

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

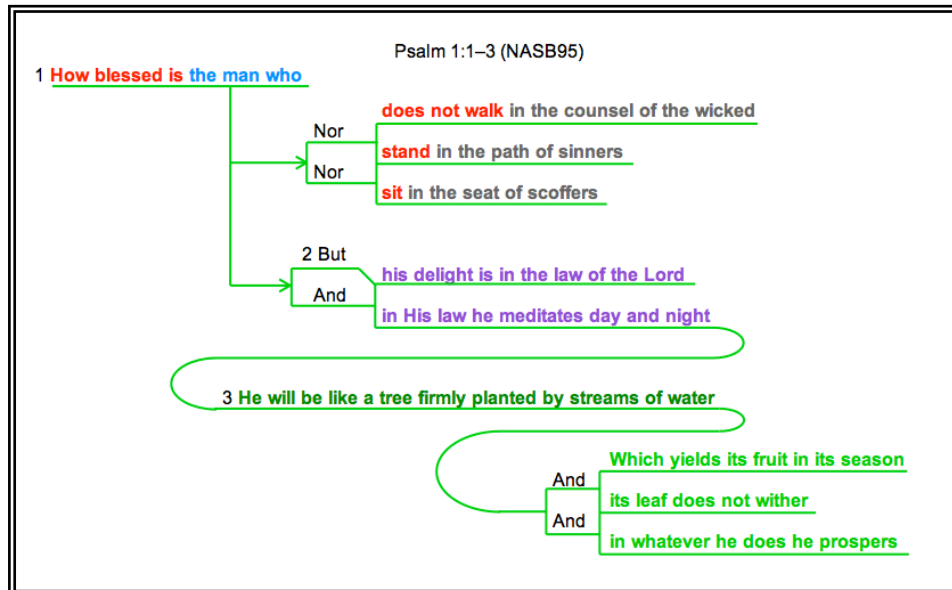
How to Study Parables

Lesson # 5

Teacher’s Tip

“If only one sin is allowed in the soul, you leave open a gap for the devil to enter. It is a simile of Chrysostom that a soldier may have his helmet and his breastplate on, but if only one place has no armor, the bullet may enter there, and he may as well be shot as if he had no armor on. So, if you favor only one sin, you leave a part of your soul unprotected and the bullet of God’s wrath may enter there and shoot you. One sin may shut you out of heaven. And as Jerome says, what difference is there between being shut out for more sins and for one? Therefore, beware of cherishing one sin. One millstone will sink a man into the sea as well as a hundred.”¹

Psalm 1:1-3



TEACHING OUTLINE: “HOW YOU CAN BE BLESSED BY THE LORD”

- I. WHAT YOU MUST AVOID TO BE BLESSED
- II. WHAT YOU MUST PURSUE TO BE BLESSED
- III. HOW YOU WILL BE BLESSED

¹ Thomas Watson, *The Godly Man’s Picture*, pgs. 152-153.

I. DEFINITION OF PARABLE

The word “parable” means to cast alongside, lay along side, or compare. It is to compare or contrast the known with the unknown. A parable is a story which could really happen. It is designed to teach a specific spiritual truth and is usually, if not always, related to the kingdom of God.

II. QUALITIES OF PARABLES

A. Sometimes they come in sets and have a repetitious build up

1. **Lk. 15:1-32** - Parables of the Sheep, Coin, Son (things lost, searched after, found, and rejoiced over)
2. **Mt. 24:32-41; 25:1-30**, Parables of the Fig Tree, Ten Virgins, Talents (Be ready for Jesus' return)

B. Sometimes they provide sharp contrast

1. **Mt. 25:1-13**, The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins
2. **Mt. 21:28-32**, The Parable of the Two Sons

C. Sometimes the main characters or themes are presented in sets of three

1. **Lk. 10:30-37**, In the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The three passers by
1) Priest, 2) Levite, 3) Samaritan (Jews hated Samaritans)
2. **Mt. 21:33** Parable of the Landowner, 1) First group of slaves, 2) Second and large group of slaves, 3) Finally he sends his son

D. Parables were told in the midst of a living encounter to meet the need of a specific situation or problem. It is very important to discover “Why” the parable was given because it will help you determine if your interpretation matches the reason for giving the parable.

