus exalting you in the sight of others (v. 10b)

Only the person who humbles himself and considers himself worthy of hell will humble himself in repentance. Historically, the Jewish people—sons of Abraham—believed that they were worthy of partaking the Messianic feast when the Messiah finally arrived. The Pharisees, particularly, believed that they would be seated before the Messiah in the places of honor. This is why the Pharisee present said, “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (v. 15; note the context of v. 1, in the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees). As a “good” Pharisee, he was confident that he would be at the Messianic banquet enjoying a place of honor. What actually happened is just the opposite of what the Pharisees expected. This comes out in the next parable of the dinner.

d. The parable of the big dinner—Lk. 14: 15-24

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • man • big dinner • invited many • he sent his slave • But they all alike began to make excuses. • head of the household became angry • Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame • still there is room • Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel <i>them</i> to come in • so that my house may be filled • none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God the Father • Messianic banquet accompanying salvation • Invited the Jewish nation • Christ (who was a servant of all) • The many excuses the Jewish nation made for not worshiping the Lord • God became angry with the Jewish nation • Invitation to those who considered themselves unworthy of salvation, and possibly cursed by God (marginalized Jews) • more than enough room in heaven for everyone who is invited to repent and believe • compelling influence of the Holy Spirit to bring in all the marginalized Jews and Gentiles who are called to salvation • God’s salvation will not be wasted; heaven will be filled • none of those who believed they were worthy of salvation and refused the invitation to repent and believe will be saved

Notice from the parable of the big dinner that God does the very thing Jesus advises the Pharisee to do when he makes an invitation. He advises him to invite the poor, the blind, the lame and the crippled—people who would not be able to return the favor (14: 13-14). These are the kind of people whom God is inviting to salvation, those who know they have nothing to give Him. We have nothing to offer God, but He has everything to offer us.

e. Parables in response to the scribes and Pharisees who grumbled because Jesus received sinners and ate with them—Lk. 15: 1-32

(1) The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin—Lk. 15: 3-10

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a man • a hundred sheep • lost one of them • go after the one which is lost • When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing • calls together his friends and his neighbors 'Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God • ninety-nine self-righteous Jews plus one sinner • one lost sinner • God pursuing the sinner until He finds him • God rescues the lost sinner and rejoices over the sinner that was found • God shares His joy over the sinner who repented

We must note the context of this series of parables found in Lk. 15: 1-3, “Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.² Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”³ *So* He told them this parable, saying,” (note the emphasized word, “so”). Therefore, Jesus tells these three parables in response to the grumbling of the Pharisees who disapprove of His socializing with sinners. In the first two parables, Jesus concludes with His own interpretation of the parable.

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • woman • ten silver coins • loses one coin • light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it • she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God • self-righteous Jews who do not believe they are lost • one sinner who is lost • God pursuing the sinner until He finds him • God shares His joy with the angels in heaven over one sinner who repents

Since this parable has the same message as the first one, we should ask, “Why?” But further, Jesus is just about to tell another parable with the same message—three parables saying essentially the same thing for profound emphasis. Note also the emphasis on the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, a theme which continues in the third parable. Stay alert to the way Jesus leaves the last of the three parables. Is Jesus reaching out to the Pharisees; is He inviting their repentance and renunciation of self-righteousness?

(2)The parable of the lost son and the elder brother—Lk. 15: 11-32

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • man • two sons • younger of them • father • went on a journey into a distant country squandered his estate with loose living • when he had spent everything • a severe famine occurred in that country • he began to be impoverished • hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country • he sent him into his fields to feed swine • he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating • came to his senses • my father's hired men have more than enough bread • I am dying here with hunger! • Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight • I am no longer worthy to be called your son • make me as one of your hired men. • So he got up and came to his father • his father saw him and felt compassion • ran and embraced him and kissed him • 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God the Father • openly rebellious sinner and self-righteous sinner • openly rebellious sinner • God the Father • broke away completely from the covenant family of Israel and from its religious life (sinners and tax collectors; vv. 1-2) • came to the end of his personal resources or spiritual self-dependence • spiritual poverty of worldly pursuits and pleasures • suffered the consequences of his sinful rebellion • service to the world rather than service to His Father—the only other alternative • service to the world is hard and unclean • service to the world brings spiritual poverty • the calling of the Spirit • the generosity of God the Father finally comprehended • poverty of spirit realized • confession of guilt before God • one’s sense of unworthiness; repentance toward God • humility that accompanies repentance • Faith in the Father’s forgiveness • the Father’s compassion for repentant sinners • the Father’s eagerness to forgive • repentance and humility publicly expressed

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; • ²³ and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate • for this son of mine • was dead and has come to life again • he was lost and has been found. • Now his older son was in the field • he heard music and dancing • <i>began</i> inquiring what these things could be • But he became angry and was not willing to go in • his father came out and <i>began</i> pleading with him • For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command • <i>yet</i> you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends • but when this son of yours came • who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes • you killed the fattened calf for him • Son, you have always been with me • all that is mine is yours • 'But we had to celebrate and rejoice • this brother of yours was dead and <i>has begun</i> to live • and <i>was</i> lost and has been found 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • union with Christ in all His benefits as the Son of God • Celebration in heaven over one sinner who repents • the returned sinner is restored to the Father's favor as a son, not as a slave • the spiritually dead comes to life • the spiritually lost has been found • Self-righteous Pharisees still working for their salvation • Pharisees watching sinners being received by Jesus into fellowship • Pharisees wondering why Jesus ate with sinners • Pharisees angry with Jesus for receiving sinners and eating with them • Jesus presently pleading with the Pharisees to repent and believe • explicit statement of self-righteousness and misunderstanding of the Law • lack of understanding of God's love and lack of appreciation for His many benefits • no identification with other sinners • minimizing one's own sin by maximizing the sins of others • lack of joy, even resentment, over the Father's willingness to forgive others (cf. 15: 7, 10) • the Father's appeal to self-righteous Pharisees • continued access to covenant blessings if one is willing to repent • The Father's nature compels Him to rejoice over one sinner who repents (God cannot deny His nature as a loving Father) • the spiritually dead comes to life • the spiritually lost is found
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Verses 22-24 and 32 form an *inclusion*. The father's celebration of his son's return and the son's coming to life again and being found—repeated twice for emphasis—serve to highlight the stiff resistance of the elder brother, the central portion of the inclusion. Notice the chiasmic structure of this parable with the emphasis in the center.

A¹—The father’s celebration—the return of the lost son who has come to life (vv. 22-24)

B—The elder brother’s resistance (vv. 25-30)

A²—The father’s celebration—the return of the lost son who has come to life (vv. 31-32)

Further, the father appeals to the elder son to change his mind and celebrate with him. The end of the parable is left open-ended, leaving the reader wondering if the parable had any effect on the resistant Pharisees listening to the parable (cf. Doriani, *Getting the Message*). Considering this episode, we cannot conclude that Jesus was *always* chiding the scribes and Pharisees with “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” He did do this on some occasions, but He also appealed to them to repent and believe.

From an interpretive standpoint, we can see how helpful it is to write out most—or even all—of the earthly elements of the parable and then attempt to identify the spiritual element (which includes the analogical element). For example, what should we make of the father’s slaves (v. 22)? Based on the other two parables, the slaves perhaps represent the angels in heaven; but their identification is not significant to the interpretation. By writing out all the elements, we can proceed to “weed out” (eliminate) those elements which are only incidental to the meaning of the parable. Also, we must be cautious about losing the central thrust of the parable by identifying all the allegorical or analogical relationships. The central thrust of this parable—and the reason Jesus told it—is the Father’s love for repentant sinners and a warning against self-righteousness. However, many other important theological truths emerge when we look at the details.

f. The parable of the unrighteous servant—Lk. 16: 1-13

<i>Earthly Elements</i>	<i>Spiritual-Analogical Elements</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rich man • manager • this <i>manager</i> was reported to him as squandering his possessions. • Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager • “I know what I shall do...” • people will welcome me into their homes • the manager’s illegitimate means of making friends with his master’s money • his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly. • the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God, who owns everything [Yet, the rich man’s character is <i>antithetical</i> to God’s] • people who handle God’s wealth • [fills out the story but this element need not be stressed] • the ultimate day of accounting for our use of God’s wealth (?) • planning for the future • people will welcome us into heaven • helping others legitimately (<i>antithetic</i> parallel) with our use of God’s wealth • God’s praise for those who <i>plan for the future age</i> by using His money wisely in helping others • unbelievers know “how the world works” (J. B. Green) to accomplish selfish goals, but believers don’t know how the kingdom of God works—i.e. how to use their money to accomplish righteous goals and future rewards

This is a difficult parable that requires much explanation. Certainly Jesus is not condoning (approving) immoral and illegal accounting practices, nor is He praising swindlers. What the master praises is not the manager's dishonesty, but his shrewdness; and it should be duly noted that Jesus refers to the thief as "the *unrighteous*" manager. However, Jesus does commend *one particular trait* of the manager, his *shrewdness* in winning friends during this lifetime—the present age (v. 8, "this age")—and in planning for the future. He could have demanded the full debt, pocketed the money, and headed out of town on a fast camel. Instead, he planned ahead. From this point on, each debtor—probably a man of means himself, considering the size of the debts—would be happy to provide him *long-term* help throughout his lifetime. Thus, his plan was a long-range plan projecting many years into the future. Rather than being fixed on the *present consumption* of ill-gotten riches, he believed that having many good friends for the rest of his life was more valuable. Likewise, if believers would be as shrewd in their use of "unrighteous wealth" (see below), they would be more inclined to use it in ways which would enhance their enjoyment of the *future age*. Rather than selfish planning for an extravagant, short-lived retirement, they would be generous with others, give to missions, develop businesses which employ others, etc. In other words, they would use their money *to store up treasures in heaven* in the age to come rather than being preoccupied with present consumption in *this age*. When they die, the "friends they have made" (people they have helped) will welcome them into their eternal homes.

Jesus provides an additional commentary in vv. 10-13.

- He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much
 - he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much
 - Therefore if you have not been faithful in the *use of unrighteous wealth*, who will entrust the *true riches* to you?
- (this statement is parallel to the next one)
- And if you have not been faithful in *the use of that which is another's*, who will give you *that which is your own*?
 - No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth

- Our management of God's money on earth for a short while is a "little thing" compared to eternal responsibilities entrusted to us in heaven
- If we are unfaithful in the use of "unrighteous wealth"—a little thing—then we would also be unfaithful in "much"—eternal responsibilities or eternal wealth.
- Why should God entrust us with true riches—eternal wealth and responsibility—if we have not been faithful in the use of "unrighteous wealth" while on earth?
- Therefore, "unrighteous wealth" is equated with "that which is another's"—that is, what God has entrusted to us *on earth*—earthly or worldly wealth. "That which is your own" is "true riches" or wealth and responsibilities given to us for eternity, never to be "removed"
- No one can serve God and wealth simultaneously. Therefore, if we are not using our money wisely to serve God by helping others, we are serving our money instead which will one day fail (cf. v. 9)

We are still left wondering why Jesus calls earthly wealth “unrighteous wealth” or “the wealth of unrighteousness”. By comparing scripture with scripture, we learn that wealth itself is neutral, neither good nor bad, and it can be a blessing from God. It is either used in a good way or a bad way. The NIV translates “wealth of unrighteousness” as “worldly wealth”, a translation which helps in the interpretation. The wealth of this world is “*unrighteous*” because it will not survive in the new age to come (cf. Joel B. Green, *Luke*)—an age characterized by *righteousness*. While “the sons of this age” (v. 8) know how to use money and the world system to their advantage, God’s people do not seem to be *as skillful* in adapting their use of money to the coming age when worldly wealth will have ceased to exist (v. 9, “**when** it fails”, not, “**if** it fails”). Therefore, many Christians hang on to their money selfishly rather than using it to the advantage of others who could use their help. Jesus is advising believers to be as shrewd in doing good with their money as the unrighteous manager was shrewd in using the manager’s debt service to secure his future.

III. Quotations from the Old Testament

The numerous quotations from the OT scriptures testify to the continuity of method, purpose, person (Christ), and people of God’s redemptive plan. The Redeemer promised in the OT has now arrived in the birth of Jesus Christ. As the Great Prophet, Christ fulfills the prophetic ministry of all the OT prophets, especially Moses, as He gives the divine interpretation and application of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount and lives in perfect obedience to the Law. The faithful remnant in the OT is continuous with the chosen people of God in the gospels who respond to their Messiah in repentance and faith. Conversely, the recalcitrant (incorrigible) Jews of the OT who rejected Yahweh’s rule over them in the Old Covenant are continuous with the hard-hearted, stiff-necked generation of Jews who beheld the miracles of Christ but would not believe. A clear understanding of the Synoptic Gospels can be achieved only as we explore the manner in which Christ and the Synoptic writers used the OT to demonstrate the fulfillment of God’s plan.

(Note: In the NASB 1995 version, all OT quotations are printed in capital letters. This helps the reader to readily identify all OT quotations. The reader is also referred to my notes on *The Synoptic Gospels* for a concise commentary on all quotations.)

A. Selected OT Quotations from Matthew

1. The birth and infancy of Christ

Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." (Matthew 1:22-23 NASB; cf. Isa. 7: 14; 9: 6-7; and 8: 10)

They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: ⁶ 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'" (Matthew 2:5-6 NASB; cf. Micah 5: 2)

So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. ¹⁵ He remained

there until the death of Herod. *This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."* (Matthew 2:14-15 NASB; cf. Hosea 11: 1)

"A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEeping AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEeping FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE." (Matthew 2:18 NASB; cf. Jer. 31: 15)

2. The ministry of John the Baptist

For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet when he said, "THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, 'MAKE READY THE WAY OF THE LORD, MAKE HIS PATHS STRAIGHT!'" (Matthew 3:3 NASB; cf. Isa. 40: 3)

"This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'" (Matthew 11:10 NASB; cf. Mal. 3: 1)

3. Satan's quotations of the OT

⁶and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" (Matthew 4:6 NASB; cf. Ps. 91: 11-12)

4. Jesus' quotations from the OT

a. During His temptation

But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" (Matthew 4:4 NASB; cf. Deut. 8: 3)

Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" (Matthew 4:7 NASB; cf. Deut. 6: 16)

Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" (Matthew 4:10 NASB; cf. Deut. 6: 13; 10: 20)

b. From the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) and the case law

(1) In the Sermon on the Mount

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; (Matthew 5:27 NASB; cf. Ex. 20: 13)

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; (Matthew 5:27 NASB; cf. Ex. 20: 14)

"It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE'; (Matthew 5:31 NASB; cf. Deut. 24: 1)

"Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.'" (Matthew 5:33 NASB; cf. Lev. 19: 12; Deut. 23: 21)

"You have heard that it was said, 'AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.'" (Matthew 5:38 NASB; cf. Ex. 21: 24; Lev. 24: 20; Deut. 19: 21)

"You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.' (Matthew 5:43 NASB; cf. Lev. 19: 18; Note: "and hate your enemy" is an addition by scribal tradition not found in the Law, one of the few additions that Jesus quotes in the Sermon on the Mount)

(2) Instructions concerning the erring brother

"But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. (Matthew 18:16 NASB; cf. Deut. 19: 15)

(3) In answer to the question, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"

Then he said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS;¹⁹ HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." (Matthew 19:18-19 NASB; cf. Ex. 20: 12-16; Lev. 19: 18)

(4) In response to the traditions of the Pharisees that violated the commandments of God

"For God said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER,' and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH.' (Matthew 15:4 NASB; cf. Ex. 20: 12: 21: 17)

c. From the book of Genesis

Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"⁴ And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,⁵ and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'?" (Matthew 19:3-5 NASB; cf. Gen. 1: 27; 2: 24)

d. From the book of Exodus

'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'?" He is not the God of the dead but of the living." (Matthew 22:32 NASB; cf. Ex. 3: 6)

e. From the Psalms

(1) The judgment

"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'" (Matthew 7:23 NASB; cf. Ps. 6: 8)

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matthew 16:27 NASB; cf. Ps. 62: 12)

(2) In response to the Pharisee's criticism

and said to Him, "Do You hear what these *children* are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?" (Matthew 21:16 NASB; cf. Ps. 8: 2)

(3) In response to the Pharisees who believed the Messiah was merely of human origin, but was not divine

'THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES BENEATH YOUR FEET'?" (Matthew 22:44 NASB; cf. Ps. 110: 1)

(4) During His crucifixion

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" (Matthew 27:46 NASB; Ps. 22: 1)

f. From the prophets**(1) To self-righteous Pharisees**

"But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:13 NASB; cf. Hos. 6: 6; Matt. 12: 7)

(2) In His instructions to the twelve as He sent them out

"For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW;³⁶ and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. (Matthew 10:35-36 NASB; cf. Micah 7: 6)

(3) In response to the doubting of John the Baptist

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵ the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. (Matthew 11:4-5 NASB; cf. Isa. 35: 5; 61: 1)

(4) Concerning the ministry of John the Baptist

"This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' (Matthew 11:10 NASB; cf. Mal. 3: 1)

(5) Concerning the oppression of the masses by the religious leaders

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. (Matthew 11:28-29 NASB; cf. Jer. 6: 16)

(6) In response to the Pharisees demand for a sign

for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:40 NASB; cf. Jonah 1: 17)

(7) In response to the multitude's unbelief

"Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.¹⁴ "In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;¹⁵ FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES, OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES, HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.' (Matthew 13:13-15 NASB; cf. Isa. 6: 9-10)

