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BIB336/NT771: Parables

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April 9th, 2023

The Parables Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation

By Brad H. Young

Brad H. Young's "The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation" is a groundbreaking exploration of the parables of Jesus in light of Jewish tradition. The author seeks to demonstrate that Jesus' parables, far from being a radical break with Jewish tradition, are actually deeply rooted in the Jewish Scriptures and rabbinic literature. By doing so in this book, he aims to provide a perspective not often seen on the parables that sheds light on their meaningful and purposeful origins. In addition he reinforces and takes apart some of the old interpretations we hold onto and expands on them with greater purpose and life as he sees fit with the new context at hand.

I divided the book into two main parts I want to focus on. The first part focuses on the parables themselves and provides an overview of the Jewish background to Jesus' teachings. Young begins by examining the parables in their historical context and arguing that they must be understood in light of the Jewish tradition. This I find to be so important. The world we live in today is so different from what it was back then. How women were held, and how racism was dominant in every culture but also the jobs people worked. It is important to have these in context and Young understands that in order to apply it to our lives today. He then explores the parables in detail, showing how they draw on Jewish themes and motifs, such as the concept of the Kingdom of God and the idea of the righteous remnant.

One of the strengths of the book is Young's use of rabbinic literature to shed light on the parables. He draws on a wide range of Jewish sources, including the Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash, to demonstrate the parallels between Jesus' parables and Jewish teachings. It helps in understanding what is mentioned before the context of everything. However now it was the context of the culture it was written for. So to have those sources was deeply important. For example, he shows how the parable of the Good Samaritan draws on the Jewish concept of the "neighbor" and how the parable of the Prodigal Son reflects the Jewish idea of repentance. This particular stuck out to me in how great detail I felt Young took to explain and dive.

The second part I want to discuss is the Christian interpretation of the parables. Young argues that the parables have often been misinterpreted by Christians because of a lack of understanding of their Jewish context. He shows how the parables have been used to support a wide range of theological positions, from liberation theology to conservative politics, and argues that many of these interpretations are flawed. This was a little tough to accept and read, as a Christian myself. I felt it was slightly unfair but I understand as an informative book, the feelings of what is written do not matter too much here.

One of the most interesting chapters in this section is the one on the parable of the Prodigal Son "The Father of two lost sons". Young shows how this parable has been interpreted in a variety of ways, from a story of individual redemption to a metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel. He argues that although those translations of what was said have their own value, Young feels they miss the point of the parable, which is to challenge the religious establishment and call for a new understanding of God's grace.

Overall, "The Parables" is a highly engaging and informative book that provides a fresh perspective on Jesus' teachings. Young's use of Jewish sources is particularly impressive, and he

does an excellent job of showing how the parables can be understood in light of the Jewish tradition. The book is also very accessible and would be suitable for both scholars and general readers. I thought it was very easy to read off the page and wouldn't find many people having trouble picking it up and understanding. However, it also has new and fresh ideas that can be welcomed by many.

One of the few criticisms of the book is that it can be a little repetitive at times. Young often restates his arguments in different ways, which can be frustrating for readers who are looking for more depth. I found that it could've been cut down and way shorter because of this. In doing so, the length of the book might be more inviting for new readers as well. Additionally, some readers may find that the book is a little too focused on the Jewish background to the parables and would like to see more discussion of the parables themselves. Personally I loved the new insight on the Jewish background of everything. However what makes the parables so great to me, is the application of them in many different life situations. So it felt quite tunnel visioned in that sense.

Despite these minor flaws, "The Parables" is an excellent book that deserves to be read by anyone interested in Jesus' teachings. Young's argument that the parables are deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition is both convincing and illuminating, and his exploration of the Christian interpretation of the parables is equally insightful. This book is an important contribution to the study of the parables and should be on the reading list of anyone interested in the subject.