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THE BANQUET TYPE-SCENE IN THE PARABLES OF JESUS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Fazadudin Hosein

October 2001
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ABSTRACT

THE BANQUET TYPE-SCENE IN THE PARABLES OF JESUS

by

Fazadudin Hosein

Adviser: Robert M. Johnston
Biblical narratives abound in ancient literary and oral conventions. One such convention is the type-scene. The study of the type-scene originated in 1933 with Walter Arend who studied compositional recurrent patterns and variations in the epics of Homer. Later, the study was developed by Robert Alter in his treatment of biblical narratives. The type-scene was a narratorial device used by ancient orators and writers in which traditional elements of repetitive compositional patterns were told and retold in innovative ways to an audience, raising their expectation and sometimes causing surprise. Conventional elements that make up the type-scene were catchwords, motifs, characters, and themes. This study investigated the banquet type-scene in the parables of Jesus in order to find out whether Jesus, and by extension, the Gospel writers were in dialogue with the fixed literary and oral banquet type-scene convention of their time.
Narrative criticism provided the framework for the study. Though narrative criticism implies a synchronic approach (the text in its final form) to the exegetical task, the diachronic approach (the text in its historical evolution) was also employed demonstrating that both approaches are complementary. Banquet narratives, banquet images, and general information about banquets in antiquity (ca. B.C.E. 1500 to 300 C.E.) were examined: Egyptian, Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, Ugaritic, Old Testament, Jewish Intertestamental, Greco-Roman, New Testament, Early Christian Noncanonical, and Rabbinic literature of Tannaim. It was discovered that at the time of Jesus all banquet-type scenes bore two basic structural elements: the preparation of a banquet and selective invitation. From that point in the structure, the plot of the banquet type-scene branched off into three other plot sequences resulting in the Eminence of Guests type-scene, the Guests and Host Response type-scene, and the Wise and Foolish type-scene.


The common theme shared by the parables was exclusion/inclusion: exclusion from and inclusion into God’s eschatological banquet. Exclusion from the kingdom was the inevitable fate of those who rejected Jesus’ invitation: the Jewish people, opponents...
of Jesus (especially the leaders), and the unprepared disciple. Inclusion in the kingdom meant acceptance and honor for the Jewish outcasts, the despised Gentiles, and the faithful disciple. In Matthew's program the emphasis was exclusion; in Luke's, inclusion.

The study showed that Jesus was interacting with the banquet type-scene convention of his day, and used it in inventive ways to teach his message in the context of his ministry and mission. The study also showed that the Gospel writers in deliberate creative ways used the banquet type-scene to emphasize themes in their individual Gospels that were commensurate with their theology and audience. It was made clear that the type-scene analysis is a valuable literary tool for an approach to the exegetical task.
DEDICATION

τῷ Θεῷ πατρί μου καὶ
τῷ κύριῳ Ἰσσων Χρυστῷ καὶ
τῷ πνεύματι ἀγίῳ αὐτοῦ

tois anaklinasi sun emoi the gnwsegw

To my darling "Dee"
Whose unfailing love and patience kept me encouraged over the years

To Krystal
Whose beauty and bearing gave a father the poise to press on

To Krystan
Whose spirit of success and sharing set the stage for my triumph

To Kryslene
Whose timely advent added sunshine to our home away from home
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The Bible abounds in narrative.\(^1\) Biblical narrative is described by Adele Berlin as "vibrant and vivid narrative that has an ongoing power to affect those who hear or read it."\(^2\) "Its power" she declares, "comes not only from the authority of scripture, but from the inner dynamics of the stories themselves."\(^3\) These dynamics make biblical narratives comparable to works of art.\(^4\) In fact, biblical narratives are generally recognized as

\(^1\) As a mode of expression, narrative holds a place of prominence in the Bible. Narratives dominate the books of Genesis to 2 Kings in the Old Testament and the Gospels and Acts in the New, prevail in books like Ruth, Esther, and Jonah, and can be found in sections of prophetic books and even in poetic parts of the Bible, such as Daniel and Revelation and the Psalms.

\(^2\) Adele Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, Bible and Literature Series, no. 9 (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 11.


\(^4\) "Art" when used in connection with biblical narratives should not be conceived only in the sense of "skill," "craft," or "technique," but in the sense of an art form, for instance, painting or music. See Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, 135. A study done by E. H. Gombrich in Art and Illusion, on the properties of art, reveals a correspondence in biblical narrative as an art form. Gombrich elucidates a very important dynamic in the art world: the message implicit in a work of art may only be
having one of the highest artistic qualities in literature known, and thus are regarded 
highly among the foremost literary treasures of the world.\(^1\) A necessary requirement for 
the coherent interpretation of such works is an appreciation of the grid of conventions 
upon which these works were modeled. A knowledge of these conventions can help to 
unravel knotty elements which so often reside in these works of art. Through the study of 
these conventions the researcher is able to decipher "patterns of repetition, symmetry, and 
contrast," distinguish between the "verisimilar and the fabulous," derive "directional clues 
in a narrative work," and tell "what is innovative and what is deliberately traditional at 
each nexus of the artistic creation."\(^2\)

Unfortunately, not all of the literary or oral conventions through which the Bible 
writers or orators shaped their works are retrievable today. Fortunately, literary research 
deciphered when the object being painted is understood in its relationship with other 
objects on the canvas. In other words, our perception of what we see is not based on 
absolutes, but relationships. Thus, there is no correct size for painting a house or a 
flower. It all depends on what else is in the picture and where it is located. There is no 
absolute shade of green, but actual pigment will depend on contrasts and lighting effects 
desired by the artist. In other words, the size and color of objects are relative; they are 
only truly represented, not by the artist's ability to replicate the original in terms of size 
and color, but by how those objects stand in relation to each other. See E. H. Gombrich, 
*Art and Illusion* (London: Pantheon, 1960), 38-62. It follows, then, that relationships in 
paintings as in biblical narrative are clues to the interpretation of what is seen. Biblical 
narrative, according to Berlin, establishes such relationships in three ways: (1) by 
narrative analogy where the reader is invited to interpret one story in terms of another; 
(2) by contrasting of different characters; and (3) by using the techniques of repetition and 

\(^1\)Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Bible and Literature Series, no. 17 
(Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 9.

has been able to cull some basic elements of ancient literary conventions; these help us to understand and interpret the biblical narratives in a more proficient manner. One such convention is designated "type-scene."

In his book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Robert Alter dedicates a chapter to the treatment of type-scenes in biblical narrative. He describes a type-scene as "a basic convention of biblical narrative," whose likeness can be seen in Greek epics of Homer, where "certain elements of repetitive compositional patterns" reside. These pronounced patterns which resurge at certain narrative junctures were "conventionally anticipated, even counted on." Alter further affirms: "Against that ground of anticipation the biblical authors set words, motifs, themes, personages, and actions into an elaborate dance of significant innovation."¹

Robert Tannehill endorses and augments Alter's definition and gives a modest elaboration on type-scenes. He posits that "we may speak of a type-scene when a basic situation, with similar characters and plot elements, recurs several times in a given literature. . . . The recurrent pattern suggests similarity, and the variations prevent monotony."²

¹Ibid., 62.

Statement of the Problem

Type-scenes are not only prevalent in the biblical narratives of the Old Testament but are also frequent in the New. In fact, they are common in the narratives of the Gospels. Of these, banquet feasts seem to hold a place of prominence. This suggests that banquet feasts played a major role in the milieu of New Testament society. So significant was the banquet that its imagery was employed by Jesus himself in some of his parabolic discourses, such as, The Great Banquet, The Wedding Garment, The Ten Virgins, The Narrow Door, Places at a Feast, The Choice of Guests, The Prodigal Son, and so forth.

---

1 Alter elucidates the betrothal type-scene in Old Testament narratives, as well as others, such as the encounter with the future betrothed at a well, the epiphany in the field, the initiatory trial, the discovery of a well or other source of sustenance, and the testament of the dying hero. See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 51. Other Old Testament type-scenes are: the divine council (David Marron Flemming, "The Divine Council as Type-Scene in the Hebrew Bible" [Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989]); the foreigner/sojourner wife-sister ploy for self-preservation (Victor Salanga, "Three Stories of the Endangered Wife: Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-18; 26:1-11; A Narrative and Stylistic Analysis" [Ph.D. dissertation, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1989]); the announcement of battle news (David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* [San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987]).


and Wedding Guests and Fasting.¹

Though studies on type-scenes in other areas have been done,² so far no study has been pursued on the banquet type-scene in the parables of Jesus.³ The commonalities and/or differences that exist between the banquet parables and the banquet scenes in literature of pre-New Testament and early post-New Testament eras have not been systematically studied. Consequently, the substantive question to be investigated in this dissertation is, How is the banquet type-scene in the parables of Jesus illuminated by literature of the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Early Christian worlds?

**Purpose**

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the banquet type-scene in the parables of Jesus in order to discover whether these parables are in dialogue with fixed literary and oral conventions found in literature outside of these parables. The study will seek to find out what were these conventions; how they were developed; whether Jesus and the Gospel writers conformed to, differed from, or uniquely modified these

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²For a summary of studies on each of these type-scenes, see sub-section "Type-Scene Studies," below.

³The only type-scene study done so far on the parables of Jesus is Taylor’s dissertation on "The Master Servant Type-Scene in the Parables of Jesus."
conventions in the formulation of their parables; and how these parables would have impacted upon their audiences.

Methodology

This research is strongly influenced by the methods of literary criticism and more specifically, narrative criticism. Literary criticism is a synchronic approach which seeks to understand the text as it is, as opposed to a diachronic approach with its emphasis on the historical dimension. This does not suggest that historical considerations are excluded in the literary exercise.

The term literary criticism is used in many senses for a diverse field of study. Over the years this diversity has created a barrage of contrasting definitions and procedures. However, despite these variations, the common thread of literary criticism still remains the analysis of the written text, whose primary concern is to answer the question, "How does the text mean?" and not, "What does the text mean?"1 It looks at the text, not through it.2 While this dissertation will focus mainly on the "how" of the text, it will also demonstrate the way in which the "how" may help to interpret the "what" of the text.


David S. Dockery points out that "closely related, and at times indistinguishable, are new classifications of literary criticism called narrative criticism, compositional criticism, and rhetorical criticism."¹ These designations are at times used interchangeably and synonymously with literary criticism.² This study will interact mainly with narrative criticism, whose basic focus is on the formal features in a narrative which reveal the storyline. Narrative criticism includes the study of type-scenes.

Possible Approaches

Biblical exegesis as it stands today may be divided into two camps—the proponents of the synchronic approach to exegesis and the advocates of the diachronic approach. The distinction between a synchronic approach and diachronic approach to literature originated with the Swiss scholar, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). In 1916 his idea of a structural approach to language was published in French, and subsequently in English in 1959.³

The Diachronic Approach

To exegete diachronically is to study a text based upon its historical evolution, in


a quest for its historical authenticity. The diachronic exegetes are preoccupied in some form or another with the pursuit for the historical reality of Scripture. They are bent on applying the historical-critical method, making assumptions about the synthetic nature of the text. Their interests involve establishing accurate texts and translations, understanding the cultural milieu and historical backgrounds and circumstances from which the biblical material developed, investigating possible sources and analogues of the Bible stories, explicating biblical theology, seeking earliest forms of individual stories, and trying to understand how they gradually developed. Some of the more common disciplines that fit this description of research are form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism, and textual criticism.

The Synchronic Approach

While the main aim of the diachronists is to look at the history of the text, the synchronic critics are interested in the final stage of that history—the present text. The synchronic approach to a text is often called “text-immanent” exegesis—a method that searches for the meaning of a text in its final form. This approach is a literary enterprise. The synchronists view the biblical text as a unity. They are interested in the study of the text, in its immediate form and structure. The synchronic approach embodies a wide range of analytical methods under the rubric of literary criticism. It embraces such


disciplines as literary criticism and all its interdisciplinary methods, rhetorical criticism, canonical criticism, structuralism, and deconstruction.

**A Complementary Approach**

The diachronic approach with all its corollaries dominated modern biblical scholarship for the last hundred years, until the gradual and constant rise of the synchronic approach began in the latter part of the twentieth century with the arrival of post-modern ideas. This resulted in a polarization of approaches in some quarters.

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1In the 1980s, biblical studies were beginning to temper their obsessive historicism with a reevaluation of biblical narrative art, nowhere more so than in the book of Samuel. See David M. Gunn, *Narrative and Novella in Samuel: Studies by Hugo Gressman and Other Scholars, 1906-1923*, trans. David E. Orton (Sheffield: Almond, 1991), 7. Modernism began in the West, since the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century with René Descartes whose philosophy elevated humankind to the center of reality. Its main characteristics are "the belief in the superiority of reason, the possibility of the objective assessment of data, the possibility of comprehensive explanation of whatever is under investigation, and the inevitability of progress." James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1995), 15. Modern science, as popularly understood, exhibits all of these traits. The term "post-modern," coined in the 1930s, referred to a major historical transition already under way and as a designation for certain developments of the arts. However, it did not gain widespread attention until the 1970s. In the current postmodern world, each of the modern beliefs is questioned—and more. Postmodernism is characterized by increasing distrust of reason and its ability to achieve understanding; lack of belief in objectivity as a possible stance with which to achieve understanding, so that all attempts at understanding are perspectival; disbelief in the possibility of comprehensive explanation of anything and everything in life, so that all explanation is partial; and loss of faith in the notion of "progress," including the loss of belief in the inevitability of progress. Postmodernism in its extreme form questions the notion of a "reality out there," separate from any observer/interpreter, even in the scientific realm. The postmodern philosophical mind-set expresses itself in the current, dominant literary theory called "post-structuralism" and its reactant "deconstruction." For more details, see Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). See also James Voelz, who offers a "postmodern" linguistic approach to the study of the Scriptures, where neutrality and objectivity are disclaimed. In fact, Voelz holds that only...
Some Bible critics began proposing the primacy of their approach. And the hard-line proponent of any one approach is usually convinced that his approach is the most resilient for the study which he undertakes.

Church believers can truly interpret the Scriptures, because interpretation is a radically subjective enterprise. See Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*.

1Some strong proponents of the synchronic approach: Paul R. Noble, *The Canonical Approach: A Critical Reconstruction of the Hermeneutics of Brevard S. Childs* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995); Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); Leonard L. Thompson, *Introducing Biblical Literature: A More Fantastic Country* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978). He described his approach as an adventure into the "fantastic country" (the literary beauty of the Bible); Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (London: SCM, 1964). Wilder chided his scholarly peers, who slighted the import of the literary analysis of Scripture, and described this attitude as an "occupational cramp." See idem, *Jesus Parables and the War of Myths* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 15; In summarizing his "Methodological Considerations," Gros Louis openly claims that his "approach is essentially ahistorical." His emphasis is "on the text itself—not on the circumstances that brought the text into its present form, not on its religious and cultural foundations. See Gros Louis et al, 14, 15; W. Ross Winterowd, *Rhetoric: A Synthesis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968). In Winterowd's modus operandi, the capstone of the literary critical endeavor spans a ten-point sweep from (1) the initial encounter with the text to (10) its meaning or interpretation, applying diachronic and synchronic rubrics. Under the diachronic rubric he points out two basic concerns: authorship and setting (the second and third step respectively). The synchronic spectrum prevails over the diachronic, in that Winterowd avers seven areas: the whole piece; medium *gattung*; stance; form (structure); style; metastyle; ratio. Thus, in terms of defined approaches Winterowd promotes a higher synchronic interest. See Winterowd, 180-196.

2The historical critic today may venture to argue the invalidity of an "existing text." Richard Moulton, *The Literary Study of the Bible* (New York: AMS, 1970), viii. He may go so far as to declare the text valid only when it is has passed through the rigors of the historical-critical method. Each critic claims the primacy of his approach in a two-step process, where the other critic will use the former findings to facilitate his investigation. Apparently, literary and historical critics who maintain that their method is superior or independent of each other have a poor and unrealistic notion of priorities, yet in their practice are truer to dependence on another's method than they would profess.
However, in the early eighties, Crossan promoted the idea that biblical studies must not be limited to one discipline only, but should be approached through the matrix of other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and literature, not excluding the older historical-critical methods. He proceeded to represent all of the methods on a graph, using two axes—the vertical Structural Axis representing the para-historical (synchronic) approaches, and the horizontal Historical Axis displaying the diachronic approaches to the text.¹

There is a virtual consensus among biblical scholars that in order to attain a complementary exegesis of the biblical text, the exegete must adequately account for the historical and literary aspects of the text.² Edgar McKnight puts it clearly: “Structural


²Several scholars support the correspondence between the synchronic and diachronic approaches. See, for example, Damrosch, 30-32. Moulton makes a statement on the question of priority: “Historic and literary study are equal in importance; but for priority in order of time the literary treatment has the first claim.” He continues to explicate the reasons for such a position: “The reason of this is that the starting point of historical analysis must be that very existing text, which is the sole concern of the morphological study.” And though the historical critic examines the text in the light of other sources, and may even alter or rearrange the text, yet, admittedly, “the most important single element on which he has to work is the text as it has come down to us.” Moulton, viii-ix. Noble has delineated three possible types of relationship that one could consider when comparing the synchronic study of the text in its final form and diachronic study of text in its developmental stages. The possibilities of two approaches may either be mutually unrelated, mutually complementary or supportive, or mutually antagonistic or destructive. The second alternative suggests that the results of each approach can
analysis cannot be done apart from historical and existential consideration. . . . The reader cannot discern elements and structures of meaning apart from the particular manifestation of those elements and structures to other historical phenomena.

The literary approach to the Bible is no less consequential than the historical, for the being of the biblical narrative is equally as appealing as its becoming.

The relegation of the historical to an ancillary place in the interpretive process leads to an ideological rather than a methodological reorientation. Literary polemics may serve its objective in excluding the historical premise, but does not substitute a complementary scholarly alternative for the full appreciation of Scripture.

mutually help each other. See Noble, 159. Sternberg posits that a proper literary approach to the Bible must not be confused with an ahistorical subjectivity, fueled only by the perceptions of the present reader. He adduces that the operations of the historical critic compel him to have, as a starting point, the extant text, that is, the text that has come down to us. His investigation involves an encounter with the extant text and its approval, reshaping, or decomposition. The literary critic not only enjoys the extant text, but is constrained to operate within a variety of assumptions about the text’s source, that is, the acceptability of the text, the underlying language system, the implied world picture, and the operative codes of form and meaning. See Meir Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 1-7, 8.

1Edgar V. McKnight, Meaning in Texts (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 250-251. Although the work of Hermann Gunkel (the Bible critic whose name is usually associated with Gattungsgeschichte [1862-1932]) is basically diachronic in perspective, it also showed a partial shift to the synchronic realm. In his work on Genesis, Gunkel handled areas such as the internal structure, people and their characterization, the relationship between plot, dialogue, and description, elements of style, and aspects of plot and the absence of explicit evaluation. See Hermann Gunkel, The Legends of Genesis: The Biblical Saga and History (New York: Schocken, 1964).

2Bar-Efrat, 10.

3Cf. Edward Noort, "'Land' in the Deuteronomistic Tradition: Genesis 15: The Historical and Theological Necessity of a Diachronic Approach," in Synchronic or
that the two orientations are interdependent, they must be combined for every investigation of the Scripture if the true meaning of its contents is to be derived. Needless to say, the historian cannot make assumptions about the source without the resource of the discourse, nor may the literary critic make suppositions about the discourse without the resource of the source. The Bible awaits both enterprises.¹

The swinging of the pendulum in parabolic studies from the descriptive to the narrative approach during the latter half of the twentieth century has brought with it a new enthusiasm for parabolic research. As a result, there is a temptation to be pessimistic and suspicious about any method that employs historical and philological tools. Notwithstanding, the aesthetic dimension can be adequately appreciated only when considered along with the historical or descriptive.

I am therefore inclined to abide by a more balanced approach, where the two approaches, though distinct, complement each other in the exegetical task. This dissertation intends to respect each approach. The main intent of this research will be not only to exhibit the literariness of the parables of Jesus (the question of the how), but will also demonstrate how the literary approach can inform and help to confirm the findings of the descriptive approach (the question of the what) in parabolic interpretation. In other words, the intent is to show how “the how” may aid in understanding what is “the what”

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*Diachronic? A Debate on Method in Old Testament Exegesis*, ed. Johannes De Moor (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 129-144. Noort demonstrates a genuine need for the diachronic approach. He discloses that the many victories which have been won in the synchronic camp were not because of better positive arguments or more convincing exegesis, but by showing the weaknesses of the diachronic positions. Ibid., 129.
of the parables. One could even argue that the historical informs the literary, and that is a valid advance. Yet this author will show that it can be the other way around.\textsuperscript{1} The two should complement each other, for they are interdependent.

The primary focus of this research is synchronic. I do not mean to suggest that questions of origin are irrelevant; but I do reject such a quest as the first step in studying the Bible. The diachronic approach, mainly worked through the principles of historical criticism, has been in vogue for a long time now, and I believe a synchronic approach applied through the rudiments of literary criticism has begun to occupy the limelight, for through the symbolic structure of the Bible, all other critical approaches are opened to the biblical scholar.\textsuperscript{2}

Methodological Considerations

The main thrust of this research involves a study of the type-scene convention in the parables of Jesus that portray a banquet imagery. Therefore, it is not only reasonable, but necessary, that the first concern be to establish the nature and function of type-scenes. Thus, the first step will be to analyze the components and characteristics of type-scenes.


\textsuperscript{2}Thompson, xv.
The second concern is to explore literature using banquet imagery outside the domain of Jesus’ parables. Using a predominantly diachronic approach, the second step will be to examine the banquet images found in other literature. An attempt will be made to discover the developmental stages of the type-scene for every type of literature studied. In chronological sequence, this section will begin with the Egyptian literature, followed by Mesopotamian (Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and Ugaritic texts), the Old Testament, Greek and Roman, followed by Jewish Intertestamental literature, together with New Testament narratives and Early Christian literature. It will conclude with the rabbinic parables of the period of the Tannaim. A discovery of the literary and oratorical devices used by orators and writers of those periods will help to determine how these devices might have influenced or not influenced the rhetorical devices used by Jesus in his banquet discourses, and the literary devices used by the Gospel writers.

The third concern is to find out whether Jesus’ method of relating banquet parables, and the Gospel writers’ ways of writing them were different from, similar to, or unique, within the literary and rhetorical conventions of the different periods. The most important step in this study will be to systematically examine the literary parallels between narratives with a banquet scene from literature outside of the parables of Jesus and the nature and function of such scenes in Jesus’ parabolic discourses. Further, the application of the type-scene to the texts will be used to demonstrate how type-scene analysis can help one to understand and appreciate the written text.¹ This will require a

¹By using this approach, the written text is accepted in the form in which it appears. The words would be allowed to play out their possibilities without challenges to
preliminary exegesis of Jesus' banquet parables, with special emphasis on traditio-historical and textual analyses followed by the application of the type-scene to those parables. Finally, the information garnered will be summarized. From this summary, the basic question will be answered.

**Justification**

We live in an age of aesthetics. The most avant-garde books on the Bible are studies of narrative or poetry. Today, literary theory is being applied to the biblical texts even in the more staid areas of research, such as commentaries and textual criticism. According to Berlin, "Account is now taken of literary issues such as the poetic needs and impact of a work, and the literary (not only historical) logic behind its formation." \(^1\) Critics now realize that it is practically futile to appreciate the dynamics of the biblical narrative fully unless one understands the network of its component elements, penetrating into its inner world, using the methods and tools of literary scholarship. \(^2\) Gunkel, who evinced a deep interest in the literary facets of the Bible, claimed that anyone who did not pay attention to their artistic form was not only deprived of considerable pleasure but also failed to clarify their meaning. \(^3\)


\(^2\) Bar-Efrat, 9.

\(^3\) Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis*, 11.
Belief structures undergird the biblical narratives. Kort postulates that "the narrative form, at the point of each of its constitutive elements (that is, character, plot, tone and atmosphere) . . . is able to engage the sacred." For him, a particular narrative addresses and reflects orientation toward beliefs concerning mystery through these elements. Whether life is personal or communal, these elements correspond to a structure of belief undergirding life. A human life, which has an identity and an orientation, rests on a structure of belief that formally matches the narrative form as a system of discourse. Therefore, narrative becomes "articulated belief structures that either reinforce the belief structure of the reader or challenge it."\(^1\) Accordingly, the fundamentals of biblical narrative must be apprehended in terms of its structure, its conventions, and its compositional techniques if we are to appreciate its role as a guide for human lives.

The Gospel narratives exhibit literary charm, and especially the metaphorical narratives—the parables. "Unquestionably," according to Gabel and Wheeler, "the most famous literary form in the Gospels is the parable, the use of which especially characterized Jesus' teaching."\(^2\) "Certainly," C. H. Dodd certifies, "there is no part of the Gospel record which has for the reader a clearer ring of authenticity."\(^3\)

\(^1\)Wesley S. Kort, *Story, Text, and Scripture: Literary Interests in Biblical Narrative* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 19. Additionally, Kort affirms that narrative "provides an underlying unity to human experience, so that fact and idea, event and word, reality and mind, are related before they are separated." Ibid., 18.


