

# Bible 101

## How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth

The Gospels and The Parables

# The Gospels

- [T]he materials in the Gospels may be divided roughly into sayings and narratives, that is, teachings *of* Jesus and stories *about* Jesus[.] (132)
- The form gospels form a unique literary genre for which there are few real analogies. (132)
- [T]he major hermeneutical difficulty lies with understanding “the kingdom of God,” a term that is absolutely crucial to the whole of Jesus’ ministry, yet at the same time is presented in the language and concepts of first-century Judaism. (132)

- Summary: the fact that Jesus didn't write, instead his words were written about (in translation), we end up with works which marry his life and teaching together, this is beneficial and trustworthy though may be difficult for a society which wants a 'tape recorder' type of testimony. (132-134)
- Summary: the second difficulty is that we have four gospels, and three of them are very similar. (134)
- [Four gospels were written because] different Christian communities each had need for a book about Jesus. For a variety of reasons the gospel written for one community or group of believers did not necessarily meet all the needs in another community. (134)

- First, there was the purely historical concern that this is who Jesus was and this is what he said and did; and *this* is the Jesus—crucified and raised from the dead—whom we now worship as the risen and exalted Lord. Second, there was the existential concern of retelling this story for the needs of later communities that did not speak Aramaic but Greek, and that did not live in a basically rural, agricultural, and Jewish setting, but in Rome, or Ephesus, or Antioch, where the gospel was encountering an urban, pagan environment. (134)

- these books stand side by side because at one and the same time they record the facts *about* Jesus, recall the teaching *of* Jesus, and bear witness *to* Jesus. (135)
- Exegesis of the four gospels, therefore, requires us to think both in terms of the historical setting of Jesus and the historical setting of the authors. (135)
- This means not only to know the historical context in general but also to form a tentative, but informed, reconstruction of the situation that the author is addressing. (135)

- Our hope here is simply to raise your awareness level so that you will have a greater appreciation for what the Gospels are, as well as a good grasp of the kinds of questions you need to ask as you read them. (135)
- It is imperative to the understanding of Jesus that a reader becomes immersed in the first-century Judaism of which Jesus was a part. (136)
- [A particular context] is a more difficult aspect in the attempt to reconstruct the historical context of Jesus, mostly because so many of his teachings are presented in the four gospels with very little context. (136)

- The literary context has to do with the place of a given pericope in the context of any one of the gospels, that is, where the evangelists chose to put the deeds and teaching. (139)
- To think horizontally means that when studying a pericope in any one gospel, it is usually helpful to be aware of the parallels in the other gospels. (140)
- To think vertically means that when reading or studying a narrative or teaching in the Gospels, one should try to be aware of both historical contexts—that of Jesus and that of the evangelist. (145)

- On the one hand, the evangelists *selected* those narratives and teachings that suited their purposes. [ ] At the same time the evangelists and their churches had special interests that also caused them to *arrange* and *adapt* what was selected. (146-147)



# The Parables

- One of the keys to understanding the parables lies in discovering the original audience to whom they were spoken. (156)
- [B]y interpreting we usually are able to understand what *they* caught, or what we would have caught had we been there. And this is what we must do in our exegesis. The hermeneutical task lies beyond that: How do we recapture the punch of the parable in our own times and our own settings? (158)

- [I]f one misses the points of reference in a parable, then the force and the point of what Jesus said is likewise going to be missed. (159)
- In [audience given] cases the task of interpretation is a combination of three things: (1) sit and listen to the parable again and again, (2) identify the points of reference intended by Jesus that would have been picked up by the original hearers, and (3) try to determine how the original hearers would have identified with the story, and therefore what they would have heard. (160)

- But what of those parables that are found in the Gospels without their original historical context? [ ] The key is in the repeated rereading of the parable until its points of reference clearly emerge. (162)
- [In reference to kingdom of God parables] Thus the whole parable tells us something about the nature of the kingdom, not just once of the points of reference or of the details. (163)
- Such urgency in Jesus' proclamation has a twofold thrust: (1) Judgment is impending; disaster and catastrophe are at the door. (2) But there is good news: salvation is freely offered to all. (164)

- What we need to do then is what Matthew did:  
*translate that same point not our own context.*