

INTERPRETATION OF PARABLES

A. Definition:

Parables are a "metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt as to its precise application to rouse it into active thought." Parables are true to life narratives designed to teach a spiritual truth - most often about the Kingdom of Heaven.

B. Purpose of Parables (Matt. 13:10-17)

They were generally not used until Matthew 13

- 1) To teach responsive disciples truth.
- 2) To hid the truth from those who unresponsive to the truth.

C. Elements of Parables

- 1) Commonly known earthly things, events, customs. A possible occurrence.
- 2) A spiritual lesson beyond the more apparent earthly lesson.
- 3) The earthly element has an analogical relationship with the spiritual element.
- 4) Every parable needs interpretation because of its double meaning.

D. Rules for Interpretation of Parables.

- 1) Perspective Principle: Understand them in relationship to Christology and/or the Kingdom of God.
- 2) Cultural Principle: recover as much of local culture as possible.
- 3) Exegetical Principle:
 - a) Determine the one central truth in it. (It may have other truths, but the details of parables are not like analogies in which every detail means something).
 - b) Determine how much is already interpreted by the Scriptures.
 - c) Check the context for clues to meaning.
 - d) Compare with O.T. and/or other parables.
 - e) Watch for figures of speech - phenomenal language, anthropomorphisms, hyperbole, etc.
- 4) Doctrinal Principle: Any use of a parable for doctrine must preserve the historical sense.

INTERPRETATION OF PROPHECY

About 20% of the Bible was prophetic at the time it was written. This is both predictive and proclamation - Foretelling and forthtelling. Prophecy was not given to satisfy man's curiosity about the future, but to rectify situations that existed (i.e. to have a moral and ethical impact on those to whom it was given) and to demonstrate that the prophet truly spoke from God (Dt. 18:19-22).

A. Principles of Interpretation - General principles are the same as for all interpretation

Language: Type of speech, figures of speech, etc.

Historical Background: The prophet and the prophecy, the culture, the time

Context: The flow of the book, passage, etc.

Cross References: parallel passages, similar prophecies, etc.

B. Distinct principles of prophetic Interpretation

Prophetic writings often are non-systematic in character.

Is it predictive (foretelling) or didactic (dealing with general truth)?

Is the prophecy conditional or unconditional?

Is the prophecy fulfilled or unfulfilled. (Caution here because some prophecies have multiple fulfillments (Isa. 7:14-16). If it is unfulfilled, who does it refer to?

Prophecy is to be interpreted literally unless the implicit or explicit teaching of the N.T.

demands/implies a typological interpretation. (If normal sense makes sense make no other sense).

Compare with similar prophecies.

C. Apocalyptic Prophecy (symbolic prophecy)

All general rules apply

A complete literalistic interpretation is impossible

Historical research may find meanings of symbols in the culture of the writer

Context may reveal the meaning of symbols used

Is any of it fulfilled in history?

Search O.T. for possible meanings of symbols.

D. Major Systems of Prophetic Interpretation

Pre-millennial: Fulfillment of many O.T. prophecies in a millennial age

Dispensational: Promises made to Israel will be fulfilled in Israel

Non-dispensational: Progression of Kingdom of God through several stages including an earthly, glorious manifestation before eternity. Church has replaced Israel.

Post-millennial: Spread of the Church by the power of the Spirit will result in millennial conditions on earth.

A-millennial: Prophecies made to Israel will be fulfilled in Church "spiritually."

INTERPRETATION OF TYPES

1) Definition and explanations.

Typology is the interpretation of the Old Testament based on the fundamental theological unity of the two Testaments whereby something in the O.T. shadows, prefigures, adumbrates (gives a faint image or indication of) something in the N.T.

Typology is a part of prophecy which by its very nature establishes the nexus (connection) between the O.T. & N.T. Jesus Himself taught that the O.T. testified of Him (John 5:39-44). Many words in the N.T. and the whole book of Hebrews refer to things in the O.T. as being a type of something fulfilled in the N.T.

2) Dangers

Seeing too much as typological - often done by allegorical & devotional schools that end up introducing something foreign, peculiar or hidden into the meaning of the text supposedly to bring out some deeper, hidden meaning.

Seeing too little as typological - often done by rationalists and radical critics.

3) Proper Typology - Designated & Implied

A) Designated: Something in the O.T. is specifically designated as a type of something in the N.T. (i.e. Rom. 5:14 & 1 Cor. 15:45-49; Heb. 5:10 & 6:20; also the Tabernacle, priesthood, offerings and wilderness wanderings are all designated as typical)

B) Implied: The evidence compels that there is a type, but there is no direct statement that it is. This must be restrained from fanciful excursions of the mind. CAUTIONS: A type must be historical (real or actually happened); there must be a genuine resemblance; the original must have had meaning to those it was originally given (though not the whole meaning) as well as picture a greater reality to come; It must be a manifest and sensible analogy. (Many of these are manifested by a direct interchange of terms - Manna in John 6, etc.); the typology is established on an empirical investigation of the Scriptures themselves. No doctrine can rest on typology alone. There must be sufficient other N.T. authority to back doctrine up. Distinction must be made in any given type of the typical and the accidental.

4) Kinds of Typology

Persons (Adam, Abraham, Melchizedek, David, etc. - Romans 5:14; Hebrews 5:10)

Institutions (Sacrifices, Passover - Exodus 12 cf John 1:29)

Places (Garden of Eden, Babylon)

Offices (Priest, High Priest, Prophet - Hebrews 3:1)

Events (Wilderness wanderings, Passover itself - 1 Cor. 5:7)

Actions (Ministry of priests; Lifting up Bronze Serpent - John 3:14,15)

Things (Tabernacle - Hebrews 9,10)