For centuries the parables have aroused the interest of Bible students and scholars. Their puzzling nature seems to have appealed to the minds of interpreters. The typical parable of Jesus, though simple at the surface level, exudes mystery and profundity at the deeper level. A parable may charm the simple-minded, yet baffle the educated. Its enigmatic nature provokes the curiosity of the inquisitive. Using this familiar convention Christ could enlighten the sincere or foil the spy. C. H. Dodd succinctly describes the mysterious parable as that which "arrests the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and which leaves the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."2

Some of the important teachings of Jesus were illustrated in parables that depict banquet scenes. Banquet feasts played a major role in the milieu of life of the ancient Middle East.3 Not only were the ancients "intoxicated" with the festive activities of eating, drinking, merry-making, entertaining, dressing, and social interaction, but today's readers are enraptured by their charm. The very nature of a banquet scenario captivates the imagination. No doubt, a study of the banquet and the parable makes an interesting

1Categorically speaking, the typical parable is a story; therefore, Wilder's conclusions about story are also applicable to the parable. He confirms that story in the life of the simple-minded is, perhaps, the most important form of linguistic construction. Through this vehicle, however fragmentary, story can bring about meaningful order and a degree of coherence to human lives that are bombarded by the primordial chaos which threatens social and psychological structures. See Amos Wilder, *The New Voice* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 56.

2Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 125.

3This is shown at length in chapter 4.
combination of adventure and mystery.

The value of the banquet and its imagery in the parables of Jesus to biblical scholarship may be itemized as follows:

1. This study will serve as another "stake in the ground" for the support of a balanced approach to the study of biblical narratives using both the historical (diachronic) and the literary (synchronic) dimensions.

2. This balanced combination of the literary and the historical will create rich insights into the parabolic analysis and interpretation of type-scenes.

3. This study may serve as an incentive tool for Bible students to investigate the parables with a keener literary eye.

4. If Bible readers can appreciate the narrative and rhetorical features imbedded in parables, they may be better able to think the thoughts of the biblical writers and hear the words of Jesus.

Scope/delimitations

This research confines itself to prominent narratives that depict a banquet scene from about B.C.E. 3000 to 300 C.E.¹ This will include those found in Egyptian literature, Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and Ugaritic documents, the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish Intertestamental literature, as well as Greek classical literature, Roman works, the New Testament, and Early Christian and Rabbinic literature of the Tannaitic period.

¹Narratives were selected based upon their consistency in structure, theme, motifs, keywords, and characters.
These narratives will be studied in conjunction with all the parables of Jesus that tell a story and deal with a banquet scenario in the Synoptic Gospels and the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas. This dissertation will be limited to the study of the banquet type-scene in the parables of Jesus.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is comprised of six chapters. The introductory chapter is followed by a review of related literature which deals with two main areas. First, the role of narrative criticism for this study is established, followed by an investigation of the parable in terms of its history of interpretation, definition, purpose and function, and structure.

Chapter 3 discusses the nature and function of the type-scene. The type-scene is shown as an ancient literary convention. A survey of type-scene studies which have been done so far is presented, after which a definition of the type-scene is given. This is followed by a study of the components and characteristics of the type-scene: plot, character and characterization, setting, narrator, point of view, repetition, and variation.

Chapter 4 deals with banquets and banquet scenes in antiquity outside of the parables of Jesus: Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, Greco-Roman, Old Testament, Intertestamental, New Testament, Early Christian and Non-canonical, and the Rabbinic corpus. These are analyzed to find out whether the ancient artists and writers were interacting with conventional elements and structural patterns of the banquet type-scene in antiquity. Three type-scenes are discovered.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The study of the type-scene falls under the ambit of narrative criticism. Narrative criticism is a branch of literary criticism. This dissertation investigates the banquet parables of Jesus from a literary standpoint. Consequently, there are two main areas covered in this chapter. The first section shows the role of narrative criticism in biblical research. It briefly traces the historical development and dominance of the literary approach to the interpretation of the Scriptures. After giving a definition of narrative, narrative criticism is explained by first comparing it with other criticisms within literary criticism. This is done in order to put in perspective, the commonalities and differences between narrative criticism and other criticisms within literary criticism. Then, a detailed analysis of the study of narrative criticism is presented, demonstrating how narrative criticism provides the framework for the study of the type-scene. The second section deals with an explanation of the parable. It begins with a brief history of interpretation of the parables, followed by a biblical definition of the parable. The purpose and function of the parable together with its structure close this section.
Narrative Criticism in Biblical Research

The Bible as Literature

In 1975, Alter lamented the long overdue literary analysis of the Hebrew Bible. This was a legitimate cry in light of the fact that "more than one third of the Hebrew Bible consists of narratives." Alter was referring to the stable formulations of narratorial study, such as "the artful use of language, . . . the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else; the kind of . . . critical approaches" which "have illuminated, for example, the poetry of Dante, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy." Alter was prepared to make the Bible scrutable in the eyes of the modern literary critics. Since Alter's clarion call to honor the Bible literarily, there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of the Bible as literature.3

1Bar-Efrat, 9.


Far from being a random plethora of heterogeneous literary fragments (forms or genres), the biblical corpus is to be regarded as containing a definitive, unified, archetypal structure. The Bible's unity "goes far beyond the unity of national authorship, religious subject matter, and didactic purpose. Biblical literature has a unifying plot conflict—the great spiritual conflict between good and evil. Almost every incident in biblical literature turns out to be in some sense a re-enactment of this archetypal plot."2

1 The Scriptures as a whole, and in its constitutive units, embrace a unitary design with a single "authorial voice," although the several or many authors who contribute to that design may have lived centuries apart. See Herbert Chanan Brichto, Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tale of the Prophets (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), viii.

The Bible's structure is highly functional. Its narratives, as with all social discourse, are controlled by a conscious purpose on the part of the narrator or author, and are designed to make a certain effect on the audience or addressee. The structure of the Bible is a means toward a communicative end. Using skillful devices, the biblical author, via the narrator, brings about certain reader responses (at times in subtle ways).

There is no question that the Bible, as much other treasured literature, is amenable to the rigors of literary analysis and to the principles and procedures of narrative criticism. For the fundamentalist who insists that the Bible is "inerrant" and is literally "the Word of God," whether in prescriptive form or narrative discourse, the genre of biblical narrative is all authentic history, purely nonfictional, a genuine report, faithful and true in its representation of the past-place, people, time, and events. For the secular mind, "the Bible is a mélange of nonfiction and fiction, a curious hodgepodge of theology and law.

1 Lategan and Vorster place the biblical material into three categorical features: historical, structural, theological. Speaking of "the structural," they argue that every Bible student recognizes that the Bible comes in the mold of a specific structure. In one sense, the Bible is linguistically structured with elements of grammar, syntax, and semantics, which are governed by certain rules. In another sense, the Bible exhibits a unified structure; individual units stand in specific relation to one another, to other productions of an author, and to the text as a whole. See Bernard C. Lategan and Willem S. Vorster, *Text and Reality: Aspects of Reference in Biblical Texts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 5.

2 One Bible writer affirmed: "In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and write words of truth correctly," Eccl 12:9-10 (NASB). The writers of the Bible operated as literary craftsmen; this is evidenced in the frequency with which they refer to literary genres, such as, chronicle, prophecy, proverb, saying, psalm, gospel, parable, epistle, apocalypse, and so forth.
mixed into a batter with various kinds of poetry in the frame of a narrative whose main thrust is to trace the origins and vicissitudes of the people that produced it."¹

To surmise that the study of the Bible as literature cheats on the potency which may be derived when it is studied as Scripture is not legitimate. "The distinction between the Bible as literature and the Bible as scripture is largely artificial. The church can properly hear its Bible as scripture only when it reads it as literature."²

Narrative Defined

Though one may be able to readily identify a narrative, what makes it as such is not immediately recognizable. Narrative’s complexity and variability make it bereft of a commonly shared definition. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that theorists and critics have their own philosophical and personal interests and tend to assume that one of the elements of narrative is always the most important.³ The study of narrative in general has created a rich and complex network of discussion. Literary critics have come to

¹Brichto, Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics, 21.


regard the study of narratives as an area where there are a variety of approaches, and upon which a number of disciplines converge. This variety is diffused among major narratorial disciplines with significant exchange.¹

This convergence and interchange of disciplines in narratorial studies, combined with the personal agendas of literary critics, have caused the rise of several designations and denotations. In secular literary studies, narrative may be perceived as "a means by which human beings represent and restructure the world."² Some literary critics


understand it as "a specific cultural system."¹ Still, others see it as "a primary act of the mind"² or "the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful."³

There are those who designate narrative as an experiential enterprise. As people relate or write narratives they are actually engaging in "a perceptual activity that organizes data into a special pattern which represents and explains experience."⁴ Narrative is the "organizing principle" through which "people organize their experience in, knowledge about, and transactions with the social world."⁵ A psycho-existential viewpoint is seen where narratives are described as "overt manifestations of the mind in action: as windows to both the content of the mind and its ongoing operations."⁶

Narrative in classical history may be defined as "a chaotic conglomerate of countless individual stories of a more-or-less exemplary nature . . . and this narrative


³Polkinghorne, 11.

⁴E. Branigan, Narrative Comprehension and Film (London: Routledge, 1992), 3.

⁵Bruner, Acts of Meaning, 35.

recording of events in historiography was based on the belief that history was made by individuals.”¹ Ancient classical narratives are not explications of “mass movements or of structural changes but of the moral decisions of individuals, who much earlier in Homer’s day were called heroes.”² In writing ancient classical narratives, authors were more preoccupied with the moral lessons to be learned from the example of a hero in the story than in the scientific validity of the facts presented for “the act of interpreting historical content was . . . an act of moral judgment.”³

Except for the definition of narrative in classical history, all of the foregoing representations of narrative are merely descriptive, not definitive. The simple definition advanced by Holman and Harmon is attractive. Narrative is “an account of events; anything that is narrated,⁴ whether actual or fanciful, reported in any way for any reason.”⁵ This narration of course could be written, told, or dramatized. A minimalist


definition is proposed by Propp. For him a narrative is a text in which there is recounted a change from one state to a modified state.\(^1\) An even narrower definition is given by Powell, who defines narrative “as any work of literature that tells a story.”\(^2\) Scholes and Kellogg augment Powell’s definition: “Narrative is all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story teller.”\(^3\)

Evidently, Powell, Scholes, and Kellogg limit their definition to written form.

Stories are commonly written in prose format,\(^4\) and are rarely found in poetry.\(^5\) They may be found in any literary material ranging from a newspaper account to a comic strip, a poster to a “T” shirt, a book of fiction to the Bible. These two incisive and


\(^{2}\)Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* 23. “While all stories are narratives, not all narratives are stories,” says Brichto. For him some narratives may contain elements or features of story without being qualified as story. For example, the log of the captain of a ship, or the minutes of a meeting, or the chronicle of a military campaign are not story. Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics*, 5.

\(^{3}\)Scholes and Kellogg, 4.

\(^{4}\)“Prose is any literature that is not poetry.” Prose can be classified “as literature that is imaginative or fictional on one side and nonfictional, practical, or utilitarian on the other.” See Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics*, 19-20.

\(^{5}\)Sometimes a fine line distinguishes poetry from prose. Poetry is not always demarcated by its rhythm or rhyme, but in other instances it may simply be the arrangement of the lines that differentiates them. See, Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 92; S. Minot, *Three Genres: The Writings of Fiction, Poetry, and Drama* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 115-122. Cf. Thompson: “Poetry is distinguished from prose insofar as poetic lines are approximately the same length and contain roughly the same number of significant words. More importantly, poetic lines tend to form couplets more considerably than prose” (16). See Ps 24; Isa 7:4-6.
inclusive definitions help us to put a handle on a simple but concise definition of biblical narrative. Biblical narrative may be defined as any part of the Written Word that gives an account of events, events that tell a story; a story written either in prose or poetry.
Indeed, a number of parables in the Gospels constitute narratives.

Narrative Criticism as a Branch of Literary Criticism

This section addresses the question of what narrative criticism entails. It discusses the origination of the study, and how it relates to other branches of literary criticism. This section also looks at the components of narrative criticism, and how they function. Finally, it shows how narrative criticism can be used to illuminate the banquet type-scene in the parables of Jesus.

Biblical scholarship pursues a wide variety of interests. Under the rubric of biblical criticism are a host of categories. The Bible scholar interfaces with dozens of critical methods—literary criticism, in no way being the least of them. With the continual rise of these different critical disciplines, “discussions have become,” according to Kessler, “a veritable confusion of tongues,” especially during the latter half of the twentieth century.

1The more prominent ones are historical criticism, literary criticism, source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, rhetorical criticism, genre criticism, canonical criticism, textual criticism, narrative criticism, redaction criticism, reader-response criticism, and structural criticism.

Literary criticism as a branch of biblical criticism faces its own challenges when it comes to its precise definition and procedures. In 1971, Amos Wilder lamented over the different connotations literary criticism bore for biblical scholars, making specific reference to the preoccupation of biblical scholars with matters of authorship, sources, dating, and purpose.¹ The sweeping impact of a literary approach to the Bible in the late 1970s brought with it a multiplicity of definitions and procedural methods,² where each proponent claimed a valid "literary approach" to the Bible.³

The pluralism in literary studies has been so phenomenal that it is impossible to offer a complete survey of all possible critical methods and their permutations. Some of the more common approaches which fall under the rubric of literary criticism are

¹Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric, xxii. The "old literary criticism" designated any study pertaining to source criticism in the first half of the twentieth century. See also Clines, 115-127.

²Culley gropes for an apt synonym to describe the myriad "approaches" to literary studies. He proposes such terms as stances, strategies, critical practices, and modes of analysis. See Culley, Themes and Variation, 6, 23. For a parade of contrasting definitions, see Aida Besançon Spencer, "Literary Criticism," in New Testament Criticism and Interpretation, ed. David Allan Black and David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 235-236.

³Until today, confusion on the question of definition and priority has bedeviled a number of investigations. Definitions have been advanced, but not definiteness. Due to this situation, it is impossible to reduce this field of study to a single approach. In his book Literary Theory: An Introduction, Eagleton engages the reader in a witty recapitulation of the historical development of literary theory up to modern times. Despite the knotty elements, notorious jargon, and the seeming confusion and overlapping of concepts in this richly diverse field of literary theory, Eagleton puts in concise perspective the main features of modern literary theory up to the early 1980s. His work spans from Formalism, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory, Structuralism and Post-structuralism, and Psychoanalysis. He climaxes with his own idea of Political Criticism. See Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
rhetorical criticism, compositional criticism, narrative criticism, reader-response criticism, new criticism, structuralism, and deconstruction. The scene is becoming more and more complex with the recent arrival of a wider spectrum of critical practices, including ideological criticism, poststructuralist criticism, postmodern readings, and political criticism.2

Literary criticism appears to be very much in flux; agreement is still in the future. Because of the latitude given to its definition and fluidity given to its scope, the precise methodological boundaries of literary criticism still remain undefined. Meanwhile, as we move into the twenty-first century, biblical critics may profit by keeping abreast of new developments in the area of study. A brief synopsis of the main branches of literary criticism will now be discussed.

Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical Criticism, according to Brichto, “is a preoccupation with the elements and features that make for a persuasive presentation of an argument in speech or in writing.”3 Rhetorical criticism has taken on different turns over the past decades. It is widely and diversely defined. That which began as a simple investigation into the

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1 Closely related, and at times indistinguishable, are these first three classifications of literary criticism. At times these designations are even used interchangeably and synonymously with literary criticism.


techniques of delivery in ancient oratory has now extended to areas such as "The New Rhetoric" and "Ideological Rhetorical Criticism."¹ In some quarters, biblical critics suggest that the term "rhetorical criticism" is more appropriate than "literary criticism." They argue that the term "rhetorical criticism" is a better description as it correlates the current methods of modern multidisciplinary, literary approaches to the study of the biblical text. They insist that the widening perspectives of the new rhetoric, as well as their contiguous and sometimes overlapping nature, necessitate this nomenclature.²

Reader Response

Reader-response criticism, in Blomberg's thinking, has come to refer to "a diverse collection of approaches which all focus on the factors that influence interpreters as they


²Good has suggested that the term literary criticism should be used in the modern sense as understood in nonbiblical criticism. See Good, 287-289. Cf. William A. Beardslee, Literary Criticism of the New Testament, Guides to Biblical Scholarship, New Testament Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 1-11. Kessler asserts that "rhetorical criticism deserves serious consideration as a label for the leading candidate for synchronic criticism, particularly if its definition is attempted along the lines of both classical rhetoric and the new rhetoric." Kessler, 14.
read a given text."¹ While the traditional approach to literary criticism focused on the author as locus of meaning, reader-response criticism directed its interest in the role of the reader in the interpretive process. It focuses on the pre-understanding and ideology of the interpreter as it shapes the "meaning of the text."² By-products of this form of reader-oriented interpretation are several ideological movements, such as Feminist and Black ideologies. In addition to the reader’s role in the interpretative process, a conservative view of reader-response critics recognizes the limitation the text puts on the reader’s interpretation. The more radical view insists that the reader is solely responsible for the actual meaning of the text.³

Whereas the conservative view can make a significant contribution when exegesis becomes an end in itself without the personal involvement of the Bible student in the interpretative process, the radical reader-response orientation for understanding the text has limitations. It is unreasonable to determine the meaning of the text solely on the basis of the interpreter’s biases, ignorance, and subjective thinking. An interpreter must not be oblivious to the audience of the original author.

New Criticism

New Criticism, which arose in the first quarter of the twentieth century and

¹Craig Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 155.


³Ibid.
attracted a large following in the second quarter, emphasizes a direct encounter with the
text. It served as a reaction to the excesses of historical scholarship. John Crowe
Ransom, in 1941, gave this label to a “new school” in critical studies. His concern was
the focus on the literature in its given form, to the total exclusion of any data external to
the piece, such as the author’s biography, setting, or provenance. The primary task of
these critics was defining the limits of literary units, that is, their beginning and end—a
concern like that of the form critics.¹ Though the “New Critics” have made a significant
contribution to literary studies, their movement has been overly reactionary, anti-
historically biased, eccentric, often unrestrained, polemical rather than theoretical, at
times raising too many voices and inflicting many charges of incongruency.²

Structuralism

The late 1950s saw the rise of what Northrop Frye called the “totalization” of all
literary genres.³ Structuralism was here to stay, flourishing in the 1960s. Its
philosophical roots were deeply imbedded in Saussure’s epoch-making work, Course in
General Linguistics. Saussure studied language from the angle of signs. For him
language must be studied as a complete system in time. Each sign comprised a ‘signifier’


(a sound-image or its graphic equivalent) and a 'signified' (the concept of meaning). For example, the jot of ink which spells d-o-g is a signifier which elicits the signified 'dog' in the mind of an English reader.\textsuperscript{1}

Later, in the Prague school, structuralism was espoused to the study called "semiotics" or "semiology," the study of signs,\textsuperscript{2} a work which all literary structuralists perform.\textsuperscript{3} Structuralism revolutionized the study of narrative. From its precepts dawnted a

\textsuperscript{1}Saussure, 110-120.

\textsuperscript{2}Daniel Patte, a strong proponent of structural exegesis, says that "semiology, the science of signs, aims at studying texts and other cultural phenomena in terms of linguistic paradigms as opposed to historical paradigms which characterize traditional exegetical methods. A sentence is meaningful because its linguistic elements are interrelated in a specific way." Daniel Patte, ed., \textit{Semiology and Parables: An Exploration of the Possibilities Offered by Structuralism for Exegesis}, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series, no. 9 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1976), vi-vii. Semiology theorizes that since "a sentence would be meaningless if its words were not interrelated according to the constraints of the grammatical rules of the specific language in which the sentence is written," by the same token, "there are other, indeed more subtle, constraints which are at work in a meaningful sentence." Ibid., vii. These constraints which Patte terms as "structures" govern "the interrelation of phonetic features, semantic features, and to even broader features." Ibid. Broad features include those that consider the meaning of a word, in large part, by the specific ways in which it is interrelated with other words within the structural range of that language. In other words, the meaning of a word is dependent to some extent, by the constraints or structures of the specific system of signs to which it belongs. Some more of Patte's publication on semiotics are \textit{Early Jewish Hermeneutic in Palestine}, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 22 (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975); idem, \textit{Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); idem, \textit{The Gospel According to Matthew} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987); idem, \textit{The Religious Dimension of Biblical Texts: Greimas' Structural Semiotics and Biblical Exegesis} (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1990); idem, \textit{What Is Structural Exegesis?} Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).

\textsuperscript{3}At present, apparently, semiotic studies are progressing in different directions. Some scholars are more concerned with formulating general semiotic theories; others gravitate to the study of constraints which belong to a specific level of the structural spectrum; still others concentrate on the interaction of several constraints belonging to different levels. These varied approaches are further intensified over the range of
whole literary science called narratology.\textsuperscript{1} Some of the more prominent contributors to this field of study are such scholars as Greimas from Lithuania, Todorov from Bulgaria, Jakobson from Russia, Genette from France, and Bremond and Barthes from the United States.\textsuperscript{2}

Analyzing the structure of narrative has its roots in the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, linguistic, anthropological, and other fields of literary studies. This has caused the burgeoning of many different semiological theories, models, and methods. Semiology has literally become a “hodge-podge” of interdisciplinary endeavors: linguistics, English and French Literature, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and biblical studies. For a working bibliography that focuses on the different applications of semiotic and structuralist methods in literary texts up to 1987, see Leonard Orr, \textit{Semiotic and Structural Analyses of Fictions: An Introduction and A Survey of Applications} (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1987), 40-188.


Strauss, who studied the constant universal structures underlying the myth.¹ For Strauss, myths operated as a kind of language and could be divided into individual units which he called "mythemes." This was to be the paradigm for the breaking down of the sound units of language (phonemes) in structuralist studies. Only when these individual sound units are combined in a recognizable order can sense be made out of words or sounds.

Structuralism represents an approach to literature that seeks to "demystify" it. Meaning became a matter of shared systems of signification and not private experience or divine revelation. As a world view, structuralism is inherently bound up with dialectic philosophy, determinism, and atheism.² It underrates the importance of the surface features of a text in favor of its "deep structures."³ It requires a synchronic approach to the study of literature and totally disregards the diachronic dimension. Central to structuralism, as in new criticism, is its text-oriented approach, while rhetorical criticism is author-centered, and reader-response is reader-oriented.


³"Deep structures" in Patte's thinking are structures of the human mind, which characterize "man qua man," including the narrative and mythical structures. Patte, *Semiology and Parables*, ix.
Deconstruction

In the post-structuralist era an antithesis to structuralism developed in what is called “deconstruction.” The major proponent of this school has been the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida.1 Other supporters of this approach are Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva.2 Derrida argued that language is not only a matter of studying differing signs within a closed, stable system. Interpreting language in terms of the process of difference within a closed system is too narrow an outlook. Meaning of language is not only limited to one signifier (see above for example “d-o-g” creating the signified, “dog”). Deconstructionists argue that structuralists ignore the fact that the meaning of a word is not limited to a particular signifier, but it is the product of a complex interaction of many signifiers. Thus, the word “dog” must not be limited to one signifier “d-o-g,” or even its proximities “hog” or “log,” but must also consider a whole gamut of signifiers, for instance, “dot,” “don,” “frog,” “fog,” and so on.3

Deconstruction has been described as “the most unorthodox movement to unsettle

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3Eagleton, 127.
the literary horizon in recent generations,"\(^1\) designed to generate "conflicting meanings
from the same text, and playing those meanings against each other."\(^2\) The extent of
*freeplay* allowed in the deconstructive process makes the study very subjective. The
interpreter has the liberty to bring to bear upon the text other unrelated texts, so long as
those texts share a similar vocabulary, theme, or structure. This approach to biblical
study offers the opportunity to stretch the polyvalence of Scripture to sometimes
unrealistic limits.

In summary, one can see that parable interpreters are assailed by an addling array
of approaches to work with. Every method boasts its positive contributions to the
interpretative process. Indubitably, the best approach for the balanced parable student is
to espouse an eclectic approach, embracing the positive insights of each. Albeit, none of
the above approaches facilitates fully the specific purpose of this dissertation. Narrative
criticism provides the agenda for this specialized study. The next section considers its
principles and procedures.

**Form and Function of Narrative Criticism**

Narrative criticism is a relatively new approach to the study of narrative in

\(^1\) Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 153.


See also Jonathan Culler, *Structural Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of
Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975); Christopher Norris, *Against
Relativism: Philosophy of Science, Deconstruction and Critical Theory* (Malden, MA:
Blackwell, 1997), 38-65. These authors point to the unpreparedness of biblical
scholarship for this approach to the study of the Bible.
biblical studies. The need by scholars to look more closely at the formal features of
narrative necessitated this fresh approach. Bible scholars felt that this discipline of
literary criticism could bring more fullness to the exegetical task. Interestingly, narrative
criticism is "without a counterpart in the secular world." It is an addition to literary
criticism, but only within the domain of biblical scholarship. Bible scholars tend to see
this critical practice "as an independent, parallel movement in its own right."

Narrative criticism as a branch of literary criticism functions within the
parameters of literary criticism. It focuses on the finished form of the text, emphasizes

1The term "narrative criticism" was first used in a formal and programmatic sense
See David Rhoads, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark," Journal of the

2Ibid, 411.

3Perhaps Mark Powell was the first to present a non-technical explanation of the
principles and procedures of narrative criticism. He distinguished narrative criticism
from other categories of literary criticism (structuralist, rhetorical, and reader-response).
His primary contribution to the study was to examine, explain, and illustrate the
categories that narrative employs, such as implied author and reader, narrator, characters,
events, and settings. These categories are handled together with other elements of
narrative such as plot, point-of-view, symbolism and irony, and narrative patterns. See

4Ibid., 19. Moore exaggerates the point when he claims that narrative criticism is
a "distinctly different enterprise from anything found in the field of nonbiblical literary
study." See Stephen D. Moore, Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical

5Secular critics are inclined to categorize this approach as "a subspecies of the
new rhetorical criticism or a variety of the reader-response movement." M. Powell, What
Is Narrative Criticism? 19.