(8) In the parable of the mustard seed

and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that THE BIRDS OF THE AIR come and NEST IN ITS BRANCHES." (Matthew 13:32 NASB; cf. Ezek. 17: 23; Dan. 4: 12)

(9) In the parable of the wheat and the tares

"Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:43 NASB; cf. Dan. 12: 3)

(10) In response to the traditions of the Pharisees that violated the commandments of God

'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. ⁹ 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" (Matthew 15:8-9 NASB; cf. Isa. 29: 13)

(11) Cleansing the temple

And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN." (Matthew 21:13 NASB; cf. Isa. 56: 7; Jer. 7: 11)

(12) In the parable of the vineyard owner

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. (Matthew 21:33 NASB; cf. Isa. 5: 1-2)

(13) Concerning His second coming

"And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. ³¹

"And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matthew 24:30-31 NASB; cf. Dan. 7)

Jesus said to him, "You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN." (Matthew 26:64 NASB; cf. Dan. 7)

(14) Concerning His disciples desertion

Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'" (Matthew 26:31 NASB; cf. Zech. 13: 7)

5. Events in the life of Jesus**a. Settling in Galilee**

This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: ¹⁵ "THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES— ¹⁶"THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED." (Matthew 4:14-16 NASB; cf. Isa. 9: 1)

b. Healing diseases

When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill. ¹⁷ *This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:* "HE HIMSELF TOOK OUR INFIRMITIES AND CARRIED AWAY OUR DISEASES." (Matthew 8:16-17 NASB; cf. Isa. 53: 4)

This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN; MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED; I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM, AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES. ¹⁹ "HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT; NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS. ²⁰ "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY. ²¹ "AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE." (Matthew 12:17-21 NASB; cf. Isa. 42: 1-3)

c. Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵ "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'" (Matthew 21:4-5 NASB; cf. Isa. 62: 11; Zech. 9: 9)

The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:9 NASB; cf. Ps. 118: 26)

d. Concerning Judas' blood money

And they conferred together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸ For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹ Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "AND THEY TOOK THE THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER, THE PRICE OF THE ONE WHOSE PRICE HAD BEEN SET by the sons of Israel; ¹⁰ AND THEY GAVE THEM FOR THE POTTER'S FIELD, AS THE LORD DIRECTED ME." (Matthew 27:7-10 NASB; cf. Zech. 11: 12-13)

e. The scoffing of the chief priests, scribes and elders at Jesus' crucifixion

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying, ⁴² "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. ⁴³ "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE *Him* now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matthew 27:41-43 NASB; cf. Ps. 22: 7-8)

B. Selected OT Quotations from Mark

1. Jesus' quotations from the Old Testament

a. From the prophets

(1) Concerning hell

"If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell, ⁴⁸ where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED. (Mark 9:47-48 NASB; cf. Isa. 66: 24)

(2) Concerning His second coming

"But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, ²⁵ AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. (Mark 13:24-26 NASB; cf. Joel 2: 31; Isa. 34: 4; Dan. 7: 13)

b. From the psalms

"Have you not even read this Scripture: "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*; (Mark 12:10 NASB; cf. Ps. 118: 22-23).

c. From the Law

Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'HEAR, O ISRAEL! THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD;³⁰ AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'" (Mark 12:29-30 NASB; cf. Deut. 6: 4-5)

2. Quotations by the Sadducees

Some Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection) came to Jesus, and *began* questioning Him, saying,¹⁹ "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES and leaves behind a wife AND LEAVES NO CHILD, HIS BROTHER SHOULD MARRY THE WIFE AND RAISE UP CHILDREN TO HIS BROTHER. (Mark 12:18-19 NASB; cf. Deut. 25: 5)

C. Selected OT Quotations from Luke

1. Mary's Magnificat

"AND HIS MERCY IS UPON GENERATION AFTER GENERATION TOWARD THOSE WHO FEAR HIM. (Luke 1:50 NASB; cf. Ps. 103: 17)

"HE HAS FILLED THE HUNGRY WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed. (Luke 1:53 NASB; cf. Ps. 107: 9)

2. Zacharias' prophecy

As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old—⁷¹ Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US; (Luke 1:70-71 NASB; cf. Ps. 106: 10)

3. Jesus' infancy

And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY *firstborn* MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD "),²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS." (Luke 2:22-24 NASB; cf. Ex. 13: 2, 12; Lev. 5: 11)

4. Jesus' quotations from the OT

a. From the prophets

(1) In the synagogue

"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."²⁰ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.²¹ And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21 NASB; cf. Isa. 61: 1-2)

(2) Concerning His crucifixion

"For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, 'AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS'; for that which refers to Me has *its* fulfillment." (Luke 22:37 NASB; cf. Isa. 53: 12)

(3) Concerning the destruction of Jerusalem as a type of the final judgment

"Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.' (Luke 23:30 NASB; cf. Hos. 10: 8; Rev. 6: 16)

b. From the Law**(1) In answer to the lawyer's question**

And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"²⁶ And He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?" And he answered, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."²⁸ And He said to him, "You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE." (Luke 10:25-28 NASB; cf. Deut. 6: 5; Lev. 19: 18; 18: 5)

(2) In answer to the ruler's question

A ruler questioned Him, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone."²⁰ "You know the commandments, 'DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" (Luke 18:18-20 NASB; cf. Ex. 20: 12-16)

c. From the psalms

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46 NASB; cf. Ps. 31: 5)

D. Summary

I have not attempted to list all the OT quotations from the Synoptic Gospels. Moreover, I have not repeated the quotations in *Mark* and *Luke* that are also found in *Matthew*. If one were to count the direct OT quotations in each gospel, he would find many more in *Matthew* than in the other two Synoptics. *Luke* has just over half as many OT quotations as *Matthew* and *Mark* has less than half as many. This is understandable since Matthew was writing to a Jewish audience who would be more interested in the fulfillment of OT prophecy. Some of Matthew's quotations are introduced by the formula statement, "This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet" followed by the OT quotation.

The main purpose of this exercise has been to demonstrate the continuity of God's redemptive plan in Christ Jesus progressing through the OT to the gospels. Jesus was born, lived, died, and was resurrected according to the eternal plan of God predicted in the OT. He did not come to abolish the OT scriptures, but to *fulfill* them in His person and work.

In every place where the OT is quoted, the student-interpreter is advised to look up the reference and familiarize himself with the context and meaning of the original quotation. When he does this, his understanding of the NT author's use of the OT will be enhanced. On the other hand, he will sometimes be surprised that the NT authors, and Jesus, use the OT in ways which are difficult to interpret.

IV. Temporal Connections in the Synoptic Gospels

It will be helpful for us to notice the difference in how the Synoptic writers move from one event in the ministry of Jesus to another. For example in Lk. 4: 38, we find the following temporal connection: “And He arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon’s home.” The synagogue referred to is the one in Capernaum (vv. 31-33). The same temporal connection occurs in Mk. 1: 29, “And immediately after they had come out of the synagogue, they came into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.” The synagogue is the one in Mk. 1: 21.

Another temporal connection occurs in Mk. 1: 32, “And when evening had come....” What evening is he talking about? The evening of the Sabbath which Mark refers to in 1: 21. This same transition is found in Lk. 4: 40, “And while the sun was setting....”—that is, setting on the Sabbath day in v. 31. Notice also in Lk. 4: 42 we read, “And when day came....” In v. 40 the sun was setting, so we would naturally wish to interpret “when day came” as being the day after the setting of the sun in v. 40. In Mk. 1: 35 we read, “And in the early morning, while it was still dark....” which is the early daybreak after the evening of v. 32.

These temporal connections are not hidden in the text, but they are often missed when we are reading narrative portions of scripture, especially the gospels ***which are not written with a strict chronology of events***. They serve as examples of transitional statements which allow us to preserve the chronology of the text ***when the Biblical writer considers the chronology to be important***. Mark wanted us to know that the events of Mk. 1: 21-38 are a single chronological unit. Luke wanted us to know that the events of Lk. 4: 31-43 are a single chronological unit and may begin as far back as 4: 16 when Jesus preaches in Nazareth. When we take note of the chronology—if it is given to us—then we can preach the passage more effectively by taking the particular context of the passage into consideration.

On the other hand, our wish for clear chronological order must be tempered (freed from excess) since we ***often*** don’t have clear temporal connections from the authors which allow us to discover the timing of the event. Scholars differ in their analysis about the chronology of certain events. Robert H. Gundry and A. T. Robertson, on the one hand, differ from D.A. Carson, William Hendriksen, and Donald Guthrie, on the other, about the chronology of Matthew’s dinner (Matt. 9: 10-17). So what is the amateur theologian supposed to do? We must do what we are supposed to do. We study the text ourselves and see which theory is the most credible. When the chronology is not clear, it is ***not important*** because the Biblical writer didn’t make it clear to us. The author is, instead, drawing our attention to a particular ***theme***. For example, Mark deals with Jesus’ rejection in Nazareth and the sending out of the twelve thematically. Just as Jesus the Son of God is rejected by men, so all of Christ’s disciples, including us, will experience a certain amount of rejection (v. 11).

As noted earlier, the gospel writers are generally not too concerned for strict chronology, but write their material thematically. Because of the limitations of time, we cannot discuss why each author arranges his material as he does, but at least the student should be aware that the Synoptists do not follow a strict chronological order precisely because each author has something special that he wishes to emphasize. Had they all followed a chronological order, there would have been a measure of redundancy (unnecessary repetition) to the gospels, a redundancy which is avoided because of their unique thematic approach.

This is evident because the Holy Spirit does not give us a “Harmony of the Gospels”. Instead, he gives us the one gospel of Jesus Christ *written from four different perspectives*. Nevertheless, this thematic approach does not forbid us from attempting to understand the timing of the events. It is, after all, the word of God which deserves our most diligent inquiry into the minute details which are not easily discovered. In this study, we are not looking at each gospel account separately but as the “synoptic gospels” (*synoptic* literally means “seen together”); thus, we must make some effort in understanding some of the chronology as well as some of the differences in the way they arranged and reported the material.

A. The Parables—Matthew 13:1-3; Mark 4:1-3; Luke 8:1-5

That day Jesus went out of the house and was *sitting by the sea*.² And large crowds gathered to Him, so He *got into a boat* and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.³ And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow; (Matthew 13:1-3 NASB)

He began to teach again *by the sea*. And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He *got into a boat* in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land.² And He was teaching them many things in parables, and was saying to them in His teaching,³ “Listen to this! Behold, the sower went out to sow; (Mark 4:1-3 NASB)

Soon afterwards, He *began* going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him,² and *also* some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,³ and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.⁴ When a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable:⁵ “The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled under foot and the birds of the air ate it up. (Luke 8:1-5 NASB)

The temporal connection of this discourse is found in Matt. 13: 1, “On that day...”—apparently, the same day in which the events of 12: 22-50 had taken place. This chronology seems to be supported by Mark who places the parables in the same context. Luke places the discourse on parables shortly after Jesus is anointed by a prostitute in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Lk. 7: 36-50). However, he only says, “Soon afterwards”, but we don’t know how soon is “soon”. “That day” is a more definite indicator. This was the same day Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of the devil (Matt. 12: 22-45), and the same day His mother and brothers came to see him (Matt. 12: 46-50). Notice another temporal indicator: “While He was still speaking to the crowds” (v. 46).

B. The Calming of the Sea and the Gadarene Demoniac—Matt. 8: 18-27; Mk. 4: 35-41; Lk. 8: 22-25; 9: 57-62

There is no temporal connection between the calming of the sea and the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law which occurs chronologically much earlier (see above). If we follow the narrative in Matthew, Jesus gives orders to depart to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (v. 18). He is interrupted by a scribe and another “disciple” who wish to join those who were more intimately involved in His ministry (vv. 19-22). This interruption is followed by his original intent to get into the boat and go to the other side of the sea. On the journey a storm comes up which Jesus calms by the power of his word. In v. 28, He and the disciples get to their destination on the other side in the country of the Gadarenes where they meet two demon-possessed men (vv. 28-34). He heals one (two?) and then gets back into the boat to cross over the Sea of Galilee again to come to his own town of Capernaum (9: 1).

It is difficult to determine the timing of the episode of Matt. 8: 19-22 which differs somewhat from the episode in Lk. 9: 57-62. In Matthew, *two* men approach Jesus with an interest in discipleship while in Luke there are *three*. In Matthew, they are on the shore ready to embark in a boat to the other side while in Luke they were walking along the road. Neither of these differences leads to the conclusion that they are separate events. If there were three men, Matthew simply condenses the story (which he characteristically does) to include only two. As for the place, they could have been on a road close to the departure point on the shore. Matthew and Luke simply insert the *pericope* (short story) in different places to suit their own purposes.

The correct chronological order seems to be that of Matthew (but also see Mark below). It is difficult to explain why he would interrupt the narrative between v. 18 and 23 at this point to randomly insert a story about two men who wished to become disciples. Further, there is nothing in vv. 28-34 which is thematically connected to the story; thus, we are led to believe that this is a simple chronological reporting of events, not thematic. But if this is the correct chronological order, *the strict requirements for discipleship given in the passage are highlighted by the fact that Jesus is on the move, going from one side of the Sea of Galilee to the other preaching the kingdom and healing diseases. He has little time for those who hesitate to accept the call; there had been no such hesitation by those whom he had already chosen (Matt. 4: 20—note the word, “immediately”).* On the other hand Luke inserts the pericope (short story) just before the 70 disciples are sent out (10: 1), and this context may give us further understanding of the text. Jesus was not looking for half-hearted volunteers. He wanted disciples who would not hesitate to follow Him. Apparently, He had others to choose from, seventy of whom were chosen for the mission (Lk. 10).

Mark helps us further pinpoint the timing of Jesus’ healing of the Gadarene demoniac. It took place after Jesus’ discourse on parables recorded in Mk. 4 and Matt. 13. Examine Mk. 4 along with the text below.

With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it;³⁴ and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples.³⁵ *On that day*, when evening came, He said to them, "Let us go over to the other side." (Mark 4:33-35 NASB; emphasis mine)

Compare the above text with that of Matt. 13: 53-54, Matthew’s conclusion of the discourse on parables.

When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there.⁵⁴ *He came to His hometown* and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where *did* this man get this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers? (Matthew 13:53-54 NASB; emphasis mine)

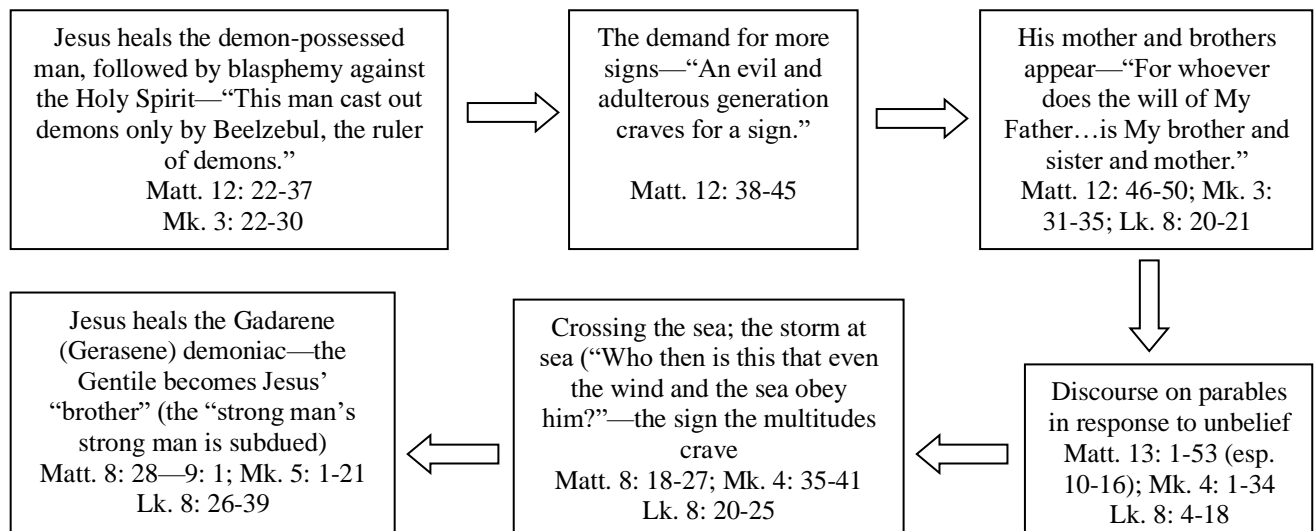
The temporal connection in the above text is much weaker than the one in Mark. Matthew simply says Jesus came to His hometown, but he does not tell us exactly *when* He came there. But Mark says “on that day” Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee and came to the country of the Gadarenes, a very definite temporal indicator.

Notice the sequence of events. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit occurs in Mk. 3: 22-30 (cf. Matt. 12: 22-37). Some of the same scribes and Pharisees who committed this blasphemy demand more signs, but from the context it is clear that the crowds are also demanding more signs. Although the sin of blasphemy is directed against the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus condemns the whole “generation” of Jews who refuse to believe Him on account of the signs He has already given (cf. Matt. 12: 39, 41, 42, and 45 in which “generation” is used). Further, He compares the whole

generation of Jews with the Assyrians living in Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah. Jesus refuses to give more signs, but gives them the sign of Jonah and the witness of the Queen of the South (Matt. 12: 38-45). This is followed by a visit from Jesus' mother and brothers (Matt. 12: 46-50; Mk. 3: 31-35). Notice the temporal indicator, "**While** He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him" (Matthew 12:46 NASB, emphasis mine). Thus, **while** Jesus was still speaking to the crowds about the demand for more signs, Mary and his brothers show up. This is followed by the **discourse on parables**. Note again the temporal indicator in Matt. 13: 1 that is absent in Mk. 4: 1. The temporal indicator "again" in Mk. is not as definite as "that day" in Matthew.

