

Keilany Santos
BIB336: Parables
Week 11: **Book Review**
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The Challenge of Jesus' Parables. By Richard N. Longenecker, Wm. B. Eerdmans-Lightning Source, 2000, Pp. v-xii - 1-336, \$26 (paper)

The book *The Challenges of Jesus Parables*, edited by Richard N. Longenecker, talks about the parables of Jesus and how it presents some challenges to modern readers. A prominent expert on the New Testament, Richard N. Longenecker (1930–2021), worked and taught for many years at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto. Paul, Apostle of Liberty, The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity, New Testament Social Ethics for Today, Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul's Most Famous Letter, and the Romans volume of the New International Greek Testament Commentary are only a few of the many publications he wrote. This book explores the parables of Jesus in the context of their original audience and includes an overview of the parable's literary structure and theological themes. This book contains thirteen papers authored by thirteen distinguished new testament scholars, each of which analyzes and interprets the parable of Jesus as it is presented in the synoptic gospels on its own terms. Jesus' parables may not be easy to understand, which is why this book shows the challenges one may have in reading Jesus' parables. This book aims to help readers understand the complexities of Jesus' parables, and that is what we will explore and go over in this review.

The book starts with an introduction about the book's goal and the method used to interpret Jesus's parables. It was said that the parables are complicated narratives that call for thorough examination and interpretation rather than straightforward moral tales or demonstrations. The introduction sets the stage for a more in-depth examination that follows by providing a summary of the book's approach to the parables. The book is section into thirteen articles. The thirteen articles that follow this book are by New Testament scholars who interpret the parables of Jesus as it is depicted in the synoptic gospels with historical background. The articles are separated by parts by the title of the information each article will give. The book is separated into four parts. Part 1 is about History, Genre, and Parallels. Part 2 is Parables of the Kingdom. Part 3 talks about the Parables of Warning and Preparedness, and the last part which talks about parables related to Christians' life.

The first article talking about History, Genre, and parallels of Jesus's parables is by Klyne R. Snogdrass. The article is titled From Allegorizing to Allegorizing: A History of the Interpretation of the Parable of Jesus. This article discusses the primary issues of interpreting Jesus' parables in 6 parts. Snogdrass talks about Theological allegorizing. He said that Jesus's parables have always been interpreted to the extent to which the details of the stories are to be taken as relevant for a proper understanding (page 3). He mentions that throughout the church's

history, Jesus' parables have been allegorized, which is interpreted by various features of the church's theology, which has little to do with Jesus's intent. (Page 4). In theological allegorizing, interpreters mentioned how Jesus' parables included secret spiritual truths that needed to be unlocked. Allegorizing of the parables came to an end during the latter part of the nineteenth century. (Page 6) In the Historical and non-allegorizing time, the Interpreters looked for the parables' original meaning and historical context. This article concludes that while each time interpretation has added to our understanding of Jesus' parables, a thorough grasp of their significance requires a balanced approach that considers their historical setting, literary style, and theological message. This allegorizing to allegorizing the Parables of Jesus should not sway away from hearing the voice of Jesus (page 26).

Chapter 2. "The genre of the parable" By Robert H. Stein discusses the necessity to clarify the essence of the parables as they occur in the Synoptic Gospels and to comprehend how the genre "parable" has been defined throughout the past century. According to Stein, the parables constitute a distinct literary form that sets the New Testament apart from other forms of writing. He stresses that parables are stories rather than allegories that make use of vivid imagery and characters to communicate a key idea or truth. The parables were delivered in a variety of contexts, such as during public teaching or in private talks with disciples, and their goal was to urge listeners to reevaluate their preconceptions of God and the Kingdom of God. I find it important that Stein mentioned how important metaphors and parables are because they give an extraordinary force nearly divine in nature. Simile and allegories can be interpreted literally or abstractly because they deal with the expressible. However, metaphors and parables are incomprehensible because they deal with the indescribable. They serve as more than just symbols or meaning-bearers. They don't clarify or add to the message. Instead, they interpret their audience by making the reader take part in the parabolic event, they make meaning (Page 35). Stein gives many examples of the genre and figurative language used in many of Jesus' parables, and he concludes by saying, "The Bible's parables have a twofold nature. They both have an informative dimension (the reality part) and an affective one (the picture part). We see that The instructive content of a parable can be translated into the referential language since this dimension can be represented in the non-metaphorical language" (Page 48).

