

QUESTIONS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN STUDYING THE PARABLES

1. How historically accurately recorded are the parables? How much redaction? Oral performance? To put this question another way, what parable are you considering? The parable as originally told by Jesus? The parable as recounted in the early church? The parable is recorded in one of the Gospels?
2. What are we to make of Jewish parallels to Jesus' parables?
3. What do we do with the parables in the Gospel of Thomas?
4. How subversive and unconventional are Jesus' parables? Have we domesticated the texts so that they do not shock? Or are we reading modern liberal values into them?
5. How helpful is speech-act theory? (To put this another way, are the parables intended to convey information? Challenge perception? Cause transformation?)
6. Where are parables on the spectrum from "naïve allegory" to "quasi-documentary realism"?
7. What is the balance between the revealing and concealing functions of the parables? For Jesus? For the evangelists? I.e., did Jesus / the evangelists use parables to clarify, confuse, illumine, transform, reveal...? Or are the parables, as Jeremias said, "weapons of controversy"?
8. How unique are Jesus' parables and their message?
9. What theology, Christology or ethics can be derived from the parables?
10. To what extent does critical study of the parables support tenets of study of Gospels in general?
11. Do parables have only a single meaning rooted in the context of first century Palestine, or do they have multiple, timeless meanings? Are they univalent, polyvalent, or ambivalent? Are they 'about' anything at all?
12. To what extent do the 'frames' or the supplied allegorical meanings control our reading of the parable?
13. How can the parables be experienced as a proclamation of the Gospel? To what extent can we read the parables apart from the context of Jesus' death and resurrection?
14. How 'parabolic' is the parable? Are some of the 'parables' simply straightforward illustrations?

Questions 1-10 are adapted from: "The Parables of Jesus: Current Trends and Needs in Research" by Craig L. Blomberg in *Studying the Historical Jesus*, eds. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans