

THE USE OF *PARABOLĒ* IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

THE English word "parable", as used in modern Form Criticism, means "a short illustrative story intended to enforce a specific point" (A. E. J. Rawlinson, *St. Mark*, p. 47). As an exact term it is sometimes called (after Jülicher) the "parable proper", to distinguish it from other forms in the teaching of Jesus. Useful as this definition is, the word does not now represent the meaning of the Greek word *παραβολή* as it entered the vocabulary of the New Testament. This article is a study of *παραβολή* as used in the Synoptic Gospels, and wherever "parable" in the modern English sense is intended inverted commas will be used. It is hoped to show that within the Synoptic Gospels there is a distinct development in the use of *παραβολή*, from the final phase only of which comes the English "parable", and that careful attention to the earlier use may help to correct mistaken exegesis in some important passages.

In classical Greek *παραβολή* generally means "juxtaposition" or "comparison". As a figure of speech it means, according to Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1393^b), a simple analogy as opposed to an illustration in the form of a *λόγος* or story, of which the fable was an example. The Socratic *παραβολή* is cited as implying the formula *ὅμοιον γὰρ ὡσπερ . . .*, which shows how close the meaning is to the idea of *ὁμοίωσις*, "likeness". In the LXX, however, *παραβολή* is employed to translate the Hebrew *מָשָׁל*, *mashal*, in all its various meanings of "oracle", "proverb", "gnomic saying", "by-word" or "enigma", but it is never used of "parable proper".

In the New Testament *παραβολή* occurs only in the Synoptic Gospels and in Hebrews. It is used twice in the latter, more or less in line with the classical meaning: *παραβολή εἰς* in ix. 9 = "a correspondence to", and the more conventional adverbial expression *ἐν παραβολῇ* in xi. 19 = "figuratively" or simply "as it were".

We may now deal with the evidence of the Synoptic Gospels, for which has been assumed the hypothesis of the priority of

Mark, and of the original independence of Proto-Luke (i.e. a document comprising the material peculiar to Luke, L, and the material commonly referred to as Q).

I. MARK

As might be expected, Mark uses *παραβολή* in a mixture of both the classical and LXX senses. The classical meaning may be seen in xiii. 28, ἀπό δὲ τῆς συνκῆς μάθετε τὴν παραβολήν, "learn the illustration from the fig-tree" (with which compare the phrase in Polybius 2.5.24, ἐκ τῶν θηρίων ποιῆσθαι τὴν παραβολήν), and the virtual equation with *ὁμοίωσις* comes out clearly in the important formula in iv. 30, πῶς ὁμοιώσωμεν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ἐν τίνι αὐτὴν παραβολῇ θῶμεν; Luke renders, τίνι ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τίνι ὁμοιώσω αὐτὴν (Luke xiii. 18).

The LXX meaning appears in vii. 17, ἐπηρώτων αὐτὸν τὴν παραβολήν, where the reference is to the *obscure saying* (*mashal*) "there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him", etc. Similarly, the adverbial phrase of iii. 23, ἐν παραβολαῖς ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς, is in primary reference to the *proverb* (*mashal*) which follows, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" The same phrase, ἐν παραβολαῖς, in xii. 1 introduces the story of the Vineyard. It is no doubt suggested to Mark's mind because the story is built on the well-known O.T. allegory of the Unprofitable Vineyard in Isa. v. The conclusion of the incident in xii. 12, ἔγνωσαν γὰρ ὅτι πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὴν παραβολήν εἶπεν, confirms the view that the story in question is considered an allegory, like the O.T. *mashal* from which it is derived. However, the classical meaning also obtrudes, for the force of the πρὸς αὐτοὺς standing in a kind of adjectival relationship to τὴν παραβολήν is that Jesus made them (the priests) the object of "comparison". Precisely this type of expression, λέγειν πρὸς τινα παραβολήν, appears with this force in Luke, as we shall see. In this present case, the comparison would be further pressed by the quotation which concludes the story, "the stone which the builders rejected", etc.; and apparently the priests were not slow to see themselves, allegorically, in the wicked husbandmen and the rejecting builders.

So far there is no indication that *παραβολή* is held to mean any particular type of story, though the instance just discussed can be described as being ἐν παραβολαῖς, "in figures", since

it is an allegory, and as containing a *παραβολή*, "a comparison", with certain persons. It remains to examine the highly important use of *παραβολή* in chapter iv, bearing in mind Mark's usage so far, and unprejudiced by the other evangelists' treatment of Mark's account.