In chapter 3, we are presented with the article "Parables in Early Judaism by Craig A. Evans. Evans discusses in his article the use of parables in early Jewish literature. The parables included in the Gospels, according to Evans, were not invented by Jesus but rather were a common literary device utilized in Jewish literature both before and during the life of Jesus (page 51). Evans goes over and examines several parables in early Judaism. He goes over the Linguistic information where he examines the terminology employed in Jewish literature to describe parables in Greek and Hebrew. He then talks about Parables in the Old Testament, where he interprets the usage of parables in the Old Testament, such as the first mentioned the parable of the Trees in Judg 9:8-15 (page 54) and the vineyard parable in Isaiah 5 (page 58). When it comes to the use of vivid imagery and symbolism, Evans points out that dreams and dream interpretations are comparable to parables a common literary genre in Jewish literature. We also see that Evans looks at a few instances of parables that were written in Jewish literature

following the time of the Old Testament, like those found in the Dead Sea Scrolls on pages 63-65. Lastly, Evan mentions that both Biblical and post-biblical parables use imagery and symbolism, but they also differ significantly in terms of their theological emphasis. Also, Evan mentions in the section comparing early rabbinic parables that there are parallels between the parables in early Jewish literature and those in early rabbinic literature in terms of their use of imagery and symbolism but that there are also variations in terms of their structure and intent (pages 66-73).

In chapter 4, we enter part 2, which talks about the Parables of the Kingdom. The first article in this part, chapter 4, is by Morna D. Hooker, titled “Mark’s Parables of the Kingdom.” Hooker examines the four kingdom parables given in Mark 4:1–34. These parables are part of a longer portion of Jesus' teaching and work in the Markan environment. While the parable of the lamp and associated sayings emphasizes the necessity to let one's light shine and the certainty of judgment, the parable of the sower underlines the need to hear and comprehend the word of God. For example, “Mark seems to have understood the Parable of the Sower as fundamental, providing not simply the key to understanding the teaching of Jesus' parabolic teaching (cf. v 13) but also the explanation of his whole ministry...The Parable of the Sower after the challenges recounted in 3:20-35; the Parable of the Vineyard and Wicked Tenants after that of 11:27-33 — suggests that Mark regarded both of them as allegories of Israel's response to and rejection of Jesus. Taken together, they encapsulate the whole story of his ministry.” (Page 89). Also mentioned was The kingdom of God's concealed development and ultimate flourishing which are highlighted in the parables of the Growing Seed and the Mustard Seed. Although these parables have been subject to numerous interpretations throughout history, according to Hooker, they all eventually emphasize the mystique and supremacy of God's kingdom (pages 98-100).

“Mathew’s Parables of the Kingdom” by Donald A. Hagner is introduced in chapter 5. In this article, Hagner goes over the parables found in Matthew 13:3-52. These parables, according to Hagner, all conclude with the mystery, omnipotence, and transformational power of God's kingdom. For instance, we see Hagner analyze the parable of the mustard seed. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven in this parable to a small mustard seed that develops into a big tree. According to Hagner, the parable highlights the kingdom's startling expansion and unanticipated growth, which finally transforms the world. He points out that Jesus' use of the mustard seed is all the more remarkable, given that it was a prominent metaphor for its smallness and insignificance in Jewish literature. Hagner further emphasizes the contrast between the size of the tree and the seed, implying that the kingdom of God would ultimately outperform all expectations and conquer all challenges. Overall, Hagner's interpretation of the parable of the mustard seed parable illustrates the transformational force and ultimate success of God's kingdom (pages 113-114).