6Ibid.
the unity of the text as a whole, views the text as an end in itself, and is founded on communication models of speech-act theory. More specifically, narrative criticism functions under an *objective* type of literary criticism as described by M. H. Abrams. This *objective* type of criticism, according to Abrams, is text-centered and views the literary product as a self-sufficient world in itself. Under this type of criticism, a text is analyzed according to intrinsic criteria, such as the interrelationship of its component parts. Looking at the text as it now stands, is its primary concern.

This concentration on the text and the interrelatedness of its component elements leads to an appreciation of what may be described as the "story world," where the characters interact in the narrative. What is communicated in the narrative is "story," the formal content element in narrative. Narrative as "story" is used to refer to "a series of events, real or fictive, that are the content of the discourse." In this sense, narrative refers to "what is told, to the actions and actors portrayed in the discourse, rather than to the words or statements or the expression. It is the subject of the story in contrast to the medium through which the subject is expressed." The narratorial approach in this sense has to do with a study of the totality of actions and situations taken in themselves,

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1 These four general characteristics of the literary criticism are taken from M. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* 7-10.


4 Ibid.
without regard to the medium, linguistic or other, through which knowledge of that

totality comes to the reader or listener.¹ "Story" in narrative is the "chronologically-

ordered deep structure² representation of all the primary and essential information

concerning characters, events and settings, without which the narrative would not be well

formed."³ When all these elements interact with each other in the story, they produce the

plot in narrative.

Using Abrams's categories, narrative criticism could also be classified as a

pragmatic type of criticism. Here the reader is the focal point of the text. This approach

views the text as designed to bring about a particular effect on the audience; a text is

considered successful when it achieves this goal.⁴ The pragmatic approach concentrates

on the rhetorical techniques employed to tell the story. It deals with how the story is told.

¹Genette, Narrative Discourse, 25

²The meaning of deep structure may be illustrated with the use of two different

sentences at the surface level, which bear the same meaning at the deep structural level:

(1)The dog ate the bone; and (2) The bone was eaten by the dog. Theorists posit that

beneath or behind the apparent superficial differences between such pairs of sentences,

there is an underlying structural identity. Though the sentences differ in arrangement and

even morphology, beneath there is a single deep structure. The deep structure concept is

now applied by literary critics to describe the underlying and core format (the "interior

design") of one or more texts (or other cultural product) used to formulate other texts.

The surface arrangement of the different texts may have embellishments and

transformations, but the base structure is the same.

³Toolan, 12-13.

⁴Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, 15. Abrams discusses two other types of

literary criticism: the expressive type, which is an author-centered approach; and the

mimetic type, which espouses an evolutionary model or referential approach. However,

Abrams's mimetic type overlaps into the historical or descriptive approach. Ibid., 8-14; 21-26.
This facet of narrative criticism is referred to as the "discourse world," by which the content of narrative is communicated—the formal expression element. "Discourse" states the story. It refers to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell an event or a series of events. This sense is used to refer to the linguistic medium, to the words and sentences spoken or written in telling a story. Narrative discourse, narrative text, and narrative expressions are all synonyms used to refer to the linguistic vehicle of the story. The study of the linguistic elements of a text has become a highly technical study today, encompassing a wide field of study areas covering different aspects of a text and needing specialized skills to pursue its complexities.

The primary concern of discourse analysis is to reveal the internal coherence or

1Genette, Narrative Discourse, 25.

2Funk, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 2.

3The syntax of a text may be studied. This aspect deals with elements such as cohesion, anaphora, hierarchy of syntactic strata, sequences and levels, ellipsis, the function of pronouns, particles, and the like. Another aspect may focus on the semantics of the text, which has to do with questions regarding the paragraphing of a text, how semantic relations are textually marked, the structure of information in a text, how reference and coherence function as semantic indicators, or plot structure and the interplay of participants in a text. Another area of study in discourse analysis handles presuppositions and inferences in texts, in speech acts, and focuses on the relevance of utterances. Another trend is to look at the typology of texts (written, spoken, expository, narrative, scientific, conversational) or the psychology of processing information, with attention to cognitive processes of comprehension and recall. Several studies have been undertaken to explicate the stylistic devices of a text, especially rhetorical choices and theme dynamics. See J. P. Louw, "Reading a Text as Discourse," in Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis, ed. David Allan Black, Katharine Barnwell, and Stephen Levinsohn (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 17-30. This research will not delve into these technicalities, but interacts with the more common elements in discourse analysis.
unity of a particular text. It is not limited to an atomistic verse-by-verse analysis of the
text. Rather, its analysis involves the investigation of how verses fit into the structural
unity of the text. It is not interested merely in the flow of thought of a text, but how the
text produces flow of thought. Thus, the "text" is "discourse." Discourse analysis is an
attempt to study the organization of language above the sentence level.¹

"Discourse-oriented analysis . . . sets out to understand not the realities behind the
text but the text itself as a pattern of meaning and effect,"² says Sternberg. Some of the
questions asked under this approach, according to Sternberg, are:

What does this piece of language—metaphor, epigram, dialogue, tale, cycle, book—
signify in context? What are the rules governing the transaction between the
storyteller or poet and reader? Are the operative rules, for instance, those of prose or
verse, parable or chronicle, omniscience or realistic limitation, historical or fictional
writing? What image of a world does the narrative project? Why does it unfold the
action in this particular order and from this particular viewpoint? What is the part
played by the omissions, redundancies, ambiguities, alternations between scene and
summary or elevated and colloquial language? How does the work hang together?
And, in general, in what relationship does part stand to whole and form to function?
The thrust remains determinate and stable under wide terminological, even conceptual
variations. To pursue this line of questioning is to make sense of the discourse in
terms of communication, always goal-directed on the speaker's part and always
requiring interpretive activity on the addressee's.³

In other words, the speaker takes full advantage of linguistic and structural tools with the

¹See David Alan Black, Katharine Barnwell, and Stephen Levinsohn, Linguistics
and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis (Nashville: Broadman,
1992), 12. Black and others outline the fundamental methodological principles of
discourse analysis, followed by analyses of the discourse features of selected New
Testament texts. Some of the interpretations are thought-provoking. These essays show
how the macro-structure of a text is usually marked on the surface level by various
linguistic signals provided to the reader by the author.

²Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 14.

³Ibid.
intent on creating a certain effect. The audience in turn receives messages from the signals given by the speaker. As it were, the discourse mediates the intentions of the speaker and guides the response of the audience.

The "discourse world" may be divided into two aspects: the first aspect is oriented around the relationship that exists between the author and the author's audience. The relationship referred to, in this context, is not the one that existed between the "historical author" and his/her real reader/s; rather, it refers to the relationship that exists in the communication event in the text, which literary critics designate as the "implied author" and the "implied reader." This aspect of the rhetoric of a text pertains to the narrator's point of view.

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1 In literary studies the "historical author" is identified as the actual writer of the literature, whereas the "implied author" is the abstract authorial presence who stands behind all the dramatis personae, including a first person narrator. The implied author is imaginary and does not corporeally exist. This author is a part of the text, but not a part of the story.

2 Just as the "implied author" or narrator is distinguished from the "real author," so too is the "implied reader" or "narratee" distinguished from the "real reader." The "implied reader" is a creation of the text, and is known through the internal contents of the text. The "implied reader" must not be confused with the actual, historical, or contemporary readers. The "real reader" is the one "who performs all the mental moves required to enter into the narrative world and respond to it as the implied author intends." See Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design, 7. Different from rhetorical criticism, narrative criticism is not interested in the original or real audience and the real author. By veering away from these two elements, narrative criticism makes its approach more text-centered.

3 The terminology "point of view" has become a rather fluid term among literary critics today. Broadly speaking it designates the position or perspective from which a story is told. As interest in the study of point of view developed, so has its complexity. At present there are different types of point of view, and different systems have developed to distinguished them. Cf. Norman Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction: The Development of a Critical Concept," Publications: Modern Language Association of
The second aspect of the "discourse world" deals with the rhetorical devices or "narrative patterns" used by the narrator in the narrative. These are "recurrent structural devices and design features that are used to organize and present the story."¹ Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie outline several types of narratorial patterns of repetition found in Gospel of Mark. They are verbal threads, foreshadowing and retrospection, two-step progressions, sandwiched episodes, framing episodes, episodes in a concentric pattern, progressive episodes in a series of three, and type-scenes.²

Narrative criticism coalesces the two features of narrative (the "story world" and the "discourse world") into what Chatman describes as "story-as-discoursed."³ Funk adds: "Narrative as discourse is the tale itself, narrative as story is what is told."⁴

¹M. Powell, What Is Narrative Criticism? 32.

²David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 47-55.


⁴Funk, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 3. There is also a third dimension in narrative: the actual narration or telling of a narrative. Genette refers to it as an event, but in this instance, it is not the event that is recounted, but the event that consists of someone recounting something: the act of narrating itself. See Genette, Narrative Discourse, 26. Funk describes this aspect of narrative as performance. See Funk, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 3. Although this dimension of narrative forms part of the study of narrative in general (especially in secular studies), it is not studied within the domain of narrative criticism.
Chatman puts it in perspective as he explains the employment of this two-prong approach. He addresses the questions of the what and the how of narrative. The "what" of narrative he calls the "story," and the "how" he calls the "discourse." The story has to do with events and existents (character and setting), and the discourse has to do with the means through which the story is transmitted.\(^1\) Chatman theorizes that "every narrative . . . is a structure with a content plane (called ‘story’) and an expression plane (called ‘discourse’)." "The expression plane," he continues, "is the set of narrative statements, where ‘statement’ is the basic component of the form of the expression, independent and more abstract than any particular manifestation—that is, the expression’s substance."\(^2\)

Having outlined the basic presuppositions and interests of narrative criticism, it is appropriate to highlight the focal question narrative criticism asks: "How does the implied author guide the implied reader in understanding the story? Narrative critics tend to think that the reader is guided through devices intrinsic to the process of story-telling."\(^3\)

In conclusion, how does the study of the type-scene relate to narrative criticism? Type-scene is one of the elements of discourse in narrative. But in order to appreciate the beauty and workings of the type-scene in narrative, it is essential to understand the elements of "story" that facilitate its workings—elements such as vocabulary, character and characterization, theme, motifs, settings, events, and plot in the "story world." These "story elements" are filtered through the "discourse element" via the narrator of the

\(^1\)See Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 43-145

\(^2\)Ibid., 146.

\(^3\)M. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* 23.
narrative. The “story” is mediated through the narrator’s different points of view. The narrator operating from these points of view applies freely the different techniques of repetition with variation, which are the main ingredients of type-scenes. This rhetorical device, together with the basic contents of “story,” will provide the parameters for this research.

The Parables Explained

Matthew notes Jesus’ common form of discourse: “And he spoke many things to them in parables” (Matt 13:3); “All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables” (13:34). In fact, he belabors the point, maintaining that “without a parable he did not speak to them,” the designated purpose being “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables” (13:34-35). Mark punctuates, “But without a parable he did not speak to them” (Mark 4:34).

John Donahue agrees: “Among the many sayings in the Synoptic Gospels, those which best embody the speech of Jesus and which are most distinctive of him are the more than forty parables attributed to him.”¹ Scholars agree that not less than one-third of Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels is found in parables.² It is peculiar that an enumeration of the parables can be made, yet, parable scholars are divided with regard to a precise definition of parable in the Synoptic Gospels. Although the study of parables has

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undergone several phases, undertaken a number of issues, and underwritten a number of methodologies, the bedeviling question still looms for many Bible and literary scholars: What really constitutes a genuine New Testament parable?

A Brief History of Interpretation of Parables

For the greater part of the Christian Church's history, the parables of Jesus have been interpreted allegorically. With antecedents in Greek philosophy, from such works as those of Homer and Philo, the Early Church Fathers had a ready-made tool which gave a legitimate reason for finding a "deeper" meaning for parables. During this period the parables were read as stories that contained a string of metaphors, which bore several points.1 These complex stories required numerous details in them to be "decoded."2 "To allegorize" was to assume that many and sometimes all of the characters or objects in the parables stood for something other than themselves: spiritual counterparts, which enable the story to be read at two levels, the surface or temporal, and the deep or heavenly.3

1 Stein, An Introduction to the Parables, 20, 21.

2 Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 30. A classic example of an allegory is John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. In this story, every juncture in Christian’s journey—for example, the Valley of Humiliation, Vanity Fair, Hill of Difficulty, and Gulf of Despondency—represents a different stage and experience in the journey in life as a Christian.

3 Ibid., 15. Hans-Josef Klauck describes "allegorizing" as a process of ascribing to a text, hidden, anachronistic meanings which the author never intended. Further, he differentiates between "allegorizing" and "allegorization." For him "allegorization" is the allegorizing expansion and embellishment of a text which originally was already allegory in simpler form. For more details on the distinction between "allegory," "allegorizing,"
In the fourth century, the allegorical approach to the interpretation of the parables was brought to its peak with Augustine’s classic example of his interpretation of the parable of The Good Samaritan. This approach to the interpretation of parables was to dominate parabolic thinking for the next fourteen hundred years. R. C. Trench was the last notable proponent of the allegorical approach to understanding of the parables.

It was not until 1888 that the bind of well-nigh two millenia of allegorical domination would be broken by Adolf Jülicher with his massive two-volume work, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu (The Parabolic Speeches of Jesus). Jülicher is remembered by scholars as one who vociferously argued that a parable is not an allegory. For Jülicher, a parable was an extended simile using the words "like" or "as," reflecting true-to-life conditions of first-century Palestine, and bearing only a simple point of comparison and "allegorization," see Hans-Josef Klauck, Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten (Munster: Aschendorff, 1978), 91.

1 See Augustine Quaestiones Evangeliorum 2.19. Of course, there was some protest against this method of interpretation, especially from the Church Fathers in Antioch. At best, however, such reactions went unheeded.

2 For a detailed history of the dominance of this approach and occasional reactions to it by people like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others, see the magisterial works of Warren S. Kissinger, The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1979), 1-67; R. Stein, An Introduction to the Parables, 42-52; Geraint Vaughan Jones, The Art and Truth of the Parables: A Study in Their Literary Form and Modern Interpretation (London: SPCK, 1964), 1-8; Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 29-69.


An allegory, on the other hand, has a succession of metaphors, is not literal, and needs decoding. Jülicher insisted that each parable is a single picture which seeks to portray a single object or reality. Consequently, the details of the picture or parable in themselves serve no real purpose, except to provide background or give embellishment for the simple point or reality which the word picture is seeking to provide.

Jülicher's view that parables had one point became dogma for years thereafter. Jülicher not only caused a turning point in parabolic interpretation, but made a significant contribution in bequeathing several descriptive categories for classifying parables: (1) Gleichnis = "similitude" or short comparison; (2) Parabel = "parable" or extended comparison; and (3) Beispielerzählung = "example story."

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1 On simile versus metaphor and parable versus allegory, see ibid., 1:52-58.

2 Bultmann’s form criticism bolstered Jülicher’s theory of non-allegorical parables. Bultmann proposed relatively fixed laws of transmission that described the process of converting a simple parable into a complex allegory as it was told and retold. See Rudolph Bultmann, The History of the Synoptic Tradition (Oxford: Harper and Row, 1963), 166-205.

3 Despite Jülicher’s prominent contribution to parabolic interpretation and the deadly blow he gave to allegorical interpretation, his work is not without its limitations. In his zeal to stamp out allegory in parables, Jülicher totally denied any allegorical elements in Jesus’ parables. Whenever such elements surfaced in a parable, Jülicher would deny its authenticity and censure the Early Church for its interpolation. Apparently, Jülicher arrived at these conclusions having been influenced by Greek theories (especially Aristotle’s) of rhetoric. The second major weakness of Jülicher’s theory pertains to his one-main-point notion in the parables of Jesus. Jülicher believed that this one main point was always a general moral truth. Jülicher was a nineteenth-century liberal theologian and the one-point emphasis in each parable reflected the general tenet of nineteenth-century German liberalism. Cf. Mary Ann Tolbert, Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations (Philadelphia:
Julicher’s work produced some reactions. Two notable reactionary figures were Christian Bugge and Paul Fiebig. Bugge protested Julicher’s Greek philosophical presupposition as the background for the interpretation of Jesus’ parables. Instead, he insisted that the Old Testament and rabbinic literature were the better starting points. Bugge argued that Jesus used the Aramaic thought form and language, and that it is arbitrary to restrict Jesus’ use of parables to a paradigm of Greek rhetoric.1 Paul Fiebig supported the notion that the combination of parable and allegory was prevalent and well-appreciated in ancient Judaism.2 Fiebig also drew attention to the frequent usage of “standard metaphors”3 by the rabbis, because of which Jesus’ hearers would have

Fortress, 1979), 15-31, 67-91. A typical example is his tertium comparationis in his most lengthy discussed parable, the Prodigal Son. He sees the one main point as “an elevated revelation over a fundamental question of religion, namely, ‘Dare this God of righteousness accept sinners in grace.’” See Julicher, 2:33. Other one-point generalizations can be found in other parables. Jesus is portrayed as an "apostle of progress." Ibid., 2:483. The logical question, therefore, is, Why was Jesus crucified if he was just a moralist? Smith points out, "No one would crucify a teacher who told pleasant stories to enforce prudential morality." See Charles W. F. Smith, The Jesus of the Parables (Philadelphia: United Church, 1975), 17. On the other hand, we read that Jesus’ parables enraged some of his listeners, so much so that they sought to destroy him (Mark 12:12, 14:12). In spite of these two major weaknesses, scholars of parabolic studies will be forever indebted to Julicher for having crumbled the hold that the allegorical method had assumed over parabolic interpretation for centuries.

1See Christian A. Bugge, Die Haupt-Parabeln Jesu (Giessen: A. Topelmann, 1903).


3These are stock symbols which had relatively fixed meanings in Jesus’ day. They originated in Old Testament and intertestamental texts and characterized the imagery of that time. Some examples are a father, king, judge or shepherd for God, a
interpreted the parables through the eyes of reasonably conventional paradigms. Fiebig suggested that Jesus' parables were after the rabbinic models, and the most common type was the "mixed form."\(^1\)

It was Dodd, however, who rejected Jülicher's universalistic liberal interpretations of the parables in favor of those that found their true meaning in the *sitz im leben* of Jesus, i.e., in the original setting in the life of Jesus and in the context of his ministry.\(^2\) This understanding is considered by biblical scholarship as a major insight into the interpretation of parables and Scripture at large. Dodd understood Jesus' teachings to reflect "realized" eschatological dimensions.\(^3\)

What Dodd did in a precursory way, Jeremias pursued more methodically. A major asset to Jeremias's work was his knowledge of the environment and religious customs of Jesus' day.\(^4\) To his advantage was his knowledge of Aramaic. Jeremias, more than any of his predecessors, sought to ascertain the *ipsisima verba* (actual words) of Jesus in the parables.\(^5\) While Jeremias endorsed Dodd's presence of the kingdom in

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\(^1\)Fiebig, *Altjüdische Gleichnisse*, 98. Fiebig demonstrated that a mixture of parable and allegory was both common and well-liked in ancient Judaism.

\(^2\)Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*.

\(^3\)Ibid., 44-46.


Jesus' ministry, he further described Jesus' message as an eschatology that was in a process of realization (processed eschatology). Both Dodd and Jeremias sought to understand the parables in their historical and eschatological contexts, and to remove allegorical elements from the parables of Jesus.¹

From 1935 to the early 1970s Dodd and Jeremias's eschato-historical mode of understanding the parables influenced a great deal of thinking about parables. But from the 1970s, a new approach rose to prominence. This was based on antecedents in other areas of biblical studies. Dominating this development was literary criticism and its corollaries: existentialism and aesthetics. This fresh zeal for the Bible as literature sparked a "new hermeneutic" among scholars who were swayed into an existential orientation and a linguistic approach to the parables.

The "new hermeneutic" school, spearheaded by Ernst Fuchs,² stressed the research on the parables to "a new height, a plateau upon which we all now stand and from the vantage point of which we see many things in a new way... There can be no going back from this work of Jeremias. It is perhaps the greatest single contribution to the historical understanding of the parables." See Norman Perrin, "The Parables of Jesus as Parables, as Metaphors, and as Aesthetic Objects: A Review Article," Journal of Religion 47 (October 1967): 340.

¹However, both of them veered, at times, to allegorical interpretations in discussing some of Jesus' parables. See Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 69; Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, 119. Cf. Matthew Black, "The Parable as Allegory," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 42 (1960): 273-287, especially 283.

²Other avid supporters of Fuch's approach were his students, Eta Linnemann and Eberhard Jüngel. Linneman is known for the phrase "the moment of truth," referring to the effective parable working on the mind of a hearer, bringing it to a decisive moment, that accomplishes a new existence for the hearer. See Eta Linneman, Jesus of the Parables: Introduction and Exposition (New York: Harper and Row, 1966). Jüngel used the parables as a key to unlock the meaning of the proclamation of Jesus, which he
importance of understanding the sayings of Jesus as Sprachereignisse (language events) that do not primarily convey the teachings of Jesus, but his self-understanding and his radical challenge to others.¹ Fuchs saw the parables as analogies which could not really add to knowledge. Rather, they helped to change lives existentially. Jesus' awareness of his own circumstance entered language in a certain way so as to make himself available to his listeners. The parables, therefore, invoke a response that is possible only when the listeners allow themselves to be absorbed by Jesus’ existence.

As a reaction to the "new hermeneutic" school originating in Europe, eminent American poet, literary critic, and New Testament scholar Amos Wilder was determined to disclose the literary weaknesses of this approach. His response was Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel. Central to Wilder’s view of parables was that "some of the parables are straight narratives (example stories) about a given individual case, ending with an application . . . while most of them were extended images, or more precise, revelatory images – images which revealed rather than exemplify."² Wilder was most concerned with the latter classification. He was prepared to differ with the more widely held categories of similitude, parable, and example story. For him, the revelatory image of the parable could be either simple, referring to the similitude, or extended, referring to the parable. Both the similitude and the parable categories were classified as compared with Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith. See Eberhard Jüngel, Paulus und Jesus (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1962).

¹See Ernst Fuchs, Studies of the Historical Jesus (Naperville: Allenson, 1964).

²Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric, 72.
Another concern of Wilder was the realism behind the parables. He went so far as to describe the events in the parables in secular terms, because of their humanness and realistic orientation to everyday human existence. From these two principal perspectives Wilder studied the parables.

Shortly after Wilder, using the methods of secular literary criticism, Robert Funk provided some rich insights into the literary nature of parables. He combined the tools of modern literary criticism with ideas from the “new hermeneutic” school and Heidegger’s philosophy of language as “the house of being.” Funk, like Wilder and Dodd, advocated that the parable was an extended metaphor. In addition, the parable was a paradox because of its “everydayness” and “strangeness.” It addresses the now and the unfamiliar. As a metaphor, a parable is open to more than one meaning. It may be open-ended. Being open-ended in Funk’s understanding does not imply that the parabolic interpretation could be swayed by any and every whimsical meaning. Rather, the original context of the actual telling of the parables presupposes definite parameters for their reinterpretation.

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1Ibid., 80.

2Ibid., 81-82.


4Funk’s focus on reader response and his understanding of parables as paradoxes are generally well-received by scholars today. He also places a high rating on the Gospel
In 1964, Geraint Vaughn Jones sought to bring more life to the parables by studying their artistic qualities. Jones's analysis finds that parables are comprised of symbols that reflect human experience.\(^1\) Aesthetics as the answer to parabolic interpretation was also pursued by Dan Otto Via,\(^2\) who approached the parables from three successive stages: the historico-literary, the literary-existential, and existential-theological. His existential posture for understanding parables inclined him to believe in the autonomous nature of the parables. Both he and Jones sought to retrieve the humaneness of the parables and their appeal to the human condition. Via opposed the "one-point" approach, and distinguished the parable from allegory, though he acknowledged the presence of allegorical correspondences in parables.\(^3\)

A leading figure in parable research is John Dominic Crossan.\(^4\) With a strong penchant toward poetic criticism and a repertoire of traditional skills in New Testament scholarship, Crossan was not content to follow Jülicher's already worn-out distinction between allegory and parable. For him the distinction was not that easy to make. From his poetic standpoint, he was prepared to say that parables are metaphors which partake in

\(^1\) See Jones, *The Art and Truth of the Parables*, 135-166.


\(^3\) Ibid., 11-70.

