

Book Review

THE PARABLES Jewish Tradition and Christian interpretation

by Brad H. Young.

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Brad H. Young professor of biblical literature in Judeo-Christian studies in the Graduate school of Theology at Oral Roberts University is the author of *The Parables*. He was a student of David Flusser, Professor Emeritus of Second Temple Period Judaism and Early Christianity, Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Brad is the author of many books, including *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus*, *Paul the Jewish Theologian*, and *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*. In addition to his well known research in the life of Jesus, he has devoted much energy to Jewish-Christian interfaith dialogue. Young has been noted as a great translator of the parables from Aramaic and Hebrew into English.

The Parables contains three hundred and thirty two pages, and six hundred and twelve citations from various scholarly works. There are seven parts which are divided into fifteen sections.

The book is organized around the subjects that are seen in both the rabbinic parables and the gospel parables such as Historical Development and the Theological Significance of Parables in Judaism and Christianity, Jewish Prayer and the Parables of Jesus, Parables of Grace in the Gospel and Their Theological Foundations in Ancient Judaism, The Theology of Reconciliation

between God and Humanity in Both Judaism and Christianity, The Disciple's call: A life of Learning and Doing and Torah Learning and Gog's Reign.

Young intends to show that the parables of Jesus should be understood as Jewish folk tales "Rabbinic and Gospel parables are authentic representations of folk culture" (pg.15). Young has an impressive list of parables, with my favorite being The Donkey and the Fat Man. This parable reflects the relief of both the Egyptians and the Israelites at the time of the exodus.

Part two of the book addresses two parables *The Contemptible Friend and the Corrupt Judge*.

These parables which are considered the 'two partner parables', have scholars struggling to ascertain what they are really teaching. As a result two questions have been asked. Do the parables teach consistency in prayer or do the parables teach preparedness for the Last Judgment? How are these parables to be studied, should they be studied singularly or together? Some scholars hold that the parables are teaching about prayer while others believe they are teaching and end time events.

Part three addresses grace and considers what is just and fair. The theological concept of grace is seen in the parable. The modern interpretation of this parable by Christians is grace, the gospel parables portray salvation by grace as God's unmerited favor. Was the employer fair and just in allowing the workers who came at the last hour to receive the same wages? The parable teaches that we are all equal and the first shall be last and the last first. "They all received the same wage in the mercy and justness of the magnanimous landlord." (pg.70).

Part four looks at the reconciliation between God and humanity, and seeks to answer the question "Who is my neighbor?" Is my neighbor my a friend or a person close to me? The parable of the Good Samaritan can be viewed from many perspectives, and scholars differ as to who is a

neighbor. The Torah understands that one's neighbor can be even thy enemy. "The gospel story portrays the question-and-answer sessions between Jesus and a Torah scholar. The parable settles a bewildering issue that pertains to God and love of humanity...love even your enemies" (pg. 105).

Part five uses the parable of the Great Banquet to address the call to discipleship. Those who were called and the various unacceptable and inadequate excuses they gave to avoid attending the banquet. God's gracious invitation is extended to all, and Jesus used this parable to teach his message of the kingdom of heaven and God's invitation to all people everywhere to come to his banquet table. Young writes, "The humor of the episode is seen in the invited guests' trumped-up-excuses, and the irony in the poor and needy, who are outside the boundaries of high society, enjoying the great feast." (pg. 171). It seems that those who reject the invitation will not be able to feast at Jesus' table. It is important to recognize that the time of the invitation is important. Jesus states, "For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet."(Luke 14:24).

Part six focuses on Torah Learning. The parable of the sower and the seed is found in the synoptic. The parable focuses on the four types of soil which represent the four types of disciples who hear Jesus' teachings. The condition of the soil will determine what type of harvest the seeds will produce. As to the meaning of this parable, each individual is called to be ready for the end time.

Young writes that some scholars and even church fathers believe that Jesus taught in parables because he has some secret message which he wanted to hide from the common people; however Jesus taught in parables because it made it easier for his audience to understand. The very title of

the book suggests that Jesus' parables are written in the Jewish tradition of the rabbis; however the interpretation of them is a Christian interpretation. Jesus' parables must be understood within the context of the time he was writing and must recognize that they were influenced by the time. According to David Flusser, in the foreword, "Jewish thought is not- as is so often claimed- merely a background for Jesus but is in reality the original context and natural framework of his message." (pg. ix).

The text is well written, well structured, and very informative. It stimulates thought and causes one to pause and think about the significance of parables for Christians in today's society. I enjoyed reading this text, and I will recommend it to those who desire to have a deeper understanding of the parables of Jesus, and the influence of the rabbinic parables during his time.