"For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." **That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea.** ²And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. ³ And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; (Matthew 12:50—13:3 NASB; emphasis mine)

"For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother." **He began to teach again by the sea.** And such a very large crowd gathered to Him that He got into a boat in the sea and sat down; and the whole crowd was by the sea on the land. (Mark 3:35—4:1 NASB; emphasis mine)



The sequence of events demonstrates that Jesus departs from the unbelieving multitudes (and the Pharisees who had accused Him of being demonic), crosses the sea, and saves a Gentile demoniac who becomes His "brother" (Mk. 3: 35). Therefore, the sequence from Mk. 3: 22 to Mk. 5: 21 begins and ends with the healing of someone who is demon-possessed. Further, Jesus' declaration that He has successfully bound the strong man, Satan (Matt. 12: 29; Mk. 3: 27), is further demonstrated across the sea when he subdues a demoniac who was able to break chains in pieces (Mk. 5: 3-4). Yet, the unbelieving multitudes are not given the benefit of seeing this miracle. Moreover, the signs they crave—something different from what He has done so far—are given instead to the twelve disciples when they behold Jesus calming the sea. The one who binds the strong man is also God who stills the sea.

C. Jesus Washing the Disciples' Feet—John 13; Luke 22

A close examination of the texts below will indicate that the disciples' dispute about who is the greatest occurs about the same time, or just before, Jesus washes the disciples' feet.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God,⁴ got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself.⁵ Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. (John 13:3-5 NASB)

And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;¹⁶ for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."¹⁷ And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves;¹⁸ for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes."¹⁹ And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."²⁰ And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."²¹ "But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table."²² "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"²³ And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing.²⁴ And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest.²⁵ And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.'²⁶ "But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant."²⁷ "For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? ***But I am among you as the one who serves.*** (Luke 22:24-27 NASB; emphasis mine)

The emphasized words in Luke appear to be a reference to what Christ was doing or what He had done previously. My preference is that Lk. 22: 24-27 refers to ***antecedent action*** before the disciples actually begin the Passover meal. In other words, the question about who would betray Jesus (v. 23) comes at a later time after the Passover had begun. Luke puts the two disputes together to highlight the disciple's confused state of mind. By making the temporal connection between the dispute about greatness and Jesus' washing their feet, one can see that the disciples would be incapable of understanding the momentous events happening that night.

D. Jesus Announces His Betrayal—Matt. 26: 21-25; Mk. 14: 17-21; Lk. 22: 21-23; Jn. 13: 18-26

The Passover meal began with ***all twelve*** disciples reclining with Him around the table. Although Jews sat through their normal meals, at special meals like the Passover, the custom was to recline on the floor with the elbows leaning on the table and the legs stretched out backwards from the table (cf. Carson, *John*, p. 473). As the disciples enter the room they are debating about who among them would be regarded as the greatest, followed by Jesus' correction (see discussion above). Just before eating, Jesus gets up from the table and washes the disciples' feet (Jn. 13: 1-17) as an illustration of his teaching (Lk. 22: 24-30). It should be pointed out that Jesus would not have waited until the meal was already underway—especially after the institution of the Lord's Supper—to wash their feet. This would have been done before the meal (note Jn. 13: 1-4). From this point, the chronological order is provided by Matthew and Mark with other details supplied by John and Luke. Luke's narrative of the Supper does not follow exact chronological order. As best I can determine it, the order of events is as follows:

- (1) The disciples' dispute about who was regarded as the greatest, followed by Jesus' correction (Lk. 22: 24-30)
- (2) Jesus washes the disciples' feet and reclines at the table with the apostles to eat the Passover (Jn. vv. 1-17; Lk. v. 14). While washing Peter's feet, He gives Judas a subtle warning, "and you are clean, but not all *of you*" (Jn. vv. 10-11).

- (3) While they were eating the Passover meal Jesus announces that one of *them* will betray Him (Matt. v. 21; Mk. v. 18; Lk. v. 21; Jn. vv. 18-21). This constitutes a second warning to Judas.
- (4) This is followed by honest confusion and discussion among eleven disciples, “Lord, is it I?” (Matt. v. 22; Mk. v. 19; Lk. v. 23).
- (5) Jesus’ answer to this question, “He who dipped his hand with me in the bowl” (Matt. v. 23; Mk. v. 20). This is a third warning to Judas.
- (6) Jesus’ final and most severe warning to Judas (Matt. v. 24; Mk. v. 21; Lk. v. 21).
- (7) Judas’ hypocritical question, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” (Matt. v. 25a)
- (8) Jesus’ reply to Judas, “You have said it yourself” (Matt. v. 25b).
- (9) Peter motions to John to ask Jesus to identify the traitor (Jn. vv. 23-24).
- (10) John asks Jesus, “Who is it?” (Jn. v. 25).
- (11) Jesus answers John’s question more specifically than He did the previous questions of the disciples, “That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and *give it to him*” (Jn. v. 26a).
- (12) Jesus then gives Judas the morsel of bread (Jn. v. 26b).
- (13) After Judas receives the morsel from Jesus, Satan enters his heart (Jn. v. 27a).
- (14) Knowing Satan had entered Judas’ heart, Jesus tells him, “What you do, do quickly” (Jn. v. 27b).
- (15) After receiving the morsel, Judas leaves the room to betray Jesus (Jn. vv. 30).
- (16) The institution of the Lord’s Supper (Matt. vv. 26-30; Mk. vv. 22-26; Lk. vv. 15-20).
- (17) Jesus’ “farewell discourse” to the disciples which includes the announcement of Peter’s denial at the very beginning (Jn. 13: 31—16: 33; esp. Jn. 13: 36-38; cf. Matt. 26: 31-35; Mk. 14: 27-31; see justification below under “*f*”).
- (18) Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer” (Jn. 17: 1-26).
- (19) Jesus and the remaining eleven disciples sing a hymn and go to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. v. 30; Mk. v. 26; Jn. 18: 1).

As indicated above, the first, subtle, warning given to Judas was while Jesus was washing Peter’s feet and conversing with him—“and you are clean, but *not all of you*.” After the announcement of betrayal—which constitutes a *second* warning to Judas—all of the disciples except Judas respond in genuine self-mistrust, “Surely, not I, Lord?” This honest questioning from “each one” occurs simultaneously with discussions among themselves about which one of them it would be. John indicates that *none* of them had even a clue who Jesus was talking about (v. 22). These questions were followed by Jesus’ answer, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me.” But this was a *veiled* answer because there were *several* disciples who were sharing the same bowl with Jesus (Hendriksen, *John*, p. 244). As such, the statement is not intended to identify the traitor but rather to highlight the heinousness (outrageously wicked) of the crime and its fulfillment of Scripture. Jesus is being betrayed by a person who, from all outward appearances, is His friend and confidant (one in whom He puts confidence). Psalm 41: 9 is thus fulfilled, “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, *Who ate my bread*, Has lifted up his heel against me.” This constituted a not-so-subtle warning to Judas. Jesus was reaching out to him even in this final hour making him realize what a terrible and unspeakable thing he was doing. After every warning, Judas had the opportunity to repent, but failing to do so, the successive warnings become more severe.

After Jesus says this, He follows with the final, most severe warning, “The Son of Man *is to go*, just as it is written of Him; but *woe to that man* by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been

good for that man *if he had not been born.*” Such a warning should have chilled Judas to the bone; but after three years of sitting at Jesus’ feet, watching Him perform miracles, and receiving His kindness and love without true repentance and faith, the opportunity of repentance was past. His heart had become stone. Then why the warnings? Why would Jesus warn someone whom He knew beforehand would not heed the warning, for He said concerning Judas, “One of you *will* betray Me”, not “One of you *might* betray Me.” The betrayal was certain, but He nevertheless reaches out to Judas one more time with a stern, blood-chilling warning (cf. Hendriksen, *John*, p. 244).

While the disciples respond to the announcement with honest self-mistrust, Judas answers with hypocrisy, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” to which Jesus responds, “You have said it yourself.” In other words, “Your own words condemn you.” From this we may assume that Judas is sitting fairly near Jesus (perhaps on His left in a place of honor reserved for the treasurer) and that Jesus whispers these words to him. (When Judas finally left, the disciples (perhaps with the exception of John; see below) still don’t know who the traitor is [Jn. vv. 28-29]).

While the confusion and discussion continues among the other eleven disciples, Peter is motioning to the disciple “whom Jesus loved”, namely, John (v. 23; cf. Jn. 20: 2; 21: 7, 20, John’s designation for himself). John is sitting at Jesus’ right hand with his left elbow leaning on the table and his head and upper body leaning upon Jesus’ chest (“on Jesus’ bosom”; cf. Carson, p. 474; while such nearness would be unacceptable, perhaps repulsive, in Western culture, it was perfectly acceptable in ancient Palestine equivalent to African men holding hands in public). Taking the cue from Peter, he quietly asks Jesus, “Lord, who is it?” In the privacy of this conversation, Jesus whispers to John that the traitor “is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him” (v. 26a). This provides John with more specific information than previously disclosed to the whole group. *No one else* heard Jesus’ statement to John, and we find nothing in the text indicating that the answer is relayed to Peter—who, judging from his behavior in the garden later, would possibly have become violent toward Judas (cf. Jn. 18: 10).

After saying this to John, Jesus then gives the morsel (piece of food) to Judas at which time Satan takes complete control of him (full possession, distinguished from 13: 2; Hendriksen, p. 247). Realizing that Satan has taken complete control of Judas (note the “therefore”), Jesus says to him, “What you do, do quickly” (Jn. v. 27). More accurately, He says, “What you do, do *more* quickly” or “do *faster*” (Hendriksen, p. 247; the word is *tachiov*, also used in Jn. 20: 4). In modern lingo, “Get on with it!” Fully in control of the situation, Jesus determines to be crucified on Friday, the 15th of Nissan (Hendriksen, p. 247). Judas then leaves the company of the disciples to do his dirty work.

From this possible reconstruction of events, the reader will see that I do *not* believe Judas was still present when Jesus formally instituted the Lord’s Supper. (Again, I do not think Luke’s account is strictly chronological). He was present when the Passover feast began, judging from the fact that he was dipping bread in the same cup with Jesus. But I believe that Jesus confronts him as the traitor and allows him to leave before He is willing to inaugurate a communal meal so momentous in the history of the church. To be sure, Judas is not present during Jesus’ lengthy discourse to the disciples, including His high priestly prayer (Jn. 13: 31—18: 1).

E. The Feeding of the 5000; Walking on the Sea; Rejection by Many Disciples
 —*Matt. 14: 22-36; Mk. 6: 45-56; Jn. 6: 15-71*

From Matthew and Mark, we can determine that Jesus walks on the Sea of Galilee during the fourth watch of the night (3-6 AM) several hours after feeding the 5000.

There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children.²² Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away.²³ After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.²⁴ But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.²⁵ And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea. (Matthew 14:21-25 NASB)

There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of *Him* to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away.⁴⁶ After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.⁴⁷ When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land.⁴⁸ Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them. (Mark 6:44-48 NASB)

Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. (John 6:10 NASB)

Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."¹⁵ So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.¹⁶ Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea,¹⁷ and after getting into a boat, they *started to* cross the sea to Capernaum. It had already become dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them.¹⁸ The sea *began* to be stirred up because a strong wind was blowing.¹⁹ Then, when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat; and they were frightened.²⁰ But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid."²¹ So they were willing to receive Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.²² The next day the crowd that stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was no other small boat there, except one, and that Jesus had not entered with His disciples into the boat, but *that* His disciples had gone away alone. (John 6:14-22 NASB)

From the texts above we can reconstruct the series of events. Jesus feeds the 5000 men plus women and children. He then sends the twelve away without him to the other side of the sea. At about 3 to 6 AM in the morning, He walks upon the sea to the disciples. The next day (beginning at 6 AM, not 12 AM), the crowd met Him on the other side of the sea (Jn. 6: 22). After the crowd met him, Jesus delivers His discourse explaining the significance of the feeding of 5000. He is the bread which God has given from heaven, the bread of life which they must eat in order to live (Jn. 6: 26-66). At the end of this discourse, many of the general disciples who had been following Jesus withdrew from Him (v. 66) at which point Jesus turns to the twelve and says, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" (v. 67), to which Peter responds, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (v. 68-69).

Why did Jesus send the twelve away after the feeding of the 5000, and what was His purpose in walking upon the sea? A little comment by Mark helps answer this question, "Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, ***for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened***" (Mark 6:51-52 NASB). The twelve not only had doubted Jesus' ability to feed 5000 with a small amount of food, but they had also failed to gain any insight concerning Jesus' identity from this incident. On the other hand, walking on the sea was another matter, and they were utterly astonished that He could do this. The next day, Jesus would be confronted with a multitude of people who would strongly object to many

of His statements in His discourse, so much so that many of them withdrew from following him. Would the twelve also desert Him? But the previous night, early in the morning, He had done something which they could not forget. He had demonstrated His mastery over the sea, strolling upon it as if it were dry land. Thus, Jesus had provided the disciples an additional object lesson which would ensure their continued faith in the midst of unbelief. The timing of the sea-walk is crucial to the disciples' faith on this occasion—all except one, Judas Iscariot (v. 70).

F. Parables Concerning the Use of Money—Lk 15: 1—16: 31

This is a long section in **Luke** including the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, the unrighteous manager, and the rich man and Lazarus. Luke provides **temporal connections** in Lk. 15: 1-3; 16: 1b; and 16: 14.

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.² Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."³ *So* He told them this parable, saying, (Luke 15:1-3 NASB; emphasis mine)

Notice the word, "so" in the above text. This word alerts the reader to Jesus' purpose, in the present context, for telling the parable of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son. The grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes elicited the parables.

Now He was *also* saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this *manager* was reported to him as squandering his possessions. (Luke 16:1 NASB; emphasis mine)

The word "also" alerts the reader to the fact that the parable of the unrighteous manager is told in temporal connection with the parable of the lost son. Although He was speaking directly to His disciples, v. 16 indicates that the Pharisees were still listening to "all these things", namely, the parables Jesus was telling.

Now the Pharisees, *who were lovers of money*, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. (Luke 16:14 NASB; emphasis mine)

Luke also provides the thematic context for these parables when he writes, "Now the Pharisees, *who were lovers of money*, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him" (Lk. 16:14 NASB). Thus, Jesus is taking the opportunity to deliver a series of parables on one's use of money and his attitude toward money to Pharisees who were lovers of money.

And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.¹⁶ "The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.¹⁷ "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.¹⁸ "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery. (Luke 16:15-18 NASB)

The accusations in these verses may be understood from the context. While the Pharisees were "highly esteemed" in the eyes of the common people, God was not at all impressed with their external righteousness; in fact, He was repulsed by them. Although giving the undiscerning masses a convincing show of personal piety, they were men who loved their money rather than God. But this was not all they did. The Hillite Pharisees were notoriously loose in their interpretation of Biblical

grounds for divorce, dismissing their wives for frivolous reasons. On the other hand, the sinners and tax collectors were “striving to enter the door” leading to salvation (Lk. 13: 24). “Everyone”—all kinds of sinners—were forcing their way into the kingdom of God by listening attentively to Jesus’ words—everyone except self-righteous Pharisees.

Jesus then proceeds to tell another parable about one’s use of money—the rich man and Lazarus. From this parable, it is likely that Jesus is exposing the Pharisee’s lack of compassion for those who were poor. Apart from genuine repentance, the Pharisees mocking at Jesus’ teaching would end up like the rich man, suffering the intense torture of hell separated from the Patriarch they revered, Abraham. Furthermore, they will learn the hard way that they should have been reading the OT scriptures more carefully than they did. Although demanding additional miraculous signs from Jesus—someone appearing to them from the dead (?)—they were not properly interpreting the Messianic predictions of the OT. Consequently, they will still be unprepared and unwilling to believe in Christ when He rises from the dead.

Thus, by looking at the *temporal connections* in Lk. 15—16, we understand that all these parables are spoken on a single occasion and primarily for the purpose of addressing Pharisees.

V. Thematic Arrangements in the Synoptic Gospels

We have already noted that the Synoptists are not especially concerned for strict chronological order. Instead, they often arrange their stories topically according to various themes. The following selections illustrate this thematic arrangement.

A. Matthew’s Call and Matthew’s Dinner—Matt. 9: 10-17; Mk. 2: 15-22; Lk. 5: 29-39

We don’t know how much time elapsed between Matthew’s call and the celebration in his house with other “tax-gatherers and sinners”. Donald Guthrie places this event much later (*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, “Outline of the Life of Christ”, p. 558). Carson offers the most convincing chronology of events which I will condense as follows (*Matthew*, p. 221): From the context of Matt. 9: 18, it is clear that the healing of Jairus’s daughter and the hemorrhaging woman occur just *after* the dinner with Matthew and his friends (Matt. 9: 10-17). All three Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke) place the raising of Jairus’ daughter *after* Jesus heals the demoniac in the country of the Gadarenes (or Gerasenes) which is reported in Matt. 8: 28-34, Mk. 5: 1-20, and Lk. 8: 26-39. Matthew 9: 2-8 places the healing of the paralytic *after* the healing of the demoniac in Gadara (the country of the Gadarenes), but Mark 2: 2-12 and Luke 5: 17-26 place the healing of the paralytic much earlier *before* the Gadarene healing. Matthew wished to arrange *all four* of these events together to suit his thematic purpose.

