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The Challenge of Jesus' Parables

The book being reviewed is "The Challenge of Jesus' Parables" by Richard N. Longenecker. The author is a professor of New Testament at McMaster University and has written extensively on the subject of biblical studies. The book provides an in-depth analysis of the parables of Jesus in the context of the first-century Jewish world and the theological significance they hold. It explores various approaches to interpreting the parables and their historical development. The intended audience for the book is primarily scholars and students of biblical studies, but it may also appeal to pastors and laypeople interested in gaining a deeper understanding of Jesus' teachings. This review will examine the strengths and weaknesses of the book, as well as provide a final assessment and recommendation.

To provide context, the topic of the book is the parables of Jesus and their interpretation. The parables are stories that Jesus told to teach important moral and spiritual lessons. The book explores the history of interpreting these parables and examines different approaches to understanding them. It also discusses the literary and cultural influences on the parables, as well as their relationship to Jewish parables of the same time period. The book aims to provide insight into the meaning and significance of the parables and to challenge readers to see the world in a new way. To evaluate the book, the criteria used will include its accuracy and comprehensiveness, the clarity and coherence of its arguments, the quality of its research and scholarship, and its usefulness and relevance to its intended audience. Overall, the review will aim to provide a fair and balanced assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the book and to provide a recommendation for potential readers.

Beginning with chapter 1, Snodgrass delves into the history of interpreting the parables of Jesus. He identifies two main approaches: allegorical and historical. Snodgrass argues that the allegorical approach often leads to interpretations that are far removed from the original meaning of the parables, while a historical approach seeks to understand them in their original context and audience. According to Snodgrass, the history of interpreting the parables is a history of the development of various approaches

that have arisen out of changes in context and interest, fresh interpretation of the New Testament, and individual creativity. (p. 3) Darrell Bock Stein, in chapter 2, further adds to this discussion, arguing that the parables are a unique genre that challenge listeners to see the world in a new way. Stein notes that they use everyday experiences and objects to convey spiritual truths. Stein writes: "The parables are not simply stories with a moral. Rather, they challenge the listener to see the world from a new perspective, to look at the familiar in a new light, and to grasp the meaning of the Kingdom of God" (p. 25). Finally, in chapter 3, Craig Evans explores the roots of the parables in Jewish literature and argues that the parables of Jesus are similar to and influenced by Jewish parables of the same time period. He notes that the parables of Jesus are distinctive in their emphasis on the Kingdom of God and the role of Jesus as the Messiah. Evans states: "Jesus' parables, then, are not the result of his creative genius or personal idiosyncrasies. Rather, they reflect in their form and content the broader literary and theological traditions of his people" (p. 54). In chapter 4, Hooker examines the parables of the Kingdom in the Gospel of Mark, focusing on the themes of growth and mystery. She argues that the parables challenge the listener to see the hidden nature of the Kingdom of God and notes that they are influenced by Old Testament and Jewish literature. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth analysis of the eight parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13. It argues that these parables offer a nuanced portrayal of the nature and effects of the Kingdom of God. Moreover it also examines the literary and historical context of the parables, as well as their theological significance. Lastly it emphasizes the importance of understanding the parables as a coherent group, rather than interpreting them in isolation. "The parables of the Kingdom in Matthew 13 ... provide a rich and multi-faceted portrait of the Kingdom of God, depicting its nature, growth, and mixed effects in the world." (p. 89)

Chapter 6 of "Stories with Intent" by Klyne R. Snodgrass explores the seven parables of the Kingdom in Luke's Gospel. Snodgrass discusses the unique features and themes of these parables, such as the emphasis on repentance and the inclusion of marginalized groups. He highlights the distinctive theological perspective of Luke's Gospel and how it shapes the interpretation of the parables. Snodgrass analyzes the literary and historical context of the parables to provide a more nuanced understanding of