In iv. 2, ἐν παραβολαῖς anticipates in this usual adverbial phrase the nature of the material to follow, and does not by itself add to our knowledge of usage. It may best be translated, quite neutrally, "figuratively" or "by illustrations". Then, following the description of a sower and the six kinds of soil into which his seed fell,¹ together with the logion, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear", there appears the interesting statement in iv. 10, ἠρώτων αὐτὸν . . . τὰς παραβολάς, "they asked him the parables". Now *ἠρωτᾶν* properly means "to ask a question", and an accusative following it (apart from a personal object) should be a cognate or its equivalent, as indeed elsewhere in the N.T., e.g. Matt. xxi. 24 = Luke xx. 3; John xvi. 23 (Luke xiv. is best omitted from discussion). Thus *ἠρώτων τὰς παραβολάς* should represent a direct question *τίνας αἱ παραβολαί*; which is confirmed by Luke's rendering of this passage, ἐπηρώτων τίς αὐτὴ εἶη ἡ παραβολή. What then are the *παραβολαί* to which the disciples refer? Most naturally they are the six types or similitudes of soils just enumerated. To suppose that *αἱ παραβολαί* here refer to "parables" in general would be to go against Mark's understanding of the word, and such an interpretation might never have been sought if his account had not been read through the eyes of the other Evangelists. The statement cannot consistently mean, as Rawlinson offers, "they asked him for the parables" or "about the parables" (*St. Mark*, p. 51), and it is quite unnecessary to suppose that "the awkward wording of verse 10 is no doubt designed to admit of the general theory about parables in verses 11-12 appearing to be equally an answer to the disciples' question, with the explanation of the parable of the Sower in verses 13 sqq." There is nothing awkward about Mark's wording so long as we do not import into his words a meaning that there is no evidence to suggest he intended. The teaching is not a "parable" at all. The barest mention of a sower is followed by a category of six kinds of soil into which seed is sown, which the disciples imme-

¹ See B. T. D. Smith, *Parables of the Synoptic Gospels*, p. 124, footnote 3: "Three degrees of fertility are named, corresponding to three kinds of unfertile soil," etc.

diately recognise as a series of similitudes to something or other. So they ask Jesus "What are the similitudes?" They might even have included the enigmatic logion, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear", among the *παραβολαί* of their question, for in the LXX sense it could be counted one. At all events, Jesus replies to their question by explaining this logion first. "Those who have ears to hear are those to whom has been given the secret of the Kingdom"; the familiar adverbial phrase *ἐν παραβολαῖς* now explains how a person can have ears but *not* hear, for "everything is in figures to those outside". It is really a play on two meanings of the same word, one being in the conventional phrase *ἐν παραβολαῖς*, whose use here is prompted by the mention of *παραβολαί* in the disciples' question. For this meaning of *ἐν παραβολαῖς* as = "in figures" we may compare the *ἐν παραβολῇ* of Hebrews xi. 19; there is a parallel usage of *παροιμία* in John xvi. 25, where *ἐν παροιμιαῖς*, "in figures", is contrasted with *παρησίᾳ*, "explicitly". We are reminded, too, of the phrase in I Cor. xiii. 12 *βλέπειν ἐν αἰνίγματι*, where a reflection only (*δι' ἑσόπτρου*), and not the object itself, is seen; it is a case of seeing, but not seeing.¹

This interpretation of *ἐν παραβολαῖς* in iv. 11 was suggested by Dr. J. W. Hunkin in the *Journal of Theological Studies* for April 1915, but it meets with the objection from Dr. B. T. D. Smith (Cambridge Bible, *St. Matthew*, p. 137): "One great difficulty in the way of any such interpretation is that it requires *παραβολή* to be understood in two senses." No such difficulty exists. It is a regular feature of language for two senses of the same word to appear in the same context, sometimes by a process of unconscious attraction, especially when one of the occurrences is in the form of a conventional phrase. For example, in Rom. xii. 13, 14, *διώκω* occurs twice, in one case meaning "practise" and in the other "persecute". Yet there is no reason to suppose that St. Paul was deliberately punning. A writer will often, by unconscious impulse, repeat a word he has recently used, and he may even be unaware of the repetition, especially if he happens to be employing the word in a different sense. J. M. Creed (*St. Luke*, p. 115) endorses Dr. Smith's objection, and supports it by contrasting Mark iv. 11, *ἐκείνοις δὲ τοῖς ἔξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὰ πάντα γίνεται*, with Mark iv. 33, *καὶ*

¹ Cf. *Wisdom of Sirach*, xxxix. 3. ἀπόκρυφα παροιμιῶν ἐκζητήσει, καὶ ἐν αἰνίγμασι παραβολῶν συνεισελεύσεται.