\(^4\) Crossan's first work, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), was so highly regarded by other scholars, that he was invited to chair the first SBL Parables seminar in 1972. Crossan has put out over twenty publications so far. See the bibliography for some of his works.
a symbolic nature, analogous to that of myth, and are not allegorical.¹

Crossan argues for what he identifies as permanent eschatology. The thesis of this eschatology is that "Jesus is proclaiming . . . the permanent presence of God as the one who challenges world [sic] and shatters its complacency repeatedly."² Three parables that Crossan believes Jesus used provide the framework for understanding the application of this eschatology.³ They serve as the paradigmatic key to understanding the nature of the kingdom in all of the other parables. All parables corresponding with these three are classified into three modes of the kingdom's temporality: (1) parables of advent, (2) parables of reversal, and (3) parables of action.⁴

Until quite recently, few scholars were willing to say more than that there must be a little more allegory in the parables than had been commonly recognized and the "one main point" rule has remained virtually inviolate. However, over the last decades scholarship and cross-disciplinary expertise in Western literature and biblical studies have affirmed that most of the major narrative parables of Jesus are by every standard, literary definition of the word, genuine allegories. Madeleine Boucher, for example, a specialist in English literature and biblical studies, observes that there are only two modes of meaning: literal and tropical or figurative. A trope may take one of several forms such as metaphor, metonymy, irony, synecdoche, or even circumlocution. Any one of these may

¹Ibid., 7-36.
²Ibid., 26.
³The Treasure, Matt 13:44; The Pearl, Matt 13:45; The Great Fish, Gos. Thom. 8.
⁴Crossan, In Parables, 37-120.
be developed into a full-fledged narrative; whenever this occurs one has a full-fledged allegory. Boucher concludes that an allegory is "nothing less than an extended metaphor in narratory form."\(^1\) For Boucher, so long as the main point of the parable transcends its literal meaning, it is an allegory.\(^2\) By extension, Boucher also contends that "allegory is a device of meaning and not a literary form or genre."\(^3\)

An interesting and insightful analysis of the nature of parables was done by John Sider, professor of English at Westmont College in California. Sider supports the idea that parables are "proportional analogies," expressed by means of a series of equations of the form "A is to B as a is to b with respect to x."\(^4\) Because of the presence of multiple analogies, Sider claims that the longer "story parables are really ‘allegorical’ after all."\(^5\)

As mentioned earlier, an inordinate interest in the literary qualities of the parables developed in the 1970s. The main parables chosen for study were those with narrative elements.\(^6\) Scholars preferred the longer parables, mainly because they were amenable to


\(^2\)Ibid. The only types of parables that are not allegories are simple similitudes or extended synecdoches (not extended metaphors) such as the Parables of the Rich Fool and of the Pharisee and the Publican.

\(^3\)Ibid.


\(^6\)Parables such as The Good Samaritan and The Prodigal Son.
narratorial analysis. Thus, in addition to pointing out parables’ metaphoric qualities, the major contribution of scholars in the last few decades has been the study of the narratorial aspect of parables. This new focus has created two tracks in parable scholarship. The first was an interest by parable scholars in the field of structuralism. The other track provided the “old constants” of secular literary criticism, which are used to analyze ancient and contemporary literature. This approach espouses constants that are much more common in literary studies, for instance, plot, character, point of view, and setting.

Another area that has attracted much study in the past few decades is the interpretation of parables against the background of Jewish culture and rabbinic traditions. Some outstanding contributors in this field have been Duncan M. Derrett.

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2See Donahue, 20.


Kenneth Bailey,¹ and the leading Jewish-Israeli professor on the New Testament, David Flusser, and his student Brad Young. Young describes his mentor's work as "a brave new approach . . . which analyzes the parable motivically as a literary genre."² This approach challenges Jülicher as well as Jeremias and all reader-response approaches.³ Flusser's main contention is that though the contexts of the parables of Jesus are not generally questionable, they are not realistic, as they overstate the typical daily life of the ancient Jew. Brad Young, with zest akin to that of Flusser, avers that Jesus, though the original founder of Christianity, must be understood as being framed within the context and natural environment of the Second Temple period. This epoch must not be viewed only as a backdrop for Jesus' teaching, but as the actual framework for them.⁴

¹Bailey looks not only at the Palestinian cultural elements in the parables but also the literary features and structures in the parables from a Jewish perspective. See Kenneth E. Bailey, Poet and Peasant (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); idem, Through Peasant Eyes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

²Brad H. Young, Jesus and His Jewish Parables: Rediscovering the Roots of Jesus' Teaching (New York: Paulist, 1989), 34.


⁴See Brad H. Young, The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998); idem, Jesus and His Jewish Parables. Other works of Young which recognize the Jewish element and thought in the teachings of Jesus and Paul are "The Ascension Motif of 2 Corinthians in Jewish, Christian, and Gnostic Texts," Grace Theological Journal 9 (1988): 73-103; idem, "The Cross, Jesus, and the Jewish People," Immanuel 24/25 (1990): 23-34; idem, Jesus the Jewish Theologian (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995); idem, The Jewish Background to the Lord's Prayer (Austin, TX: Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1984); idem, Paul the Jewish Theologian
In the last decade, parable studies began gravitating again to the question of allegory in parables, but in a more positive light, to the polyvalent interpretation of the parables, and to the banal nature of Jesus’ parables. Craig Blomberg recognizes the parables of Jesus as allegories. For him a parable is a literary genre that may have more than one point of comparison. Each main point corresponds to each of the main characters who are likely candidates for allegorical interpretation. Most of the parables of Jesus sustain a triadic structure of three main characters and, therefore, convey three main points, though some may have one or two.¹

Polyvalence as a way to interpret the parables has been defended by Mary Ann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997); Brad H. Young and David Flusser, "Messianic Blessings in Jewish and Christian Texts," in Judaism and the Origins of Christianity, ed. David Flusser (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 280-300.

The biggest challenge for scholars who use rabbinic parables as a paradigmatic mold for interpreting the parables of Jesus is the period when these parables originate. The corpus of rabbinic parables, which originates largely from the second and third century C.E., numbers about two thousand and is scattered throughout a wide variety of writings. Robert M. Johnston has collected 325 parables either attributed to the Tannaim (the rabbis of the first three centuries of the Christian era) or found in Jewish writings of the same period. He has provided translations for them and offered a rudimentary commentary on each. See Robert M. Johnston, "Parabolic Interpretations Attributed to Tannaim" (Ph.D. dissertation, Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1978). Almost none of the rabbinic parables can be dated as early as the first half of the first century. In spite of this apparent negative variable, scholars have arrived at some interesting findings as they compare the parables of Jesus with rabbinic parables.

Another grave concern of scholars regarding the "Jewish" approach for the study of the parables is the oftentimes unwarranted enthusiasm and hyperbolical treatment of the parables. Yet, "given the insensitivity and hyperbole of some Christian scholars, this is not surprising and may be necessary." See Klyne R. Snodgrass, "From Allegorizing to Allegorizing: A History of the Interpretation of the Parables of Jesus," in The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 19.

¹See Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables.
Tolbert and Susan Wittig. Tolbert argued that because the Gospel writers themselves sometimes adjusted the original contexts of the parables, thus justifying their polyvalent character, each scholar may arrive at equally legitimate interpretations.\(^1\) Wittig explains the polyvalent nature of parables in semiotic terms.\(^2\)

Bernard B. Scott looks for the commonplace elements in the parables of Jesus.\(^3\) Scott draws the readers' attention to the fact that before, during, and after the time of Jesus a process of regularization of stereotypical plots, characterization, phraseology, and use of formulas in parables was in progress. During this period of regularization, an "ideal thesaurus" of stereotyped traditional elements developed, from which "we can view the parable proper as a structure, with the extant version being a performance of that structure."\(^4\) This presupposes that the matter of import is not the *ipsissima verba* of the parable, but its *ipsissima structura*. To get at the simplest, banal form of the original parable of Jesus is Scott’s main objective. Scott believes that the allegorical elements in the parables are interpolations that occurred via tradition.

In summary, parabolic investigation has undergone several phases of change.

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\(^1\)Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*. In this bid, Tolbert in no way tries to undermine the integrity of the parables. In one instance, she construes a parable using labels from Freudian psychology. See her discussion on the Prodigal Son, in 102-107.


\(^4\)Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 18.
What began in the early stages of the Christian Church under the yoke of the "allegorical method" continued until the nineteenth century, when Jülicher broke with tradition. In spite of Jülicher's over-reaction, he ignited the spark of parabolic dialogue. Today, however, there is a revival of the "allegorical vocabulary," this time with a different orientation to the understanding of parables.

Reactions to Jülicher's assertions took different twists, and looked at the parables from different angles. Consequently, the interpretation of parables has spanned the broad spectrum of biblical hermeneutics found in almost every area of biblical studies, from historical, descriptive, and diachronic approaches, all the way to the synchronic literary approaches.

In history, the parables have been studied: in their sitz im leben, trying to discover the ipsissima verba of Jesus, investigating their historico-eschatological orientations, searching for fixed laws of transmission, exploring their existential dimensions, probing their aesthetic makeup, analyzing their symbolic nature, surveying their Jewish contexts, examining their polyvalent and banal character, and anatomizing their metaphoric traits in an attempt to realize their potency in human lives. Today, the dominant approach to the study of the parables is from a literary perspective. Scholars are more concerned about the impact of the parables than the proof of their historical veracity.

The Parable Defined Biblically

In biblical scholarship, definitions for the genre "parables" have been many and varied. This extravagance of explications can be accounted for by the ambiguity of the
use of parables in biblical literature. Practically all individuals who read, study, or write on parables gravitate to the widely accepted lengthy, "parabolic" pericopes in the Gospels (such as The Sower and the Seed, The Prodigal Son, Laborers in the Vineyard, and so on), yet do not demonstrate comparable interest in other smaller units of parabolic sayings in the same Gospels (for example, Mark 3:23-27; 7:14-17). It is also interesting that many of the most prominent parables in the Christian tradition are not so designated in the Gospels themselves (for instance, The Good Samaritan, and the Unjust Steward). It follows, then, that the original sense of the word "parable" is not limited to a fixed literary form. It is commonly said that the parable is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning." As we shall discover, the parable requires a much more encompassing definition.

Webster's dictionary renders two definitions for a parable: "a short allegorical story designed to convey some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson" or "a statement or comment that conveys a meaning indirectly by the use of comparison, analogy, or the like."¹ These definitions are not exclusive in their scope. The reason for this is that we must not try to define "parable" as we understand it, in a twenty-first-century context. For a more accurate meaning of parable, it is imperative to study the term in its first-century Hellenistic context, and even prior to that, its Hebrew context. The complexities in parabologic definition are realized more when an etymological study is done of the term, complemented by a contextual study of how parables are actually used in Scripture.

¹Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary (1996), s.v. "parable."
the same word used in the LXX to refer broadly to the Aramaic/Hebrew Old Testament *māšāl*. The Gospel writers wrote the parables in 'koine' Greek, and probably Jesus spoke and understood Greek. But it is well-established that Jesus spoke in Aramaic and understood Hebrew. Thus, when Jesus used the word "parable," his frame of reference would have been the Aramaic/Hebrew *māšāl*. It follows, then, that "the antecedents of Christ's parable must be sought not in the Hellas but in Israel; not in the Greek orators but in the Old Testament prophets and the Jewish Fathers." Accordingly, a study of the word *māšāl* in its Old Testament context is indispensable.

The word *māšāl* is derived from the Hebrew root *mšl* translated "to be like," or "shadow." Analogically speaking, it is like a silhouette of the real substance. This meaning of *māšāl* seems to suggest a natural affinity between the temporal world, in which the *mēšālim* (the shadows) are cast, and the spiritual dimension (the real substance). Accordingly, the creative genius of the *māšāl* affords the opportunity for the ordinariness of the human forum to interface with consciousness of the divine.

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4Heintz supports this idea of the *māšāl* functioning as a shadow by quoting an early Semitic proverb where a king is portrayed as the shadow or resemblance of God. See J. G. Heintz, "Royal Traits and Messianic Figures: A Thematic and Iconographical Approach (Mesopotamian Elements)," in *The Messiah*, ed. J. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 52-66. Heintz also mentions a seventh-century B.C.E. document in which an official address is made to king Assurbanipal. The king is likened to the shadow of the god, and the subject is the shadow of the king. Ibid.
Apart from its elemental meaning of similarity, resemblance, or reflection, *māšāl* sustains a wide semantic range in the Hebrew literature. Its meaning may span from a simple comparison to any kind of illustration, from a proverbial saying to a fictitious story. A *māšāl* may refer to a maxim or proverb, a byword or taunt, an ode or poem, a riddle, anecdote, fable, allegory, or narrative unit. In the Old Testament the parables of the trees (Judg 9:7-15) and that of the ewe lamb (2 Sam 12:1-4), though in structure and form carrying a resemblance to some New Testament parables, are not identified as parables. From the foregoing evidences it is tenable to say that the “parable” in the

1 Sam 10:12; 24:13; Prov 1:1, 6; 10:1; 26:7-9; Ezek 12:22-23; 16:44; 18:2-3. Scott claims that the proverb is the archetypical *māšāl*, because its characteristics allow other connotative language to be called *māšāl* by extension. Whatever is proverbial is a *māšāl*. See Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 13.

2 Pss 44:14; 69:11; Isa 14:3-4; Mic 2:4; Hab 2:6.

3 Judg 14:10-18; Pss 49:4; 78:2; Prov 1:6; Ezek 17:2ff.

4 Judg 9:7-15; 2 Kgs 14:9, 10. Fables tend to employ animals and plants as leading characters who behave as humans. Their lessons are usually more prudential. Though the Hebrew *māšāl* may designate a parable and a fable alike, sometimes the Hebrew *mišlē suʾālim*, “fox comparisons,” has been used to describe the fable, while *mrʾālim*, “comparisons” or “likenesses.” See Haim Schwarzbaum, *The Mistle Shualim (Fox Fables) of Rabbi Berechiah Ha-Nakdan: A Study in Comparative Folklore and Fable Lore* (Kiron, Israel: Institute for Jewish and Arab Folklore Research, 1979), i. While in the Old Testament, parables may be fables, in the New Testament they are not so. The parables of the New Testament prefer to use people in everyday life. They portray realistic settings, where people are people and animals are animals. Parables are usually more theological and theocentric. See Young, *The Parables*, 21.

5 Isa 5:1-7; Ezek 17:2-10; 20:49-21:5; 24:2-5.

6 *En* 39-71.

Hebrew literature is much more than a story with a moral lesson, more than an analogy or allegory. It embraces a broader concept than this. The *māšāl* defines the unknown by using what is known. It begins where the listener is, and then transposes him into a new, rich, and fascinating realm of discovery.¹ "Above all else, the *māšāl* represents the greatest effort to imagine God."²

παραβολή in the Greek New Testament is derived from the preposition παρά, "alongside of," and the verb βάλλω, "to cast," "to place," or "to throw." Thus, παραβολή is translated literally "to cast alongside," "to set beside," or "to throw beside."³ Etymologically, the parable consists of placing one thing alongside another, or casting something in juxtaposition to another, or setting a thing beside to compare it with another. As with the *māšāl*, these meanings suggest the idea of comparison, signifying similarity or parallelism.

As there is a wide range of meanings with the Old Testament *māšāl*, so it happens with the New Testament παραβολή. It may refer to a proverb,⁴ a wisdom saying (Luke

¹Young, *The Parables*, 3.


⁴Luke 4:23; 6:39. (The parallel passage in Matt 15:14 is not described as a parable. Notwithstanding, it is a parable.)
5:36-39), a riddle (Mark 7:15; 14:58), a similitude,\(^1\) a story,\(^2\) an example,\(^3\) or an allegory.\(^4\)

Some pericopes are not explicitly identified as parables but bear marks of structure and form analogous to rabbinic parables.\(^5\) Others are classified as parables because they are placed in a parabolic section and the context warrants categorization as such (Luke 15:11-32). Some parables may be classified under more than one category.\(^6\) This warrants a caution when trying to classify parables: rigidity suggests arbitrariness.


\(^4\) A distinction must be made between the type of parable called "allegory," and the exegetical method of "allegorizing." Some parables may be considered genuine allegories, where multiple symbols are used to represent counterparts in the teaching to be conveyed. These allegories must be interpreted in the way the authors intend, as allegories. The classic example is the parable of The Sower and the Seed, Mark 4:3-9. Others are: The Parable of the Tenants, Mark 12:1-11; The Wheat and the Tares, Matt 13:24-30; The Great Supper, Matt 22:2-10; The Ten Virgins, Matt 25:1-13. For the difference between "allegory," "allegorizing, and "allegorization," see Klauck, 91.


\(^6\) Mark 7:15 is a riddle, but may be classified as a proverb or figurative saying.
The Purpose and Function of the Parables

The Parable in Relational Terms

Some scholars understand the parable in personal and relational terms. They describe the inherent qualities of the parable, and how it relates to and functions in the human/divine relationship. Donahue affirms: “The parables embrace images of the dynamism of nature and deviousness of human nature.”1 Tannehill notes: “The sayings do not invite contemplation of themselves as objects of value but require us to contemplate our lives.”2 Young avers that “the reality of God is revealed in the word-pictures of a parable”; further, the parable illustrates “the nature of God and human responses to his love.”3 He also finds that “the parable teaches more by intuition than by precept. The message is caught rather than learned.” Parables “awaken the inner spirituality of the listener rather than challenge the intellect in the purely cognitive realm.”4 “Through the parables and poetry of Jesus,” writes Donahue, “we are in contact with his imagination as it brings to expression his self-understanding of his mission and his struggle with the mystery of his Father’s will.”5

Maisonneuve promotes the instructional nature of the parables: Communicating a

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2Robert Tannehill, The Sword of His Mouth (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975), 17.
3Young, The Parables, 3.
4Ibid., 23.
message is its main purpose.¹ Young agrees that parables are designed “to instruct,” to “illustrate and teach,” “to drive home a point,” “to communicate a message.”² But parables not only communicate at the cognitive level; they also operate at the affective level where the reader participates in the “language event.” They embody two dimensions: referential and commissive. They are often described as having a twofold function: the referential dimension enhances communication, the commissive assists persuasion.³

The above citations illustrate how the parables accentuate human/divine relationships and serve as communicative instruments. The parables of the Gospels are loaded with circumstances of everyday life. This stage of common worldliness becomes the context for God to view the human condition. Notwithstanding, the appraisal of the parable in relational terms is inadequate for a full appreciation of its substance.

The Parable as Story

Some outstanding scholars have advanced their understanding of what characterizes the "parable" of Jesus. They classify parables under different names, emphasizing certain characteristics, noting how they serve distinct functions. There are those who appraise the “story” element in the parable. A minimalist but simple definition


²Young, The Parables, 33-34.

is rendered by John Gabel and Charles Wheeler: "The parable originally was a brief story that used details from ordinary life to illustrate a moral point . . . and was an effective teaching device because it put things in terms that people could understand and made them easy to remember."¹ Young believes a parable may refer to a saying or story example. For him, parables are teachings about God using concrete illustrations that reach the heart through imagination. They challenge the mind at the highest intellectual level with the use of simple everyday stories which make common sense amidst the complexities of religious faith and human experience.² Donahue finds parallels ranging from short narrative vignettes to full-blown dramatic stories.³

**The Parable as Metaphor**

Some scholars, especially in recent times, are not satisfied to describe the parables exclusively as stories. The parable is seen as displaying disorientation of everydayness, exaggerated realism, distended concreteness, and incompatible elements often subtly drawn, which prohibit the parable from coming to rest in the literal sense.⁴ The language of the parables is couched in the figurative and tropical, where communication occurs through the media of images and the power of suggestion. Literalness is not the mode in


²Young, *The Parables*, 3.


which parables must be understood. The seminal works of scholars such as Wilder, Funk, and Perrin, who are versed in poetic criticism, have argued for the strong metaphoric element in parables. Thus, they have opened the way for a new understanding in the literary and theological appreciation of the parables. The parable is sometimes seen as a narrative paradox formed into a story. This parable-story possesses hidden power and is disturbingly paradoxical. In essence, a parable is a storied paradox, designed to establish tension, to cut through existing structures of perception with the sharp knife of paradox. The parables are paradoxical, shattering, exploding, and disclosing narratives.

Crossan maintains that the paradoxical nature of the parables of Jesus qualifies them as metaphors of the transcendent. Only when one stands before the limit of language does one possess the ability to appreciate the kingdom of God as a free gift. The parables are metaphors because they function as metaphors. Warren Carter and John Heil point out that "metaphors bring together the familiar and the unfamiliar, the similar (epiphor) and the different (diaphor), the everyday and the extravagant, realism and hyperbole." When two distant entities approximate each other, they "redescribe,

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3 Bausch, 117.

4 John Dominic Crossan, Cliffs of Fall: Paradox and Polyvalence in the Parables of Jesus (New York: Seabury, 1980).
disclose," and "create." Metaphors reveal a "new reality" and create a new vision for the reader, thereby providing new lenses for understanding an entity. In other words, metaphors disturb normal seeing." It is well-established that the metaphor in narrative is a vibrant vehicle which impacts the reader forcefully. For Wilder, metaphor is "a bearer of the reality to which it refers. The hearer not only learns about that reality but participates in it."

Today, the metaphor is sharply delineated from the simile. A simile is a comparison which uses the particle "like" or "as." A metaphor is an implied comparison. According to Wilder, "a simile sets one thing over against another: the less known is clarified by that which is better known. But in the metaphor we have an image with a certain shock to the imagination which directly conveys vision of what is

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3Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric*, 92. When the reader participates in the metaphoric encounter, the parable operates at the affective level. The parable as a vehicle of communication is not limited only to its cognitive or informative dimension.

4Ancient writers never insisted on a sharp distinction. Aristotle postulated that "the simile is metaphor, for there is very little difference." See Aristotle *The Art of Rhetoric* 1.406b. Quintilian held that "on the whole, metaphor is a shorter form of the simile." See Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* 8.6.8.

signified. Metaphor contrasts two fundamentally different categories of reality and hence produces a shock to the imagination, while the simile is essentially illustrative.

Some of the more celebrated definitions of "parable" viewed from an emphasis on its metaphoric nature have received widespread acceptance. For Wendland, a parable is "simply a verbal analogy in which a comparison is made between two events or situations which either correspond or contrast in certain critical respects, but not in others." It functions as "an extended simile—or better, a metaphor—whereby imagery selected from the realm of concrete, everyday experience in first-century Palestine, especially rural Galilee, is used as an illustration (or 'vehicle') to convey a deeper level of meaning (the 'tenor')." Young states: "The Eastern mind tended to conceive of God in dynamic metaphors; God is known through his mighty acts. Parables describe God in similar images."

For Scott, a parable employs "a short narrative fiction to reference a narrative symbol," thus hinting at its primarily oral and mythical character. The reason for the


4Young, *The Parables*, 4.

5Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 8.
referencing function is to highlight the metaphorical process. The narrative symbol in the context of Jesus' ministry refers to the kingdom of God. Crossan designates the parable as "an extended metaphor or simile frequently becoming a brief narrative, generally used in biblical times for didactic purposes."\(^1\) The metaphor, as understood by Crossan, is language dressed in adornment, which will be unadorned if put in simple prose. This ornamentation in metaphor is useful in teaching students something new. The metaphor is able to "articulate a referent so new or so alien to his consciousness that this referent can only be grasped within the metaphor itself."\(^2\) Metaphor, then, does not simply adduce information; but first, elicits participation. In other words, participation precedes information.

C. H. Dodd offers a comprehensive definition for the parable: "At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought."\(^3\) Dodd's definition features four aspects of parabolic language: (a) its poetic and metaphoric quality, (b) its realism, (c) its paradoxical and engaging quality; and (d) its open-ended nature.\(^4\) Eta Linneman, with


\(^{2}\)Idem, Cliffs of Fall, 13.

\(^{3}\)Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom, 5.

\(^{4}\)Donahue adds the narrative aspect to Dodd's four features. See Donahue, The Gospel in Parable, 6.
her "interlocking" concept of the nature of the parables, describes the parable as a dialogue which engages the hearer.1

The Structure of the Parable

Few attempts have been made to formulate a structure of the typical parable since Johnston's illuminating work on rabbinic parables.2 The structural characteristics of the typical narrative masa' proposed by Johnston have gained widespread support.3 Later, Johnston and Harvey McArthur analyzed Jewish parables vis-à-vis the parables of Jesus.4 Although Jesus' parables, in many instances, do not follow this structure, and many lack one or two of the structural elements, their paradigm serves well for analyzing the Gospel parables. Johnston's five-part structure of the typical narrative masa' is as follows:5

1. The Illustrand or the point to be illustrated.

2. TheIntroductory Formula. Some are "explicitly labeled," for example: "A parable," "A Parable: It is like unto . . .," or "They parable a parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like unto . . ." Some have "abbreviated labels," for example: "It is like ________

1Linneman, 23-30.


4See Harvey McArthur and Robert Johnston, They Also Taught in Parables (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 165-196.

5Ibid., 99.
3. The Parable Proper, the story part, or so-called picture half of whole unit.

4. The Application, usually introduced by the Hebrew word, _khak_ (even so; likewise) or another linking word.

5. Scriptural Quotation, often introduced by the formula "as it is said" or "as it is written." (The quotation is followed by a second application, which itself may become an illustrand, thus producing a chain of parables.)

Brad Young discusses the structure of the classic parable in literary and psychological terms. He offers six components:¹

1. Prolegomenon: This may be a single word such as “to” or “parable.” The standard phrase, “A parable, to what may the matter be compared? To a . . .,” became the accepted form to introduce a parable. In the Gospels Jesus introduced his parables by saying, “The kingdom of God is like . . .” These introductions were perhaps more standardized in their written forms, but abbreviated in their oral forms.² The prolegomenon prepared the listeners and built up anticipation.

2. Introduction of the Cast: This has to do with the introduction of the characters who are important for the development of the plot and the final outcome of the story. For example, Luke 15:11-32 presents the prodigal son and his stay-at-home brother.

¹Young, _The Parables_, 24-25.

3. Plot of the Story: Here the drama begins. Through the dramatic movements (the play and counterplay of characters in the story) of the plot, the story line is revealed.