their meaning. He states, "Luke's interest is in portraying the Kingdom of God as that realm of life in which the divine rule is effectively realized and exercised" (p. 126). In Chapter 7, Allan W. Martens examines three parables of judgment in the Gospels that are directed at the Jewish religious leaders and the nation as a whole. He argues that these parables reflect Jesus' prophetic stance against religious hypocrisy and spiritual complacency. Martens analyzes the historical and social context of the parables, as well as their theological significance. He also explores the implications of these parables for contemporary Christian ethics and discipleship. Martens asserts, "These parables of judgment ... express Jesus' prophetic protest against the failure of Israel's leaders and people to heed the call of God for repentance and renewal" (p. 154). Chapter 8, written by Richard T. France, focuses on the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1-46. France explores the theme of readiness and the implications of this parable for Christian discipleship. He analyzes the literary and historical context of the parable to provide insight into its meaning. France emphasizes the importance of being prepared for Christ's return, stating, "The primary lesson of the parable is that being a disciple is not a matter of merely accepting the invitation to the kingdom, but of being ready for it" (p. 174). In chapter 9 of the book, Barton examines the three parables in Luke 15: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. He asserts that these parables teach us about the love and forgiveness of God, and that they affirm the worth of every individual in the eyes of God, regardless of their social status. Barton emphasizes that the context in which these parables were told was Jesus' criticism for eating with sinners and tax collectors. He believes that these parables challenge us to extend the same love and forgiveness to others. As Barton states, "It is the exuberance of this divine love that the parables communicate so powerfully" (p. 205). Chapter 10, Stephen I. Wright examines three parables of Jesus that address the theme of wealth and poverty. The parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13-21 warns against greed and the pursuit of material possessions, while the parable of the dishonest manager in Luke 16:1-13 highlights the importance of using wealth for the benefit of others. Lastly, the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 contrasts the fates of a wealthy man who ignores the suffering of a poor beggar and the beggar himself, who receives comfort in the afterlife. Wright argues that these parables challenge us to reconsider our relationship with money

and to use our resources to serve others. He states, "The parables of Jesus force us to confront the question of our own relationship with wealth, and to consider whether our priorities are aligned with those of the kingdom of God" (p. 230).

In chapter 11, Walter L. Liefeld explores two parables of Jesus that deal with the theme of prayer: the parable of the friend at midnight in Luke 11:5-13 and the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18:1-14. Liefeld argues that these parables teach us about the importance of persistence in prayer and the need to trust in God's goodness and faithfulness. He emphasizes that these parables are not meant to be taken as formulas for prayer, but rather as illustrations of the kind of attitude that we should have in our approach to God. Liefeld says, "The point of the parables is not that we can manipulate God by our persistence, but rather that God, who is already inclined to listen and respond, will ultimately do what is right and good for us" (p. 250).

In chapter 12, Sylvia C. Keesmaat examines three parables in the Gospels that deal with the themes of forgiveness, hospitality, and neighborly love: the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35), the parable of the great banquet (Luke 14:7-14), and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Keesmaat emphasizes the importance of caring for our neighbors, even if they are strangers or different from us, and the need to extend forgiveness and hospitality as expressions of love. She also notes the risk involved in caring for others, as it can require sacrifice and vulnerability, but ultimately leads to a deeper understanding of God's love. "The parables of Jesus challenge us to extend love and hospitality to our neighbors, even when they are strangers or different from us. This means being willing to take risks and make sacrifices for the sake of others, as expressions of love and care" (p. 263). The final chapter of the book, written by Robert W. Wall, focuses on parables related to discipleship. Wall argues that the primary aim of these parables is to shape the identity of Jesus' disciples and to invite them to participate in the kingdom of God. He asserts that discipleship in the kingdom of God is not just a matter of learning a set of doctrines or following a set of rules, but it involves a complete transformation of one's life and identity.

"The Challenge of Jesus' Parables" is a unique and valuable contribution to the field of biblical studies and specifically the study of Jesus' parables. In comparison to other books on the same subject, it

stands out for its comprehensive approach, combining historical, literary, and theological analysis of the parables. One notable comparison is with Klyne Snodgrass' "Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus," which also takes a comprehensive approach to studying the parables. However, Snodgrass' book is more focused on the historical and literary analysis of the parables, while "The Challenge of Jesus' Parables" also incorporates theological analysis and contemporary applications. Another comparison is with Kenneth Bailey's "Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke." Like "The Challenge of Jesus' Parables," Bailey's work also incorporates literary and cultural analysis of the parables, but focuses specifically on the parables in Luke and uses a more narrative approach. "The Challenge of Jesus' Parables," on the other hand, provides a broader analysis of the parables across all the synoptic gospels and incorporates a wider range of scholarly perspectives.

Overall, "The Challenge of Jesus' Parables" is a valuable resource for scholars and students of the Bible seeking to deepen their understanding of the parables.The book is well-researched, with clear and concise explanations of the historical context and literary features of the parables. Its strengths in historical and literary analysis make it a valuable addition to any biblical studies library. However, readers should be prepared for a dense read and may need to supplement their reading with additional resources to fully grasp the parables' meanings.