Carson argues—correctly, I believe—that Matthew’s dinner must have taken place significantly *later* than Matthew’s call as a disciple. Significantly, *none* of the Synoptists tie Matthew’s call and his dinner together with strong temporal connections (cf. Matt. 9: 9-10; Mk. 2: 14-15; Lk. 5: 28-29). “And it happened” (Mk.) and “Then it happened” (Matt.) are weak temporal indicators. Luke simply says, “And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house...” without any reference to time. Carson believes that Mk. 1: 40—2: 14 provides the basic chronological framework (p. 196) while leaving out many details. For a possible chronology of events, see the outline of the Synoptics.

However, since Matthew's call and the dinner with tax-collectors and sinners go well together *thematically*, all three Synoptists record the two events together. Although criticized for eating with tax-collectors and sinners (Matt. 9: 11; cf. Lk. 15: 1-2), Jesus sat down with them and ate with them in order to draw them into the kingdom of heaven. He had not come to call self-"righteous" people to repentance and faith, but sinners (Matt. 9: 13).

B. The Sending of the Twelve Disciples—Matthew 9: 35—11: 1

There is no clear temporal connection between Jesus' lament in Matt. 9: 35-38 and the sending out of the twelve in Matt. 10. However, there is a strong *thematic* connection, especially considering the comment Matthew makes in 9: 34, "But the Pharisees were saying, 'He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.'" This is followed by the lament that the people were like sheep without a shepherd. The Pharisees were no spiritual help to the people, actually burdening them with 633 extra rules and regulations which made their lives unnecessarily difficult. Matthew then records Jesus doing something about this problem by sending the twelve on a mission "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10: 6). On this mission they would preach that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (10: 7); they would "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons" (10: 8), the same things Jesus had been doing to bring people into the kingdom of God. The timing of this mission is left indefinite, but Matthew records it in close connection with Jesus' compassion for the shepherd-less multitudes. Incidentally, this is the first and only time Matthew calls the twelve the "apostles" (literally, "one sent on a mission"; *BibleWorks*) (Carson, p. 236).

C. The Healing of the Gentile Woman and the Feeding of the Four Thousand—Matt. 15: 21-28, 32-39; Mk. 7: 24-30; 8: 1-10

Mark makes a point of saying that this woman was a Gentile, Matthew that she was a Canaanite woman living in the region of Tyre and Sidon. In the episode, Jesus tests the woman's faith by saying that He had been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (15: 24). After listening to her continued pleading, He then insists that it was not appropriate to take the children's bread (Jewish children's bread) and throw it to the Gentile dogs (15: 26). Speaking redemptively-historically, Jesus is saying essentially the same thing He told the Samaritan woman, "salvation is from the Jews" (Jn. 4: 22) and what the Apostle Paul wrote the Roman church, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, *to the Jew first* and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16 NASB). Cleverly, the woman argues that even the dogs are allowed to feed off the children's crumbs (Mk. 7: 28). Having accomplished His goal of highlighting the faith of this Gentile woman in contrast to Jewish unbelief, Jesus then grants the woman her wish.

Mark informs us that Jesus leaves the region of Tyre, comes through Sidon, and then to the Sea of Galilee in Decapolis where He heals a deaf man (Mk. 7: 31-37). Decapolis was heavily populated with Gentiles; therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the 4000 fed on this occasion consisted of many Gentiles (cf. notes on Synoptic Gospels). Thus, with the coming of the new age in Christ, the Gentiles would no longer be feeding on the covenantal crumbs falling from Jewish tables. They would become fellow heirs of the kingdom of God on *equal* standing with the Jews (Eph. 2).

We don't know how much time elapsed between the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter and the feeding of the 4000. Mark says, "In those days" (8: 1) which is a loose temporal

indicator. However, the arrangement of the two stories closely together indicates the important theme of the gospel going to the Gentiles.

D. Peter’s Confession and the Transfiguration—Matt. 16: 13-20; Mk. 8: 27-30; Lk. 9: 18-21; Matt. 17: 1-13; Mk. 9: 2-13; Lk. 9: 28-36

These two stories demonstrate not only Matthew’s *thematic arrangement* of material, but also the importance of *chronology*. The Transfiguration takes place, by Matthew’s calculation, “six days” after Peter’s confession (Matt. 18: 1). In his confession, Peter declares that Jesus is “the Christ, *the Son of the living God*” (16: 16). Six days later, Jesus leads Peter, James, and John—the inner circle of the disciples—upon the mountain to witness the Transfiguration during which the voice of God comes out of heaven declaring, “This is *My beloved Son*, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” (Matthew 17:5 NASB) Thus, in spite of Peter’s “recession” in which he rebukes Jesus for speaking of His death, God the Father confirms Peter’s declaration of Jesus’ identity. Writing years afterwards, Peter says, “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ¹⁷ For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’” (2 Peter 1:16-17 NASB)

E. The Cost of Discipleship and the Sending Out of the Seventy Disciples—Lk. 9: 57—10: 20

We find an almost identical story in Matt. 8: 18-22 in which two men, not three, approach Jesus with the request to follow Him. There is no clear indication of time or place in *Luke*, and it is most likely that this is the *same event* recorded in Matt. 8 with clear temporal and geographical indicators. Luke simply records the same event here with no concern for chronological sequence in order to highlight the *theme* of discipleship. The very next story records the sending out of the 70 (or 72). Where did Jesus acquire this many committed disciples who would receive the power to cast out demons (10: 17)? Clearly, Jesus was not dependent upon volunteers whose commitment to His mission was questionable. Rather, He chose (“appointed”; 10: 1) His disciples and sent them out. Notice the language of 10: 1, “Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others”. “*Now after this*” is a loose *temporal indicator* that gives the reader no definite time frame. “*this*” seems to be a reference to the refusal of the three to follow Him. It is true that Jesus would use the instrumentality of men to accomplish His extended mission of saving the world, but if some refused to come with Him immediately—the three men in Luke’s story—then He would choose “others” who were willing to drop whatever they were doing to respond to His call. His work will get done, with the three volunteers or without them.

The application of the story is not that Christ’s 21st century disciples cannot attend the funerals of their parents, say good-bye to their friends and relatives, or live in permanent dwellings. The point is that following Christ implies the willingness to abandon personal comforts, plans, goals, and even family commitments in order to accomplish our particular calling as disciples. God will not render Himself dependent upon His people. It is our privilege to serve Him, but if we refuse make the sacrifices necessary in this service, He will simply by-pass us and choose someone else.

The story has been use in connection with “thematic arrangements” since there is little reason to suggest that it occurred in chronological connection with the sending out of the seventy. As indicated above, the event probably occurred just before the healing of the Gerasene demoniac.

F. The Second Coming of Christ and Persistent Prayer—Lk. 17: 20—18: 8

At first glance, there appears to be no thematic connection between Jesus' dramatic description of His second coming and the parable of the persistent widow. However, the last statement in the parable (18: 8b) indicates that the need for persistent prayer will be especially important during the traumatic events of His return which is likened to the days of Noah (17: 26, 33). Furthermore, the mention of "justice" and "protection" is a clue to the interpretation of the parable. If an unjust judge will bring about protection and justice for a helpless widow simply because of her unrelenting requests, how much more will a just and holy God who loves His people bring about justice and protection for His elect? Judging from the description given here and elsewhere in Matt. 24, the coming of the Son of Man will occur amidst the intense persecution of the church during which many will fall away from the faith (Matt. 24: 12). Therefore, Jesus tells them, "But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved" (Matthew 24:13 NASB). It will therefore be crucial for one's survival during the intense time of trial and persecution ahead to keep praying and not lose heart in the certainty of God's protection. But when this happens, will those hearing this parable be among those who are persistent in prayer?

One can see from the *thematic arrangement* between the second coming and the need for persistent prayer that Jesus is not promising the believer anything he wants on the basis of persistence. Do you want a new car? Well, if you pray persistently, God will have to give it to you! No. The subject of this parable is the persistence of believers in praying for justice and protection from their persecutors. For those of us living in countries which allow freedom of religion, the parable may not mean much to us, but for believers living in Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, China, and dozens of other countries around the world, the parable provides great comfort.

G. Parables Related to the Second Coming of Christ—Matt.24: 43—25: 46

In the parables of the thief and the sensible slave, the central meaning is the need for *alertness*. If the head of the house had known when the thief was coming, he would have been alert and prepared to defend his house. Believers, therefore, should not allow Christ's coming to catch us asleep or unready. The parable of the sensible slave indicates what readiness entails. When Christ returns, we should not be spending our days sitting under a shade tree playing cards waiting for Him to return. We should be actively *doing* what He has told us to do—namely, taking care of other members of His household. Being ready does not imply being idle. Notice also that the evil slave presumed that the master would not be coming back for a long time, and his behavior toward fellow slaves became abusive. The implication is that lack of expectation of the master's return breeds wicked and careless behavior. The believer lives constantly under the watchful eyes of his master whom he *expects* to see at every turn and at any time.

The third parable of the virgins is about being alert and *prepared for delays*. The bridegroom didn't come back when He was expected, and his delay left five of the virgins ill-prepared for Him when He arrived. A possible analogy is that the believer must persevere for the long term. A sudden burst of energy in spiritual things is not sufficient. The believer must run the marathon, not the 100 meter sprint. Sustainable progress and energy is the key.

The parable of the talents, like the parable of the sensible slave, deals with the *manner of alertness and preparedness*. After entrusting each servant with a considerable sum of money (one talent was equal to 20 years wages), the master goes on a long journey and later returns. This can be none other

than Christ's ascension to the Father followed by His second coming at an undisclosed time. At His return, Christ will settle accounts with all His slaves and each of us will give an account for what we have done during this earthly life (2 Cor. 5: 10; Matt. 16: 27). For those who have been faithful with the gifts, abilities, money, and opportunities he has been given, a reward of additional responsibilities will be given. For those who have squandered these gifts, there will be punishment in hell. The true believer will not be content with a minimum effort which amounts to laziness (v. 26), he will only be content to make the most of his opportunities to be a productive slave in the kingdom of God. For those who have such grace to be productive, God will grant them even more grace in eternity; for those who lack the grace to use His gifts, even the common grace He has will be taken away from Him (v. 29).

The final parable is also concerned with the *manner of preparedness* and is also comparable to the parable of the sensible slave. What will Christ find us doing when He returns? Will we be concerned for the welfare of others, or will we be pursuing our own selfish interests heedless of the needs of others? If we are persistently and characteristically heedless, it proves that we are not true believers. If we spontaneously and characteristically care for the needs of others without being conscious of our good deeds—not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing (Matt. 6: 3)—we prove that God's grace has changed our lives.

A more detailed explanation of these parables is found in my notes, *The Synoptic Gospels*. The important thing to note in this study is that all these parables are *arranged according to a common theme*, the second coming of Christ and His judgment of men. Believers must be alert and ready for this judgment; but further, their alertness must demonstrate the willingness to be about the Lord's business rather than pursuing their own selfish interests.

VI. Different Emphases in the Gospels Accounting for Differences in Reporting and Content

Why do we have four gospels rather than one? The *Gospel of John* is somewhat distinct from the Synoptics in its emphasis, but even the Synoptics demonstrate different emphases distinguishing them from one another. What are they and how do these different emphases enhance our understanding of Jesus' teaching and miraculous works?

A. Matthew

As we have seen earlier, *Matthew* contains more quotations from the OT than *Luke* and *Mark*. *John* has less than *Mark*. Writing to Jews, Matthew is especially intent to prove that Jesus was the fulfillment of the OT scriptures, particularly as the embodiment of the Law and the Prophets. Frank Thielman suggests that this emphasis is demonstrated in five ways in Matthew's gospel: Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures, His embodiment of the Law and of Wisdom, His identity as the new and greater Moses, His identity as the messianic son of David and Son of God, and His identity as the personification of Israel (*Theology of the New Testament*; p. 84). We will explore three of these below. I will also be drawing from Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*.

1. Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets

a. Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures and the new Israel

The structure of the gospel according to *Matthew* is a restatement of the history of Israel (Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, Chapter 17, "*Fulfillment of the Law in the Gospel According to Matthew*"). We can see this development in the following ways: (1) The

genealogy of Jesus beginning with Abraham; (2) the supernatural birth of Jesus corresponding to the miraculous birth of Isaac to Abraham; (3) the attempt on Jesus' life corresponding to Pharaoh's murder of male Israelite infants; (4) the flight to Egypt and his return to the land promised to the fathers corresponding to Israel's move to Egypt and the exodus [Jesus, like Moses, is the new deliverer]; (5) Jesus is led up into the wilderness for forty days to be tested, even as Israel was tested for 40 years in the wilderness; contrary to the Israelites who wanted to live by bread alone, Jesus quotes the Law; (6) Jesus heals diseases among the people corresponding to God's deliverance of Israel from the diseases of Egypt—Dt. 7: 15, (7) Jesus is the great Law-giver and a prophet, the one Moses promised the people in Dt. 18: 18-19.

We have already made note of many of these references in our treatment of OT quotations, but perhaps it would serve our purposes to repeat some of these here. (All references below are from *Matthew, NASB, 1995 edition.*)

1. The virgin birth (1:22-23; cf. Isa. 7: 14; 9: 6-7; and 8: 10)
2. His birth in Bethlehem (2:5-6; cf. Micah 5: 2)
3. His move with Joseph and Mary to Egypt (2:14-15; cf. Hosea 11: 1)
4. Herod's slaughter of Israelite males (2:16-18 NASB; cf. Jer. 31: 15)
5. His decision to make Capernaum His home base (4:14-16; cf. Isa. 9: 1)
6. His healing ministry (8:16-17; cf. Isa. 53: 4)
7. His silencing those He healed (12:17-21; cf. Isa. 42: 1-3)
8. His use of parables as a form of judgment (13:13-15; cf. Isa. 6: 9-10)
9. Riding into Jerusalem on a donkey (21:4-5; cf. Isa. 62: 11; Zech. 9: 9)
10. His refusal to call for deliverance from arrest (26: 53-54; cited in Thielman; no direct OT quotation but a general reference to the necessity of His suffering; cf. Lk. 24: 25-27)
11. The thirty pieces of silver to purchase the potter's field (27:7-10; cf. Zech. 11: 12-13)

As we have also noted, many of these quotations are introduced by Matthew's familiar formula quotation, "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet". As Thielman observes, "The formula quotations show that Jesus' life and ministry from his conception to his death mesh with the expectations of Israel's prophets for the eschatological restoration of Israel" (Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 85-86). Confirmation of this assessment can be made by reviewing Matthew's quotations from the prophets (see above under "OT Quotations").

Jesus came not to do away with the OT scriptures—the Law or the Prophets—but to fulfill them (Matt. 5: 17). This becomes evident in His interpretation of the Law of Moses from 5: 21-48, for why should He explain what He is now setting aside or abolishing? Yet, there is distinct **discontinuity** between Jesus' promulgation of the Law (formal declaration or publication) and the Law as given through Moses. This is demonstrated numerous times in Jesus' formula saying, "You have heard that it was said...but I say to you." There is more to Jesus' words than a mere restatement or reinterpretation of Moses. Sometimes He clearly goes beyond the teaching of Moses. According to Poythress,

...Jesus' concentration on issues of the heart represents a **shift of focus** in comparison with the law of Moses...the **stress** of the law is **predominantly** on externals. The Ten Commandments...focus in their obvious meaning on the most obvious violations....Jesus' teaching does not contradict the true meaning of the law of Moses, **but neither is it**

a straightforward exposition of the obvious meaning of Moses. For example, Jesus intensifies the punishments of the law. Now that the kingdom of heaven is near, the copy is about to be *superseded* by the reality. The preliminary is about to be superseded by the final. Jesus therefore speaks of the final judgment, the judgment of hell, rather than merely the preliminary judgments embodied in portions of the law of Moses....(Matthew 5:22; 5:30, 5:20). Jesus here confirms...that the external punishments enjoined by Moses *foreshadow the ultimate punishments* to be executed by God (pp.258-259, italic emphasis his; bold emphasis mine).

Thielman concurs by saying,

The Mosaic law was incomplete as it stood, and Jesus brought it to its eschatological fulfillment.... The “law of the Lord” was indeed “perfect” for these less than perfect situations in a theocracy that included both the godly and those whose hearts were corrupt. In contrast, Matthew believed that Jesus was assembling a new people who were “pure in heart” (5: 8). For such a people the humane foundation that lay beneath the Mosaic law could be brought to the surface and the Mosaic law brought to its fulfillment. In the situation Jesus envisioned, the only court would be the eschatological judgment of God, and the maximum punishment would not be physical death but hell itself (5: 22, 29-30). Evidence in this court would not be the outward, physical violations of normal societal statutes but the intentions of the heart (5: 22, 28; cf. 6: 21; 12: 34; 13: 15; 15: 8, 18; 19: 8) (*Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 88-89).

This brings us to the next section.

b. His identity as the new and greater Moses

(1) Matthew 1—7

While Matt. 1—4 concentrates on the narrative portions of the life of Christ corresponding to the Pentateuch (the five books of Moses), Matt. 5—7 concentrates on the teaching of Jesus as the new law-giver corresponding to the Moses (Poythress, p. 255). Even the narrative portion prepares the reader for this identification. Herod’s slaughter of the male infants is equivalent to Pharaoh’s slaughter of the infant Israelite males (Ex. 1: 15-22). Joseph and Mary’s move from Egypt back to Israel is equivalent to Moses moving his family back to Egypt, his native land. The reason for each move is also the same. The one seeking the life of Jesus had died, even as the one seeking the life of Moses had died (Ex. 4: 19; Matt. 2: 19-20; Thielman, p. 92). The setting of the Sermon on the Mount (a mountain) draws the reader’s attention to the resemblance of Moses’ receiving the Law on Mount Horeb. Chamblin has noted that just before Jesus began to teach, he “sat down” (5: 1), an act which Matthew used to remind his readers that Jesus was “sitting in Moses’ seat” (Matt. 23: 2; Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished class notes, p. 34).

