

The Parables of Jesus

Lesson 1

Bible parables are popular teaching methods which Jesus employed to open the eyes of some, and blind the eyes of others. Sound interesting? Good. Let's find out more.

Matthew 13:10-17, "The disciples came to him and asked, Why do you speak to the people in parables? He replied, Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it."

Matthew 13:34-35, "Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."

This Bible study lesson will teach you all the essential elements of the parables of Jesus. You should understand what a parable is before you attempt to understand the meaning of Jesus' parables. This really is great stuff, so let's get started.

What Are Bible Parables?

Bible parables are simple stories illustrating a moral or religious lesson (Definition by American Heritage Dictionary). Expanding upon that definition, a Bible parable is, "a short, simple story designed to communicate a spiritual truth, religious principle, or moral lesson; a figure of speech in which truth is illustrated by a comparison or example drawn from everyday experiences" (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary).

Parable literally means, "a comparison or likeness." So the parable stories are placed alongside the spiritual principles and truths being taught in order to shed light on those principles and truths.

Bible parables illustrate a spiritual truth and principle. Spiritual truths and principles are invisible and abstract, so parables give them a graphic presence followed by an application to the hearer's life. Parables help our minds "picture" the spiritual lesson being taught so we can apply the lesson to our physical lives.

The names, people and places used in the parables are fabricated but the truths are real. It's a colorful, indirect way to teach powerful lessons. Understanding the Bible is the precursor to applying the Bible. Parables are used to increase our understanding of God's truths, principles and morals. Jesus wants us to understand His teaching and parables are a powerful way to make sure that happens.

Who Taught Bible Parables?

Bible parables weren't only taught by Jesus, but He was by far the most prolific user of this teaching method. Jesus actually taught at least 40 different parables. Psalm 78:1-2 predicted that Jesus would use parables to teach God's truths, "Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old."

The prophet Nathan knew he had to illustrate a point to the spiritually blind King David so he used a Jewish parable (2 Samuel 12:1-4). David was in the midst of a series of sins including lust, covetousness, murder and adultery. He became blind to his sinful, out of control lifestyle.

Nathan presented the parable of the rich man to King David, and the parable shook David to the core of his soul and led him to repentance. Nathan's parable, given to him by the Lord, was a parable of severe rebuke. The graphic parable enlightened King David to his sin. Keep that important thought in mind.

David was also involved in another use of a parable. The wise woman from Tekoa relied on a Bible parable to help King David understand that the grace of God must be applied to Absalom his son. David realized the point of the story, applied it to his life and then allowed his banished son to return to the Israel (2 Samuel 14:1-24).

Jesus' Parables Hide Truth From Hypocrites

Parables were used by Jesus to hide certain teachings from hypocrites. Jesus instructed his followers to refrain from throwing pearls to the swine because they would get trampled on and wasted, and in fact, they can actually come back and attack the messenger (Matthew 7:6).

He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy by confusing hypocrites with parables (Isaiah 6:9-10). Confusion would leave the religious leaders...the enemies of Christ...with little evidence for their "cases" against Him.

Example of Bible Parables

An example of a Bible parable would fit well here so we can show you the elements in action. Let's use the parable of the fig tree. This parable is recorded in these three locations: Matthew 24:32-35, Mark 13:28-31 and Luke 21:29-33.

Jesus used a very common fruit tree to illustrate a point He was teaching. After telling the disciples of His second coming, He told them to "learn a lesson from the fig tree." He explained that summer approaches when the branches bud and the leaves sprout. Jesus used "summer" to represent His second coming, the fig tree to represent the timeline of history and the buds and leaves to represent the signs of His coming.

Get This!

Parables use common objects to represent spiritual matters. Notice how the fig tree was used above. The disciples probably remembered Jesus' teaching about His 2nd coming every time they walked by a fig tree. That is an effective, lasting teaching style.

Bible parables must be understood by us or there is a serious spiritual issue. The disciples throughout the ministry of Jesus failed to understand the parables because they had not yet been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Their failure to understand the simple, short Bible parables frustrated Jesus.

At the end of His earthly days, Jesus allowed the disciples to see spiritually (Luke 24:45). Jesus must do the same for us as well. He opens our minds to truth so we understand the Scriptures and in our specific case today...His parables.

Understanding the Scriptures is a wonderful sign for us but ignorance of the Scriptures...that failure to understand...should be a terrifying thing for a Christian. If this is true for you then plead with God to enlighten your mind, soften your heart and help you understand His Word.