Chapter 6 introduces the article “Luke’s Parables of the Kingdom” by Richard N. Longenecker. In this article, we go into Several parables from the Gospel of Luke that highlight various elements and aspects of God's kingdom. Longenecker mentions that the parables are tough and complicated teachings that show the characteristics of God's kingdom rather than simple stories with moral implications. In Mathew 13:18-21 The kingdom of God is compared to

yeast in the leaven parable, which is added to the dough to make it rise. Longenecker says that this parable exemplifies the kingdom's capacity to transform people and communities for the better from the inside out (pages 137-143). To finalize this article, Longenecker explores how the parables might be contextualized for modern audiences in addition to evaluating the parables themselves. He says that even in modern times, the parables can force us to reevaluate our presumptions about God, the world, and our own lives, stating, "To stay within the texts, however, attempting to contextualize for our day the multifaceted nature of the explicit and implicit teachings of the parables of Jesus, is, as Luke's Gospel has it, to proclaim "the good news" to "those with a noble and good heart, who, hearing the word, hold it fast and bring forth fruit " (8:15) (page 146).

Part 3 talks about the parables of warning and preparedness. Chapter 7 is the article "Produce Fruit Worthy of Repentance": Parables of Judgment against the Jewish Religious Leaders and the Nation" By Allan W. Martens. Martens discusses various parables of judgment on Jewish religious authorities and the country of Israel. According to Martens, Jesus' disappointment and rage toward those who have fallen short of God's standards are shown in these stories. The Parable of the Tenants, which is mentioned in all three Synoptic Gospels, serves as an illustration of such a parable. In this story, a landowner rents out a vineyard to a group of workers who refuse to give him a share of the harvest and even murder his son when he attempts to collect it. According to Martens, the parable depicts God's judgment on Israel for failing to bear fruit indicative of repentance, for rejecting his prophets, and eventually for doing so with regard to his own Son. For example, "particularly for the nation Israel, it is always the "season for fruit." This lesson was implicit in the Cursing of the Fig Tree pericope of 21:18-22, which portrayed Jesus in a symbolic fashion as looking for righteousness in Israel but unable to find it. And the same lesson is implicit here in the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, where the repeated sending of servants to receive "his fruit" suggests that God has continually sought righteousness from Israel" (page 159). Martens' interpretation of these parables highlights the gravity of Jesus' judgment against those who fall short of God's standards as well as the pressing need for repentance and fruitfulness in the kingdom of God.

Chapter 8 is the article by Richard T. France titled "On Being Ready." In this article, France goes over and examines Jesus' parables that address the subject of being prepared for the coming of God's kingdom. France claims that these stories highlight the significance of being ready for God's kingdom to appear suddenly and unexpectedly. One parable that many are familiar with is the parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. The story of the Ten Bridesmaids from Matthew's Gospel serves as one illustration of this type of story. Ten bridesmaids are awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom for the wedding feast in this tale. While the other five are foolish and do not, five of them are clever and bring extra oil for their lamps. The foolish bridesmaids' lamps go out when the bridegroom is late, and they are not permitted to attend the bridal feast. France claims that this parable illustrates the value of being ready for the arrival of God's kingdom, which could occur suddenly and necessitates our constant readiness. While the foolish bridesmaids, who are unprepared, are barred from the bridal feast, the wise bridesmaids, who bring extra oil, stand in for people who are ready for the arrival of the kingdom. (pages 180-182).

Part 4 talks about the Parables of the Christian life. This section starts off with Chapter 9, an article by Stephen C. Barton titled “Parables on God’s Love and Forgiveness.” In order to investigate the themes of God’s love and forgiveness in Jesus’ teachings, Barton examines the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Unmerciful Servant. He claims that these parables demonstrate both the requirement of forgiveness in human relationships and the radical character of God’s love, which extends even to those who have committed serious sins. For instance, in regards to the parable of the Prodigal Son Barton said that the “parable has such strong echoes of the stories of the Old Testament. For biblical stories about younger brothers were a classic source of reflection on the unpredictability of God’s ways — in particular, of God’s refusal to limit the measure of his grace to human ways of seeing and doing things.” (Page 209). This shows the importance of looking back into the Old Testament to understand some of Jesus’ parables.