4. Conflict: The classic form almost always introduces a major conflict. This may be a family crisis (the Prodigal Son), a property crisis (Laborers in the Vineyard; The Talents, etc.), or a crisis with the wealthy and the outcast (the Great Supper, the Unforgiving Servant). The conflict focuses on a major problem and begs for resolution.

5. Conflict Resolution: The audience is led to a resolution of the conflict. In this whole process the audience actively participates. Sometimes the parable is left without a clear resolution and invites the audience to decide the matter. Usually, however, the parable leads the listener to an early resolution of the conflict and illustrates the resemblance between the fiction of the parable and the reality of life.

6. Call to a Decision and/or Application: Jesus called his listeners to a decision. Both Gospel and Rabbinic parables frequently made an application to life. Rabbis used an expression *kakh* which means "thus it is also with." They applied the parable to daily living or illustrated the purpose of the story. The call for a decision and/or application of the parable is the major turning point of the parable. Here the parabler describes the significance of his parable and explains the central theme.

While Bible interpreters must be aware of these six features in the classic form of story parables, they must also be prepared to encounter deviations from this process. Sometimes the story is streamlined (Mustard Seed and Leaven). On occasion the form is expanded. Usually the deviations occur in the plot, conflict, and conflict resolution stages of development (The Prodigal Son and the Unforgiving Servant).
CHAPTER III

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF TYPE-SCENES

For an appreciation of the workings of the type-scene, an examination of its nature and function is necessary. What it constitutes and how it works are the two foci of this chapter. The first section establishes the type-scene as an ancient narratorial convention. This is followed by a survey of the type-scene studies that have been done so far, demonstrating how the type-scene analysis has been applied to secular and biblical narratives. A detailed definition of the type-scene is then presented, followed by an elaboration of its component elements and characteristics. Four main components comprise the type-scene and two facilitate its workings, while two characteristics develop its actualization.

The Role and Nature of Convention in Narrative

Until the middle of the twentieth century, the role of literary convention as a communication device in culture was assumed but not studied by literary critics.¹ As a literary theory, convention was recognized only in a formal way in studies of poetry and

drama. But, in recent years, literary critics have begun to take cognizance of the important role that literary convention plays within narrative, in the communication of ideas, beliefs, values, and practices of a society. Today, literary discussions on convention as a theory thrive even in areas such as law, philosophy, art, sculpture, film, and even television. Literary critics are becoming more and more aware that literary "convention is basic to culture and communication within culture."3

The term "convention" conveys three basic meanings. It may mean "a formal assembly," "a rule or method," or "an agreement, compact, or contract."4 From a literary standpoint, "convention" may be best understood as fitting the last definition. Essentially, literary conventions are tacit agreements, between authors and their contemporary readers, which enable them to actualize the message they are endeavoring to communicate, contextualize, and interpret that message. Abrams puts it in perspective when he says that literary conventions are "convenient devices, accepted by a kind of implicit contract between author and audience, for solving the problems imposed by a particular artistic medium in representing reality."5

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2Two entire issues of *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* were dedicated to the subject of convention in the humanities: vols. 13 and 14 (Spring 1982, Winter 1983).

3Thimes, 8.


John Lowes posits that "conventions exist by virtue of usage, and usage is, of all things human, the most capricious."¹ They are open to change. Through the process of "wholesale imitation, conscious or unconscious, of forms, devices, and methods of expression, which may themselves have had their origin in any of a hundred ways,"² convention may "multiply and ramify and split and merge" in a "bewildering and phantasmagoric variety of branches."³ Convention may even fade and die over time, only to reactivate later. "Despite the fact that they change and vary, however, they are in some form or another, always present."⁴ Even if they do die "through a process of sloughing off, . . . new and more vigorous life develops within them."⁵

Within the culture of any society, certain narratorial conventions are employed in the writing of literature.⁶ In the Hebrew narrative tradition of the Bible, the biblical

²Ibid., 49.
³Ibid., 48.
⁴Levin, 178.
⁵Ibid., 86.
⁶Crowley investigated a variety of traditional folktales in the Bahamian islands of the West Indies which are called “old stories” by the local people. He concluded that the storytellers use only traditional motifs in their folktales, in addition to a few “original” ones totally in the spirit of the tradition. Furthermore, these old stories have a definite structural arrangement resilient for extensive variation. He identified standard characters (persons and animals) and stock elements who could exercise different roles from story to story. Some characters are B’Rabby who is the trickster, and B’Booky his stupid foil, B’Jack is the clever boy hero, B’Devil is a kind of trickster who is always defeated by the hero. Miss Different is the devil’s brawling wife or secretary. See Daniel J. Crowley, *I Could Talk Old-Story Good: Creativity in Bahamian Folklore*, Folklore Studies 17.
authors utilized the stock scene or episode used by oral narrators as a device of narrative construction. By the mere act of writing, the Bible writers/narrators obligated themselves to observe, or at least to consider, certain strategies and formal features in the communication of their texts’ repertoire.\(^1\) The repertoire of a text "sets the work in a referential context within which its system of equivalences must be actualized."\(^2\) The conventional mode requires that the author/narrator, in a formal way, organizes formally his or her strategies to actualize the equivalences, so as to provide a meeting-point for the repertoire and the reader.\(^3\) Thus, the Bible writers set "interpretive strategies" (keywords, characters, motifs, and themes) in anticipated patterns of language or actualized equivalences that their readers could identify and appreciate.

Readers of a text recognize and decipher conventions through the process of "naturalization."\(^4\) Naturalization begs the question, What constitutes "reality" or "likelihood"? The challenge for the narrative reader is to determine the "natural" changes

\(^1\)The text’s repertoire is made up of "material selected from social systems and literary traditions." See Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 86.

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Basically, the strategies serve two functions: they "organize both the material of the text and the conditions under which that material is to be communicated." Ibid.

\(^4\)For an excellent source on this process, see Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*. 

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\(^2\)Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 86.
one society undergoes as compared to another, and also from one era to another. To naturalize a convention means not only to identify and interpret the convention, but to "forget" its conventional character, to assimilate it into the reading process, to incorporate it into one's interpretative net, giving it no more thought than to the manifestational medium."\(^1\) S. Fish insists that the meaning of convention in a text is not determined from the text itself, nor from the readers' private interpretation, but from the "interpretative community."\(^2\)

Today, the reader of the Bible has the task of trying to recover the ancient conventions if he is to bring some coherence to the biblical text. However, a stumbling block to this exercise is the "loss of most of the keys to the conventions out of which it [biblical narrative] was shaped."\(^3\) Though biblical authors/narrators' "tacit contract with their contemporary audiences" is not fully retrievable today, scholars such as Alter and Tannehill have been able to recover some essential elements of ancient convention. This basic convention is that in biblical narrative "more or less the same story often seems to be told two or three more times about different characters, or sometimes even about the

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\(^1\)Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 49.

\(^2\)The interpretative community is made up of "those who share 'interpretive strategies' not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties." These strategies "exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around." S. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14. In other words, "to know a convention is to be party to it." J. Schleusener, "Convention and the Context of Reading," *Critical Inquiry* 6 (1980): 675.

\(^3\)Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 47.
same character in different sets of circumstances." This convention is known among literary critics as type-scene.

**Type-scene Studies**

In 1933 Walter Arend came up with the concept of the type-scene. His studies revealed the compositional recurrent patterns and variations in the epics of Homer. According to Robert Alter, Arend believed that there were "certain fixed situations which the poet is expected to include in his narrative and which he must perform according to a set order of motifs—situations like the arrival, the message, the voyage, the assembly, the oracle, the arming of the hero, and some half-dozen others."

The impact of Arend's work spawned a number of type-scene studies in the epics

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1Ibid., 49. A typical example is the three incidents when Abraham ventures to foreign territory due to famine, bears false witness about his true relation with Sarah, escapes her seizure by the local ruler, and is finally blessed with gifts (Gen 12:10-20; 20:26:1-12). Another example is Hagar, who on two occasions flees from the belligerent hands of Sarah to the dessert, and there finds a miraculous well (Gen 16; 21:9-21). This story poses a variation of the recurrent story of bitter conflict between a favored wife and a concubine.


of Homer\(^1\) and other literary works.\(^2\) Later, however, Robert Alter was considered as the specialist of type-scene studies with the advent of his celebrated *Art of Biblical Narrative* in 1981. Alter is known as a twentieth-century authority on the study of narratorial conventions. The notion of the type-scene was developed by him. His several productions in biblical narratology show his expertise in this area.\(^3\)

Later literary critics of the Bible, esteemed favorably for their work in the maturation of type-scene studies, are Robert Tannehill and David Damrosch. Tannehill,  


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a specialist in Luke-Acts, discovered four scenes of a similar structure in several passages in Luke and Acts 16-20. The type-scene in Luke presents Jesus relations with Jewish leaders. This type-scene depicts the Jewish leaders either objecting, posing a testing inquiry, or taking a position which Jesus corrects. The four chapters in Acts, in a patterned sequence, feature accusations against Christians. He concluded that these scenes may be best described as the public accusation type-scene.

Damrosch astutely analyzes the structure and role of the battle report type-scene at work in various accounts in the Old Testament. His examples are the Ark Narrative, the History of David's Rise, and the Succession Narrative. In these three instances, he illustrates the use of "the announcement of battle news" type-scene.

In the last two decades, apart from Tannehill and Damrosch, there have been

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3 See Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*.

4 The Ark Narrative occupies less than four chapters in 1 Samuel (2:12-17, 22-25; 4:1b-7:1). This gives an account of the Philistine capture of the Ark of the Covenant and its subsequent repossession by Israel. See Damrosch, 182-192.

5 The History of David's Rise covers 1 Sam 16:14 through 2 Sam 2:5. This unitary passage renders the account of David's early exploits and defense of his overthrow of Saul and Saul's household. See Damrosch, 193-202.

6 The Succession Narrative consists of 2 Sam 9-20 and 1 Kgs 1-2. See Damrosch, 241-250.
intermittent journal articles,\(^1\) and about a dozen dissertations on type-scene or type-scene-related studies. A brief look will now be taken at the dissertations in chronological order, starting with those that interacted with non-biblical literature. Marcia Bullard followed the theme of revenge in an injury/counter-injury type-scene in Beowulf. The theme of fratricide is followed by rebellion, and in a reversal of theme, rebellion precedes slaughter.\(^2\) Mack Perry identifies five type-scenes in Anglo-Saxon poetry: sea voyage, ship burial, battle (two types: single combat and mass combat), expulsion, and journey to the underworld.\(^3\)

James Wyatt studied the festival and lodging type-scene, as well as the armed combat and love type-scene in Sir Thomas Malory’s romance, *Tale of Gareth*. He showed how motifs in these type-scenes contributed to the theme of worship.\(^4\) Chad Oness looked at the Old English sea voyage type-scene and how it is used in the old epic, *Tale of Gareth*.

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\(^3\)Mack Allen Perry, "Journey Type-Scenes in Anglo-Saxon Poetry (Old English)" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mississippi, 1984).

In the area of biblical studies, David Reese proffers an exorcism type-scene for the three exorcism narratives in the Gospel of Matthew.2 Using the meal type-scene, Craig McMahan treated the meal scenes in the Gospel of Luke as integrated related units.3 He looked at four types of meal scenarios: Jesus’ three meals with women; Jesus’ eating with toll collectors and sinners, and outcasts; Jesus’ meal at Pharisees’ houses; and Jesus’ meal with the apostles. McMahan’s research is useful for establishing the interdependence of meal narratives for interpreting the types of meal scenario within the Gospel of Luke.

McMahan’s use of the elements of “story” in narrative is excellent, but the elements of discourse analysis are excluded.4 He discusses at length the significance of the meal in antiquity,5 but an actual description of the convention with its patterns of repetition and variation with antecedents in antiquity is lacking. McMahan does not analyze the meal type-scene in the Gospel of Luke against the background of a descriptive type-scene convention in antiquity. The research is limited to narrative events that portray a meal scene only with Jesus and other parties. Only three of these meals have a


5 Ibid., 4-26.
banquet scenario.\(^1\) McMahan includes in his research only two narratives found in the meal parables.\(^2\)

David Flemming employs the divine council type-scene in narratives of the Old Testament. Flemming applies Genette's notions on frequency in narrative to type-scene studies. In terms of frequency/repetition, he distinguishes between the singulative and clustered type-scenes.\(^3\) Taylor's study of *The Master-Servant Type-Scene in the Parables of Jesus* comes closest to a genuine application of the type-scene to biblical narratives. However, his research was limited to antecedents from the Old Testament, one narrative in the intertestamental period, Early Christian literature, and the Tannaitic Corpus.\(^4\)

In her work, *Convention and Invention: Studies in the Biblical Sea-Storm Type-Scene*, Pamela Thimes discovered that the sea-storm type-scene in ancient and classical Mediterranean literature was consistent with Hebrew and New Testament literature. Stories that follow a miracle/rescue/adventure narrative structure shape the framework for the application of the type-scene. Her work demonstrates and confirms the deliberate artistic design by the Gospel writers in applying a convention consistent with antiquity. Victor Salanga discovered the foreigner/sojourner wife-sister ploy for self-preservation type-scene in three narratives in Genesis. In his work *Three Stories of the Endangered* 


\(^3\)Flemming, 63-209.

\(^4\)Taylor, 14-95; 252-330.
Wife, Salanga discusses three wives whose lives had been endangered by a foreigner/sojourner’s ploy.¹

Adeline Fehribach did excellent work on the betrothal type-scene in narratives from the fourth Gospel. She shows how this type-scene was used to portray women in the Gospel of John in a supportive role of Jesus as a messianic bridegroom. The type-scene was adapted for incidents that deal with women as the mother of the messianic bridegroom, the betrothed/bride, and sister of the betrothed/bride. The type-scene accommodates Mary, the mother of Jesus, as an important figure in the wedding at Cana, and at the Cross, as a sign for the “heavenly” patrilineal descent group that Jesus established through his “blood sacrifice.” The Samaritan woman is used to signify that Jesus, as the messianic bridegroom, “wedded” himself to the Samaritan people.² Mary of Bethany is the betrothed/bride, accompanied by her sister, Martha. Mary Magdalene is the bride representing the community of faith. Here, Fehribach compares betrothal type-scenes found in Greco-Roman novels with Mary Magdalene.³ Fehribach’s work is a classic example of how type-scene research can aid in the exegetical process.

From this brief overview of type-scene studies, several conclusions may be drawn. At first, the majority of type-scene studies were done on secular literature, but there is now a growing interest in type-scene studies of the Bible. Different researchers have

¹See Salanga, 34-68.


³Ibid., 176-209.
different leanings in their approach to type-scenes. One major weakness of all the type-scene studies oriented in the Bible is the little attention paid to conventional antecedents in pre-Hebrew antiquity. Only one type-scene study has been done on the parables of Jesus—parables that show a master-servant scenario. Though one study was done on meals as type-scene by McMahan, it was limited only to the Gospel of Luke and did not incorporate all the meal scenarios in the parables of Jesus in that Gospel. In fact, no type-scene studies dealing with banquet scenarios have been found, thus, there is still room for another study on type-scenes.

Type-Scene Defined

The type-scene convention was developed by students of Homer, who agreed on conventional elements of repetitive compositional patterns found in Greek epics. They concluded that uppermost in the mind of the epic-narrator was the traditional story. The epic-narrator’s primary impulse was to recreate and not to create. Scholes and Kellogg point out that the narrator was “retelling a traditional story, and therefore his primary allegiance was not to fact, not to truth, not to entertainment, but to the story as preserved in the tradition which the epic story-teller was re-creating.”¹ Thus embedded in every narrative are layers of tradition (or conventions) which sustain a fixed constellation of predetermined motifs, which the students of Homer termed type-scenes.

The type-scene, according to Alter, is “an episode occurring at a portentous

¹Scholes and Kellogg, 12.
moment in the career of the hero which is composed of a fixed sequence of motifs.\textsuperscript{1} It is often associated with certain recurrent themes; it is not bound to specific \textit{Leitwörter}, though occasionally a recurrent term or phrase may help mark the presence of a particular type-scene.\textsuperscript{2} The type-scene is "not merely a way of formally recognizing a particular kind of narrative moment; it is also a means of attaching that moment to a larger pattern of historical and theological meaning."\textsuperscript{3} A type-scene emerges when a characteristic configuration of motifs is presented in a stylized manner.

To illustrate how type-scenes work, Alter supposes a scenario of movie-critics living a few hundred years hence, in retrospect appraising several twentieth-century western films. Upon analysis, it is discovered that in every film there is a repeated eccentricity. Invariably, every sheriff-hero, always with "the same anomalous neurological trait of hyper-reflexivity," would in an instant pull the trigger and hit his target, while his opponents are still fumbling with their weapons. In one of the films a variation is discovered: the hero is portrayed with a withered hand, yet performs with a heavy rifle even in the most dangerous situation. This variation creates suspense and

\textsuperscript{1}A motif is "the smallest element of a tale having the power to persist in tradition." Atelia Clarkson and Gilbert B. Cross, \textit{World Folktales: A Scribner Resource Collection} (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980), 4. One of the most compelling aspects of folklore study is the appearance of motifs across cultures. For some sound examples, see Anne Marie Kraus, \textit{Folktale Themes and Activities for Children}, vol. 1, Learning Through Folklore Series, ed. Norma J. Livo (Englewood, CO: Teacher Ideas Press, 1998). For further elaboration, see sub-section, "\textit{Leitwörter}, Motifs and Theme," below.

\textsuperscript{2}Alter, \textit{The Art of Biblical Narrative}, 96.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 60.
For the twentieth-century western viewer, disappointment ensues if perchance the “star” succumbs to defeat. But this almost always never happens, because he emerges every time as the “fastest gun in the West.” However macabre the prospects, and no matter how many foes he is up against, the hero’s unearthly swiftness on the draw proves his irrepressible superiority. There is nothing ambiguous about this scenario, for it aligns itself with “the conventional,” and according to Alter, “this is a necessary condition for telling a western story in the film medium as it should be told.”

Alter’s work on type-scenes was limited to narratives in the Old Testament. Of the several biblical type-scenes he identified, Alter focused on the betrothal type-scene, “for it offered some particularly interesting and inventive variations of the set pattern.” Alter compares the conventional motifs of Jacob’s encounter with Rachel with Isaac and Rebekah’s betrothal type-scene. He also makes a comparison with Moses’ encounter with Reuel’s seven daughters. At times, the Bible author/narrator may allude to a betrothal type-scene in innovative ways; at other times, he may intentionally suppress or

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1Ibid., 50.
2Ibid.
3Ibid., 51.
4Ibid., 54, 56-57.
5In a very adroit fashion, the writer of Ruth alludes to a betrothal type-scene. The type-scene becomes very moving with elements of recurrence and innovation. One must not deem it an orchestrated improvisation on the part of the biblical narrator to manipulate a convention for the frail sense of fancy, though playful activity should not be
abort a type-scene as a deliberate ploy of characterization and thematic argument.¹

Alter’s concept of the betrothal type-scene is shown in table 1.²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Future bridegroom or surrogate journeys to a foreign land</td>
<td>Female otherness of the prospective wife or mate outside of immediate family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He encounters a girl at a well</td>
<td>Well is a symbol of fertility and femininity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either one draws water</td>
<td>Emblematic of bonding of male-female or host-guest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl hurries to carry news</td>
<td>Urgency and excitement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation to a meal</td>
<td>Gestures of hospitality; common values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Betrothal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Damrosch also brought some flourish to the study of type-scenes in the Bible. In altogether rejected. See ibid., 58-59.

¹A deliberate attempt to avoid a betrothal type-scene is recognized in the story of Samson (Judg 14). A betrothal type-scene is aborted in Saul’s encounter with girls at a well (1 Sam 9:11-12). The author/narrator was loathe to enjoin the stylization of a betrothal type-scene in the case of David, knowing fully the circumstances of David’s marriages and complicated relations. See Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 60-62.

²This type-scene is applied to the encounter at the well with Abraham’s servant and Rebekah at Aram-Nahraim (Gen 24:10-61). The role played by the bridegroom and bride in this instance is a pointed divergence from the convention. Isaac is manifestly the most passive of the patriarchs.
his book, *The Narrative Covenant*, Damrosch has given some rich insights into the
"announcement of battle news" type-scene in three instances in 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1
Kings, chaps. 1 and 2. He concluded that several instances of this type-scene were
brought to the foregound of the overall story from the Ark Narrative to the History of
David's Rise and finally to the Succession Narrative. The type-scene in each of the
accounts helps to link the once-separated elements into a unified story and to provide
analogies through which any single scene can be assessed against the other.¹

Damrosch observes that the middle incident forms a bridge between the first and
the last incidents.² In the first story (1 Sam 4:12-18), Eli learns that his sons have been
killed and the ark has been captured by the Philistines. In the second incident (2 Sam 1:2-
27), David learns of the death of Saul and Jonathan, and of the defeat by the Philistines.
In the third incident (2 Sam 18-19) David learns of the death of his son Absalom, and
hears that his army has defeated the supporters of Absalom.

A comparative analysis of all three episodes reveals the application of a type-
scene.³ Several parallels exist among the three incidents. In the Ark Narrative, Samuel is
described as sitting at the gate, the conventional place where one would anxiously wait to
receive news about the outcome of a battle. David is also placed at the city's gate, where

¹Damrosch, 257.

²Ibid., 253.

³These three episodes are what Flemming would label a "clustered" type-scene to
refer to a group of scenes in a close narrative context. On the contrary, the "singulative"
type-scene refers to a single scene described only once in a narrative context. See
Flemming, 38. The descriptions "clustered" and "singulative" were adopted from
he receives the news of Absalom’s death.

In the Ark Narrative, hearing that Israel had been defeated, his sons were dead, and the Ark had been taken, Eli falls from his seat, breaks his neck, and dies. Then the narrator adds that Eli had judged Israel for forty years. It appears as if the Ark Narrative provides a backdrop for the portrayal of David’s most grievous moment when he suffers the dire consequences of his poor judgments in dealing with Amnon and Absalom.

In the episode regarding Jonathan and Saul’s death, in the History of David’s Rise, a messenger appears on the scene in the same manner as in the Ark Narrative. The messenger has fled from the battlefield with torn clothes. Both Eli and David anxiously ask, “What is the news?” In both cases the messenger replies that the army fled, and many fell, and significant others (i.e., the sons of Eli, and Jonathan and Saul) have been killed. The two scenes presuppose stock elements underlying the narratives.

Not only are there parallels in this convention, but also shrewd variations. Eli gives up the ghost the moment he receives the tragic news. One would expect a comparable consequence in David’s case if the authorial intention was to recall Eli’s death. On the contrary, David does not react with either joy or sadness when he hears that Saul and Jonathan are dead and that Israel has lost the battle. Instead, David questions the messenger, “How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?” The narrative deflects to the messenger. The narrator is able to modify the type-scene by diverting the reader’s attention, not on the dead king, or even the prospective new king, but to the messenger himself. Of course, the outcome was the execution of the self-seeking Amalekite messenger for an act which he did not really perform. But the
question still remains, Why would the narrator distract the audience from David’s reaction to the messenger? The audience expects David to be either happy over Saul’s death or sad over the conquests of the Philistines.

Damrosch believes that the narrator, through his innovation, focuses on the fate of the Amalekite (who incidentally is a stranger and, therefore, does not understand the sacredness of God’s selection of the king) so as to portray him as a negative image of David. He allegedly kills Saul, expecting personal favor from the king-to-be. In stark contrast, David feels a sense of loss because of the death of Saul and orders that the Amalekite be executed. This exaggerated disparity of the two characters facilitates the exoneration of David. Now, no accusations can be cast against David that he sought to kill the Lord’s anointed.

In the case of the news of Absalom’s death in the Succession Narrative there is also a modification of the underlying form. In this instance, the scene seems to hark back to the two previous narratives. Apparently the narrator wants to show David in a good light in his reaction to Absalom’s death by shaping this scenario in the fashion of how he reacted to Saul’s death. The narrator produces a graphic detail of David’s emotional response to the death of his son. The purpose of this type-scene was to acquit David of the indictment that he was partisan to the killing of Absalom.¹

Damrosch then makes a bold assertion that the type-scene in all three stories about Samuel, Saul, and David functions as a “found” element in each narrative that guides the

¹Damrosch, 256.
audience into the new history. This new history begins with the account of Solomon’s accession, which forms the culminating version of the type-scene. When Solomon is anointed as king by David, Adonijah, his main opponent, hears commotion in the city. Noise echoes the sound of battle. Adonijah asks from one Jonathan ben Abiathar the meaning of the tumult. He greets him as one who brings good news (1 Kgs 1:42). This harks back to David’s words to the messenger who came from the battle against Absalom (2 Sam 18:27). However, Adonijah is wrong as David was wrong—right in spite of himself, as David was also.

Damrosch has demonstrated how the type-scene analysis of three narratives of the Old Testament is beneficial and may even be indispensable for understanding and interpreting another paradigmatic narrative. He also has shown how the author/narrator of a text could, in a deliberate ploy, modify the type-scene to bring about a certain perspective on the part of the reader.

The analyses of type-scenes done by Alter and Damrosch are paradigmatic for analyzing other type-scenes in biblical narratives. In their work, they gave attention to key words, relationships between blocks of material within stories or between stories, the use of dialogue in rendering narrative action, and the role of the narrator who is both all-knowing and reliable.