τοιούταις παραβολαῖς πολλαῖς ἐλάλει, καθὼς ἠδύναντο ἀκοῦειν. But the contrast serves to illustrate this very difference in usage—*ἐν παραβολαῖς* is a fixed adverbial phrase; *τοιούταις παραβολαῖς πολλαῖς* with no *ἐν*, and with two qualifying words, is the normal substantive use in the instrumental dative. There is no impropriety in assigning them different shades of meaning.

To "those outside" everything was, in fact, *ἐν παραβολαῖς*, "in figures". It is no question of the personal motive of Jesus for teaching by similitudes. The attitude of the people was the same, whatever medium he chose to use. The agent of the *δέδοται*, "has been given", is no doubt God the Father, not Jesus (cf. Matt. xvi. 17), and there is no reason why *πάντα γίνεταί*, "all things are", should be read as if it were *πάντα λαλῶ*, "I speak all things". Of course the difficulty is generally held to lie in the *ἵνα* which introduces the quotation from Isa. vi. An attractive suggestion has been made by Prof. T. W. Manson (*The Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 77 ff.) that *ἵνα* is a misunderstanding of an ambiguous Aramaic particle *dē*, and should have been translated *oʿ*, the relative pronoun "who". So also C. C. Torrey, *Our Translated Gospels*, p. 10. This would mean that the quotation is simply descriptive of "those outside", and does not express purpose at all. But even if the *ἵνα* is correct—and it is certainly what Mark intended—it still does not express the purpose of Jesus' teaching, which, as has been said, is not really in question here. It must be remembered that, whatever the syntactical connection, the significance of the quotation is that Jesus is drawing a parallel with the situation which confronted Isaiah—a people blind and deaf, a people whose heart had been hardened lest they should convert and be healed. Now whatever problem of purpose there may be in Isaiah, it arises out of the given condition of the people. In Mark the problem is the same, and again it arises out of the given condition of the people, here expressed: "to those outside all things are in figures", and it is no more connected with the personal motive of Jesus' teaching than it was with the personal motive of Isaiah's preaching. A problem of purpose there is, but it is not one of deliberate obscurity on the part of Jesus, and it is not solved by "the method of the blue pencil" (Manson, p. 75).

The conjunction *ἵνα*, then, may express purpose either in regard to those who are already mentioned as being blind (to

them all things are in figures), as in Isa. vi. 9, 10; or in the sense of the fulfilment of prophecy, i.e. "the people see in figures that (it might be fulfilled which was spoken, namely,) seeing they might not perceive"; etc. The surface meaning of the similitudes they would no doubt understand well enough, but this would only be a figure of the real truth; thus similitudes were described as "such as they could hear", in verse 33. So we have seen that Jesus takes up the word *παραβολαί* from the disciples' question, and, with a subtle turn of meaning, employs *ἐν παραβολαῖς* to illustrate the two kinds of hearers implied by the logions in verse 11.

Coming to verse 13, it will be seen that the development of thought continues with perfect naturalness, *οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην, καὶ πῶς πάσας τὰς παραβολὰς γνῶσεσθε*; This is the first *singular* use of *παραβολή* in the whole passage, and the context leads us to refer it to the logion which Jesus has just expounded (*ὅς ἔχει ὄτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω*), which, as has been noted, is a *παραβολή* in the *mashal* sense.¹ There is nothing in the Marcan version which requires, or even suggests, that *ἡ παραβολή αὕτη* refers to the whole account of the sowing and the soils. On the other hand, this latter series of soil similitudes will again be what is meant by *πάσας τὰς παραβολάς*, as in verse 10. This is the more likely since, without further ado or explanation, Jesus goes on to interpret "all these similitudes". Again, therefore, in verse 13, we have a play on the slightly different meanings of *παραβολή*, *ἡ παραβολή αὕτη* being a *mashal*, and *αἱ παραβολαί* being simple "likenesses". The one points to the explanation of the others, and the whole verse might be paraphrased "If you do not understand the key-saying, how can you understand the similitudes which hang upon it?"²

Most commentators since Adolf Jülicher have assumed that we have in the Sower teaching a "parable" which has been misunderstood by Mark, and edited with a patchwork of secondary explanations (in accordance with a doctrinal theory) the inconsistency of which reveals the ineptness of Mark's interpretation.³ But if the view I have taken of Mark's use of

¹ Or perhaps to the quotation from Isa. vi. 9, which immediately precedes this question of Jesus, and which is in the form of a *mashal*: "to see and not to see." But it would still be closely related to the logion before it.

