

Brad Young

Class: Parables

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Subject: Book Review

Date: April 11, 2023

Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*. Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, Michigan 1998. Pp. 332. Price \$28.73 ISBN 978-0-8010-4820-3

Foreword is by the late David Flusser, who was born in Czechoslovakia and grew up in the Bohemian town of Pribram. He was Professor Emeritus in the Second Temple Period, Judaism and Early Christianity, Hebrew University, Jerusalem. The author has acknowledged a few of the people who have also contributed to his life and work in academia, Joseph Frankovic, who devoted time to reading the manuscript, and Dr. Steven Notley, for his valuable advice and suggestions, for his knowledge of the historical geography of the Holy Land.

Brad H. Young (Ph.D., Hebrew University) is a professor of Biblical Literature in Judeo-Christian studies at the Graduate School of Theology at Oral Roberts University. In addition to his well-known research on the life of Jesus, he has devoted much energy to Jewish-Christian interfaith dialogue. He authors many books, including *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus*, *Paul the Jewish Theologian*, and *Jesus, the Jewish Theologian*.

The book contains over four hundred scholars and works cited in the Bibliography pages, about twenty-five sources quoted, 19 Greek and Latin authors, about sixty Rabbinic literature sources, numerous passages from the Old and New Testament, the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and the

Dead Sea Scrolls. This book is dedicated in loving memory to Dr. Robert L. Lindsey of Jerusalem, who has contributed a lot to the author's life.

The book's contents are well arranged in six parts, with fifteen chapters.

- The historical development and the theological significance of Parables in Judaism and Christianity.
- Jewish prayer and the parables of Jesus.
- Parables of Grace in the Gospels and their theological Foundations in Ancient Judaism
- Teaching in Parables: The Theology of Reconciliation between God and Humanity in Both Judaism and Christianity
- The Disciple's Call: A Life of Learning and Doing
- Torah Learning and God's Reign.

Under each part or chapter are lovely and eye-catching topics that can easily create curiosity. For example, The Samaritan, Love your enemies, The Urgent Invitation, Four Types of Hearers, Death, and Eschatology: A Theology of Imminence.

The opening statement in the foreword gives a glimpse into the purpose and the audience that would benefit from this book. "This great new book by Brad H. Young is a decisive step in the right direction. However, all who are involved in the study of Judaism and everyone seeking a better understanding of Jesus' parables will be challenged by Young's creative and solid research. This book is a great aid to understanding Jesus' theology and ethics as embedded in his parables. Young explores Jesus' ethics and theology with scholarly precision compared to early Jewish teachings" (p.9-11).

This is my first major detailed study of the parables. It has been a blessing to understand the background of the parables from a Rabbinic perspective, giving a window into the world of Jesus

Greco-Roman and Jewish culture, some of the materials that were available during the study now with the scholarly research of this book in harmony with the *Parable of the Sages, The Challenge of Jesus parables*. This book is a treasure trove of wealth and essential information for a lifetime of continued study. This book is highly recommended for any serious student who wants to delve into the subject of Rabbinic and biblical parables.

The background information comes from the table of contents and the statement in the foreword and on the back cover, which states, "fully one-third of Jesus' words in the synoptic gospels occur in parables. It could be said that knowing the parables is essential for understanding the person of Christ. In this book, Young displays his unique perspective as a scholar steeped in Jewish and Christian studies. He examines the parables that best illustrate the parallels between Rabbinic and Gospel parables. He challenges readers to remember the importance of first-century Judaism". This book is central to those who have never had the opportunity to study Rabbinic parables to give us a better understanding of the gospel parables. As a result of the information dispersed in this book, it can stand shoulder to shoulder with this subject available today.

Summary: Some of the main points of this book can be found on (p.3). The reality of God is revealed in the word pictures of a parable, the Hebrew word for parable *mashal*. And the Greek word *parabole*. First and foremost, both the parables of Jesus and the parables of the rabbis must be studied as Jewish *Haggadah* (p.7). Some topics that create curiosity are the middle age man with two wives, the heron, and the lion, better to lose the ox than catch the thief (p.17-23), the six components of the classic form (p.24-25), and the challenge statement by Joachim Jeremias, stating that Jesus was the first parable teacher (p. 37).

Part two shared the clever borrower, who knocks on her neighbor's door, the arrogant traveler who refuse hospitality, and the prince who pestered his father until his father gave in to his demands. Part three is about the fair employer showing Jewish grace and settling conflict. Part four, Love and fear of the King's servant demonstrating loyalty and dishonesty. The Theological Foundation of Jesus' parable. Part five, The Samaritan loving Your enemies, the Jewish perspective on this parable (p.109). The people listening to this parable are keenly aware that the Sadducees in the priestly service are highly concerned about their ritual purity. In the eyes of the Sadducean literalist, the prohibition is in the written Torah Leviticus 21:1. They were more concerned about not defiling themselves than service or good deeds to a human being.

Part six focuses on the meaning of divine forgiveness and demonstrates God's mercy is not given to those who do not forgive others. Human relationships are not perfect, but even in their imperfection, Judaism and Christianity teach people to show mercy and compassion for one another (p. 119). Chapter 9, the gospel of Thomas and the wedding invitation is fascinating (p.177), and chapter 12, Jesus' challenge to the Essenes (p.246).

Evaluation: Chris Surber reviewed this book on Amazon. He said, I recently delivered a sermon on the parable of the prodigal son. With the added insight from this work, I was able to flesh out new perspectives, Judaic perspectives, on the text. While we often read Western philosophical assumptions into the text, be we scholars, pastors, or otherwise, there is a wealth of information available regarding the early context of the parables of Jesus in this book. This is an area of study long neglected by many, but I am thankful for this and other resources like it, which have

reminded us of the roots and context of the Christian faith, the teachings of Jesus, and the meaning of His coming. Great tool. Great price.

I concur with this review from the many I read about this book. Part one deals with the historical development and significance of Judaism and Christian parables. Part two is the parable about the contemptible friend and the corrupt judge. Part three, Jewish grace and God's gracious gifts. Part four, love your enemies, be merciful and forgiving. Part five is the urgent Invitation and the Unjust Steward. Part six deals with the types of heroes, death, and eschatology. These are all very informative knowledge of understanding the interpretation of parables. This book balances *The Parables of the Sages* by R. Steven Notley, & Ze'ev Safrai. Carta, Jerusalem 2011. Brad gives a comparison and contrasts in explaining the parables. *The Challenges of Jesus' Parables*, Richard, N. Longenecker, Ed. Eerdmans publishing company, Grand Rapids, Michigan.2000 and *The Parables in The Gospel*, John Drury, crossroad New York, 1985.

Conclusion: because of my recent introduction to this wealth of information in reading, studying, and learning the parables, especially from the Rabbinic perspective, I only see strengths. The book is well written with many scholarly references, easy to understand, and a great price. I highly recommend it to all who are willing to study the parables. And most importantly, in learning the approach to proper interpretation. This book is a great resource.