Type-scene must not be confused with "genre" in form criticism. In biblical

\[1\text{Ibid., 256-257.}\]
studies, form criticism probably comes nearest to the study of conventions.\(^1\) Form critics set out to find recurrent regular patterns elicited in literary convention, while ignoring manifold variations. Form critics use form criticism to lend credence to the social function and historical evolution of the text. A common criticism of form criticism has been that the study concentrates too much on the typical and, thereby, disregards the individual demonstration of genius in a work. Form critics’ main focus is to determine the “literary type” represented in the biblical text—the generic form—with disproportionate interest in authorial intention. Alter warns that we must be careful “not to relegate every perceived recurrence in the text to the limbo of duplicated sources or fixed folkloric archetypes, but that we may begin to see . . . pronounced patterns . . . at certain narrative junctures” that conform well with the literary convention.\(^2\)

Scholars of type-scene studies set out to find episodic situations composed of a typical set of elements which serve to produce a meaningful pattern and which allow for variation. Scholars of type-scene studies use the study of type-scene to demonstrate the

\(^1\)Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 47.

\(^2\)Ibid., 62. Culley and others who study oral narration attribute all apparent duplication in the narratives to a duplication of sources, to a kind of recurrent stammer in the process of transmission, whether oral or written. To illustrate, Culley uses examples of oral storytelling in Africa and the West Indies. As in the Bible, Culley argues, as a tale is told over and over, changes occur in it, and even the identities of its personages shift. See Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative*, 66-68. A closer look at Culley’s schematic tables reveals more than a “random theory” of varying episodes, but unequivocally proves the point he denies, that the Bible narrators employed a deliberate literary convention. Therefore, Alter is right to conclude that repetition in biblical narrative is not a mere rerun of stories, settings, and events. Narratorial convention belies each biblical narrative. See Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 50.
literary authenticity of the biblical narrative in its employment of particular conventional episodes.

Finally, type-scene must not be confused with the term "typology" or its study. Typology is a study that deals with types: the type exists in the past and the anti-type in the present, or the type exists in the present and the anti-type in the future. It supports the theory that there is a meaning or a point to historical figures and events. Persons or events reach their fulfilment in anti-typical persons and events. Typology in theological circles is viewed from two positions: It may refer to the treatment of Old Testament figures and events as divinely preordained and predictive prefigurations of New Testament figures and events or it may be understood in terms of historical correspondences retrospectively recognized within the consistent redemptive activity of God. Later persons and events correspond to earlier persons and events and vice-versa.

Components of Type-Scene

The main components of the type-scene are key words, characters, motifs, and themes. However, the study of type-scene requires an interaction with other constants of narrative. Plot facilitates the workings of type-scenes. As an element in "story," plot operates as a source from which the actual elements of type-scene perform their roles. Point of view as an element in discourse is valuable for seeing how the authors/narrators

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reach the mind of their audiences through the type-scene convention. Plot and point of view stand in conjoint relationship with key words, characters, motifs, and theme in narrative, providing the context for a type-scene construction, from which the characteristics of repetition and variation are actualized. These basic components and characteristics will provide the outline for the following subsections.

Plot

Type-scenes found in narrative are evidence that they help to develop plot. Alter demonstrates that the betrothal type-scene is a good example of how the type-scene serves to promote plot in narrative.\(^1\) He further notes that the individual application of the type-scene in the development of plot becomes interesting when a sudden tilt of innovation and refashioning of the type-scene is done, resulting in the creation of imagination.\(^2\) Type-scenes in plot may be enacted in two major ways. First, a single type-scene may emanate its own definite plot bringing meaning to an individual pericope. Second, an individual type-scene may be seen as a causative agent in the ongoing plot of a larger narrative. In this instance, the type-scene lends meaning to the plot of the bigger narrative in context.

Every student of literature claims to understand the term "plot," yet the responses differ considerably. A consensus may be unreachable. Aristotle defines plot as "the

\(^1\)Referring to the betrothal type-scene, Alter notes "the plot dramatically enacts the coming together of mutually unknown parties in the marriage." Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 52.

\(^2\)Ibid.
arrangement of incidents."¹ Scholes and Kellogg see it as "the dynamic, sequential element in narrative literature."² Janette Oke places the emphasis on the characters in the narrative and describes plot as "the interconnected series of actions through which the characters move by the will of the writer."³ E. M. Forster views it as "a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality."⁴ "A set of rules that determines and sequences events to cause a determinate affective response," is how Kieran Egan explains plot.⁵ Bar-Efrat regards it as "an organized and orderly system of events, arranged in temporal sequence."⁶ Brichto is comprehensive: "A series of events (or two series of events and their convergence) in time and place [organized] in a way that suggests other meaningful relationships (such as causality) between the events and the characters who figure in them."⁷ For Abrams, the plot in a narrative is "the structure of its actions, as these are

¹Aristotle Poetics, Introduction, Commentary and Appendixes by D. W. Lucas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1450b. Aristotle renders this definition against the backdrop of the tragic drama, in which plot, or what he calls praxis and sometimes mythos, is "the soul of any literary work that was an imitation of an action." Ibid.

²Scholes and Kellogg, 207. In reaction to Aristotle, they believe that "plot is not the soul of narrative, but the quality of mind as expressed in the language of characterization, motivation, description, and commentary." Ibid., 239.

³Janette Oke, Reflections on the Christmas Story (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1994), 12.

⁴E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Penguin, 1962), 87. Though the time-sequence is preserved, the sense of causality overshadows it.


⁶Bar-Efrat, 93.

⁷Brichto, Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics, 8.
ordered and rendered toward achieving particular emotional and artistic effects."\(^1\)

From the foregoing definitions one can gather that the constants of plot include elements such as incidents, events, actions, and characters. The terms incidents, events, and actions are used interchangeably to convey the same or approximate meaning.\(^2\) Plot is "the indispensable skeleton which, fleshed out with character and incident, provides the necessary clay into which life may be breathed."\(^3\) Some common characteristics of plot are sequence, causality, unity, and artistic and affective qualities.

A major characteristic of plot is commonly called "sequence of action." Culley, 137. A reader is said to have reached a state of equilibrium, a tranquility of soul, where all passions have been spent, when a narrative has a good plot.

\(^1\) Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 137. A reader is said to have reached a state of equilibrium, a tranquility of soul, where all passions have been spent, when a narrative has a good plot.

\(^2\) For example, Bar-Efrat indicates that the incidents are like building blocks or individual units in the plot. The smallest narrative unit contains one incident. Several small units create larger units called scenes and acts. An action occurs when the character is the subject of the incident and an event occurs when the character is the object of an incident. See Bar-Efrat, 93. Chatman supposes that "events are either actions (acts) or happenings. Both are changes of state. An action is a change of state brought about by an agent or one that affects a patient. If the action is plot-significant, the agent or patient is called a character." Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 44. Evidently, action as performed by a character coincides with Bar-Efrat's action. Tomashevsky and other Russian Formalist writers hold that "event" is synonymous with "motif." See Boris Tomashevsky, "Thematique," in *Théorie de la littérature*, ed. Tsvetan Todorov (Paris: Seuil, 1966), 269. The distinction between the concepts of "state" and "events," and between "happening events" and "action events" may be seen in Zelda Boyd and Julian Boyd, "To Lose the Name of Action: The Semantics of Action and Motion in Tennyson's Poetry," *A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory* 2 (1977): 21-32. They also differentiate "acts" from "actions." The former is punctiliar action; the second is durative. It is not feasible in this study to elaborate on the different usages, approximations, and overlappings of these terms.

\(^3\) Scholes and Kellogg, 239. "Incident" in this context is understood in a general way to also mean event or action.
in his attempt to label the movement of action in narrative, uses the term "action sequence." This refers to "a movement within a story which goes from the arousal of an expectation to the fulfilment of that expectation." Culley proposes two stages in the sequence of action—the initial stage characterized by tension and the final stage distinguished by resolution. He goes on to identify and illustrate nine examples of "action sequence" under six headings, and suggests three combinations or variations of "action sequences."

Wendland advances the classic syntagmatic or sequential development in the story plot of dramatic narrative under seven headings: setting, trigger, conflict, comment, 

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1Culley, Themes and Variation, 50.

2Ibid., 49. Others acknowledge this characteristic of plot. Scholes and Kellogg point out: “All plots depend on tension and resolution. In narrative the most common plots are the biographical (birth to death) and the romantic (desire to consummation), because these are the most obvious correlative for the tension and resolution which plot demands.” Scholes and Kellogg, 212. Oke notes: “Usually the plot involves a problem and takes the characters through the conflict toward an agreeable solution. Each part of the action moves the story one step forward toward the climax or turning point.” Oke, 12.

3The sequences are as follows: Punishment: wrong/punished, injury/avenged; Rescue: difficulty/rescued, difficulty/escaped; Achievement: desire/achieved, task/accomplished; Reward: good deed/rewarded; Announcement: announcement/happened; Prohibition: prohibition/transgressed. See Culley, Themes and Variation, 50-76.

4(a) Embedding: when one phase of a sequence is itself a sequence, as in the case of Lot’s wife (Gen 19:17-26); (b) Adding: when one sequence is followed by another, so that a story in which a sequence has come to an end may continue by moving into another sequence, as in the story of the serpents in the wilderness (Num 21:4-9); (c) Concurrence: when sequences run side-by-side in a story, as in the story of Elijah and the sick boy (1 Kgs 17:17-24. See ibid., 78-79.
confrontation, climax, and resolution. He also lists a number of literary markers that distinguish the sequence of plot segments. Wendland has also perceptively observed that a narrative may have the linear structure of an unfolding plot and at the same time manifest a concentric pattern of organization. The two structures—linear and concentric—usually stand in relationship to each other. For instance, the narrative content may stand in relation to the theological theme in the narrative.

Another characteristic of “sequence of action” is the principle of “cause and effect.” Since Aristotle, there has been a strong consensus among literary analysts on the notion that events in narrative are intrinsically correlative, enchaining, and entailing. The sequence in plot—events, they argue, is not merely linear, but causative. This causation may be overt or covert. In classical narratives, this chain formation is commonly seen. Each event is linked to each other through a relationship of cause and effect. The first event in the plot has a cause-effect framework. That first effect in turn causes another effect, then that effect causes a third effect, and so on, until the final effect is caused.

1Wendland applied these components of plot in dramatic narrative to the incident where Jesus is an invited guest in Simon’s, the Pharisee, house in Luke 7:36-50. See Wendland, 106.

2Ibid., 107.

Chatman points out: “Narrative events have not only a logic of connection, but a logic of hierarchy. Some are more important than others. In the classical narrative, only major events are part of the chain or armature of contingency. Minor events have a different structure.”¹ Barthes describes a major event as a noyau that advances the plot by raising and satisfying questions.² Chatman translates noyau as kernel, which is a narrative moment that gives rise to cruxes in the direction taken by events. It is a node or hinge in the structure, a branching point which forces movement into one of two (or more) possible paths.³ In classical narratives proper interpretation of events at any given point is a function of the ability to follow these ongoing selections, to see later kernels as consequences of earlier ones.⁴

Chatman labels the minor plot event as satellite. It is derived from the French structuralist term, catalyse.⁵ The minor plot can be deleted without disturbing the logic of the plot, although its omission will, of course, impoverish the narrative aesthetically. Satellites entail no choice, but are the workings-out of the choices made at the kernel. They necessarily imply the existence of the kernel. Their function is to fill in, elaborate

¹Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 53.
²Barthes, 16.
³Chatman renders some examples: Huck Finn can stay home or go down the river; Achilles can give up his girl or refuse. The three respondents can either accept the invitation or reject it. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 53.
⁴Ibid.
⁵Ibid., 54.
on, and complete the kernel; they form the flesh on the skeleton.¹

So far plot has been seen in terms of its story line. Genette points out that a distinction must be made between the order of events in the story plot and the order of events in the discourse.² Genette demarcates the normal sequence of events in narrative, where the story and discourse share the same order (1, 2, 3, 4), from the non-sequential order, which he calls “anachrony.” An anachrony can be classified under two labels: flashback (analepse), where the discourse breaks the story flow to recall earlier events (2, 1, 3, 4), and the flash forward (prolepsé), where the discourse leaps ahead, to events subsequent to immediate events (1, 3, 2, 4).³

An interesting feature in plot is the element of "suspense and surprise." A distinction is normally made between suspense and surprise. Suspense has been defined as:

uncertainty, often characterized by anxiety. Suspense is usually a curious mixture of pain and pleasure. . . . Most great art relies more heavily on suspense than on surprise. One can rarely reread works depending on surprise; the surprise gone, the interest is gone. Suspense is achieved in part by foreshadowing—hints of what is to come. . . . Suspense is . . . related to tragic irony. The tragic character moves closer and closer to his doom, and though he may be surprised by it, we are not; we are held by suspense. If, in fact, he is suddenly and unexpectedly saved (as is a hero of a

¹Ibid. Chatman presents a convenient diagram to illustrate the relations of kernels and satellites.

²Genette observes that while the discourse may have its events organized in any order, the story-sequence must remain recognizable. The plot fails in unity if this is not observed. See Genette, Narrative Discourse, 35.

³See Genette, Narrative Discourse, 33-85, for examples on how anachronies work in narratives. They are utilized to great advantage in movies.
melodrama), we feel cheated.\textsuperscript{1}

Chatman explains the unique workings of suspense and surprise in plot:

Suspense and surprise are complementary, not contradictory terms. The two can work together in narratives in complex ways: a chain of events may start out as a surprise, work into a pattern of suspense, and then end with a 'twist,' that is, the frustration of the expected result—another surprise.\textsuperscript{2}

The analysis of plot may be done in two ways: a macro-structural analysis and a micro-structural analysis. A macro-structural approach treats the general designs of plot. It implies a plot-typology, in which plots group together according to structural similarities.\textsuperscript{3} The micro-structure of plot focuses on the formal nature of the molecular units, the principles of their organization, including negative possibilities (antistories), and their manifestations in actual media. In summary, micro-structure deals with how individual pieces fit together.\textsuperscript{4}

Aristotle based his macro-structural plot analysis upon the vicissitudes of the protagonist. He distinguished between the fatal or tragic plot and the fortunate or comic

\textsuperscript{1}Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, and William Burto, \textit{A Dictionary of Literary Terms} (London: Constable, 1969), 83-84.

\textsuperscript{2}Chatman, \textit{Story and Discourse}, 60.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 84. Chatman argues that due to macro-structural theorists' emphasis on the content analysis rather than expression for plot criteria, macro-structural schemes are highly speculative. The basis for his argument is that plot in macro-structures and typologies depends upon an understanding of cultural codes, interplay with literary, artistic, and ordinary life codes not readily available to the modern reader. Chatman, as other narrative structuralists, is inclined to glorify and make indispensable the semiotic aspect of the text. This is overstating the issue, for there are antecedents in antiquity of plot structure based on "content" that markedly demonstrate definite, conventional plots.

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid.
plot. These plot lines, as Aristotle understood them, provided possibilities for three distinct character roles which the protagonist could manifest: the unqualified good, the unqualified evil, and the noble (somewhere in-between).¹

Within the range of three characterizations, Aristotle developed six types of macro-structural plots. The first three fall under the category of the fatal: (1) An unqualifiedly good hero fails: this is shockingly incomprehensible, since it violates probability; (2) a villainous protagonist fails; about his downfall we feel smug satisfaction, since justice has been served; (3) a noble hero fails through miscalculation, which arouses our pity and fear. The last three fall under the category of the fortunate: (1) a villainous protagonist succeeds; but this causes us to feel disgust, because it violates our sense of probability; (2) an unqualifiedly good hero succeeds, causing us to feel moral satisfaction; (3) a noble hero (like Orestes) miscalculates, but only temporarily, and his ultimate vindication is satisfying.²

Some modern plot analysts are also worth noting.³ In his book, Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye offers two main approaches. The first is a character-oriented approach based on the notion of "mode." The basic tenet of this type of plot is determined by the conventional action exercised by the main characters in the narrative, which tend to succeed one another in a historical sequence. His second approach

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¹ Aristotle Poetics, 124, 127.


³ Aside from these, additional modern approaches may be found in Chatman, Story and Discourse, 88.
revolves around the theory of mythos. He suggests four *mythoi*: comedy, romance, tragedy, and iron satire. Each is divided into six phases, totaling twenty-four categories.

Ronald Crane proposes three categories of plot: plots of action, plots of character, and plots of thought. The first involves a change in the protagonist's situation; the second, a change in the protagonist's moral character, and the third, a change in the protagonist's thoughts and feelings.¹ Norman Friedman has arrived at fourteen categories of plots. He advances admiration plots, maturing plots, education plots, action plots, pathetic plots, tragic plots, sentimental plots, punitive plots, reform plots, testing plots, degeneration plots, revelation plots, affective plots, and disillusionment plots.²

Kort delineates three kinds of temporal plot patterns, which he says “constitute the heritage of the culture's narrative tradition.” He describes them with musical terminology: (1) rhythmic or cyclical: “emphasize return, favor the past and are most easily expanded by natural metaphors,” (2) polyphonic: “patterned by the interaction of contemporary figures and forces,” and (3) melodic: “The actualization of a particular person's or group's potential.” While the first two elaborate on social and political metaphors, the third focuses on the future and is most favorably identified with psychological implications. While all three patterns may be present in a given narrative, one of them is usually dominant and more inclusive, and therefore carries more significance than the others.


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other two.¹

Three micro-structural models that have been applied to plot in biblical texts are the symmetric, the syntactic, and semantic structures. Bishop Lowth, in the mid-eighteenth century, observed certain patterns of symmetry in the arrangement of words in the Hebrew Bible.² It is now widely accepted that ancient literature, including the Bible, used symmetric organization in plot structure, sometimes in a rather baroque fashion. A tool used today in discovering and studying symmetric structure is the linguistic density plot.³

The concept of the syntactic structure was developed by the Summer Institute of Linguistics.⁴ Syntactic structure involves the study of how clauses (minimal paragraphs)...

¹Kort, 16.


³In this study the number of occurrences of linguistic phenomena in a narrative plot is depicted on a graph. This aids in understanding the surface structure of a text. Parunak experiments on the book of Galatians with this approach. See H. Van Dyke Parunak, "Dimensions of Discourse Structure: A Multidimensional Analysis of the Components and Transitions of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians," in Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis, ed. David Allan Black, Katharine Barnwell, and Stephen Levinsohn (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 210-212.

join into larger paragraphs, which in turn form still larger paragraphs. This process continues up the hierarchy until the entire text is studied as a single paragraph. Lastly, Parunak describes semantic structure as a type of structure whose interest is in the world of the text, not in the text itself. The text’s world provides the semantics for the text.

Plot, as may be perceived, is important for the development of narrative. Literary critics have hypothesized several theories about plot. The narrative parables of Jesus are good examples of the workings of plot, using some measure of these different orientations and facets. In this research the dynamics of plot that can be applied to the parables is featured, showing how plot helps to facilitate the workings of the banquet type-scene in the parables of Jesus.

Character and Characterization

A range of meanings in an unabridged dictionary reflects the elasticity of the term “character.” In the Greek, the word χαρακτήρ has the dominant meaning of “mark,” or “disposition” (as a result of habit). Aristotle used the word ἴθος to describe character in

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1Parunak, 212-213. Beekman and Callow use this terminology to describe a different type of structure—the one Parunak calls syntactic structure. Semantic structuring has its foundation in structuralism.

2Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary (1996), s.v. "character." There are no less than 23 meanings for the word "character."

narrative.\textsuperscript{1} When used in the study of literature, Brichto says "character" can stand for "a trait or an aggregate of traits, an individual distinguished for such trait or traits, or (in its most neutral sense) a person represented in a drama or story, that is, a member of the cast, one of the dramatis personae."\textsuperscript{2} These designations of character orient contemporary approaches to the study of character and characterization in narrative.

Characterization is an important component developed in the type-scene. Different types of characters portrayed in the type-scene help to advance the plot. Alter demonstrates how characterization is produced in type-scenes with characters such as Laban, Jacob and Rachel, and David.\textsuperscript{3} Characterization is also revealed in Damrosch's type-scene study with the feature of three main characters: Samuel, Saul, and David.\textsuperscript{4} Characterization is sometimes produced in subtle ways. For instance, Damrosch exaggerates the dissimilarity of the characters of David and the Amalekite who brought the fatal news of Saul's death to show David's character in a positive light.\textsuperscript{5}

Characters are seen "primarily as autonomous beings with traits and even personalities, or as plot functionaries with certain commissions or tasks to be fulfilled."\textsuperscript{6}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Aristotle \textit{The Art of Rhetoric}, 143.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Brichto, \textit{Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics}, 7.
\item \textsuperscript{3}See Alter, \textit{The Art of Biblical Narrative}, 53, 55-56, 61.
\item \textsuperscript{4}Damrosch, 250-260.
\item \textsuperscript{5}Ibid., 255.
\end{itemize}
The first perspective is supported by Chatman,¹ and the latter has been promoted by the Russian formalists and some structuralists.² While Chatman's perspective may sound attractive, it hinders the study of parables and of the Gospels as a whole. Most of the characters in the Gospels are mentioned briefly and they can hardly be described as "autonomous beings." Frequently, in any single narratorial unit, one or two, or at most...

¹Chatman advocates an open theory of character: "A viable theory of character should preserve openness and treat characters as autonomous beings, not as mere plot functions. It should argue that character is reconstructed by the audience from evidence announced or implicit in an original construction and communicated by the discourse, through whatever medium." Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 119. He argues for "a conception of character as a paradigm of traits; ‘trait’ in the sense of ‘relatively stable or abiding personal quality,’ recognizing that it may either unfold, that is, emerge earlier or later in the course of the story, or that it may disappear and replaced by another." Ibid., 126.

²Like Aristotle, the Russian formalists and some structuralists support the notion that characters are products or derivatives of plots. Characters are only secondary in narrative and serve as mere functionaries or participants and are not real beings. Characters are not considered as characters in themselves, that is, as villains, ingénues, *ficelles*, choral characters, *munitii*, and others, but as components which contribute to the parts of the plot and more broader to the whole narrative. Scholes and Kellogg, 204. The important dimension of characters in narrative is not who they are, but what they do. See Propp, *Morphology of Folktale*, 20; and Tomashevsky, 293. Cf. Todorov and Barthes, who advocate a more open, character-oriented, psychological and afunctional view of character. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 66; Barthes, 256-259. Tomashevsky’s extreme view that "the hero (as a character) is scarcely necessary to the story," and that as a system of motifs, the story can "entirely dispense with the hero and his characteristic traits," has come under severe criticism. See Tomashevsky, 293. Cf. Barthes, 16. Barthes characterizes the quest for traits of character as conjectural. In this pursuit he reckons that one often invents "synonymic complex[es] whose common nucleus," leads away from possibilities as discoursed in the narrative, "toward other related signifieds." Consequently, the reader is tempted into a "metonymic skid," where "each synonym [adds] to its neighbor some new trait, some new departure." Ibid., 92. However, Tomashevsky acknowledges that the audience or reader must interact with the interests and dislikes of characters in narrative, since narrative works through the emotions and moral senses. Tomashevsky, 293.
three, operate as the main characters, who may properly be designated "autonomous beings."¹ The drawback of Chatman's definition is even more recognizable in the narrative parables. Usually, there is one main character (a certain man, a king, etc.) or two (the publican and the pharisee), or at most three (the father and the two sons). All other characters are only what the literary critics call "flat" characters.²

Literary critics commonly identify two categories of characters. The flat character assumes a single quality or trait and does not stand out as an individual.³ Inversely, the round character manifests a number of traits and, as "real people," may surprise us by the things they do and say. They are more complex in temperament and motivation.⁴

¹Most of the narratives in the Gospels suggest that Jesus is the central figure, the "autonomous being," as it were.

²Scholes and Kellogg contend that characters in primitive stories (including biblical narratives) are invariably "flat," "static," and quite "opaque." They posit that "the very recurring epithets of formulaic narrative are signs of flatness in characterization." Scholes and Kellogg, 164, 166. Berlin accuses Scholes and Kellogg of being inaccurate in their description of primitive Hellenic and Hebraic literature; see Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, 23.

³"Flat" characters may also be called minor participants by structuralists. Minor participants are defined by their sudden appearance and disappearance in a story without any formal introduction. They are referred to in full each time they enter or depart from the story. Stephen H. Levinsohn, "Participant Reference in Koine Greek Narrative," in Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis, ed. David Allan Black, Katharine Barnwell, and Stephen Levinsohn (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 32.

⁴See Forster, 73, 81; however, Forster treated the matter of characterization as a matter of trivial significance. Cf. Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative, 23; Sternberg, Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction, 138. "Round" characters may also be labeled as major participants. Major participants are introduced formally in some way and typically are involved in a series of events. Levinsohn, 32.
Chatman offers three criteria for distinguishing minor characters or participants in narrative,¹ and Levinsohn submits three typical ways in which major participants of Koine Greek narrative are introduced.² Fowler demonstrates how “semantic features” (semic) operate in deciphering particular characters.³

Abrams delineates a third category, which he describes as a mere functionary and not characterized at all.⁴ Berlin renames the three categories of characters. The round character is described as “full-fledged,” the flat is called the “type,” and the functionary is

¹Chatman’s criteria also apply to "walk-ons" or "extras" in cinematography. (1) Biology: Chatman insists it makes no sense to treat ‘walk-ins’ as characters; (2) Identity or Nomination: the mysterious property of having a name. If the name is surrounded by several traits. Chatman thinks this is debatable, for the fact that critical boundaries are hard to define; (3) Importance to the Plot: Chatman believes this criterion seems most plausible. See Chatman, Story and Discourse, 139-140.