² This would accord well with Jesus' custom of decisive appeal to the Scriptures. Cf. xii. 24: "Is it not for this cause that ye err, that ye know not the scriptures?"

³ E.g., B. T. D. Smith, *Parables of the Synoptic Gospels*, pp. 124-5; C. H. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, pp. 13ff. and 180ff. For a reply to the linguistic evidence adduced

παραβολή is correct, this hypothesis of Form Criticism is deprived of its mainspring. For we are not dealing with a single "parable", but with a series of similitudes of soils, each complete in itself (e.g. "some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it"). The mention of a sower is the briefest possible introductory note, and is, so to speak, incidental. Dr. Rawlinson remarks that in the exposition in verses 14 ff. "the centre of interest is no longer in the Sower, but in the different kinds of soil" (*St. Mark*, p. 52). This he takes as evidence that the exposition is secondary and inappropriate. But the centre of interest never was in the Sower, so far as Mark's account takes us, and Dr. Rawlinson's observation only serves to confirm the view that *αἱ παραβολαί* of verses 10 and 13 are the similitudes of different kinds of soil.

The two remaining occurrences of *παραβολή* in Mark, iv. 33 and 34, conclude this same section, and depend for their meaning on the formula in verse 30 which has already been discussed. The meaning is again simple "similitude", the example alluded to being: "like a grain of mustard-seed". Such similitudes are in a form which can be grasped by all ("as they were able to hear") but their spiritual meaning is reserved for those whose ears are opened.

We may conclude that nowhere in Mark does *παραβολή* mean "a short illustrative story intended to enforce a specific point", i.e. a "parable". Moreover, to judge from the antecedent history of *παραβολή* both in classical and LXX usage, it would probably be an innovation if it did mean "parable".

II. LUKE

It is probable that *παραβολή* did not stand in the original Q discourse-material used as a source by both Matthew and Luke; for where, in such material, it is introduced by one Evangelist, it is as an editorial addition and does not appear in the other. Proto-Luke (L + Q), therefore, may be taken as providing independent evidence of Luke's understanding of the word.

by Professor Dodd in favour of the secondary character of Mark iv. 11-20, see Professor Otto Piper's article in *THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY* for January 1942: "The Understanding of the Synoptic Parables", p. 44. T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 75-80, rightly sees the integral connection of the Sower passage with parabolic teaching but regards it as a "parable" as do most Form critics.

(a) *Proto-Luke.*

As might be expected, Luke leans towards the ordinary classical meaning of *παραβολή*, "likeness" or "comparison" with the idea of *ὁμοίωσις* not far away. Twice, however, it is applied to *proverbs*, "Physician, heal thyself", iv. 23 (L), and "Can the blind lead the blind?", iv. 39 (Q), but in the other eight passages Luke's understanding of the term is made clear by the constructions in which he places it. Four times it conveys a direct comparison with a person, when the characteristic construction is *λέγειν πρὸς τινα παραβολήν*. The force of this will come out in an examination of the actual passages. Four times it conveys a comparison or illustration of a particular statement or situation.

Comparisons with persons.

(1) From L we have, in xiv. 7, *ἔλεγεν πρὸς τοὺς κεκλημένους παραβολήν ἐπέχων πῶς τὰς πρωτοκλισίας ἐξελέγοντο κτλ.* The teaching which follows is not a "parable" at all. It might easily, however, be put into "parable" form, and it might be argued that Luke has simply given the *application* of such a "parable" together with its concluding logion. If this is so, it shows clearly that *παραβολή* means for Luke, not the "parable" itself, but the application or comparison involved. In any case, he has observed the simple correspondence of *ὁ ὑψῶν ἑαυτὸν* to *οἱ κεκλημένοι*, and the position of *πρὸς τοὺς κεκλημένους* immediately before *παραβολήν* has an adjectival force, so that it should be translated "He made a *comparison* with those who were bidden", and not, as in the R.V., "He spake a *parable* unto those who were bidden". An instance of this type of expression has already been noted in Mark xii. 12.¹

(2) A more striking instance of this adjectival construction qualifying *παραβολή* is in another L passage, xviii. 9, *εἶπεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τινὰς τοὺς πεποιθότας ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ὅτι εἰσὶν δίκαιοι καὶ ἐξουθενούσας τοὺς λοιποὺς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην*. Luke does not mean that Jesus was actually speaking to such people, but the *παραβολή* is a comparison of "certain people" with the Pharisee of the story. In all these cases Luke himself has supplied the application, which suggests that it is the relationship which constitutes the *παραβολή* and not the story in itself or on its own.