Stephen L. Wright’s article on “Parables on Poverty and Riches” is Chapter 10, and it mentions the theme of poverty and riches in the parables of Jesus. Wright goes over the parable of the rich fool and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. He examines the social and literary issues raised by Jesus’ parables. He investigates the literary forms and methods utilized to transmit the contents of these parables, as well as the historical and cultural context in which they were presented. For instance, Wright points out that Jesus’ parables were frequently used to address particular social and economic issues, such as the unequal distribution of wealth in first-century Palestine. For instance, the wealthy elite who disregarded the needs of the poor and disenfranchised are criticized in the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. Wright said, “Our task as present-day interpreters is to re-visualize the features of ancient society that are contained within both this parable and the other two of our present concern — and having positioned ourselves back into the society depicted in these parables, to make sense of them as examples.” (Page 219).

In chapter 11, we are presented with the article “Parables on Prayer” by Walter L. Liefeld. Liefeld examines the concepts of perseverance and humility in prayer, by mentioning the parables of the Friend at Midnight, the Persistent Widow, and the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The challenge presented by these stories, according to Liefeld, is for us to approach prayer with both persistence and humility. While acknowledging our own shortcomings and the need for God’s mercy, we should continuously pray to God for what we require. Liefeld compared the parable of the friend at midnight with the persistent widow in not mentioning prayer. For example, “The context of the Parable of the Persistent Widow in Luke is quite different from that of the Parable of the Friend at Midnight... the theme of prayer does not appear in the context of the parable here. Instead, this parable is linked with Jesus’ eschatological teachings in 17:22-37 — which teachings were a major concern of the evangelist Luke, as has been particularly recognized since the work of Hans Conzelmann.”(Pages 252-253). But in the article, it comes to the conclusion that both parables “At the same time, the ultimate focus in both parables is on the response of the second figure... We learn that if even the man in bed or the unjust judge responds in spite of their reluctance, we can certainly count on God to respond.” (Page 257). This observes that the parables stress the value of steadfast prayer. Both The Friend

at Midnight and The Persistent Widow feature characters who consistently beg for what they need despite challenges or resistance.

Chapter 12 talks (Matt 18:21-35; Luke 14:7-14; Luke 10:25-37) in the article “Strange Neighbors and Risky Care” by Sylvia C. Keesmaat. In her interpretation of the Parable of the Compassionate Samaritan, Keesmaat provides an illustration. She contends that the Samaritan's deeds urge us to accept and care for those frequently considered "strange neighbors" or outsiders and reject the suspicion and fear that often underlie anti-immigrant prejudice. Sylvia mentions “that the parable is set in the context of a question about the coming of God's rule and how the lawyer can be a part of that kingdom. As we have seen from the previous parables, God's world is a world where forgiveness, in the broadest sense of the word, is central. It is a kingdom of unexpected reversals, where the lowest members of Israel are the ones welcomed the most enthusiastically to the feast.” (page 282).

Chapter 13, “Everyone who hears these words of Mine: Parables on Discipleship” by Michael P. Knowles, is about four of Jesus' parables: the parable of the two builders; the parables of the tower builder and the warring king, the parable of the unworthy servant and the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. According to Knowles, these parables push the hearer to obey Jesus' teachings as well as to hear them, consider the consequences before committing to an action, and maintain humility while doing so.

I enjoyed reading "The Challenge of Jesus' Parables." it was an interesting and informative book. The book offers a thorough and insightful interpretation of Jesus' parables. The articles that New Testament scholars wrote examine the historical and cultural setting in which Jesus delivered his parables, which offers a profound grasp of the relevance and meaning of Jesus' parables. In conclusion, I suggest this book to anyone looking for a more in-depth and academic interpretation of Jesus' parables. It offers an insightful viewpoint on some of the most crucial principles of the Christian faith and is thoroughly researched and written. I valued the articles' authors' in-depth analyses of each parable, making it easier for me to understand the messages and hidden meanings that Jesus was trying to convey. The book helped me comprehend the meaning of Jesus' parables and how they relate to his teachings on a deeper level. Anyone who wants to examine and evaluate Jesus' parables and learn more about how they apply to contemporary life and in Jesus' time should definitely read this book.