The Beatitudes (5: 3-12) remind us of the covenant ceremony of Deuteronomy 27—28 during which the curses and blessings of the covenant were pronounced upon the Israelites from Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim respectively (Poythress, p. 256). The Beatitudes, therefore, must be seen within the broader context of covenant obedience or disobedience to the law of God which will either be blessed or cursed. With the blessings of the Beatitudes, there is also implied the curses for those whose lives do not conform to the Beatitudes. For example, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (v. 8), implies the opposite, that those who are not pure in heart will *not* see God. Explicit curses upon those who disobey Jesus’ words come at the end of the Sermon (Matt. 7: 24-27; Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, p. 90).

(2) The Mount of Transfiguration

In the episode of the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17), Jesus is met by two prominent figures from the OT, Moses and Elijah, representative of the Law and the Prophets respectively. On that occasion, Jesus' face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. This description had been made of only one other human being, Moses, the man of God who had spoken with the Lord on the mountain (Ex. 34: 29-30). But this is where the comparison ends. On this occasion, Jesus' face is not shining because the Lord is speaking to Him; rather, His face begins to shine before any words are uttered from heaven. Moses and Elijah then appear, followed only moments later by the appearance of a bright cloud. A voice then comes out of the cloud saying, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" (Matthew 17:5 NASB) Therefore, the analogy is not that Jesus' face shone—as Moses' face shone—*because* He was talking with God. Rather, Jesus' face shone because He *was* God. As Chamblin remarks,

The brilliance which shines forth from Jesus is not (as with Moses) a *reflected* glory [i.e. reflected from God] but an *inherent* glory, the glory of Yahweh himself (cf. Jn. 1: 14). Moses, Elijah and the disciples are with Jesus as Moses was with Yahweh. As both Moses and Elijah conversed with Yahweh on Sinai, so here too both of them converse with Jesus, Yahweh incarnate and now disclosed in glory. "Moses meets 'God with us' on a new cloud-covered Sinai just as he met God on the old cloud-covered Sinai" (Gundry, 344). There is an important difference, however. In face of the disciples' (quite predictable) fear over the awesome presence of God, Jesus—God incarnate—*comes* to them, *touches* them and *speaks* to them to dispel their fear (v. 7)...Jesus, "God with us," bridges the gap between the terrifying majesty of God the Father and the frail human beings trembling with fear before him on the mountain (Knox Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished class notes, p. 127, bold emphasis his; underlined emphasis and words in brackets mine).

Further, as noted in the voice from heaven, Jesus was not there to listen to Moses and Elijah. Moses, Elijah, and the three disciples were there to listen to Jesus—"listen to Him!" There was no equality between Jesus and Moses; Jesus was the new and *greater* law-giver. Only through this inherent authority could Jesus make the repeated statement in the Sermon on the Mount, "You have heard that it was said [followed usually by a *direct quotation* from the Law]...but *I say unto you*." At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the crowds listening to Him were amazed because He was teaching them as one who had authority (Matt. 7: 29). As the legitimate interpreter of the Mosaic Law, Jesus' action is set in contrast to the scribes and Pharisees who twisted the Mosaic legislation with the traditions of men.

(3) *The Great Commission*

Jesus left His disciples with the *great commission* which included the command of "teaching them [*the nations*] to observe all that I [*not Moses*] commanded you" (Matt. 28: 20) (cf. Thielman, p. 92).

(4) *Jesus' teaching on divorce*

There is perhaps no other single example of Jesus' independence and superiority to Moses than His teaching on divorce. Since this is such a definitive departure from Mosaic legislation, I have given it a somewhat lengthy treatment. Two texts are pivotal in developing this theme.

"It was said, 'WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE';³² but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32 NASB)

*Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?"⁴ And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM*

MALE AND FEMALE,⁵ and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.'⁶ "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."⁷ They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY?"⁸ He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way."⁹ "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:3-9 NASB)

Two schools of thought existed in Jesus' day—the Shammai school and the Hillel school. The first of these interpreted the law of divorce more conservatively to mean that it was legitimate only on the grounds of sexual immorality. The more liberal Hillel school allowed divorce for more frivolous reasons including burning the husbands' food (Chamblin, p. 41; Carson, p. 411). It would appear from the Mosaic legislation that the Shammai school was too strict and the Hillel school too lenient. Moses permitted divorce for reasons *other than* adultery because of the hardness of men's hearts. The "indecency" (Deut. 24: 1) found in her must have been something other than adultery since adultery was punishable by death (Lev. 20: 10). There would be no need for divorcing a dead woman who had been executed for adultery. On the other hand, the Hillel school had exercised liberality to an extreme, allowing divorce for all kinds of ridiculous reasons.

The Mosaic legislation was not designed to make divorce *easy* for hard-hearted men, but to give them reason for *hesitation* if they chose to divorce their wives without sufficient reason. If they went ahead and divorced their wives for "some indecency", and if she married another man, her former husband could never marry her again even if she was divorced by her latter husband or if her latter husband died. There could be no going back to this relationship, so it was advisable for the husband to carefully consider whether he would go through with it. Therefore, the Mosaic Law actually restricted divorce without forbidding it. Keep in mind that divorce would have been unnecessary in the case of adultery, since the guilty party would be executed. At the first advent of Christ, the penalty for adultery in Palestine was no longer execution, and the guilty party could be divorced. The righteousness of this solution is evident from Matt. 1: 19, "And Joseph her husband, *being a righteous man*, and not wanting to disgrace her, desired to put her away secretly." Therefore, divorce for the reason of adultery was not only legally permissible but "righteous" in the sight of God.

Jesus confirms the righteousness of divorce for reason of adultery (*porneia*—which includes any sexual immorality) by the exceptional clause, "except for the cause of unchastity" (v. 32). We have to take the exceptional clause seriously as not only setting forth the legitimate grounds for divorce but also the legitimate grounds for remarriage in case of divorce (for a detailed treatment of this argument, see John Murray, *Divorce*). *If*, indeed, the wife is divorced for reasons other than sexual immorality (*porneia*), and if she marries another man, *then* she will be guilty of adultery, as well as the man who marries her. The phrase, "makes her commit adultery" most likely means that the husband divorcing his wife for reasons other than adultery puts his divorced wife in the difficult predicament of surviving alone in a difficult ancient culture, in which case she may marry another man in order to survive (Ferguson, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 91). For this reason, Hendriksen prefers to interpret the verse, "exposes her to adultery" because the husband puts her in a very tempting situation to remarry *illegitimately*. On the other hand, if the divorce was for reason of adultery, and if the divorced woman remarries, she has *not* committed adultery *by remarriage*, nor has the man who marries her. Sexual immorality is a legitimate reason for divorce which breaks the

covenantal bond of marriage allowing both the guilty party and the guiltless party to remarry without committing adultery through remarriage.

Time will not permit a discussion of all the complicated scenarios concerning divorce and remarriage. What should interest us at this point is that Jesus' statement in v. 32 is *not specifically found in the Mosaic legislation*. The warning of adultery to the woman divorced for illegitimate reasons may be logically deduced from the prohibition of remarriage to the former husband because of being "defiled" (Deut. 24: 4), *but the sin of making her commit adultery through remarriage is not specifically stated in the OT passage*. Jesus makes it clear that the defilement of Deut. 24: 4 is adultery (Adams, pp. 66-68). However, it is seriously questionable that this would have been deduced from the Mosaic legislation alone, and if one wishes to prove that this "defilement" was in fact, understood as adultery in the OT, then he proves too much. He proves that *not all adultery* in the OT was punishable by death—namely, adultery committed through remarriage.

There seems to be little question that Jesus is here going beyond (adding to) the Mosaic legislation regulating divorce *to include adultery occasioned by illegitimate divorce*, something not specifically spelled out in the OT. (For further reading, see John G. Reisinger, *But I Say Unto You....*, pp. 55-73, in which Reisinger challenges the typical reformed opinion that the standard of ethical behavior in the Old Covenant is exactly the same as that in the New Covenant).

A parallel passage on divorce is found in Matt. 19: 1-12. On that occasion (which is not the Sermon on the Mount) Jesus is teaching in Judea (v. 1) and is approached by the Pharisees (v. 3) with the question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?" On this occasion Jesus appeals to Gen. 1: 27; 5: 2; and 2: 23-24. The clause, "for any cause at all" refers to the spurious and frivolous reasons which many Jewish men were using to justify divorce based on the liberal interpretations of the Hillel school. Jesus' appeal to the Genesis account, and his qualification of the Mosaic legislation—"Because of your hardness of heart"—indicates that he was now *abrogating divorce for reason of "indecentry"* (Carson, p. 417). By his own testimony, there was but one reason for divorce—sexual immorality (another is given by Paul in 1 Cor. 7). Again, it is necessary to stress that the "indecentry" of Deut. 24: 1 could not have been adultery in which case the woman would have been put to death. Poythress notes a difference between Matt. 5: 31-32 and Matt. 19: 4-6 in the following statement:

Jesus corrects this abuse [the abuse of the Pharisees who permitted loose divorce], but *goes beyond the direct teaching of Moses* by indicating that divorce is morally evil. His teachings are in harmony with Genesis 2: 23-24, as we are reminded in Matt. 19: 4-6. *But in the context of Matt. 5: 31-32 His teaching on divorce rests on His own authority rather than merely on an appeal to Genesis* (p. 259; emphasis mine).

In either passage, he is abrogating the legitimacy of divorce for *any other reason* than sexual immorality and thereby *demonstrating his authority to advance the ethical standard beyond the Mosaic legislation*. While it is true that Moses also wrote Gen. 2, it seems clear that the fuller revelation of what Moses wrote is not found in the Mosaic Law but in Christ alone. Furthermore, in Matt. 19 Jesus makes it clear that the guilt of adultery attaches not only to the woman who remarries after an unlawful divorce and her new husband (5: 32), but also her former husband who remarries (19: 9). Thus, all the parties are implicated in adultery—the divorced woman, her new husband, her former husband and his new wife. This was admittedly "bad news" for the Pharisees whose fondness for divorce had become openly scandalous (Carson, p. 411).

The question which naturally occurs to the modern reader is: ***What about a husband divorced by his wife?*** The answer is that wives were not allowed to divorce their husbands in the ancient Eastern context, even in Jewish culture. If the husband, or an unmarried man, was guilty of sexual relations with a ***married*** woman, both of them would be executed, thus eliminating the need for divorce from an adulterous husband (Deut. 22: 22). On the other hand, if the husband had sexual relations with an ***unmarried*** woman, this was not considered adultery since polygamous relationships (more technically polygyny—having more than one wife) were permitted. For instance, if Bathsheba had not been married, King David would not have been confronted by Nathan the prophet for adultery, but he would have been expected to pay her father a dowry and take her as his wife. Bathsheba’s father, on the other hand, would not have been obligated to give her to David (Ex. 22: 17), although an unlikely scenario. In Jewish law, David’s offense was not against his many wives—at least six at the time of his adultery—but against Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband. In the case of an unmarried woman, the offense is against the woman’s father, with whom no formal contract of marriage has been arranged (David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible*, p. 98). The man who seduces a virgin must pay the dowry to the woman’s father whether he takes the woman as his wife or not (Ex. 22: 16) since the father would no longer be able to get the same amount of bride price for a woman who was no longer a virgin (Hurley, p. 39).

In Matt. 19, Jesus does not lend himself to the ongoing debate by pointing out the original meaning of the text. Rather, ***he goes beyond the text of Deuteronomy by stressing the importance of marriage as a creational ordinance***, “And He answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning made them male and female, and said, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh”? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate’ ” (vv. 4-6). The structure of marriage—the “one flesh” principle—***did not begin with Moses but with Adam and Eve at the beginning of creation***. It is, therefore, unnatural to divide what God has joined together; and it is only because of men’s sinful hearts that this unnatural division has come about (Carson, p. 413). The emphasis of the whole debate about the grounds for marriage was misplaced, an emphasis which Jesus now condemns by properly pointing to God’s original design for marriage. Although all divorce is not unlawful, all divorce is based on sin.

Challenging Jesus, the Pharisees again go back to Deut. 24: 1-4, quoting Moses’ command to give the wife a certificate of divorce and send her away. Jesus corrects their interpretation, pointing out that Moses never ***commanded*** the husband to send his wife away, but ***permitted*** him to do so because of the hardness of men’s hearts. The hardness of their hearts is partly a reference to their indifference to the sanctity of marriage as a creation ordinance and their moral obligations in the marriage. Their self-serving interests in possessing the “perfect” wife to gratify their own selfish desires had clouded their judgment about the marriage covenant which required them to be loving companions to their wives and to treat them as they would their own bodies. Although this requirement for marriage is made more explicit by the Apostle Paul in Eph. 5: 28, Paul uses the creational ordinance expressed in Gen. 2: 24 to make this point—the husband and wife are one flesh, thus any mistreatment of one’s wife is mistreatment of himself (Eph. 5: 31).

Jesus therefore goes beyond the Mosaic legislation of Deut. 24 by forbidding divorce for any reason other than sexual immorality (*porneia*), thus eliminating the normal practice of divorce for any “indecent” other than sexual immorality. He also goes beyond the Jewish understanding of adultery

as an offense only against another *husband*. “Another woman” of Matt. 19: 9 is a single woman, yet Christ says that if the man divorces his wife and marries this single woman, he has committed adultery “against” *his former wife* (cf. Mk. 10: 11). As Hurley notes, “This step is radical in its historical context, *placing husband and wife on the same level...*” (p. 97; emphasis mine; see also Lane, p. 357). This would not imply, however, that Jesus was proclaiming the immorality of polygamy as such (as Instone Brewer argues); otherwise His forbidding of such a practice would have been registered in Paul’s instructions later in 1 Tim. 3: 2, the qualifications for elders. At this time, polygamy among Jews was becoming less common. Nevertheless, a man may not divorce his wife for reasons other than *porneia* (including adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, etc.) and marry another woman without incurring the guilt of adultery. This teaching was radically new in Israel and overturned both the Hillel and the Shammai schools of thought *as well as the Mosaic legislation* allowing divorce for *some other indecency* (Hurley, pp. 102-103; cf. Lane, p. 357).

The additional statement found in Mk. 10: 12, “and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery”, also intensifies Jesus’ *radical departure from Jewish law*. The right of divorce was reserved to the husband even though the wife could sue for divorce for certain reasons—denial of conjugal rights or lack of material maintenance (Ex. 21: 9-11; cf. Instone-Brewer, pp. 99-102). Nevertheless, the act of divorce had to be carried out by the husband (Lane, p. 358, including note 19).

The new element in this teaching, which was totally unrecognized in the rabbinic courts, was the concept of a husband committing adultery against his former wife. According to rabbinic law a man could commit adultery against another married man by seducing his wife (Deut. 22: 13-29) and a wife could commit adultery against her husband by infidelity, but a husband could not be said to commit adultery against his wife. The unconditional form of Jesus’ statement served to reinforce the abrogation of the Mosaic permission in Deut. 24: 1. This sharp intensifying of the concept of adultery had the effect of elevating the status of the wife to the same dignity as her husband and placed the husband under an obligation of fidelity (Lane, p. 357).

Mark was writing for Gentiles who would be more oriented toward Roman law which permitted wives to divorce their husbands. The pronouncement is also a bold condemnation of Herod Antipas and Herodias, former wife of Philip, who divorced him to marry Herod Antipas, a union which John the Baptist declared unlawful (Matt. 14: 1-4). (Lane also points out that some manuscript evidence does not use the word “divorce”, *apoluo*, but “desertion”, p. 358).

The urgent question at this juncture is: Why did Mark leave out the exceptional clause—“except for immorality”—which Matthew includes? It is possible that Mark, writing to Gentile readers, did not consider it necessary to mention this exception since they would have *assumed* the exception. For Matthew’s Jewish readers, however, divorce upon the grounds of adultery *effectively abolished the death penalty for adultery established in the Mosaic Law* (Carson, p. 418).

Again, the purpose of this lengthy discussion of divorce and remarriage is to illustrate Jesus’ independence of Mosaic legislation. He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it; but in fulfilling the law, He claimed the authority to make ethical demands superseding the Law of Moses. This is to be expected. The progressive revelation of Christ allows the progressive revelation of the ethical demands of the Law. Jesus clearly demonstrates in His “but I say unto you” formula sayings that He is not constrained by a mere rote understanding of OT law. Rather, He penetrates more deeply into the radical demands of obedience that strikes to the very heart of the

commandments but which would have remained undiscovered apart from His divine disclosure—to the Israelite and to us. Furthermore, He even takes the liberty of abrogating some provisions of the Mosaic case law, namely, the right of divorcing one's wife for any other reason than adultery. Given the equality of women in the new covenant, we would expect Jesus to give an interpretation of divorce which is more sensitive to their elevated status in the kingdom of God.