¹ There is a similar expression in Acts ii. 25, where *λέγει εἰς αὐτόν* = "speaks of him", not "speaks to him".

(3) An interrogatory inversion of the usual order appears in the Lucan addition to the Q teaching about watchfulness, in xii. 41, *πρὸς ἡμᾶς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην λέγεις ἢ καὶ πρὸς πάντας*; If *παραβολή* meant "parable" it would here refer simply to the story of the Unready Householder in verses 39 and 40. But the reference is surely to the whole passage from verse 35 on, and in particular to verse 36 *ὁμοίως ὁμοίως ἀνθρώποις προσδεχομένοις τὸν κύριον ἑαυτῶν*. Again, as in xiv. 7, this sounds like the application of a "parable" (cf. the story of the Ten Virgins in Matt. xxv. 1), and it is this "likeness" which constitutes the *παραβολή*, not the story of the Servants or of the Householder. Peter's question merely seeks to specify the general application already made—"Does it apply to us or to everybody?" The whole section is represented as teaching to the disciples only (verse 22 ff.), so again *λέγειν πρὸς τινα παραβολήν* means not "to recount a story to someone" but "to express a comparison with someone".

(4) Another Lucan introduction to a Q passage is in xv. 3, *καὶ διεγόγγυζον οἱ τε Φαρισαῖοι καὶ γραμματεῖς . . . εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς ταύτην τὴν παραβολήν*. It might be argued that here at least is a clear case of *παραβολή* being equated with a "parable", but, though the process by which such a transference was ultimately made is beginning to be evident, there are reasons for thinking that Luke has not actually made the change. The first story is of the one lost sheep and the ninety-nine safe sheep. The peculiar Lucan application—"there is joy in heaven over one sinner repenting rather than over ninety-nine righteous who do not need repentance"—with its clear reference to the Pharisees and scribes, indicates that the *πρὸς αὐτούς* is still comparative in force, and dependent on *τὴν παραβολήν*. Moreover, it is perhaps significant that, though three "parables" are in fact related (not only "this parable", v. 3), the application is the same in each, and is verbally expressed twice. So we may still hold that it is Luke's understanding of the single basic illustration or comparison which leads him to speak of *αὕτη ἡ παραβολή*.

Comparisons with Situations.

There remain in Proto-Luke four instances of *παραβολή* meaning an illustration of a given statement or of a situation, though the treatment varies.

(1) The comparative force is clearest in xviii. 1, *ἔλεγεν παραβολὴν αὐτοῖς πρὸς τὸ δεῖν πάντοτε προσεύχεσθαι αὐτοὺς καὶ μὴ ἐγκακεῖν*. (Cf. Heb. ix. 9 *ἥτις παραβολὴ εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τὸν ἐνεστηκότα*.) The story is that of the Widow and the Unjust Judge, and it is the expressed relationship to a spiritual situation in the story which constitutes the *παραβολή*.

(2) Again, the story of the Rich Fool in xii. 16—*εἶπεν δὲ παραβολὴν πρὸς αὐτούς*—illustrates “Beware of all covetousness, for a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions”, and the specific comparison is given, “So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God”. The *πρὸς αὐτούς* here is not adjectival, as we might gather from its position; it is simply equal to *αὐτοῖς*.

(3) Again, the story of the Unfruitful Fig in the Vineyard in xiii. 6—*ἔλεγεν δὲ ταύτην τὴν παραβολὴν*—illustrates “Unless you repent, you will likewise perish”. No further application is pressed,¹ but there is clearly no doubt in Luke’s mind about the relationship of the story to the discussion evoked by the disasters of Pilate’s outrage and Siloam. Hence *παραβολή*.

(4) The final instance in Proto-Luke is xix. 11, and is in Luke’s introduction to a Q passage, *προσθεὶς εἶπεν παραβολὴν διὰ τὸ ἐγγυὲς εἶναι Ἰερουσαλήμ αὐτὸν καὶ δοκεῖν αὐτοῖς ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἢ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφανῆσθαι*. Once again the *παραβολή* is expressed by means of a story, that of the Entrusted Pounds, and once again Luke feels the need to indicate *παραβολή* as being an illustration of *something*—in this case, of the true situation, in the face of false expectations. Luke’s style may be somewhat awkward, and not altogether successful, but at least it bears witness to his instinct that the mention of *παραβολή* calls for some sort of expressed comparison or relationship.

