

Parable, Similitude Form

Introduction

Once a long time ago the ruler of a great country saw a beautiful woman bathing. He was attracted to her and, even though he was married already, he sent the woman's husband off to certain death in the army and then took the widow for his wife.

The ruler's adviser approached him not through newspapers, a grand jury, or the special prosecutor's office. Instead, he told the ruler the following story.

"As chief executive of this land," the advisor began, "judge this situation for me.

Structure

Element	Example (2 Samuel 12:1-15)
1. Narrative Introduction	(verse 1a above)
2. Story	"In a certain town there were two men, one rich, the other poor. ² The rich man had flocks and herds in great numbers. ³ But the poor man had nothing at all except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He nourished her, and she grew up with him and his children. She shared the little food he had and drank from his cup and slept in his bosom. She was like a daughter to him. ⁴ Now, the rich man received a visitor, but he would not take from his own flocks and herds to prepare a meal for the wayfarer who had come to him. Instead he took the poor man's ewe lamb and made a meal of it for his visitor."
3. Question Posed by Storyteller	<i>[in this case, the story functions as its own question, to which the ruler responds...]</i>
4. True Answer Given by Audience	⁵ The ruler grew very angry with that man and said to the adviser: "As God lives, the man who has done this merits death! ⁶ He shall restore the ewe lamb fourfold because he has done this and has had no pity."
5. Storyteller's Conclusion	⁷ Then the adviser said to the ruler: "You are the man! <i>[And specifies his punishment...]</i>
6. Narrative Conclusion	¹³ Then the ruler said to the adviser, "I have sinned against the Lord." The advisor answered, "The Lord God on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die. ¹⁴ But since you have utterly spurned the Lord by this deed, the child born to you must surely die." ¹⁵ Then the adviser returned to his house.

A parable is a story that draws the audience in to their own lives. It is a powerful teaching tool and form of prophetic speech because it helps the audience to see something they might not otherwise have expected to see, wanted to see, or *been able* to see. With a deft comparison drawn from nature or common experience, the storyteller suggests the surprising truth by analogy, and the character and audience see it. Parables climax with the character's or listener's realization of the truth. Parables work both on the characters in the story and on the audience reading the story (recall the story/discourse distinction).

Content

The truth conveyed by analogy in a parable is designed as an instruction for the audience (disciples) or as an indictment of them (opponents). Sometimes the images drawn from the culture and used for the analogy are obscure to modern audiences. At other times, their meaning is intentionally opaque to draw the audience in to deeper reflection. The question and answer elements are more or less explicit depending upon the parable.

Function

The function of the parable is to instruct or to indict, depending on the response of the audience.

For Further Practice

Matt 18:21-35
Matt 24:45-51

Matt 20:1-16
Matt 25:1-13

Matt 22:1-14
Matt 25:14-30