(It should be noted here that Jesus was dealing with husbands and wives within the covenant community. This situation would be equivalent to a situation between a believing husband and a believing wife in the new covenant community of the church. The Apostle Paul addresses a somewhat different marriage between a believing spouse and an unbelieving spouse in 1 Cor. 7. The reader may wish to examine this situation more closely in my *Systematic Theology, "Anthropology"*. Jesus was not attempting on these two occasions—Matt. 5 and 19—to give an exhaustive analysis of the grounds for divorce. This should be self-evident from 1 Cor. 7 where Paul gives additional grounds for divorce. For further reading, see Jay Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* and David Instone Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* and *Divorce and Remarriage in the Church*.)

c. His embodiment of the Law and of Wisdom

Jesus not only taught the law with inherent authority, He embodied the law in His life and ministry. The Apostle Paul says "He knew no sin", and Jesus openly challenged the scribes and Pharisees—who were looking carefully for anything to accuse Him—"Which one of you convicts me of sin?" (Jn. 8: 46a). No one has more carefully and completely modeled selflessness, mercy, compassion, purity of heart, and all the moral attributes of God, than the incarnate Son of God. We are saved as much by His sinless life as a substitute for our obedience as we are His substitutionary death.

Jesus is also the embodiment of wisdom. I do not agree with Thielman that there is an "*identification*" of Christ with OT wisdom (p. 91). In Prov. 8: 22, the Lord "possessed" wisdom before He created the world. "Possessed" presents the connotation of an *attribute* of God, not the second person of the Trinity. In Prov. 8: 24, wisdom is "brought forth" (NASB) or "given birth" (NIV), and in Prov. 8: 27 wisdom is presented as a witness to creation rather than the Creator. Neither of three descriptions is appropriate for Christ who, as the second person of the Trinity, was never "born" nor was He merely a witness to creation nor possessed by the Father. John says, "All things came into being through Him [Christ], and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3 NASB). (For a detailed discussion, see Bruce Waltke, *Proverbs*; or see a condensed discussion of Walke's position in my *Wisdom Literature*, pp. 24-25.)

Nevertheless, I do believe there is an *allusion* to OT wisdom in Matt. 11: 28-30 (the direct quotation is to Jer. 6: 16).

"*Come to Me*, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and *I will give you rest*.²⁹ "Take My yoke upon you and *learn from Me*, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.³⁰ "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30 NASB; emphasis mine)

Compare this quotation with Prov. 8: 32-35.

"Now therefore, *O sons, listen to me*, For blessed are they who keep my ways. ³³ "***Heed instruction and be wise***, And do not neglect *it*. ³⁴ "Blessed is the man who listens to me, Watching daily at my gates, Waiting at my doorposts. ³⁵ "For ***he who finds me finds life*** And obtains favor from the LORD. (Proverbs 8:32-35 NASB; emphasis mine)

The gentle beckoning (calling) of Christ is generally equivalent to the beckoning of wisdom, and the results are the same: those who listen and obey will be blessed. Furthermore, Jesus' invitation to feed upon Him in John's gospel is at least reminiscent of Lady Wisdom's invitation to her banquet in Proverbs 9.

"I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ "This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh." . . . ⁵³ "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. ⁵⁴ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. ⁵⁵ "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. ⁵⁶ "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ "This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:48-51, 52-58 NASB)

Wisdom has built her house, She has hewn out her seven pillars; ²She has prepared her food, she has mixed her wine; She has also set her table; ³She has sent out her maidens, she calls From the tops of the heights of the city: ⁴ "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here!" To him who lacks understanding she says, ⁵ "Come, eat of my food And drink of the wine I have mixed. (Proverbs 9:2-5 NASB)

Wisdom invites the naïve to cease their foolish ways by partaking of her food and wine. To eat her delicacies is synonymous to listening to her counsel. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus prepares His own table for those who believe in Him. By fellowshiping with Christ at His table, we symbolize our willingness to listen to His word. There is another possible allusion to Wisdom's house (Prov. 9: 1) in Jesus' concluding remarks in the Sermon on the Mount.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a ***wise man*** who built his ***house*** on the rock. ²⁵ "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and *yet* it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. (Matthew 7:24-25 NASB; emphasis mine)

2. *The opposition of the religious hierarchy of Israel*

More than any other Synoptist, Matthew emphasizes the opposition of the religious hierarchy of Israel against the person and ministry of Jesus. At one point in his narrative, Matthew even omits a positive reference to this hierarchy which Luke includes in his narrative (Thielman, p. 100). Examine the following texts from ***Matthew*** and ***Luke*** concerning the healing of the centurion's slave.

And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, ⁶ and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." ⁷ Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." ⁸ But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does *it*." ¹⁰ Now when Jesus heard *this*, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. ¹¹ "***I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; ¹² but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.***" ¹³ And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that *very* moment. (Matthew 8:5-13 NASB)

When He had completed all His discourse in the hearing of the people, He went to Capernaum. ² And a centurion's slave, who was highly regarded by him, was sick and about to die. ³ ***When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders asking Him to come and save the life of his slave.*** ⁴ ***When they came to Jesus, they earnestly***

*implored Him, saying, "He is worthy for You to grant this to him; ⁵for he loves our nation and it was he who built us our synagogue."*⁶ Now Jesus *started* on His way with them; and when He was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself further, for I am not worthy for You to come under my roof;⁷ *for this reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You*, but *just* say the word, and my servant will be healed."⁸ "For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it."⁹ Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith."¹⁰ When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health. (Luke 7:1-10 NASB)

The first difference we encounter is that Matthew reports the event as if the centurion speaks directly with Jesus, while Luke offers the additional information that the Centurion—aware of the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles, and respecting this separation—sends others in his place to speak with Jesus. The apparent contradiction is softened by recognizing that exact reporting of events is not necessary for divine inspiration. It is resolved by recognizing cultural practices—by sending others to mediate for him, the centurion was essentially going in person. There is no essential difference. Luke, a Gentile (cf. Col. 4: 11, 14), was also sensitive to this wall of separation between Jew and Gentile; and by the time he wrote *Luke* and *Acts*, he was keenly aware that Christ through His death had broken down this barrier between the two. Writing to a Gentile audience whom he wishes to win to a Jewish savior, Luke is especially eager to mention that there were at least some ranking Jews in the religious establishment—elders no less—who believed in the power of Jesus to heal this man's slave. What's more, the Jewish elders came *in public* to ask this favor and "earnestly implored Him" (v. 4) while Jesus was surrounded by the crowds (v. 9; "the crowd that was following Him").

But what about Matthew? Why does he omit this important part of the story? Writing to the Jewish audience—most of whom had rejected Christ—Matthew does not wish to mitigate (lessen) Jesus' stinging rebuke to the Jewish nation on this occasion. While both Matthew and Luke mention the relative lack of faith in Israel (Matt. v. 10; Lk. v. 9b), Matthew records two additional comments. In v. 10, Jesus says, "with *anyone* in Israel" while Luke only says, "in Israel". Secondly, Matthew records the stinging rebuke in vv. 11-12 which is omitted by Luke. This could be interpreted as none other than the inclusion of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God while at the same time the Jews are thrown into hell.

Thielman makes this observation,

For Matthew, this comprehensive rejection of Jesus by the corrupt leaders of the Jewish people leads inexorably [without alteration] to God's judgment on his people. This judgment takes two forms: the destruction of Jerusalem and the movement of God's saving purposes beyond the ethnic boundaries of Israel. Matthew brings these two themes to the surface in several places [one of those places being the healing of the centurion's slave].... Matthew intends his readers to understand that the lack of faith in Jesus within Israel has led to God's judgment, and this judgment has expressed itself in the extension of God's saving purposes beyond Israel to include the Gentiles (*Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 100-101).

Another difference is found in Matt. 12 and Lk. 11 with Jesus' example of the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South—believing Gentiles. In the story, both Matthew and Luke use the examples of the believing Gentiles, and both use the illustration about an evil spirit leaving a man and then coming back with seven other evil spirits, thus making the man's condition worse than it was at first. The difference is in the way Matthew and Luke use the story and the story's grammatical relationship to the believing Gentiles. In *Luke*, the story of the evil spirit comes *before* the mention of the men of

Nineveh and the Queen of the South. This order suggests a meaning which is more directly applied to the individual. Considering those persons who have been delivered of demons, they are now duly warned to follow the exorcism with faith in Christ lest the spiritual vacuum in their lives be filled with a demon possession worse than the first. On the other hand, by placing the story of the evil spirit *after* the example of believing Gentiles, Matthew *focuses the attention upon the unbelieving Jewish generation in contrast to the believing Gentiles of Nineveh and the Queen of the South*. The story of the evil spirit now has a more corporate meaning and application related to the Jewish nation. While the *Jewish nation* has been the beneficiary of multiple exorcisms and the comprehensive ministry of Christ, their unbelief—if not corrected—will result in a national condition far worse than it was *before Jesus came*. Evidence for this interpretation is found in v. 45 with the conclusion of the parable, “That is the way it will also be with this evil generation”—that is, your last state will be worse than the first. Included in this statement is a veiled warning of the destruction of Jerusalem that would come in 70 AD (cf. Thielman, p. 101 and quotation above).

In the parable of the vineyard owner (Matt. 21: 33-46; Mk. 12: 1-12; Lk. 20: 9-19), the content in each gospel is essentially the same except for Matthew’s comment at the end, “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it” (Matt. 21:43 NASB). This warning is similar to that when Jesus healed the centurion’s slave, “I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;¹² but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:11-12 NASB).

Finally, Matthew’s gospel is unique in its inclusion of a long discourse of seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23: 1-39; note: v. 14 is not in the earliest and best manuscripts). A comparable text is found in Lk. 11: 42-54 in which six woes are pronounced, but the size of the Matthean discourse is much larger and more comprehensive.

3. Israel’s negative example not to be imitated by the church

Thielman has observed that Matthew shows an interest in the church going beyond that of the other synoptists.

Only in his gospel does Jesus use the term “church” (*ekklesia*, 16: 18; 18: 17) and express an interest in the church’s authority (16: 18-19; 18: 18), discipline (18: 15-18), and offices 23: 8-10). When Matthew considers the church, however, most of his attention is focused on a single concern: The church should not repeat the errors of the “wicked and adulterous generation” who have rejected Jesus and persecuted his followers. He hopes to prevent this both by recording warnings of Jesus against the hypocrisy that characterizes unbelieving Judaism and by urging the church to shepherd vulnerable Christians with special care (p. 105).

Many of the corrections Jesus makes in the Sermon on the Mount are directed to the future church which must not imitate the hypocrisies of the scribes and Pharisees. Consider the following examples (cited in Thielman, p. 105):

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 6:1 NASB)

"So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.³ "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, (Matthew 6:2-3 NASB)

"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.⁶ "But you, when

you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:5-6 NASB)

"Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites *do*, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.¹⁷ "But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face (Matthew 6:16-17 NASB)

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns the church of *false prophets* who appear to be sheep (believers) but inwardly are ravenous wolves (unbelievers). Such men will be recognizable by the kind of fruit they produce—that is, the kind of life they live (Matt. 7: 15-20). Further, many false believers will demonstrate some measure of spiritual giftedness—prophesying, exorcism (casting out demons) and performing other miracles; but their lives are lawless and do not conform to the will of God (Matt. 7: 21-23; cf. Thielman, p. 106). Jesus does not deny any claims of success in these administrations of power; He only says that they practice the very opposite of what they claim to teach and that He never “knew” them in a saving way (cf. Hendriksen and Calvin on *Matthew*).

Two of the parables that specifically consider the mixture of true believers and false believers in the church are the parables of the wheat and the tares and the parable of the dragnet (Matt. 13: 24-30, 47-50). The first parable speaks of a field in which the enemy, Satan, sows tares among the wheat which grow up until the harvest—the end of the age. At that time, angels will come and root up the tares to be burned while the wheat will be gathered into the barn—the consummated kingdom of God. In the parable of the dragnet, the net of the kingdom of heaven is cast into the sea, catching all kinds of fish, good and bad. On the beach the good fish are separated from the bad fish; the good fish are kept and the bad are thrown away. At the end of the age, true believers will be separated from the false who will be thrown into a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. These two parables of Jesus *are found only in Matthew*, once again demonstrating Matthew’s concern that the church of Jesus Christ avoid the false professions of the Jewish nation that they were God’s people (Thielman, p. 106).

The parable of the *wedding banquet* (Matt. 22: 1-14) is very similar to the parable of the *big dinner* but with significant differences (Lk. 14: 15-24). Examine the following elements of both parables:

Lk. 14: 16-24

The host: a certain man
 A big dinner
 Three invitations (vv. 16, 22, 23)
 Excuses from the invited guests
 Worldly concern (land, oxen, marriage)
 Indifference to the slaves offering invitation

 Host becomes angry
 Host passes over the invited guests
 Invitation to poor, crippled, blind and lame
 inside the city
 Integrity of guests undefined
 House filled with guests
 All guests partake of dinner (assumed)

Matt. 22: 1-14

The host: a king
 A wedding feast for the king’s son
 Three invitations (vv. 3, 4, 9)
 Complete indifference (“paid no attention”)
 Worldly concern (farm, business)
 Indifference followed by hostility and
 violence
 King becomes enraged
 King destroys murderers and burns city
 Invitation to anyone on the highways
 outside the city
 Integrity of guests defined (“evil and good”)
 Wedding hall filled with guests
 Guests improperly clothed are expelled

One thing we notice about this comparison is that while the integrity of the guests in Luke's parable is *undefined*, the guests in Matthew's parable are described as "*evil and good*"—a striking similarity to the parables of the wheat and tares and the parable of the dragnet. Further, in Luke's parable it is implied that *all* the guests partake of the dinner while in Matthew's parable one of the guests was not properly dressed and is thrown out of the banquet into a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth (hell). The king had provided his guests with the proper wedding garments, freshly washed, to replace their own garments soiled from their journey to the wedding hall (Knox Chamblin, Matthew, unpublished, p. 197). Presumably, one man has refused this *freshly washed* wedding garment in preference to his own *soiled* garment; thus, his lack of preparation for the feast is his own fault, and he can blame no one else. The king is not acting harshly by throwing the man out of the wedding hall; he is merely responding to his insult in refusing his generous—and free—provisions.

The man who refuses the wedding clothes represents *false professors* in the church who eventually will be cast out. Traditionally, the wedding clothes have been interpreted as the *imputed righteousness of Christ* as opposed to the *self-righteousness* of the false professor, represented by his soiled garments. According to this interpretation, the man who is expelled from the wedding hall is a professing believer who responds outwardly to the offer of the gospel but rejects the very essence of the gospel, the imputed righteousness of Christ, in favor of his own self-righteousness (Gal. 3: 27). However, the imputed righteousness of Christ is never expressly taught in the parables of Jesus, and this doctrine is not formalized until the Pauline epistles (e.g. Rom. 3: 22; 4: 2-5; 5: 18; 9: 30; 10: 3-6; 2 Cor. 5: 21; Gal. 2: 21; 3: 6, 21; Phil. 3: 9). Thus, it may be a mistake to import the formal doctrine of imputed righteousness from the Pauline epistles into this parable. Another interpretation is offered by Chamblin (p. 199; along with Robert Gundry, F. F. Bruce, and William Hendriksen) which fits more consistently with Jesus' *repeated insistence upon good works and good character as evidence of true faith*.

The requirement of the proper wedding garment, therefore, represents the *necessity of obedience, not as the basis or cause* of salvation, but as the *evidence* of salvation. This interpretation is consistent with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5: 17-48; 7: 13-29; cited in Chamblin) that unless one's *practical* righteousness—not imputed righteousness—surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, he would not enter the kingdom of heaven. Furthermore, it is consistent with Jesus' emphasis in so many other parables which insist on the necessity of good works—the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18: 23-34); the two sons (Matt. 21: 28-32); the talents (Matt. 25: 14-30); the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25: 31-46); the good Samaritan (Lk. 10: 25-37); the rich fool (Lk. 12: 16-21); the wise servant (Lk. 12: 42-48); the barren fig tree (Lk. 13: 6-9); the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16: 19-31); the minas (Lk. 19: 12-27); the house built on the rock (Matt. 7: 24-27); the candle under a bushel (Matt. 5: 14-16); and the sower (Matt. 13: 3-9).

Likewise, there is much similarity in Matthew's and Luke's parable of the sensible slave (Matt. 24: 45-51; Lk. 12: 42-46).

"Who then is the faithful and sensible slave whom his master put in charge of his household to give them their food at the proper time?"⁴⁶ "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes."⁴⁷ "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions."⁴⁸ "But if that evil slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,'⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow slaves and eat and drink with drunkards;⁵⁰ the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour which he does not know,⁵¹ and will cut him in pieces

and assign him a place with the *hypocrites*; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 24:45-51 NASB; emphasis mine)

And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?"⁴³ "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.⁴⁴ "Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.⁴⁵ "But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins to beat the slaves, *both* men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk;⁴⁶ the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect *him* and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the *unbelievers*.⁴⁷ "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes,⁴⁸ but the one who did not know *it*, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. (Luke 12:42-48 NASB; emphasis mine)

In his version of the parable, Luke concentrates on the level of knowledge each slave possessed. Some slaves knew their master's will, and these will be given a worse punishment than those who did not know it. The one's who knew it are professing believers, and those who did not know it are unbelievers. On the other hand, Matthew concentrates more on the character of the slave. He was one who pretended to serve his master, but proved to be a *hypocrite* (cf. Thielman, pp. 106-107).

Again, we may observe an emphasis in *Matthew* that is focused upon warning the church of false professors, hypocrites, who pose a threat to the health and integrity of the church. Just as Israel's profession to be the people of God proved to be false, the church should recognize that mere profession is not enough; there must be obedience in keeping with one's faith and repentance.