(b) *Luke’s Use of Mark.*

This confirms the evidence of Proto-Luke. Once, in v. 36, he employs the *mashal* sense in designating a proverb as a *παραβολή*, “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment”. In xx. 9, *ἤρξατο δὲ πρὸς τὸν λαὸν λέγειν τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην*, where Luke has avoided *ἐν παραβολαῖς* in favour of a more definite expression, looks at first like a

¹ Though Luke may have the *ἀμπελών* in mind as being the “similitude”. It is an O.T. figure of the Israelitish nation. The instance is a “parable proper”, though for Luke it is still a “similitude”.

case of comparison with a person, but the position of the verb makes this unlikely, though Luke may be taking the familiar *ἀμπελών* as a comparison to *ὁ λαός*. Mark’s “learn the illustration from the fig-tree” has become more specific in Luke xxi. 29, by a method already observed in Luke’s writings. He introduces his *καὶ εἶπεν παραβολὴν αὐτοῖς* by a general statement, not found in Mark, “when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”, a situation to which the example of the fig-tree, and indeed all trees, is a corresponding *παραβολή*.

Finally, important changes appear in Luke’s version of the Sower passage. In viii. 4, *διὰ παραβολῆς* replaces *ἐν παραβολαῖς*, and in viii. 9, *ἠρώτων αὐτὸν τὰς παραβολὰς* is expanded to *ἐπηρώτων αὐτὸν τίς αὐτὴ εἶη ἢ παραβολή*. Note the singular for plural in both cases. Luke understands as Jesus’ reply to this last question, verse 11: *ἔστιν δὲ αὐτὴ ἢ παραβολή· ὁ σπόρος ἐστὶν ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ*. That Luke regards *ὁ σπόρος* as one term of the comparison (*παραβολή*) is supported by his addition of *τὸν σπόρον αὐτοῦ* to Mark’s brief introduction. This version, and the singular *παραβολή* throughout, reveals a different emphasis from Mark. For Luke there is one basic *παραβολή* or similitude, namely, “the seed = the word of God”.

To conclude Luke’s evidence we may say that, apart from his three *mashal* contexts, he does not depart from the basic classical meaning of *παραβολή*. No more than Mark does he use it to mean a “parable” as such, and in those frequent cases where a “parable” is in fact involved, the *παραβολή* always refers to a particular and expressed comparison, not to the story in or of itself.

III. MATTHEW

So far as we can judge, Matthew used *παραβολή* primarily because he found it in Mark. All its occurrences in the non-Markan sections seem to be editorial additions by the same hand as edited the Marcan sections. Matthew’s usage is a development from Mark’s; it reveals an important semantic change, and an independent and different attitude from Luke to the same word. In Matthew, the development from “likeness” or “comparison” to the story-form so often containing the “likeness” is complete. The tendency towards this involved Luke in some odd-looking expressions, but he did not take the final step of equating *παραβολή* with a story containing a

παραβολή. Matthew did take this step, and it has led to the present meaning of the English word "parable". Such semantic change is generally unconscious.

(a) *Matthew's Use of Mark.*

He makes some slight changes which reveal his different conception of *παραβολή*. Oddly enough, he only once takes up the *mashal* sense, and that is where it occurs in an integral part of the narrative (xv. 15) which, for another reason (the appearance of Peter), Matthew possibly held to be important. But even here he seems to find Mark's *ἐπηρώτων τὴν παραβολήν* (Mark vii. 17) too elliptical, for he transposes it into direct speech with *φράσον ἡμῖν τὴν παραβολήν* (cf. *διασάφισον* in xiii. 36).

In the Vineyard story, xxi. 33 ff., Mark's reason for finding *ἐν παραβολαῖς* appropriate (i.e. the allegorical character of the story) disappears in Matthew. The story becomes simply *ἄλλη παραβολή*, presumably being thus classified with the "parable" of the Two Sons just related. Hence also the plural in verse 45, *ἀκούσαντες οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι τὰς παραβολὰς αὐτοῦ ἔγνωσαν ὅτι περὶ αὐτῶν λέγει*. The change of emphasis from Mark is quite clear. *τὰς παραβολὰς αὐτοῦ* is now "his 'parables'", and a new subordinate clause is required to convey what Mark could do with a simple *πρὸς αὐτούς* qualifying *παραβολή*. Matthew's *παραβολή* has become attached to a particular literary form.