²Major participants may be presented in (1) a non-active way in a clause with a non-event verb like εἴμω (it is common for this type of introduction to be followed by the participant’s involvement in the event described in the next clause (e.g., Luke 15:11-12a); and/or (2) with τίς attributive to a noun phrase (e.g., Luke 15:11; Acts 9:10a. (Minor participants may be used with τίς, but in this case it is not attributive to a noun phrase, as in Acts 5:25); and (3) in an active way to an existing scene in connection with ἵδε. In this instance the participant may be introduced into the event line of an episode (e.g., Matt 2:1). Supernatural personages may appear as minor participants or as major participants. They usually appear on the scene and act, then disappear, leaving the human interactions to continue as in Acts 5:19. Levinsohn, 32-34.


⁴Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 21.
labeled the "agent."1 The three categories of character may be found in biblical narratives, and it is quite normal to have a person appearing as a round character in one story, and then taking on the role of a flat or agent character in another.2

In addition to this general classification of characters in narrative, scholars have come up with more descriptive categories that interact more intimately with the plot of narrative. In *Morphology of Folktale*, Propp identifies seven basic types of characters: villain, donor/provider, hero (seeker of victim), dispatcher, helper, princess (+ father), false hero. An actual character may fill more than one character role, and by the same token several actual characters may fill one role.3 Greimas identifies six roles (characters) underlying all narratives. He describes these roles as "actants" which comprise three pairs: giver/receiver; subject/object; helper/opponent.4

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1Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 23. One of Berlin’s major focuses in biblical narrative is character. She identifies the types of character that can be seen in David’s wives and examines the major techniques which produce characterization. Ibid., 23-42.

2Classic examples of how these three categories function can be seen in the stories about David. Berlin does an excellent analysis of characters like Michal, Bathsheba, Abishag, Abigail, and of course, David. Ibid., 24-33.


4These roles are diagrammatically portrayed below:

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sender (superhelper)  -- object  -- receiver
    ↑
  ↑
helper  -- subject  -- opponent
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A typical fairytale may go something like this: A subject (hero) of low estate is madly in love with a charming, young princess (object), and seeks her hand in marriage. In his grave plight, he is helped by a trusted friend or relative (helper), but this assistance is of limited value in view of the intense struggles he undergoes because of his wicked opponents (a wicked relative, or some ignoble suitor). But this crisis is only short lived,
In his insightful study on parables, Blomberg discovered that the interpretation of the parables depends mainly on the understanding of “what a small handful of characters, actions, or symbols stand for and fitting the rest of the story in with them.” From this submission, we can deduce that, as far as Blomberg is concerned, the major thematic elements in the Gospel parable are to be found in the principal characters.

Character types are portrayed with the use of diverse techniques. From the information provided in the discourse, the reader formulates an image of a character in a narrative. The reader makes inferences from the actions and statements of the character, and makes conclusions predicated upon statements and judgments made by the narrator and other characters in the narrative. Some leading techniques used by Bible writers to portray characters are description, inner life, speech and actions, and contrast.

Characterization in biblical narrative is normally achieved by a skillful combination of

because the king, or God, or some person with magical powers (super-helper) steps in and saves the day for him. See Greimas, 172-191. This six-role idea fits well the dramatis personae in an advertisement for most modern advertisements.

1Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 55.

2Blomberg notes three basic classifications of parables: the one-point parable, the two-point parable, and the three-point parable (also called the “monarchic parable”), which is the most prevalent. Normally, the tripartite category features a central authority figure, for example, a king, father, or judge, who must act in relation to a pair of subordinates. These two typically manifest contrasting attributes and behavior, either positive or negative with respect to the norm or message of the story. Of course, a parable may assume a more complex structure where there are more than three characters, yet Blomberg argues that the triadic structure is almost always fixed. In these instances, the subordinates of one category (good or bad) may number more than one but each subordinate in that category exercises similar traits (e.g., the levite and the Pharisee in the parable of the Good Samaritan). The parable of the Wicked Tenants is one of the few which flouts the triadic mode. Apparently, it has four points. For examples of the simple three-point parables, and the complex three-point parables, see Ibid., 171-288.
several or all of these techniques.¹

It is typical of Bible writers to describe characters in terms of status (king, servant, widow, etc.), profession (sower, husbandman, shepherd, etc.), gentilic designation (Syro-phoenician, Canaanite, Tarsan, etc.), or distinctive physical features (lame, small, beautiful, etc.). However, physical features of human beings are not usually described in detail. It appears as if the Bible makes little attempt to describe them in concrete, corporeal terms.²

The inner life of a Bible character is frequently revealed by describing the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of that character.³ Whereas the inner life and

¹See Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 41-42; Bar-Efrat, 109-110. A good example, where all the techniques are utilized, is Job 1:1-8.

²It is often said that the Bible seldom presents a detailed description of characters. Berlin suggests two major reasons for this paucity: “The ratio of description in general to action and dialogue is relatively low, and character tends to be subordinate to plot.” Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 34. When a description of a character is rendered in a narrative, it is presented in a way that facilitates the plot. The mention of Zaccheus as being small and short is not merely descriptive, but lends a certain drama to the plot of the narrative. His shortness is presented vis-à-vis the big crowd, and his climbing up a tree exaggerates Zaccheus’s strong desire to see Jesus. Even the kind of tree, the sycamore, is not without significance for the plot (Luke 19:4). It is not without a sound reason that the woman who anointed Jesus had hair long enough to dry her tears that fell upon his feet (Luke 7:38). And Jesus’ movements down the mountain, into the plain, by the seaside, then in the sea, and finally to the other side (Mark 3:13-4:41) are no mere happenstance. An exception might be in the Songs of Solomon, yet the descriptive imagery portrayed is basically for poetic effect and may not be physically accurate. Ibid.

description of characters in biblical narrative are done by the narrator, and sometimes by
the words of other characters in the story, the speech and/or action of the character says
more in terms of advancing the plot, or creating characterization.\(^1\) In the case of the
parables, characterization normally is portrayed through the use of showing rather than
telling. The Bible as a whole takes full advantage of this technique.\(^2\)

Another technique which characterization applies in biblical narratives can be
seen in a writer’s formulation of contrasts. Contrasts may be either implicit and subtle or
deliberate and sharp. Berlin identifies three types of contrasts: contrast with another
character (as with Nabal and Abigail, Esau and Jacob, and David and Uriah); contrast
with an earlier action of the same character (the constantly shifting nature of Judah and
Saul); and contrast with the expected norm (David kills twice as many as Saul, and
Tamar’s actions are in contrast to Judah’s).

Characterization in biblical narrative is still an ongoing study, and the different
categories used by different authors are by no means exhaustive. Its dominance in the

\(^1\)Chatman distinguishes several actions (including speeches) a character or
existent may perform: nonverbal acts, for instance, “Krystan kicked the ball”; speeches,
for example, “Krystan said, ‘I am hungry’,” or “Krystan said that he was hungry”;
thoughts or mental verbal articulations, like, “Krystal thought, ‘My time is up’” or
“Krystal thought that her time was up”; and feelings, perceptions, and sensations (these
are not articulated in words) – “Kryslene felt happy,” or “Dolly perceived Faz would give
her a surprise.” Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 45.

\(^2\)More often, action and words combine to give a vivid portrait (e.g., Gen 25:29-
34), but at times, there are actions without words (e.g., Gen 22:3). “The ‘characters’
perspective’ differs from all the others—God’s, the narrator’s, the reader’s—in its
multiplicity. Each character observes the world from his own perspective. And it is their
divergence—in interest, interpretation, world view, scenario, hope and fear—that keeps the
action going, just as their convergence makes for its resolution.” Sternberg, *The Poetics
of Biblical Narrative*, 172.
study of modern as well as ancient literature makes it perhaps the most familiar element to the contemporary reader, for “character contributes images of human life to a narrative.”¹ In the study of type-scenes, characterization must be regarded, for, basically, a type-scene is “more or less the same story often told two or three or more times about different characters, or sometimes even about the same character in different sets of circumstances.”²

Setting

Setting may be described as the space in which characters exist and from which they operate. From this deep, abstract, narrative level the character is portrayed. The setting “is the place and collection of objects ‘against which’ the characters’ actions and passions appropriately emerge.”³ It is “the background of the story; the place where the action occurs.”⁴ Though less necessary in narrative than plot or character, the placing of a story in a suitable setting fosters psychological readability. Setting helps the reader to have a sense of bearing, to know the spatiotemporal circumstances—where and when a thing happened. Readers want to follow a story in a systematic sequence of events involving change; they anticipate that those changes affect or involve characters with

¹Kort, 16.
²Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 49.
³Chatman, Story and Discourse, 138-139.
⁴Oke, 36.
whom they can identify and sympathize. This is what setting does for healthy readers. It serves to heighten a mood, accentuate a character, or forward an action.

Alter demonstrates how setting plays a vital role in the establishment of the type-scene. The setting of an encounter at a well with a future bridegroom and an eligible girl for marriage is indispensable for the development of the betrothal type-scene. The setting, in this instance, has rich symbolism and is significant for the interpretation of the type-scene. A study of setting is very important for a true appreciation of the type-scenes in the parables of Jesus.

The relations that exist between setting on the one hand, and plot and character on the other, can be revealing. Sometimes setting acts as a causal or effectual agent of behavior or action in a given scenario: it influences characterization. At other times, its function is analogical. By analogical, I mean setting may act by way of reinforcement and symbolic congruence of the character portrayed. In simple terms, setting can be portrayed as a character or characters in certain respects.

*Leitwörter*, Motifs, and Theme

Through the play, interplay, and counterplay of *Leitwörter* or “catchwords,” an author/narrator can convey a predetermined theme to a text. Catchwords are usually used

1The reader must be careful not to overlook the descriptive detail or the absence of it in biblical narratives. It is for a significant purpose that at a certain juncture a narrative bears ornamental description, while in another scenario it is devoid of it where it is most expected. For example: Why is the peak in Moriah a two-days’ journey from Beersheba (north or south?). Or why does God make his appearance in the garden of Eden “at the breezy time of day?”

in the repetitive mode. The semantic range of a word is usually explored with nuances deriving from its roots, synonyms, and antonyms. At times the use may even diverge into phonetic relatives.\(^1\) A type-scene is not bound to any specific *Leitwörter*, though occasionally a recurrent term or phrase may help mark the presence of a particular type-scene, e.g., the annunciation of the birth of a hero, the betrothal at a well, and the trial in the wilderness.\(^2\) In Hebrew poetry, a poet had at his disposal a stock of word-pairs from which he could draw.\(^3\) Those who composed poetry had access to a store of poetic lines and half lines.\(^4\) These techniques might be used to create *Leitwörter* in type-scenes to produce repetition and variation.

The word “theme” is used in diverse ways, which may be quite contradictory. Scholes and Kellogg use theme synonymously with the technical term from Greek rhetoric called *topos*. This term refers to a traditional image in an oral or written narrative. It cannot be distinguished by formulas or syntactical arrangement of words used by a poet to forge his construct, but rather “on the basis of the image to which the

\(^1\)Ibid., 95.

\(^2\)Ibid., 96.

\(^3\)E.g., death/Sheol in Ps 6:5. Notable examples of word play in Hebrew poetry are puns, hypocoristics, alliteration, onomatopoeia, double entendre, and oxymoron. See Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics*, 39.

\(^4\)Culley has compiled some 175 formulas or formulaic systems from the Psalms. For example, the supplicatory phrase: “incline thine ear to me” (Pss 31:2; 71:2; 102:2). Within the formulaic system there could be variations such as “incline thine ear to my cry” (Ps 88:2); “because he inclined his ear to me” (Ps 116:2); and “incline thy ear, O Lord” (Ps 86:1). See Culley, *Oral Formulaic Language in the Biblical Psalms*, 111-129.
words refer." Whenever *topos* refers to the external world, its meaning is "motif"; when it refers to the world of disembodied ideas and concepts its meaning is "theme." More specifically, the word "theme" usually means the "principal idea (or theology) which governs the literary and rhetorical construction of the book." This idea is "part of the value-system of the narrative—it may be moral, moral-psychological, legal, political, historiosophical, theological—made evident in some recurring pattern." Theme is often associated with one or more *Leitwörter* and a motif.

Theme is "the message—sometimes overt, sometimes subtle—that the writer is attempting to convey to the reader." "The purpose of a story is to present this message as clearly and effectively as possible so the reader will understand it and, perhaps, change

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1Scholes and Kellogg, 27. *Topoi* of ancient oral narratives are easy to identify, because given motifs and theme stand in constant association. However, in written narrative, the conventional *topos* is subject to the poet’s manipulation. This sometimes makes the thematic content of *topos* of ancient narrative difficult to analyze.

2Ibid. These two elements of "topos" can be illustrated by two examples respectively: the hero’s descent into the underworld, which is historically durable; and the search of wisdom or the harrowing of hell, which is more subject to change or replacement over time.


4Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 95. Alter gives some examples: the reversal of primogeniture in Genesis; obedience versus rebellion in the Wilderness stories, knowledge in the Joseph story; exile and promised land, the rejection and election of the monarch in Samuel and Kings.

5Oke, 18.
his or her behavior as a result of it."1 The conventional nature of type-scenes does allow for thematic relevance in the contexts in which they are used. The type-scene offers thematic clues to the direction which is to be taken in the larger progress of the narrative and its implicit values.2

There lies a marked distinction between motif and theme. A motif may be a concrete image, sensory quality, an object or action which recurs through a narrative, while a theme conveys the idea of a value recurrent in the narrative.3 Theme underlies abstraction, while motif is corporeal. Motifs can be associated with *Leitwörter*. They are of little or no significance if they are not interpreted within a defining context. A motif is commonly used as a coherent device in a narrative plot, or simply as a symbolic ingredient.4 Type-scenes occur when motifs and themes in narrative interact through recurring patterns of repetition with variation.

**Narrator**

The narrator is, according to Bar-Efrat, "an a priori category, as it were, constituting the sole means by which we can understand the reality which exists within a

1Ibid. While themes in narrative may be easily detected, the task of identifying and describing them in a systematic manner is a rather tedious and complex endeavor which demands a great deal of analytical acumen.


3Ibid., 95.

4Alter gives some examples: fire in the Samson story, stones and the colors white and red in the Jacob story, water in the Moses cycle, dreams, prisons and pits, and silver in the Joseph story. Ibid.
narrative." It is a term used as a rhetorical device to describe "the voice that tells the story and speaks to the reader," says Culpepper. The reader of a narrative does not have direct access to the characters of a narrative. The narrator's role is to serve as mediator. And so it is only through such phrases as, "And he answered and said" or "And she cried," that the reader can gain an awareness of characterization in narrative.

The narrator's relationship to the narrative is not comparable with the relationship that exists between an artist and their artistry, or composers and their compositions. The narrator is an intrinsic structural component of the narrative. Although a narrator could be conspicuous, for instance, when there is a first-person narrative, there are times when the narrator's position may not be obvious, especially to a careless reader.

In biblical narrative the narrator frequently appears to be omniscient. Narrators are aware of activities that take place in secret and in the most intimate situations. They see covert actions and hear private conversations. They claim insight into the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters. Omniscient narrators exercise all the privileges of knowledge that transcend human limitations. They have open access to the minds of their dramatis personae. They are bold enough to enter into the mind of God ("And he

1 Bar-Efrat, 13.
3 The narrator normally speaks in the third person or first person. Using the third person the narrator steps outside of the story. Sometimes a narrator may do this temporally, spatially, and even ideologically, as in the case of 1 Kgs 12:15.
4 Omnipresence accompanies omniscience. A narrator could take the story in several directions and different geographical locations.
read their hearts,” “The Lord repented,” etc.). They enjoy the free movement in time (present, past, and future) and in space, follow secret conversations, and shuttle between simultaneous happenings (Jesus prays while the disciples are asleep) or between heaven and earth.¹

The narrator of a literary work must not be confused with its author as a real person. The author is not the same “person” or “voice” as the narrator.² It is the author’s prerogative to choose the type of narratorial voice he thinks is best for his story. The character and condition of the narrator may be deciphered only from the internal evidence of the work.³

Apart from the narrator, and different from the real author, is the “implied author.”⁴ Dubbed as the “official scribe,”⁵ the author’s “second self,”⁶ or “the principle that invented the narrator,”⁷ the implied author is implied in the narrative and must be reconstructed by the reader. “Unlike the narrator, the implied author can tell us nothing.

¹Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 84.

²“The author is the creative artist who stands outside the creation for which he is responsible.” Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics*, 9.


⁴This label was coined by Wayne Booth in 1961. See Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 70.

⁵Ibid., 70-71.

⁶Tillotson revived the description. See Tillotson, 23.

He, or better, it has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all means it has chosen to let us learn."¹ Only by study and analysis can one discover the character of the "implied author."²

As the narrator is differentiated from the author (real or implied), so the narratee³ is distinguished from the real or historical audience. The narratee and the real audience may or may not coincide.⁴ Like the narrator, the narratee may materialize as a character. The narratee-character is a device used by the implied author to inform the real reader how to respond as implied reader. The narratee’s situation is similar to the narrator

¹Ibid. The implied author is best appreciated when several works of the same real author are compared. Each literary work carries a different implied author, as can be seen in the books written by the apostle Paul. An implied author may be appreciated in a literary work when it is written by a committee or a group of people over a long period of time, or even guided by a computer. The point is that there is always an implied author for every literary piece.

²Bar-Efrat, 14. The counterpart to the implied author is the "implied reader." The implied reader is not the actual reader, reading the material today, but the audience presupposed in the narrative itself. The implied reader is forever present in any literary work.

³The term "narratee" appears to have been first used by Gerald Prince. See Gerald Prince, "Notes Towards a Categorization of Fictional ‘Narratees’," Genre 4 (1971): 100-105.

⁴Berlin considers the possibility of an implied audience (the audience that the text is addressing) as a counterpart to the implied author, but is dubious whether the narratee differs from the implied audience in the biblical text. She thinks that even the difference between the narrator and implied author thus becomes suspect. Berlin, Poetics and Interpretation in Biblical Narrative, 52, 53.
in that it ranges from a fully "characterized" individual to "no one."¹

To clarify the different facets of the narrative communication, Chatman offers a simple diagram:²

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| Real Author | → | Implied author → (Narrator) → (Nartatee) → Implied reader | → | Real reader |
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In terms of classifying narrators, Bar-Efrat identifies at least ten categories. Bar-Efrat suggests that one determines these narrative modes by examining the viewpoints³ from which the narrator observes the events and through which the relationship between him and the narrative world is expressed. The many possibilities that are most germane to biblical narrative are: (1) narrators who know everything about characters and narrators whose knowledge is limited, (2) narrators who intrude into the story and narrators who are silent, (3) narrators who relate from a remote perspective and narrators who are close to events, (4) narrators who watch things from above and narrators who have a participant's viewpoint, (5) narrators who are neutral or objective and narrators who

¹Chatman, Story and Discourse, 151. In modern fiction the narratee is sometimes addressed as "you" or even "dear reader," though at other times this person may not be made so evident.

²Ibid. Chatman's diagram suggests the immanence of the implied author and implied reader to the narrative, and the parenthetical nature of the narrator and narratee. The real author and the real reader, though indispensable to the whole process of communication, are outside the narrative transaction. Ibid.

³Point of view or viewpoint is discussed at length in the subsection that follows.
adopt a definite attitude.¹

These ten distinctions represent extremes, but a narrator's trait may be anywhere on the continuum of any two extremes and may be found in a variety of combinations. A specific type may not be consistent throughout a narrative. There is no reason why one type of narrator should dominate the narrative. One type may replace another as the real author deems necessary. And if a narrator's mode varies markedly, is still bound to be discoverable.

Various narratorial strategies may be employed by an author for dramatic effect. Two common ones are worth noting. The first is direct discourse. Direct discourse or dialogue is the quintessential mode of drama in any good narrative. "Free direct discourse is the speech of a character that in some way must be understood as being either more or less than what the person portrayed as a character would have said in that particular circumstance in real life."² The narrator's deployment of direct discourse and dialogue in biblical narratives is artful and is never accidental or arbitrary.³

"Interior monologue," notes Brichto, "like spoken dialogue, will similarly be featured when the narrator wants to make a character's motivation more specific, vivid, 

¹Bar-Efrat, 14-15.

²Brichto, Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics, 12. When the Bible reader senses the liberal use of free direct discourse, there will be no doubt of the validity of its use as a purposive literary device (its frequent use comes across as an idiosyncracy of biblical art) or question regarding the authenticity of its transmission.

³Alter dedicates an entire chapter to the significance of direct discourse in dialogue. See Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 63-87.
Sellew demonstrates the use of monologue in six parables of Luke’s Gospel to produce dramatic effect. In Luke’s Gospel this device is used to portray Jesus’ heroic virtues of discernment and illumination. The different roles exercised and various techniques employed by the narrator make it imperative that the narrator be considered when analyzing type-scenes.

Point of View

Point of view is perhaps the most difficult term in critical studies. As with any other theory, a researcher has to encounter the many ambiguities, the vagueness, and the metamorphic changes of terms passed down. The confusion lies in the area of cognition.

1Brichto, Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics, 11. This technique was used long before the time of Jesus, employed in Greek mimetic literature, and more often in epic poetry, tragedy, and Hellenistic novels. See George B. Walsh, "Surprised by Self: Audible Thought in Hellenistic Poetry," Classical Philology 85 (1990): 1-21. There is always a subtle objective by the narrator. Brichto, Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics, 11.

2The Rich Farmer, the Unfaithful Servant, the Prodigal Son, the Crafty Steward, the Unjust Judge, and the Owner of the Vineyard. Sellew is convinced that this device is used in narratives whenever a character in the story is “faced with a moment of decision, usually in a moral crisis.” Phillip Sellew, "Interior Monologue as a Narrative Device in the Parables of Luke," Journal of Biblical Literature 111 (Summer 1992): 239.


4Chatman has delineated three senses in which point of view may be used: (1) The literal: this is the perceptual point of view which is perceived through a person’s eyes; it describes an actual physical situation (e.g., From Krystan’s point of view, on the mango tree, he could see the airport). (2) The figurative: the point of view which reveals a person’s world view, attitude, and concepts; this may be called the conceptual point of view (Krystal said that from her point of view Trinidad is the best place on earth). (3)
and interest.\textsuperscript{1} As interest has developed, so has its complexity and fluidity. Different
types of points of view and different systems have developed to distinguish them.

Broadly speaking, the term is used in literary criticism "to designate the position or
perspective from which a story is told."\textsuperscript{2} Point of view, sometimes described as "voice,"
answers the fundamental question, Whose voice am I to understand is speaking to me in a
given line or lines? Or to put it more precisely, Who is talking to me?\textsuperscript{3}

Some literary critics see point of view as a modern concept connected with the
study of modern fiction.\textsuperscript{4} Point of view, as a mode of conveying perspective in modern

The transferred: this view is neither actual nor figurative. It describes a person's interest-
advantage or non-interest-disadvantage; it is the perspective of someone's benefit or loss,
well-being, or misfortune (To return to her beloved country was indeed a blessing from
Dolly's point of view). For the application of these three senses in biblical narrative, see

In the perceptual and conceptual points of view, the action is seen from the
person's perspective. The person is the subject of the action. In the interest point of view
the person's action is seen by another's perspective. The person is the object being seen.
Chatman, \textit{Story and Discourse}, 151-152.

\textsuperscript{1}Kristin Morrison, "James's and Lubbock's Differing Points of View,"

\textsuperscript{2}Berlin, \textit{Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative}, 46. Cf. Norman
Friedman, "Point of View in Fiction," 1160-1184; Fowler, \textit{A Dictionary of Modern
Critical Terms}, 149; S. Lanser, \textit{The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction};
Holman and Harmon, 366-367; Abrams, \textit{A Glossary of Literary Terms}, 142-145.

\textsuperscript{3}Brichto, \textit{Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics}, 9.

\textsuperscript{4}Uspensky and Renoir defer, demonstrating that the origination of point of view is
not found in the realistic social and psychological novel, but is perspicuously evident in
relatively ancient texts. For a discussion of point of view in Russian literature and
Beowulf, respectively, see Boris Uspensky, \textit{A Poetic of Composition} (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1973), 171; and A. Renoir, "Point of View and Design for
prose fiction, is also frequently found in the Bible.¹ In biblical narrative it operates in an oblique and unobtrusive way, yet plays a decisive role, as opposed to the more direct approach seen in the Prophetic and Wisdom literature of the Bible.² Bar-Efrat outlines the importance of the study of point of view in biblical narrative.³ He notes that: (1) it accords unity which involves diffuseness and variety as regards characters, events, places, time. Aristotle called it "the fourth unity"; (2) it dictates what will be narrated and how;⁴ (3) it enhances the interest or suspense of the narrative; and (4) it influences the reader, causing the assimilation of the narrative's own values and attitudes.

In a typical narrative there are three primary points of views: those of the narrator, the characters (from each character, a different point of view), and the audience. More sophisticated narrative espouses a fourth point of view, that of the author, clearly


²Bar-Efrat, 16.

³Ibid., 15.

⁴Point of view in biblical narratives is analogous to the narration in a film. The narrator is the camera’s eye, and the reader “perceives” the story as the narrator presents it. The biblical narrator is omniscient and he determines what his reader must see. The narrator is very selective about what must be included and what must be excluded. The narrator can zoom in on a character throughout a narrative or can, from a distance, shift from one scene to another. The narrator can even oscillate from one scene to another. For a classic example of how the narrator does this, see Gen 22, the binding of Isaac.
distinguished from the narrator.\textsuperscript{1} Literary critics often refer to the narrator’s point of view as an omniscient point of view.\textsuperscript{2} One may even go further to say that a narrator potentially possesses a perceptual point of view (using Chatman’s categories). The narrator’s omniscience may lead anywhere and everywhere, sometimes even into the thinking of the characters.