4. The need to protect the "little ones" who are vulnerable

Thielman has also drawn attention to Matthew's emphasis upon members of the church who are especially vulnerable to stumbling.

Although Matthew's picture of the eschatological fate of such false Christians is unsparing, Matthew believes that this fate is only sealed at the eschatological judgment. Before that time Matthew advocates a gently persuasive approach to those who seem to totter on the edge of authentic Christianity (p. 107).

[The reader should understand that when Thielman says, "Matthew's picture" or "Matthew believes" or "Matthew advocates", he is not implying that Matthew is putting words into Jesus' mouth which He never said. He simply means that Matthew's version of Jesus' teaching and ministry highlights certain emphases which are not present in the other Synoptists, Mark and Luke.]

Matthew records a long discourse of Jesus in *Matthew 18* that presses the need for diligence in protecting those members of the church who may be most vulnerable to stumbling and falling away from the faith. The discourse is provoked by this question from the disciples, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus' answer consists of an illustration and commentary. Drawing a small child to Himself, He says that unless one assumes the humility of a child, he will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Far from becoming greatest in the kingdom, if the disciples fail to humble themselves, they will not even enter at all. Yet, whoever humbles himself as this child is the greatest in the kingdom. The manner in which Jesus begins this discourse sets the tone for everything else He says in Matt. 18: 5-20. From this point, the major emphasis is upon the "little ones" (*mikrós*) who demonstrate the following weaknesses (cf. Thielman, p. 108):

- (1) They are more susceptible to the sins of others who cause them to stumble (vv. 6-7).
- (2) They are spiritually weak and likely to stumble (vv. 8-9)
- (3) They are more likely to stray away from the faith (vv. 12-14)
- (4) They are more likely to sin against others (vv. 15-20)

Such weaknesses are likely to attract contempt from other believers—including the disciples—who are spiritually healthy (or who *think* they are), but Jesus warns them that they must not despise these “little ones” who demonstrate spiritual frailty (v. 10a). Quite the contrary, God has appointed angels for their protection who behold the face of the Father in heaven (v. 10b). Moreover, the Father is willing to leave the 99 healthy sheep to go looking for the one sheep (a little one) who gets lost (vv. 12-14). He is not satisfied if even one of these vulnerable believers strays away from the fold of God’s covenant community. In fact, Jesus then commands other believers to act the part of a good shepherd who goes looking for the lost sheep (vv. 15-20). If this brother sins against you, go confront him. If he listens to you, well and good; you have prevented your brother from straying more deeply into sin. If he does not listen to you—after many confrontations (?)—take another brother who cares about him, etc. (see a more lengthy explanation of this text in my *Synoptic Gospels*).

In order for the disciples to be able to rescue these erring little ones back into the church, they must undergo a radical shift in attitude. Rather than being preoccupied with the question of who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, they must condescend gently, but firmly, to those who are prone to stumbling. In the church of Jesus Christ, we are often prone to despise those who are weak in their faith and prone to imitate the sins of others; but Jesus warns us here against this kind of thinking. Rather, we must be spiritually on guard in behalf of the weaker members of the church (cf. 1 Cor. 12; Gal. 6: 1-2).

Although I believe Thielman is correct in his conclusion that the text in Matthew 18 especially emphasizes the more vulnerable members of the church, we should not limit the text to such members (and neither does he—cf. p. 108). There is a sense in which all of us are “little ones” who are susceptible to stumbling and straying away from the faith. Moreover, the moment we think that we are strong and beyond stumbling seriously into sin, we are then ready for a big fall, “For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself” (Gal. 6:3 NASB) and “...let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall” (1 Cor. 10:12 NASB). Spiritual arrogance is the first stumbling block into sin.

B. Luke

The specific burden of Luke’s gospel seems to express itself in the following ways:

- (1) God’s burden for the poor and marginalized, including women
- (2) God’s burden for those who are not Jewish
- (3) God’s warning about the dangers of wealth
- (4) God’s concern about the proper use of wealth

1. God’s burden for the poor and the marginalized in Jewish society

To be marginalized means that a person is set aside on the “margins” (so to speak) of society). They

are considered insignificant and unimportant, and they are generally oppressed by the more powerful members of society. In Jesus' day four groups of people were especially marginalized in Jewish society—poor people, women (we also could add orphans), non-Jews including Gentiles and Samaritans (who were part Jew and Gentile), sinners and tax collectors. Yet, in Luke's recollection (memory), Jesus had special regard for those who were despised by the rest of the culture. All but one of the stories below and all of the parables cited are found *only* in Luke's gospel, contributing to Luke's thematic concentration on Jesus as the liberator of the poor, the oppressed, and the sinner.

I have not attempted to give a lengthy explanation of any of these stories and parables. For those who wish to explore each one more in depth, see my *Synoptic Gospels*.

a. The circumstances of Jesus' birth

Only Luke records details of Jesus' birth revealing the circumstances of humility and poverty into which He was born.

(1) Mary's "magnificat" (song of praise after the revelation from the angel Gabriel)—Lk. 1: 46-55

There are not-so-subtle hints in Mary's song of praise that she was from a humble background. Moreover, she quotes sections from the psalms which are particularly concerned with the poor and the oppressed.

"For He has had regard for the *humble state* of His bonds slave; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed." (Luke 1:48 NASB; emphasis mine)

"He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered *those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart*.⁵² "He has brought down rulers from *their* thrones, And has exalted those who were *humble*.⁵³ "HE HAS FILLED THE *HUNGRY* WITH GOOD THINGS; And sent away the rich empty-handed. (Luke 1:51-53 NASB; cf. Ps. 107: 9).

In her limited way, Mary recognizes that with the coming of the "Son of God" (v. 35), the world of pomp and power would begin to experience a *great reversal*. The faithful (not all the poor) who were now humbled through "hunger", economic and political marginalization (being set aside as unimportant) would be exalted, and the "proud", "rich", and politically powerful would be humbled. This reversal is not what anyone would have expected.

(2) The appearance of angels to shepherds (Lk. 2: 8-15)

Shepherds were considered members of the lowest socio-economic status in Israel; but God chooses this humble group (economically and socially, not spiritually) to be the recipients of His revelation of "the Savior who is Christ the Lord" (v. 11). Shepherds had a reputation for being "rough around the edges" and for stealing (Hendriksen), but it seems clear from the response of these shepherds that there was more to these particular shepherds than their appearance.

b. Jesus as the fulfillment of the Year of Jubilee (Lk. 4: 17-21)

While Matthew makes mention of the Jubilee principle (Matt. 11: 4-5), Luke presents the significant

events of the Jubilee in far more detail and with Jesus' explicit confirmation of its *fulfillment* (Lk. 4: 21, *plerōō*). In the context of Isaiah's prophecy, the release of captives is a prediction of the return of the exiles after Israel's Babylonian captivity. But the reference in *Isaiah* to the "favorable year of the Lord" is a clear reference to the Jubilee principle of releasing Israelite slaves who, burdened with poverty, had sold themselves to other Israelites. Their sale was for a limited period of time only, six years maximum or until the Year of Jubilee, whichever came first. In essence, the poor Israelite was not selling *himself*, but only his *labor*. After six years, or at the Year of Jubilee, the Hebrew slave would be set free. Not only this, but if a Hebrew had sold his land due to poverty, the land would revert back to the poor Israelite without a purchase price, clearly indicating that the land could not be permanently *sold*, but only *rented* for its produce for a prescribed period—49 years or until the Year of Jubilee, whichever came first. Further, all Hebrew debts must be forgiven on the seventh year (cf. Lev. 25; Deut. 15).

The purpose of these laws was the mitigation (lessening) of poverty. If a person was cut off from the land—his normal means of production in an agrarian society—he would become permanently destitute. Thus, to mitigate the extent of poverty in Israel, God provided for the return of land to the original owners. Had Israel actually obeyed these laws and other commandments—but they did not—there would have been either *no* poor or *very few* poor Israelites, depending on the level of obedience. As it turned out, there is very little evidence from the prophetic literature that they were faithful to any of God's laws, including case laws concerning the poor. Consequently, there were always poor people living in the land of Israel.

By claiming that He was the fulfillment of the Jubilee Year, Jesus proclaimed a release of debts, a return to one's land, and—according to Isaiah's prediction—a recovery of sight to the blind and a release of those who are captive. In the historical context of ancient Palestine, the last category could be a reference to those in debtor's prison. Jesus spoke these words in the synagogue in Nazareth, the town where He grew up (Lk. 4: 16). Familiar with His humble family background, the people are initially impressed with His words (v. 22), an admiration which quickly turns into contempt—"But we know this man and all his sisters and brothers. How can he claim to be the fulfillment of Jubilee?" (paraphrase). Jesus, knowing their hearts, recognizes that they are not willing to acknowledge His full identity in spite of the miraculous works He has done in Capernaum. For this reason, Mark reports that Jesus "could do no miracle" there except to heal a few sick people (Mk. 6: 6). Matthew's version (13: 54-58) says, "And He *did not* do many miracles there because of their unbelief" (Matthew 13:58 NASB). (See *Synoptic Gospels* for a fuller explanation.)

We must keep in mind the timing of this event. Luke reports Jesus' rejection in Nazareth much earlier than it actually happened as a thematic foreshadowing of His later rejection. The same event in Nazareth is reported in Mark 6 and Matt. 13 which indicates that His rejection in Nazareth takes place after Jesus had already performed many miracles in other cities (see *Outline of Synoptic Gospels* for a suggested chronology.)

For our purposes here, the significant point to be stressed is Luke's understanding of Jesus' fulfillment of the Jubilee Year. Although Jesus' ministry, perfect obedience to the law, and atonement did not eliminate material poverty, He nevertheless *delivered His people from the spiritual poverty of sin*—a fact which the Apostle Paul accurately recognized, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that

you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9 NASB). Regardless of the humility of the believer’s earthly circumstances, he is rich in his relationship to God who has “released” him from the crushing debt of sin (Col. 2: 14; cf. Matt. 18: 24). Conversely, no matter how rich one is in regard to earthly goods, if he does not have this relationship to God through Christ, he is poor (Lk. 12: 16-21, the rich fool). Jesus came to make the poor rich—rich in spiritual blessings (Eph. 1: 18).

From an eschatological perspective we can take this even further. The cause of world poverty is sin, and before Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he enjoyed the abundance of the earth. Because of his sin, the ground became resistant to his efforts. The ground produced thorns and thistles, and it did not as readily yield its produce as before (Gen. 3: 17b-19). Furthermore, mankind’s persistence in sin since the fall continues to be the cause of world poverty. With the existence of irrigation, agricultural technology, and international aid, even famines, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc. cannot account for the lack of food in many undeveloped countries. Poverty persists in the world because sin persists in the world. But in the new heavens and earth, there will be no scarcity of material and economic resources precisely because there will be no sin. We will be living perpetually in the Jubilee Year when God “releases” us completely—body and soul—from any form of spiritual and material scarcity. Therefore, when Jesus proclaimed the Jubilee Year, He had more in mind than simple release from spiritual poverty, and it is insensitive—in my opinion—to over-spiritualize Luke’s regard for the materially poor and marginalized. Jesus was also looking ahead to the far-reaching future implications of His atoning work. His atonement would eventually result in the restoration of the material universe in which the forces of nature are no longer hostile to man’s rule over the creation (Rom. 8: 18-25; cf. my comments on Jesus walking on the sea, *Synoptic Gospels*).

c. The poor widow—Lk. 21: 1-4 (also in Mk. 12: 41-44)

Thus far—and for the rest of this section—we have only looked at stories which are found only in Luke’s gospel. This one is also found in *Mark*, but it is also a good example of Jesus’ concern for the poor and marginalized (those who were set aside on the “margins” of society as insignificant and unimportant). (For a fuller explanation of the parable, see *Synoptic Gospels*.) Jesus has more regard for this woman’s offering—one that required great personal sacrifice—than the surplus offerings of the rich and powerful. That which is highly esteemed before men is generally despised by God (Lk. 16: 15; incidentally, a statement found only in *Luke*). While everyone else was in awe of the large sums placed into the treasury by the wealthy—with much pomp—Jesus was in awe of this poor woman.

d. Parables concerning the poor and marginalized

(1) The lunch or dinner—Lk. 14: 12-14

Rather than limiting our dinner invitations—symbolizing different kinds of social interaction—to wealthy friends or relatives, Jesus advises us to invite people who are too disadvantaged to pay us back—the poor, and those who are poor through one kind of handicap or another (blind, lame, crippled). If we limit our kindness to those who repay us in like kind, we will have our reward here on earth—“that will be your repayment” (v. 14). But when we are kind to those who cannot repay us in this life, we will be “repaid [*apodidomi*; cf. Matt. 16: 27] at the resurrection of the righteous” (v.

14). It all depends on *when* you want repayment and *how*. Considering the generous promises of God toward His servants, a future reward will be far more substantial.

(2) *The big dinner—Lk. 14: 15-24*

In the same setting—at the home of a Pharisee—Jesus tells the parable of the big dinner. Those who are first invited to the dinner make excuses not to come. In the comparable parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22: 1-14), Matthew does not develop the characters as distinctly as Luke. One person goes to his farm, another to his business (v. 5). In *Luke*, however, one person has bought a piece of property and another has purchased five yoke of oxen (vv. 18-19). Although the man who has recently married says nothing about his relative wealth, the first two examples present pictures of people who have financial means. At risk of reading too much into the parable, this may be Jesus' way of illustrating His later statement, "How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:24 NASB) The wealthy are too preoccupied and distracted with their "things" to be interested in Jesus' invitation to enter the kingdom of God—a kingdom that they cannot see, touch, taste, or feel.

On the other hand, those who are later invited to the feast—even compelled to come—are the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, the very kinds of people whom Jesus recommends as objects of our compassion and kindness (vv. 21-23, 13-14). For the Messianic banquet at the end of the age, God wants a full house (v. 23), an element in the parable that can easily be overlooked. If, indeed, God has a full house, it appears from the parable that the house must be filled with these marginalized people—the poor, the blind, the crippled, and the lame—who never get any other invitations from the rest of society. But the ones who often get invited to dinner parties, the well-to-do who don't seem to need anything, none of those who reject His invitation will get even a taste (v. 24).

From the historical standpoint of Jewish culture, the Jewish nation had enjoyed the great spiritual wealth of God's covenant relationship, and the Pharisees in particular, with whom Christ is eating, considered themselves the custodians or guardians of the law. They thought of themselves as the spiritual elite, those who were rich in faith. Yet the common Jews and Pharisees were the ones in the parable who had rejected the invitation. On the opposite end of the scale were those Jewish members whose lives God had cursed because of some sin. Why else would they be poor, crippled, blind, and lame? After all, traditional wisdom said that bad things happen to bad people (cf. Lk. 13: 1-5)! Further down the scale were the Gentile dogs whom the Pharisees had forgotten were also promised a place in the Abrahamic family. The Gentiles also were represented by Jesus as the outcasts, the marginalized. But God loves people with no social credentials who could never repay Him for His kindness, and He will go out of His way to find them wherever they are, in the city or outside the city—in the slums, brothels, and crowded streets of this world—to bring them to salvation. Heaven, I believe, will be full of such people who were despised by the rest of the world; and it will be uninhabited by those who considered the gospel a second-rate invitation.

e. Stories about women

(1) *Appearance of angels to Elizabeth and Mary—Lk. 1*

The visitation of the angels to Elizabeth and Mary is a foreshadowing of the new age in which the things valued by God will come to the forefront while the things valued by men will slowly recede into the background (cf. Joel B. Green, *Luke*, p. 552). Elizabeth is old and barren and Mary is a

woman of low social standing (see above), yet God selects them for the honor of being the mothers of John and Jesus respectively.

(2) *The healing of the widow of Nain's son (Lk. 7: 11-17)*

Like the poor widow of Lk. 4: 1-4, this widow would soon be destitute due the loss of her only son (v. 12). Although sometimes requiring a show of faith before healing (Mk. 9: 22-23), Jesus does not do so in this incident. Rather, Luke says that Jesus “felt compassion” for her and then raised her son from the dead. This is only time in the gospels that this word (*splanchnizomai*; to be moved in the inward parts) is used during a healing event. Matthew uses the word to express Jesus’ compassion for the multitudes (Matt. 9: 36; 14: 14), and Luke uses it again to describe the Samaritan’s compassion for the beaten traveler (Lk. 10) and the father’s compassion for his lost son (Lk. 15).

Jesus’ compassion is the incarnate fulfillment of the Father’s compassion for the widow and the orphan registered throughout the OT legislation in which provisions were made for their protection (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:19ff; 26:12f; 27:19; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 7:6; 22:3; Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5)

(3) *The prostitute who anointed Jesus’ feet—Lk. 7: 36-50*

If the average married woman with children was marginalized in Jewish society, one can only imagine how prostitutes were treated. This was in spite of the fact that many women became prostitutes because Israelite society had violated the legal provisions mitigating the effects and extent of poverty—the remission of debts every seven years and in the Year of Jubilee and, possibly, the Levirate law requiring a man to marry his deceased brother’s wife. Jesus does not excuse the woman for her sins (v. 47), but He also does not agree with Simon’s severity (v. 39). While Matthew reports that the tax collectors and prostitutes would get into the kingdom of God ahead of the chief priests and elders (Matt. 21: 31-32), Luke reports a *personal example* of one such prostitute who did just that. While Simon, the Pharisee, had flagrantly omitted the ordinary cultural courtesies afforded to house guests—doubtless as an intended insult to Jesus (vv. 44-46)—the woman had humbled herself before Him and honored Him in the most self-effacing manner possible. Jesus declares the woman, whose sins are many, forgiven. Yet, from the love that she bestows upon Jesus, it is apparent that she believes she is forgiven *before* she acted. Likewise, the parable presented recognizes the reality of this forgiveness before Jesus declares it.