Matt. xxiv. 32, *ἀπὸ τῆς συκῆς μάθετε τὴν παραβολήν*, reproduces Mark xiii. 28 without change.

Two very significant changes from Mark appear in Matthew's treatment of the Sower passage in chapter xiii. The introduction, verse 3, and conclusion, verse 34, are similar, but an entirely new turn is taken in verse 10 with the disciples' question, *διὰ τί ἐν παραβολαῖς λαλεῖς αὐτοῖς*; Not only are *διὰ τί* (why?) and *αὐτοῖς* (to them, i.e. the people) not represented in Mark (or Luke), but there is, I hold, no suggestion of such a question at all in Mark's account (or Luke's). Surely what has happened is that Matthew, having a different conception of *παραβολή* from Mark (i.e. "parable" as against "comparison" or "similitude"), and regarding the story of the Sower as being in itself a "parable", finds justification for Mark's plural use of the word by taking Mark's concise indirect question as a compressed expression for "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" Later exegesis has suffered by reading

Mark through Matthew's eyes. In the words of Jesus which follow, therefore, Matthew has made some consequential changes of construction. A *ὅτι* is necessary in verse 11 (or at least in verse 13), the Isaiah quotation is represented as the direct answer to the disciples' question ("this is the reason why I speak to them in parables") and is elaborately linked with other teaching in accord with this. Moreover, Jesus goes on to expound the former "parable", not as having been asked to, but by way of further illustration of his general teaching. The phrase used in verse 18, *ἀκούσατε τὴν παραβολὴν τοῦ σπειράντος*, is one, I suggest, which would have been almost impossible for Mark, and it represents the final development of Matthean usage. It means, as in the categories of Form Criticism, "the 'parable' of the Sower", where *παραβολή* means little more than "story" (*λόγος*), and is a convenient nomenclature for this form of teaching. Actually, the Sower plays no part at all in Matthew's interpretation, which proves that the title is only conventional. But by taking the line he does in verses 10 ff., he naturally cannot adapt to his sense of "parable" the Marcan question *οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην, καὶ πῶς πάσας τὰς παραβολὰς γινώσσετε*; We may notice, in passing, that if Luke had used a phrase of the kind Matthew uses, it would have been *ἀκούσατε τὴν παραβολὴν τοῦ σπόρου* and he would have meant it literally, "the comparison of the seed", not just as a conventional title.

(b) *Non-Markan Material.*

There are seven occurrences in such material, and it is here that we get a clear hint of how Matthew came to his peculiar notion of *παραβολή*.

On four occasions when it is used to introduce a "parable", the "parable" in question begins either with *ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία κτλ.* (xiii. 31; xiii. 33) or with *ὁμοιώθη ἡ βασιλεία κτλ.* (xxii. 1, xiii. 24). These, and similar expressions involving the idea of *ὁμοίωσις*, were frequent formulas in Matthew's discourse-material for presenting "parables". Now the crucial question is, Why did Matthew use the word *παραβολή* as a label for this form of story? The answer, I believe, probably lies in a similar formula which Matthew found in Mark, *πῶς ὁμοιάσωμεν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ ἐν τίνι αὐτὴν παραβολῇ θῶμεν*; (iv. 30). In Mark it meant simply "likeness", rather closely akin to *ὁμοίωσις*, but it gave Matthew what he was looking for, namely

παραβολή as a convenient label for similar material. In fact, it might almost be said that Matthew was the first Form critic. And since *all* such stories conveyed in some way comparisons or similitudes relating to the Kingdom of God, no detailed indication of comparison was felt to be demanded by the use of παραβολή, and thence its absolute substantive use to mean a certain type of story was established.¹ Matthew can now introduce his stories with ἄλλην παραβολὴν παρέθηκεν αὐτοῖς (xiii. 24, 31), ἄλλην παραβολὴν ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς (xiii. 33) and πάλιν εἶπεν ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς (xxii. 1).

A parallel expression to ἡ παραβολὴ τοῦ σπειραντοῦ appears at xiii. 36, διασάφησον ἡμῖν τὴν παραβολὴν τῶν ζιζανίων τοῦ ἀγροῦ, where "the parable of the Tares of the Field" is simply a convenient title for a story.

