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Calvary Chapel Ahwatukee

How to Study Parables

Parables are a special type of figurative literature and require a strict set of rules to interpret them correctly
This is especially true with the Bible, since Jesus used parables extensively to teach His followers

Parable:

1. a true-to-life short story designed to teach a particular truth
2. taking a known and using it to illuminate an unknown
3. NOT historical
4. NOT allegorical

In addition, we must understand how Jesus Christ used parables to teach

5. A physical truth was used to teach a spiritual truth
6. A "sharp, two-edged sword" (Heb 4:12, Matt 13:10-17)
    - To obscure the truth from the unresponsive
    - To reveal the truth to the responsive

Rules for interpretation of parables

- Context, context, context
  The occasion
  An explanation given?

- Identify the central point
  Most parables deal with the
  Kingdom of heaven…for Jewish readers
  Kingdom of God…for Gentile readers
  which is NOT the Church!

  Matt 13, Mark 4, Luke 8

- Identify central details

- Identify peripheral details

- Lean on words previously defined by Jesus
  The Word of God defines its terms…Scripture interprets Scripture
  e.g. field = world
  seed = The Word of God
  once defined, use the words consistently in other parables

- Learn about the known to understand the unknown
  e.g. How a planted seed becomes a plant
  How an oil lamp works
  What yeast does

- Look for figures of speech
  Simile: "as", "like"
  Metaphor: an implied likeness (John 10:7)
  Similitude: spiritual application of a commonly known reality (yeast)

Do you understand the Parable (or any other passage of Scripture)?
Can you re-tell it in your own words?

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How to Study Prophesy

What is prophesy?

1. Proclamation of God's Word.
   1 Cor 14:5

2. God's whole plan, from before the Creation to the Eternal state
   prophesy is the pathway to the promise
   the chief value of studying prophesy is not to understand future events, but rather to enable us to link the future with the past as part of God's holy and perfect plan

   Jesus is at the center of that plan…
   Israel is the chosen instrument of delivery

3. God's foretelling of future events
   Time is a physical property that is subject to mass, gravity, and acceleration
   ($E = mc^2$)
   our universe is 4D, not 3D
   height, width, depth, time
   Is God affected by mass, gravity, or acceleration?
   No
   Therefore, He is outside the time dimension He created
   God is eternal
   eternity = absence of time ≠ "lots of time"
   How does God communicate with His creation?
   By His Word
   Therefore, His Word is also outside the time dimension
   How does God authenticate His Word?
   By giving man history before it happens

   Note: There are no prophesies in Koran or any other religious writing
   Prophesy (foretelling of future events) is unique to the Bible,
   God-breathed by the Holy Spirit

Why does God give us prophesy?

1. To bless us.
   Rev 1:3

2. To prove He exists and is in control to confirm our faith
   Is 48:3-5
   Is 41:22-23

3. Because His character is not secretive
   Amos 3:7
   Deut 29:29

4. To give us comfort, confidence, and assurance in difficult times.
   1 Thes 4:13-18
   1 Thes 5:9-11

5. As a witness to the world to draw it closer to Him
   Ezk 36:23-24

6. For proper orientation and preparation for coming events
   Matt 24-25

God has given us a clear vision of the future.
   Our hope is in that vision.

When God reveals the future, His purpose is to change our present behavior.
   A glimpse of God's plan should motivate us to serve Him right now.

Why prophesy is so confusing?

1. We don't have God's viewpoint

   we are constrained by space & time, which blur when we look into the future
   God sees all, all at once
   e.g. when John wrote Revelation, as directed by Jesus and the Holy Spirit, he wasn't writing prophesy, he was writing history!
   - "I saw" appears 49 (7x7) times
   - "I heard" appears 28 (4x7) times

2. Must know the <u>entire</u> revelation of God

   Gen 1 (the foundation) thru Rev 22 (the capstone)
   How well do you know the OT?
   the 404 verses in Revelation contain 360 OT references

3. We read between the lines vs read literally

   we over-sensationalize Scripture regarding future events
   look at the meaning of plain words used in the Scripture vs. elaborate theories or interpretations

   fulfilled prophesy is our only safe guide in studying the unfulfilled
   all of fulfilled Bible prophesy was fulfilled <u>literally and completely</u>
   God says what He means and means what He says

   e.g. Psalm 22 and Is 53 with Christ's Passion
   so vague and figurative/symbolic that no one could have acted out what it foretold in the intervening 800 years
   yet, once fulfilled, so clear and definite that even a child can understand it

   The Word of God was given to communicate, not to confuse

How do you study prophesy?

1. Pray, pray, pray

2. Context, context, context
   - Historical
   - Cultural
   - Spiritual

3. Determine the major theme
   - Messiah
   - Israel
   - Gentiles
   - Church

4. Understand there are gaps in time
   - Dan 9:24-27
   - Luke 4:17-21 & Is 61:1 (2) two comings

   God stopped the flow of water in the Jordan River for Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha so He can also stop the flow of time

5. Look for obvious, literal rather than hidden meanings…
   - assume the passage is to be read literally

   unless there is a compelling reason to read a passage of prophesy figuratively, read it literally
   - If a literal interpretation would be absurd, it is figurative (Joel 2:31, Is 11:1)

   Scripture interprets Scripture

   wait and watch as future becomes clearer rather than "force fit" an interpretation

6. The key to prophesy is **Israel**

7. Do not limit God e.g. do not set dates and times (vs. seasons)

8. What does it mean to me today?

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How to Study the Bible
Summary

HOW do I study the Word of God?

1. Honestly…begin with a "blank sheet", not a pre-disposition or premise

2. with Faith

3. Pray

4. with Discipline

5. Read…and again…and again…and again…and again…

6. Meditate

7. Context, context, context

8. Read the Word literally…unless an obvious metaphor or symbolism

9. Scripture interprets Scripture…the Bible interprets itself

10. use a Systematic method of study…Inductive Bible Study Method
    Observation
    Interpretation
    Application

    Epistles
    Poetry
    Short Story
    Parables
    Prophesy

11. Whole-heartedly and single-mindedly

2 Tim 2:15