1. **Mt. 13:2** -- And great multitudes [in need of salvation] gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole multitude was standing on the beach.
2. **Mt. 18:21** -- Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

3. **Mt. 19:27** -- Then Peter answered and said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?"
4. **Mt. 24:3** -- And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

E. Parables are given in order to evoke a response from the hearers and the main point is almost always at the end.

1. **Mt. 13:49-50** -- [End of the parable of the tares.] "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [Point to be learned, don't go on weeding expeditions in the church or you may often uproot true believers. Let the angels do the weeding at the end of the age for they will gather unbelievers together and cast them into hell.]
2. **Mt. 18:34-35** -- [End of the parable of the unforgiving servant.] "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."
3. **Mt. 20:16** -- [End of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.] "*Thus the last shall be first, and the first last.*"
4. **Mt. 21:31** -- [End of the parable of the two sons.] "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The latter." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you."

III. PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING PARABLES

A. Find the specific problem or situation that the parable is addressing. This is usually found in the immediate and sometimes farther preceding context. The far context usually tells you that the parable is within the kingdom theme since Jesus came proclaiming and presenting the kingdom. The immediate context usually tells you the specific situation or problem being addressed by the parable.

1. The problem may be stated in an introductory question, e.g. **Matt. 9:14** -- "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples fast not?"

2. The problem may be seen in a criticism, e.g. **Luke 15:2** -- "And both the Pharisees and scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."
3. The problem may be seen in a false or wrong attitude, e.g. **Matt. 21:23** -- "By what authority do you do these things?"

B. Determine the main point in the parable, which answers or addresses the problem or situation for giving the parable. This "main point" within the parable is found in several different forms.

1. A question posed to promote a specific answer, e.g. **Lk. 7:42** -- "Which of them will love him more?"
2. A direct conclusion made in the parable, e.g. **Mt. 18:35** -- "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."
3. External interpretation of the parable, e.g. **Mt. 15:15** -- "And Peter answered and said to Him, "Explain the parable to us."
4. Repetition of the main point in several connecting parables
 - a. **Mt. 24:43** -- "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into."
 - b. **Mt. 24:46** -- "Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes."
 - c. **Mt. 24:50-51** -- "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, 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."
 - d. **Mt. 25:13** -- "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour."
 - e. **Mt. 25:45** -- "Then He will answer them saying, [on judgment day following the second coming of Christ], 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'

- C. **Discover the cultural background or customs of the parable if any.** Seek to understand the cultural details of the text which might help you understand how the hearers would have understood Jesus' parable.
1. What were the marriage customs? **Matt. 25:1-13**
 2. How was leaven used? **Matt. 13:13**
 3. What did it mean and why would someone kill the fattened calf and why would they be given a ring? **Luke 15:11-32**
- D. **Use cross references.** See if the parable is given in any other gospel. Is the situation the same in both places it is given? Is it worded differently? Does it have the same context? Why should it be interpreted the same in both places? Why or why not? (*A Harmony of the Gospels is very helpful at this point. I prefer the one by Robert Thomas and Stan Gundry's Harmony of the Gospels, which is available for both the New American Standard and New International Versions of the Bible.*)
- E. **Interpret details properly.** Unlike an allegory, not every detail or main detail of a parable needs to have a spiritual meaning. If you decide that certain details have spiritual meaning, why did you? What might be the reasons for taking it literally as a detail with no spiritual comparison? Be careful not to turn every parable into an allegory (every part has a spiritual parallel) or to treat it as strictly literal.
1. Does the fattened calf which was killed in the parable of the prodigal son represent Christ? **Luke 15:33**
 2. Does the oil in the parable of the ten virgins represent the Holy Spirit? **Matt. 25:1-13**

IV. HOMEWORK

- A. **Read Luke 12:16-21 the Parable of the Rich Fool**
1. What is the situation or need which led to Jesus' giving the parable?
 2. What is the main point in the parable which addresses the main problem, situation, or need?

3. What cultural customs or background information is helpful in interpreting the parable (if any)?

4. Is the parable given anywhere else? At the same time? To the same group of people? To meet the same need, problem, or situation?

5. What details have spiritual meaning, and which do not?

6. How does the main point of this parable apply to you personally?