There remain only the LXX quotation in xiii. 35, ἀνοίξω ἐν παραβολαῖς τὸ στόμα μου, ἐρεῶμαι κεκρυμμένα ἀπὸ καταβολῆς, which has only a general reference to parabolic teaching, and where, oddly enough, the expression ἐν παραβολαῖς is clearly the "in figures" sense which we have observed in Mark, and which, strictly speaking, is scarcely appropriate in this sense to Matthew's usage; and the note at the end of the whole section ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν τὰς παραβολὰς ταύτας (xiii. 53), which refers to the "parables" previously noted.

IV. CONCLUSION

We may summarise these results and their significance in terms of a brief comparative exegesis of the Sower passage as treated by Mark, Luke and Matthew.

(a) Introduction.

Mark: His ἐν παραβολαῖς = "in figures".

Luke: Regards the teaching as being διὰ παραβολῆς, "by means of a comparison", and has added the small but important τὸν σπόρον αὐτοῦ to his introduction.

Matthew: His ἐν παραβολαῖς = "in parables".

¹ I have not discussed the bearing of the Rabbinic "parables" on this question. *Mashal* was used by the Rabbis as a title for some of their "parables", and it might be argued that there is therefore no need to look further for the origin of παραβολή as meaning "parable". But in view of the consistent picture of development presented by the Synoptic Gospels in themselves, and the later date of the Rabbinic evidence, it seems reasonable to regard the conclusions here reached as valid. Of course the development was a very natural one, and the identification may well have been arrived at quite independently by the Rabbinic usage, though even so I do not know that *mashal* actually found its way into Greek παραβολή by this route, even later.

(b) Basic Passage.

Mark iv. 3-9; Luke viii. 5-8; Matt. xiii. 3-9. All evangelists agree on the main details.

(c) The Question of the Disciples.

Mark: "What are these similitudes of soils to be compared with?"

Luke: "What is the 'likeness' in this story?"

Matthew: "Why do you speak in 'parables' to the people?" Matthew's question does not arise directly out of the foregoing story.

(d) Jesus' Reply.

Mark: An immediate explanation of the key-logion, "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear", explaining, with appeal to Isaiah, who are those who hear effectually, and who are not. The similitudes would seem to be intended primarily for those who *could* hear, not for those outside. "You are those to whom the secret has been given; those outside are like the men of Isaiah's day—they see only shadows."

Luke: Verse 10 is a parenthesis: before replying directly, Jesus points out that the disciples themselves do not need "comparisons": "To you it is given to know the secrets plainly; to the others it is given to know the secrets by means of comparisons, for this is the 'seeing' of those who do not see, and the 'hearing' of those who do not hear." There is nothing deliberately secretive in Luke's idea of παραβολή. Comparisons are not used to conceal the truth from οἱ λοιποί, but to be some means of seeing and hearing to those who are otherwise spiritually blind and obtuse. The emphasis is "that they may see and not see", not "that those who see may not see". Luke does not mean that even now such people see or understand fully. He is aware that the more fundamental criterion of knowledge lies in obedience to the word of God, that is, in a right response to the seed sown. See his conclusion to this whole section in verses 19-21.

Matthew: Jesus replies directly to the disciples' question by saying that the condition of the people demanded that he speak in "parables". He does not suggest what effect they were calculated to achieve, but it could hardly be one of concealment.

(e) *The Interpretation of the Sower Passage.*

Mark : Jesus indicates that failure to understand the basic truth of the word regarding effectual hearers naturally precludes an understanding of the similitudes of the soils, and He proceeds to draw in detail the various comparisons involved. They are no doubt intended as a guide to those who really hear, and whose task it is, or will be, to continue sowing the Word.

Luke : Jesus returns after His parenthesis to reply to the disciples' question, " This is the comparison : the seed is the word of God ", and He proceeds to the detailed interpretation.

Matthew : Although He has not actually been questioned about it at all, Jesus interprets the " parable of the Sower " by way of illustrating His answer to the disciples' previous question about the purpose of " parables ".

The respective viewpoints might be further studied in the various gospels, as well as the bearing of these studies on the question of the teaching of Jesus as a whole, but that is beyond the scope of this article. It is sufficient if we have seen enough of the conception of *παραβολή* in the minds of the three Evangelists to enable us to understand it aright in their respective testimonies. Technically it might be looked on as a study in semantic change ; as such it is typical of the living idiom in which the Evangelists wrote, and which we ought to grasp. More significant is it for us to observe how God the Holy Spirit speaks through the thoughts and words of men in such a way as to provide a rich perspective of the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. They give us a valid witness in a threefold cord which is not easily broken.

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