(4) *Women who supported Jesus’ ministry—Lk. 8: 1-3*

Thematically, Luke follows up the previous story (Lk. 7: 36-50) with another honorable mention of some women who had been supporting Jesus’ ministry from their private means. Some of these women had been demon possessed, namely, Mary Magdalene who had been delivered of seven demons. The previous conditions of the other women mentioned are not disclosed. Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward, was likely a woman of considerable means capable of liberally supporting the disciples. She shows up later as one of the women reporting the empty tomb to the apostles (Lk. 24: 10). This could have accounted for Luke’s naming her here except for the fact that Susanna is mentioned nowhere else. Furthermore, the registry of these female supporters in vv. 2-3 does not seem to contribute, at first glance, to the following story of Jesus’ parabolic discourse. However,

Luke's emphasis upon the poor and marginalized—including women—makes Jesus' parabolic discourse the perfect thematic context for their inclusion. While most of the multitudes were resisting Jesus' plain teaching as well as the miraculous evidence for His identity as the Son of God, these women had believed in Jesus and had registered their belief through sacrificial giving.

(5) *Mary and Martha—Lk. 10: 38-42*

In thematic connection with the parable of the good Samaritan (10: 30-37), Luke tells the story of a woman named Martha who proved to be a neighbor to Jesus by welcoming Him into her home (v. 38). Although Martha had much to learn about priorities, this is another story indicating Luke's emphasis upon Jesus' ministry to the lowly and insignificant members of society.

2. *God's burden for those who were not Jewish*

a. *Simeon's revelation in the temple—Lk. 2: 29-32*

Simeon's revelation is found only in *Luke*.

And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the *consolation* of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him.²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen *the Lord's Christ*.²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law,²⁸ then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said,²⁹ "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, According to Your word;³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation,³¹ *Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples*,³² A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And *the glory of Your people Israel*."³³ And His father and mother were amazed at the things which were being said about Him.³⁴ And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—³⁵ and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed." (Luke 2:25-35 NASB; emphasis mine)

There were a *few* people in Israel looking for someone other than a military Messiah. Simeon was looking for someone who would save Israel from her *sins*—the “consolation of Israel.” Simeon is probably alluding to Isa. 40: 1-2 in which the Lord says,

“Comfort, O comfort My people,” says your God.² “Speak kindly to Jerusalem; And call out to her, that her warfare has ended, That her iniquity has been removed, That she has received of the LORD'S hand Double for all her sins.” (Isaiah 40:1-2 NASB)

The Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint (LXX), translates “comfort” with the word “*parakaleō*”, the same root word from which “consolation” (*paraklēsis*) is derived. The OT text Simeon quotes in v. 32 has four direct references in *Isaiah*: Isa. 42:6; 49: 6; 51: 4; 60:3. Isaiah the prophet foresaw that the blessings of the Messiah would not be limited to the Jewish nation but would be poured out upon the Gentile nations as well (see also Isa. 2: 1-4). Thus, Simeon says that the salvation of the Lord is “prepared in the presence of all peoples.” This “consolation” is especially consoling to Luke, a Gentile, who is also writing to Gentiles. By recording Simeon's prophecy, he reminds his Gentile audience that the salvation prepared ages ago for the Jews was prepared equally for the Gentiles.

b. *The parable of the good Samaritan—Lk. 10: 25-37*

The Samaritans were despised by the Jews, partly because they were half Jew and half Gentile, but also because of ancient history. The Samaritans had offered to help Zerubabbel in the rebuilding of

the temple after the Jews returned to Jerusalem from exile (536 BC). Because of their syncretistic religious practices—worshiping both Yahweh and other pagan gods—this offer was refused, leading to political sabotage by the Samaritans (Ezra 4: 1-5). Thus, the bad blood between Jew and Samaritan got worse, each party returning the hatred of the other (cf. Lk. 9: 53). In this parable, Jesus strikes at the root of racial and social hatred by presenting the example of a man who was willing to help another needy human being regardless of who he was.

Attempting to interpret the Law in such a way that he could be excused, the lawyer says, “And who is my neighbor?” hoping that “neighbor” would have a very limited definition suitable to his own apathy (lack of concern) toward anyone he didn’t like. Jesus’ reply in the parable of the good Samaritan corresponds not only to the question: “Who is my neighbor?” but “What is the requirement of the Law in regard to loving my neighbor as myself?” Jesus quotes directly from Lev. 19: 18, but there is much in the context of Lev. 19: 9-19 which helps us understand the lawyer’s confident expectation that he had no obligations to do good to anyone indiscriminately.

Gleaning laws had been instituted so that the “needy” and the “stranger” living among the Israelites could acquire food while maintaining dignity (vv. 9-10). Further, the Israelite must not lie to his neighbor, deal falsely with his neighbor, steal from his neighbor, or oppress his neighbor in any way (vv. 11-13a). The Israelites also must not keep a working man’s wages overnight since he needed his wages daily for basic subsistence (v. 13b; cf. Matt. 20). The deaf and the blind must be respected (v. 14), and the poor should have equal access to justice in the courts (v. 15). Slander against one’s neighbor was forbidden or any premeditated action against his life (v. 16). Up to this point in the text, the word “neighbor” has appeared four times (vv. 13, 15-17). We may assume then that the poor, the needy, the hired man, the poor, blind, and deaf are included in the designation, “neighbor”. Yet, who is this neighbor specifically within the confines of Lev. 19? The answer to this question may be found in vv. 16-18 in which we find three parallel phrases: “among your people”, “your fellow countrymen”, and “the sons of your people”. All three phrases designate *fellow Israelites* as “your neighbor”.

This leaves the question of “stranger” in v. 10. A stranger could be an alien living among the Israelites, but one who had embraced Yahweh as their God, someone like Ruth (compare v. 10 with Lev. 23: 22). Loving the neighbor also applied to the alien, for the Israelites were also once aliens living in the land of Egypt (Deut. 10: 18-19). Yet, it is self-evident that the aliens living amidst the Israelites were those who had embraced Israel’s God; for no one, alien included, was allowed to even mention the name of another god (Ex. 23: 13), and he would be put to death for serving other gods (Lev. 20: 2; 24: 16). Green is, therefore, correct in saying,

In [Luke 10’s] context in Leviticus 19, love for the neighbor is love for fellow Israelites, though love for the other is extended to “resident aliens” *who embrace the covenant with Yahweh* (Lev. 19: 33-34) (*The Gospel of Luke*, p. 429; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

Thus, the alien or stranger who embraces Yahweh and the covenant could be included within the definition of “neighbor.” However, the context of Israelite culture in 1st century Palestine had changed dramatically from that of ancient Israel living under the theocracy. There were many living among the Israelites who had not subscribed to its religion.

As a consequence of Hellenistic imperialism and Roman occupation, it could not be generally assumed in the first century...that those dwelling among the people of Israel qualified as “neighbors.” Different attitudes toward these foreign intrusions developed into a fractured social context in which boundaries distinguished not only between Jew and Gentile but also between Jewish factions. How far should love reach? (Green, p. 429)

We must also consider the ancient commands of Yahweh to exterminate pagan nations living in close proximity to the Land of Promise, a command which included killing women and children. Those nations living far off would be given the opportunity to surrender to Israel and become forced labor, but those living close by were not given this opportunity lest their pagan gods become a snare to Israel (Deut. 20: 10-18). Therefore, within the cultural and historical context of the 1st century, we might *expect* Jews to be more discriminating in their definition of “neighbor”—as certainly this lawyer was. Was not the Roman a pagan intruder into the land and of Israel, and had not the forced Hellenization of Israel led to the degeneration of its religious life? Why then, must the lawyer consider anyone and everyone his neighbor? All considered, the lawyer remained self-confident that “neighbor” had a very restricted meaning in the law. Commenting on Matt. 5: 43, Poythress observes,

The added phrase “and hate your enemy” is found nowhere in the Old Testament but is a distortion of the meaning of the original. Jesus thus corrects a misunderstanding. But at the same time *His emphasis introduces an atmosphere somewhat different from the atmosphere of Mosaic times*. Moses never commanded the people to hate *their* enemies (see Exodus 23: 4-5; Leviticus 19: 17-18), but in a certain sense the Israelites were indeed to hate *God’s* enemies, the Canaanites. *The practice of holy war and the separation from evil peoples introduced an element that might properly be called “hatred”* (Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, p. 261).

Fully cognizant (aware) of the lawyer’s reasoning and his attempt to justify himself before God by restricting the definition of neighbor, Jesus tells a parable which is calculated to overthrow the accepted social boundaries and limitations of neighborliness. By leaving the identity of the robbed and injured man hopelessly indefinite throughout the story—Jew (?), Gentile (?), Samaritan (?), who (?)—Jesus demonstrates that He has no interest in any questions of the nature, “Who is my neighbor?” He is simply interested in people as human beings, not as members of a particular race or social order (Green, p. 429). Ironically, the lawyer to whom Jesus is speaking would also have no interest in race or social order *had he been the man lying naked, bleeding, and dying on the road to Jericho*. Rather, he would gladly have accepted any help from *anyone* who cared about him. Thus, if the lawyer wished to restrict the definition of neighbor to people whom he counted worthy of help, he must also accept the consequences of forfeiting help from those he refuses to accept as neighbors.

Writing for Gentiles, Luke uses this parable of Jesus to lay the groundwork for the spread of the gospel into pagan lands. As far as *Christian* Jews were concerned, *all Gentiles* in need of the gospel were their neighbors. The climactic understanding of this principle occurs in Luke’s sequel to his gospel account, *The Acts of the Apostles*, particularly in the revelation given to Peter in Acts 10 with its far-reaching implications for the family of Cornelius and the whole Gentile mission.

c. The cleansing of ten lepers—Lk. 17: 11-19

The only leper returning to give thanks is a Samaritan, whom Jesus calls “a foreigner” (v. 18). This fact alone brings up the connection between this leper and Naaman, the Aramean soldier who was cleansed of leprosy by washing in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5). Jesus used this story as a rebuke to his home folks in Nazareth who were not believing in Him (Lk. 4: 27). Just as there were many

lepers in Israel during Elisha's day, but only Naaman was healed; even so, there were many people in Nazareth who needed healing but would not be healed for lack of faith (Matt. 13: 58). Luke uses the story to eliminate any presumption that spiritual blessings will come on the basis of nationality. This, in turn, corresponds to Peter's statement to Cornelius, "I most certainly understand *now* that God is not one to show partiality,³⁵ but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him" (Acts 10:34-35 NASB).

Jesus' last statement to the Samaritan leper begs an interpretation, "your faith has made you well." The other nine who did not give thanks are also well, so what makes this leper special in Jesus' eyes? Jesus' words must imply something other than physical wellness. They must also imply that the leper's response—in the absence of the other nine—has indicated a complete shift in his thinking. He has not only been cured of leprosy; he has been cured of a self-centered, materialistic world-view which is only concerned with physical well-being.

Further, Jesus' command to all ten to show themselves to the priest begs another question, "Which priest?" The Jews worshiped in Jerusalem with one set of priests, but the Samaritans worshiped on Mt. Gerizim with another set (Green, p. 621). By this time in His earthly ministry, Jesus had already experienced the encounter with the Samaritan woman to whom He had said, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers (John 4:23 NASB). As a foreshadowing of this momentous reality, the Samaritan leper does not go any temple, but returns to Christ, the true temple.

He recognizes that the restorative power of God is manifest in Jesus. In recounting his action thus, Luke indicates that the socio-religious divisions between Jew and Samaritan have been mediated in Jesus. People who discern God at work through Jesus worship God at his feet. In restoring to wholeness a Samaritan leper, Jesus has countered not only notions of acceptance based on ritual purity but also, and more importantly for this episode, conceptions of election grounded in nationality and genealogy. As the one in whom God's purpose is manifest and through whom God's salvific prerogative is available, Jesus is the instrument of healing in the midst of these long-standing and deeply rooted rifts [between Jew and Gentile] (Green, p. 621; words in brackets mine).

3. *God's concern about the proper use of wealth*

Finally, we will look at Luke's emphasis on wealth and the proper use of wealth. This is not to say that we fail to find any concern about money in *Matthew* (cf. Matt. 6: 21) or *Mark* (Mk. 10: 21). However, the number of parables concerning money seem to highlight Luke's concern that the Gentile world pursue the kingdom of God rather than material wealth.

a. *John's instructions to those seeking baptism (Lk. 3: 10-14)*

All three Synoptists report John's baptizing the multitudes in the Jordan River (see Matt. 3 and Mk. 1). However, only in *Luke* do we find the following instructions given to those who desired baptism.

And the crowds were questioning him, saying, "Then what shall we do?"¹¹ And he would answer and say to them, "The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise."¹² And *some* tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"¹³ And he said to them, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to."¹⁴ *Some* soldiers were questioning him, saying, "And *what about us*, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not take money from anyone by force, or accuse *anyone* falsely, and be content with your wages." (Luke 3:10-14 NASB)

John's admonition to each group—the general multitudes, the tax-collectors, and the soldiers—concerned the use of money and one's attitude toward money. Two of the groups addressed were well-defined in Jewish circles as social outcasts—tax collectors and Roman soldiers. They were the ones who had been “forcing their way into the kingdom of God” since the time of John's baptism while most Jews were rejecting it (Lk. 16: 16). (Therefore, this story could be included in ***I. God's burden for the poor and the marginalized in Jewish society.***) The first group is commanded to share what they have with others, the second group to cease corruption, and the third to cease using extortion as a means of gaining wealth and to be content with their wages. Evidently, the fruits that are appropriate to repentance (v. 8) include one's attitude toward and his use of money. Heart conversion must also include the conversion of money to the ***Lord's use*** and the making of money in the ***Lord's way***. This conversion rate was much too high for the rich ruler, but not too high for Zaccheus (see below).

b. Conversion of Zaccheus—Lk. 19: 1-10

The conversion of Zaccheus stands in stark contrast to the non-conversion of the rich ruler who believed he had kept the law (Lk. 18: 18-27). While Jesus tells the rich ruler to sell all his goods, give to the poor, and follow Him, He says nothing of the sort to Zaccheus. Rather, Zaccheus ***voluntarily*** offers to follow the commandments pertaining to restitution (Ex. 22: 1; Lev. 6: 5), thus demonstrating the same change of heart Jesus desired from the rich ruler. For this reason, there is no necessity to command Zaccheus to do what the Holy Spirit had already prompted him to do. Further, the requirement to sell everything is not needed in Zaccheus' case who has just demonstrated that his riches are no longer in command of his life—Jesus was—a divine control which is blatantly absent in the life of the rich ruler.

As with the story of John's baptism, Luke once more demonstrates his concern for the ***despised and marginalized in Jewish society***. Tax collectors were considered by the rabbis as beyond hope of salvation, and their testimony was not allowed in court cases. When Jesus invites Himself to lunch, He is criticized for socializing with sinners (v. 7), but sinners are the very people Jesus came to save—not those who thought they did not need saving. The story of Zaccheus is, therefore, another example of Luke's concern for those on the fringes of Jewish society.

c. Parables concerning wealth or the use of wealth

(1) The good Samaritan—Lk. 10: 25-37

In the earlier treatment of this parable, we concentrated on the social implications which constitute the primary focus of the parable. The parable is told in answer to the question: Who is my neighbor? Yet there are other implications in the parable which are related to Luke's other emphases. A compassionate person is often described as a person who shows deep emotion and empathy for others. He, or she, laments and weeps over the poor and suffering of the world. Luke shows us, however, that genuine empathy and compassion goes far deeper than an external show of emotion. True compassion can be costly, but does not count the cost, of helping needy people. Nothing is said in the parable about the Samaritan's relative wealth, but he spends a considerable amount of money tending to the urgent relief of this beaten man. First, there is the loss of his time. He bandages the man's wounds and then uses his own donkey to transport the injured man rather than himself. He

also spends time at the inn making the necessary arrangements. In any culture during any period of history, “time is money”. The oil, wine, and bandages are his first expenses, but these are nothing compared to the undisclosed expenses incurred by providing him lodging at the inn. He also leaves the inn-keeper with two denarii or two day’s wages for further expenses, plus the promise of repayment if such an amount proves insufficient (v. 35). All of this adds up to a considerable sum of money for someone who is probably a common working man.

Although the thrust of the message is to lay racial and social differences aside in order to help people, we cannot ignore the implications: being a neighbor is often costly, not to speak of inconvenient. Before we claim to be good neighbors, we should count the costs. Are we ready to pay such costs?

(2) The rich fool—Lk. 12: 13-34

We have treated this parable briefly above. Jesus condemns the rich fool, not because he is rich, nor because he stores his wealth in barns, but because he does not use his riches for the betterment of others. And why doesn’t he? Because by helping others, he thereby reduces his presumed security in wealth. This is precisely why many wealthy people in the US and Uganda are among the lowest per capita in benevolent giving. Even those who earn far less give far more in actual dollars (not just in percentage of income). These have learned what the Lord has told them, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33 NASB).

(3) The unrighteous servant—Lk. 16: 1-13

(4) The rich man and Lazarus—Lk. 16: 19-31

We have covered these two parables already. I only mention them here as examples of Luke’s emphasis on the use of one’s money.