\textsuperscript{1}Scholes and Kellogg, 240. Uspensky did initial work in classifying several levels of point of view from an analysis of the linguistic structure of a text. (1) The Ideological Level: the point of view from which the events of a narrative are judged or evaluated. This level occurs when the author, the narrator, or one of the characters approve or disapprove of certain actions. In the Bible, this level is most prevalent, most often from the narrator’s point of view. However, there are times when this level springs from the character’s point of view. This happens especially when the character is God. Whenever this happens, the narrator’s point of view coincides with that of the character. See N. Petersen, “‘Point of View’ in Mark’s Narrative,” \textit{Semeia} 12 (1978): 107. (2) The Phraseological Level: this has to do with the linguistic features in a discourse, indicating whose point of view is being conveyed. (3) The Spatial and Temporal Levels: this refers to the location in time and space of the narrator in relation to the narrative. The narrator, in this instance, may tell the story as it happens or after the event. The narrator may stay with one character or move from one character to another in the narrative. (4) The Psychological Level: this refers to those viewpoints which are described or interpreted behaviorally—internal or external, subjective or objective. See Uspensky, 157-158.

\textsuperscript{2}In an adroit shift the author may pose the narrator as omniscient—fully or partially. The omniscient narrator can know about events taking place in different places at the same time, and can even know the thoughts of individual characters. The narrator may know what past conditions precipitated the present situation and what effect this will have on future state of affairs. The narrator may analyze actions, extend motivation, and even make judgments of all types: aesthetic, moral, and pragmatic. However, the narrator’s omniscience may be curtailed partially or fully by the author’s deliberate denigration of the narrator’s reliability. An example of this device is seen when the first-person narrator impeaches himself or herself as a liar or sets himself or herself up as a trustworthy reporter of events. The reliability or unreliability of the narrator is a shrewd tactic used by an author and may cause misunderstanding by the reader. This artful move in biblical narrative is normally used to provide the reader with the omniscient perspective of God in relation to a character or characters or a part of an action in the story.
The narrator’s point of view may also be described as external or internal. Through the external, the narrator is objective, looking at things as any person present could. Through the internal, the narrator enters the mind of the character and sees the story from the character’s perspective. The narrator is then, as it were, a privileged observer. In biblical narrative the narrator oscillates from the internal to the external.¹

In the characters’ point of view, the narrator speaks from the viewpoint of a character in the story. In this instance, the privilege of omniscience is withheld, and mode of speech is in the first person. A character’s point of view may be expressed either by means of direct speech or through the narrator’s words. In this situation, it may be difficult to ascertain whether the viewpoint is that of the narrator, the character, or another character.²

¹Uspensky’s study of internal and external points of view led him to distinguish three types of characters: (1) Characters who are never described internally, but always originate from the point of view of an external observer (this is analogous to the “agent” character). (2) Characters who are never described from the viewpoint of an external observer. (3) Characters who may be described either from their own point of view or from the point of view of an observer.

Most of the biblical characters are presented through a combination of these internal and external viewpoints. A good instance of this is in Gen 45:3. Uspensky, 97.

²Some indicators can help identify characters’ views: (1) Naming, the reference to a character with the use of words describing familial relationship (e.g., the constant use of “brother” and “sister” in the story of Tamar and Amnon in 2 Sam 13. (2) Inner Life, portraying the inner life of the character. The character’s emotions and attitude where thoughts, feelings, and inclinations are described. (3) The Term hinneh, known to sometimes mark a character’s perception as distinct from the narrator. It must be noted, however, that the presence of hinneh in a sentence construction does not always indicate point of view. (4) Circumstantial Clauses, not only indicating synchronicity and introducing new characters or episodes, but indicating point of view. This may be so, even when a verb of perception and/or hinneh is absent (e.g., 2 Sam 13:8; Esth 7:8). (5) Direct Discourse and Narration, not only enhances the scenic nature of a narrative, but communicates in the most striking way the internal psychological and ideological points
Points of view may constantly change in any given narrative (e.g., from internal to external, and from temporal or spatial to another point of view). Biblical narratives constantly make use of multiple points of view. Multiple points of view, by means of several compositional techniques, are able to present a discourse in a unified and multidimensional narrative, thus giving the narrative depth. Viewpoints may vie for validity, and it is this striving that creates interest, irony, and ambiguity in biblical narrative. The reader is given different viewpoints, in order to perceive the narrative from different angles and to arrive at his or her own point of view. Consequently, point of view of view of the characters in it. Rost discusses the “primacy of dialogue” in biblical narrative, and Alter points out “the subsidiary role of narrative in comparison to direct speech” and that “third person narration is frequently only a bridge between much larger units of direct speech.” See L. Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*, Historic Texts and Interpreters Series no. 1 (Sheffield: Almond, 1982), 16-21; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 65. (6) Alternative Expressions, using alternative or synonymous expressions to characterize a point of view. An example of this usage may be found in 2 Sam 6. At other times a reverse order of terms is used. See Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 59-73.


2Multiple points of view are best illustrated by Berlin’s film analogy. She compares how drama is presented in a theater and how the same play is produced for a television screen. In the theater the viewer sees all of the action from the same perspective, whereas in the film version the story is filtered through the perspective of the camera’s eye. Spectators in a theater see all the actions in a given scene from where they are seated. Their point of view is limited in one sense to their seat, and completely unrestrained in another. Spectators can focus on any section of the stage, or for that matter may even look abroad to any part of the theater. Theater directors have developed several techniques to control viewers’ perspective to certain parts of action by having the main character on center-stage, followed by a spotlight, and having more to perform, and often being dressed more gaudily. On the other hand, the television viewer is forced to see the actions in a scene from the camera’s perspective. The point of view constantly changes as the camera zooms in or widens its scope on a particular object or person, or scene. As the camera shifts its perspective from one angle to another, so does the viewer.
assumes a bridging function from narrative to interpretation.

Narrative discourse uses several techniques to reconcile the different viewpoints of characters and narrator in a unified presentation. Generally, the technique used to do this is repetition, which takes different forms. Sometimes, the information repeated is slight; at other times, it can be sweeping. The repeated information may be with or without variation. Sometimes the same information is repeated twice consecutively or in close proximity. Repetition may also send back the reader to a former scene after an interlude. These modes of repetition may sound redundant, but the discerning reader captures the appearance of another point of view, especially when a new character arrives on the scene.

Another technique employed by narrative composers to make varied literary effects is to create disparity among three or four points of view. This literary device produces irony. There are two main types of disparities in point of view: disparity

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See Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 44-46.

12 Sam 19 is a superlative example of two forms of repetition: one with minimal change and the other with extensive change. This narrative is skillfully arranged in a multi-dimensional construct that bares three points of view in addition to that of the narrator. For further details, see Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 75.

2 Judg 4:16, 22; Gen 37-39.

31 Kgs 1:15; 2 Sam 13:8.

4 "Irony occurs when we speak from one point of view, but make an evaluation from another point of view; thus for irony the nonconcurrence on the different levels is a necessary requirement." Uspensky, 103. In Gen 22, Abraham speaks from one point of view; the reader sees from a different point of view. Actually there is a double irony here. Abraham is being ironic, because Isaac’s understanding of the statement is different from
between two characters, and disparity between narrator/reader and character. On a few occasions in biblical narrative there occurs a kind of disparity where the reader or narrator lacks knowledge that only the character reveals.

Understanding the different points of view helps one to have a better appreciation of the beauty of a literary work. The type-scene affords the Bible student this experience. The different points of view and the various strategies employed by authors bring additional insight to the interpretation of type-scenes.

**Characteristics of the Type-Scene**

Two main characteristics of the type scene are repetition, or redundancy, and variation. Generically, variation is an integral and component part of repetition. In fact, there can be no genuine appreciation of repetition unless repetition tolerates some degree of variation. In some way or another, all redundancies in literature have some form of variation, or else its repetitive force is sure to diminish, and we may not be able to his. The reader finally perceives that Abraham himself did not fully understand what he said.

1Disparity in points of view may be used even for comic or tragedy effect in biblical narratives. See the story of Esther: only the reader appreciates the comedy with the turning of the tables for Haman. Neither King Ahashaurus nor Haman knew each other’s point of views.


3The terms "repetition" and "redundancy" are used interchangeably by scholars. For instance, see McMahan, 55; Esther H. Roshwalb, "‘Build-up and Climax’ in Ugaritic Literature with Biblical Parallels and Its Bearing on Biblical Studies" (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1988), 4; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 369. The same understanding is adopted in this dissertation.
distinguish between an original text and its repetition.¹ Because of its unique role in the repetitive constructs of ancient literature, variation is subsumed under a separate heading in this study.

Repetition

Different explanations have been given for the workings of repetition, and various methods have been proposed to understand the principle underlying this technique. The traditional approach embraces the view that repetition represents a literary convention.² The source critics postulate that repetition was the result of the combining of different sources by redactors.³ Using Ugaritic texts as a backdrop for understanding repetition in ancient texts, Roshwalb concludes that repetition with variation is characteristic of build-up and climax in biblical texts.⁴ More recent literary critics hold that repetitions are


deliberate and functional in divulging information.\(^1\)

Anderson recapitulates the functions of repetition: to highlight or draw attention; to establish or fix information in the mind of the implied reader; to emphasize importance; to create expectations, increasing predictability and assent (anticipation); to cause review and reassessment (retrospection); to unify disparate elements; to build patterns of association; or to draw contrast.\(^2\)

Licht has advanced several uses of repetition in Old Testament narratives:\(^3\) (1) to impose clear formal patterns (Ahaziah; Samuel's call; Samson and Delilah);\(^4\) (2) to organize narratives by informal and less conspicuous patterns; (3) to achieve mimetic or dramatic effects by the manipulation of the cross references (story of Joseph: three pairs


\[^4\]In the Old Testament there is one full-scale story, entirely constructed upon the device of repetition of a few elements; the account of the death of King Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:2-17). The repetitions are arranged in a pattern of AABBA:

- Short Introduction = vs. 2
- A: First Statement of Prophecy = vss. 3-4
- A: Second Statement of Prophecy = vss. 5-8
- B: First Captain's Mission = vss. 9-10
- B: Second Captain's Mission = vss. 11-12
- B: Third Captain's Mission = vss. 13-15
- A: Third Statement of Prophecy = vs. 16
- Ending

Other instances are: the repeated command to Jonah to "arise go to Nineveh"; the story of Balaam (Num 22-24) which follows an A+A+(BBB)A schema.
of dreams; wooing of Rebecca);\(^1\) (4) to bring about local effects; the most frequent use.\(^2\) Repetition in speech or in writing is needed because of the constant "noise" in the external environment, sheer absentmindedness, the abstruseness of accents, mispronunciation, or penmanship, and the impotence of language itself.

Sometimes one is left to wonder about the strange modes of repetition found in the Bible. Sometimes the text possesses such a network of parallels and oppositions as to couple the apparently dissimilar or even disjoin the apparently similar. At other times, the text elaborates on symmetries already inherent in the plot.\(^3\) This network of repetition in biblical narrative subsumes a wide range of devices with varied functions. Repetition may be found in information given by the narrator or by a character in direct discourse or in several instances of direct discourse.\(^4\) Repetitive structuring may be detected in devices ranging from small unitary elements to large composite ones—in *Leitwörter*,

\(^1\)The function of repetition in this instance is structural. The repetition gives "body" or "weight" to the story filling out the story. Changing of point of views help the author to repeat his information without monotonous repetition.

\(^2\)A conspicuous word (motif) or short phrase (theme) may be used twice or several times to underline a notion, to give some form to an otherwise loose stretch of narrative, to put a part of a story into brackets, or to reveal a theme. Repetition on a narrower scale produces a rhetorical figure called a "tricolon." This is a repetition of a syntactic figure (not of words), thrice in a single sentence, e.g., 1 Sam 1:8. It is almost a poetical rhythm. Licht, 90.

\(^3\)Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 367.

\(^4\)Repetition commonly occurs in two constructs: a situation where the narrator narrates an incident where a character has participated, and the character in turn repeats phrases from the original narration; or a circumstance where a speech is repeated during a conversation with another character. See W. Baumgartner, "Ein Kapitel vom herbräischen Erzählungsstil," *Eucharisterion: Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 19 (1922): 150-155.
doublets, themes, motifs, sequences of action, and type-scenes.¹

The simplest manner of redundant writing or speaking is to repeat the same words or phrases or sentences in the same manner expressed theretofore.² This reduces the risk of the hearer or reader not listening or understanding what was just heard or read.³ In addition to the simple word-for-word repetition, the Bible writers espouse several modes of repetition at the structural level. One of the beauties of oral narratives is found in the threefold mode of repetition.⁴ The charm of the recurrence resides in the third repetition. Normally, the third repetition betrays the turning point of the story. Not uncommon in the Bible is the 3+1 structure of repetition. In this fourfold structure a formula or incident occurs three times with the decisive turn occurring in the fourth scenario.⁵

¹Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 95-96. Other examples of repetitive devices are symbol, imagery, and setting. See Carter and Heil, 59.

²Literary critics generally point out that verbatim repetition of words, phrases, and lengthy passages are characteristic of the more ancient and primitive forms of narrative, such as epic poems or folk tales. Licht, 62. Gunkel believes that the more advanced narrative art underlines the important and impressive elements by treating them at length; the more ancient art does it by repetition. Hermann Gunkel, *Geschichten von Elisa* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Press, 1973), 8.

³Simple repetition as found in biblical narratives is considered by some to be boring and bothersome. Today, much ingenuity is laboriously exerted to disguise repetition. And yet, in biblical narration, when the author leaves the repetitive pattern on the surface, he is presenting to the reader in clear simple words the clarity of the structure.

⁴The underlying treatment of repetition by ancient writers seems to indicate that verbatim repetitions were used with discretion and some restraint, and that various repeated motifs were combined to produce an interlocking pattern, consisting mostly of triads. See Licht, 74.

Another distinguishing trait of repetition in the Bible is found in the use of *parallelism*. Parallelism can aid in understanding how a theme develops within a narrative, what elements are repeated, and how new aspects of a theme are related to those introduced earlier. Parallelism is more than embellishments, as in Ps 1. Nor is parallelism simply repetitious. “Almost invariably something is added,” writes Muilenberg, “and it is precisely the combination of what is added that makes of parallelism the artistic form that it is.”

Gradation is another form of repetition used freely and to great advantage in the Bible. It operates on the principle of development of repetition. Usually, it works with three or four characters or components in a narrative; the description of each consecutive

1There are six basic types:

(1) Synonymous parallelism: The second line of a couplet more or less repeats the thought of the first line in different words (Matt 6:10; Ps 51:1).

(2) Antithetical parallelism: The second line of a couplet presents the opposite of the thought in the first (Prov 11:2; Luke 1:53).

(3) Synthetic parallelism: The two lines of couplet are only loosely connected, the second line developing or completing the thought of the first (Ps 27:6; Rev 5:9).

(4) Emblematic parallelism: One of the lines presents as a simile the thought in the other.

(5) Stairlike parallelism: Part of one line is repeated in the second, but also developed further (Ps 29:1-2).

(6) Introverted parallelism: The members of the parallelism are in chiastic or inverted order (Ps 124:7; Mark 2:27).

The first three types were first described by Lowth. See Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*. The last three were developed later to supplement them. While categorization is useful because it points up relationships and verbal associations for the reader, it should not be done rigidly and mechanically.

2Most of the studies done in this area treat the poetic parts of the Bible: Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Parables are no less amenable to such study.

character or component is repeated and developed with variation. Another interesting area of study with regard to repetition in narrative is highlighted by Hedrick. Hedrick looked at that aspect of poetics in parables which relates to assonance and consonance. Assonance has to do with repetition of similar vowel sounds in a unitary passage, and consonance deals with repetition of consonantal sounds. Parables are amenable to these types of repetition.

Variation

The Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp is perhaps the most famous and frequently cited scholar on the subject of repetition and variation in narrative. Albert Bates Lord

1 A classic example is mentioned by Licht: the sending of the captains in the Ahaziah story (2 Kgs 1:2-17). The narrative mentions that three captains were sent, and the sending of all three is described in similar words. Only the first two captains, however, were disrespectful and consequently punished. But the last one behaved differently. It follows then that the first two passages are closely parallel, though with a slight difference; the last captain, though parallel to the first two, is freer. Clearly, the pattern is variegated and graded, and the structure could be expressed by the formula (B1 + B2) + B3. Samson and Delilah is another example of gradation in Judg 16:4-22. Three unsuccessful attempts by Delilah are followed by a successful one. Each attempt becomes freer and fuller. Licht expresses the pattern in the following formula: A, A, O, X + A. See Licht, 57-58.

2 Hedrick, Parables as Poetic Fiction, 59-71. Hedrick, supporting Wilder, distinguishes poetry from prose mainly by its rhythm, and in other instances, by the different arrangement of lines (Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric, 92). Aristotle used the expression "periodic" style to describe a complete sentence (with either one or two clauses—divided, opposed, or exactly balanced), distinct in its parts and easy to repeat in one breath... when it is taken as a whole." Aristotle Rhetoric 3.9.5. These "periodic" clauses, with their dominant element of rhythm (and rhyme and balance), employ repetitive devices such as assonance and consonance to create rhythmic effects.

3 Propp made a collection of 115 Russian fairytales. He analyzed them by searching for particular recurring elements and features that came up randomly and
studied the characteristics of repetition with variation in oral narrative. Lord opts to use the term "multiformity" to designate the kind of stability and variation characteristic of oral narrative.¹ Northrop Frye studied repetition in the book of Judges. He claims that the narrative pattern in the book is U-shaped (apostasy, disaster and bondage, repentance, deliverance), and is repeated with significant variation throughout the biblical narrative.² From the consensus of literary scholars it may be expedient to say that literary ingenuity in the ancient world seems to lie in the ability to create "new variations of the fixed forms."³

Repetition with variation may manifest itself in various forms of physical deviance. Sternberg outlines these variations and gives examples of each: expansion or addition (Gen 2:16-17; 3:2-3; 27:2-7); truncation or ellipsis (Exod 2:9; 1 Sam 3:9-10); change of order (1 Sam 22:9-13; 1 Kgs 20:5-7); grammatical transformation (Gen 2:1-2; 1 Sam 30:1-3); substitution (Gen 37:29-30; 31:14-17).⁴


¹Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, 99-123.


own right which the narrator formulated to fit a particular subject.1 Variation provides new information which fosters development in type-scenes.2 The unexpected features in a redundant pattern impel the reader to view the type-scene from more than one angle.3 They engage the reader who must account for them. This deviation from the expected pattern mandates a constant evaluation of the original and the repeated text, and forces the reader to postpone tentative conclusions about the text until the entire text is perused. This unpredictability creates suspense and interest. Suspense and interest in type-scenes are made possible by the movement in variation,4 and through it, the stasis of redundancy is broken. Finally, variation, like repetition, may help to maintain unity within type-scenes.5


2Variation produces new or high information resulting in low predictability. This is so because predictability is inversely proportional to information. Thus, a low information factor produces a high predictability factor. See Susan Wittig, "Formulaic Style and the Problem of Redundancy," *Centrum* 1 (1973): 127.


4Culpepper, "Redundancy and the Implied Reader in Matthew," 2.

5Speaking of the unity produced through variation, Sternberg comments on the "wooing of Rebekah" in Gen 24: "The variations in the passage . . . in wording, in continuity, in specification . . . go to dramatize a single point." "Below the surface, . . . all this formal variety combines into functional unity." Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 138.
CHAPTER IV

BANQUETS AND BANQUET SCENES: IMAGES FROM ANTiquity OUTSIDE OF THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Imageries of banquet scenes encompass such a broad gamut of geographical and historical attestations that this survey cannot claim to be exhaustive. I have considered the more important narratives and pictorial assemblages of banquet scenes that are available today. In seriatim, the scenes considered are Egyptian, Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, and Ugaritic texts. These are followed by Old Testament, Jewish Intertestamental, Greco Roman, New Testament outside of the parables, Early Christian and Non-canonical, and finally, those from the Rabbinic corpus. These seem to be most contemporaneous with the ones described in the parables of Jesus. Whenever possible, a relief or mural of the banquet scene under the pertinent section of study is displayed in the text.

The Egyptian Banquet

The common people in the Old Egyptian Empire squatted for their meals. Usually, two persons squatted before a six-inch-tall table, eating with hands from a heap of fruit, bread, and roast meat (preferably goose). Drinking bowls stood beneath the table. During the era of the New Empire the upper class preferred to sit on high,
cushioned chairs and to be waited upon by male servants and female slaves, especially on formal occasions. Water was poured over hands after eating was finished. A jug was typically present for this purpose.

In ancient Egypt, table decoration was a fine art. Large lotus flowers adorned the dining tables of banquet feasts, and under the New Empire the jars of wine and beer were always garnished with covers of embroidered work. Not only were the tables decorated, but the guests at the banquet were adorned with sweet-smelling flowers and buds; “they wore lotus buds in their hair, and held them out to each other to smell, just as the guests amongst other nations pass glasses of wine to each other at the present day.”

Egyptian banquets portrayed many moods. They were mostly sponsored by the wealthy. The more formal banquets were "many-sided affairs, ranging from gay entertainments to occasional morbid ceremonies." Excessive drinking and gluttonous eating were inevitable elements of the evening. Charlatans and folk-tale tellers amused the tipplers during the first round. As the evening dissipated and the mood got more libertine, dancing girls in slow erotic moves or wild acrobatic stunts stupefied the hearts


of the drunk. The feast was not complete without dance. Figure 1 shows a classic example of an Egyptian banquet scene.

![Image of an Egyptian banquet scene](image)

**Fig. 1.** Banquet with musicians and dancing girls (Wall Picture from a Theban Tomb in the British Museum). Reprinted, by permission, from Adolf Erman, *Life in Ancient Egypt* (London: Macmillan, 1894).

Public banquets were commonly held to celebrate the conquests of the pharaohs.¹

These banquets were officially announced by royal decrees. They could last for as long

¹Thutmose III hosted feasts in celebration of his splendid conquests in Asia (these may be seen on the Karnak temple on the back of the south half of Pylon VI). He established fixed dates for three great “Feasts of Victory”: the feast of Amon, lasting five days; the “Day-of-Bringing-in-the-God,” lasting five days; and “the Gift-of-Life,” lasting also for five days. See J. H. Breasted, ed., *Ancient Records of Egypt*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1906): 2:221, §550-552.
as a week. Coronation of a pharaoh was another occasion for banqueting.\textsuperscript{1} Funerary banquet scenarios were also common in Egyptian culture.\textsuperscript{2} Whenever the opportunity availed itself, an Egyptian had the liberty to arrange a "house of beer."

From all appearances, the Egyptian banquet was a convivial occasion known for its ostentation, uncontrolled passion, and excessive eating and drinking. It was mainly held for the celebration of attainments. A banquet feast could be public or private, and essentially established the status of the mighty who normally hosted it.

In summary, some basic features in the Egyptian banquet scene were washing and serving by servants and slaves, squatting or sitting to dine, adorning of guests, dancing girls, wine or beer, charlatans jesting, and abundant food—meat, bread, and fruits. It seems that in Egyptian society banquets were usually hosted by those who wished to improve their political or social standing. Apparently, Egyptian women took full advantage of the banquet environment to demonstrate their beauty and standing in society.

\textsuperscript{1}Breasted speaks about a royal feast hosted for the coronation of Thutmose I. Thutmose I issues a royal decree announcing his accession to Thure, the viceroy of Nubia, informing him of his full titulary name to be used in the cultus and the oath. The decree concludes with the date of the feast. See Breasted, 2:25, § 60. See also 2:179, §417 for a feast for the coronation of Thutmose III.


\textsuperscript{3}That is a small banquet, if he was not content with the feasts instituted at the great festivals. Erman, 256.
Mesopotamian Banquets

Banquets and banquet scenes from Mesopotamia are considered in this section. These are grouped together because they originate from the same geographical region. They are presented in chronological sequence: Sumerian, Akkadian, and Assyrian banquets.

The Sumerian Banquet

According to cylinder seals and plaques of figurative art of Mesopotamia, banquets appeared in vogue in the Early Dynastic II period, and reached their apex in the Early Dynastic III period. During this time banquets also exhibited their greatest variety in themes and composition. The dominant banquet theme reflected in the different banquet scenes in the Mesopotamian period is still under debate. Several themes have been posited. There is support for the New Years festival and sacred marriage theme, a ceremony where women's roles are prominent, a funerary theme, a plurality of feasts, and

1See Frances Pinnock, "Considerations on the ‘Banquet Theme’ in the Figurative Art of Mesopotamia and Syria," in Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in Ancient Near East, ed. Lucio Milano (Padua, Italy: Sargon, 1994), 15-26. In the Early Dynastic II/III and Akkadian periods, apparently, it was customary to have a theme of administrative value attached to the cylinder seal, a theme of cultic value associated with the votive plaque, and a theme of palace milieus, in the inlays and orthostats in palace reliefs.


3P. R. S. Moorey, "What Do We Know about the People Buried in the Royal Cemetery?" Expedition 20 (1977): 24-40.

4Pritchard, The Ancient Near East in Pictures, 209, §637. This follows the normal style of a funerary banquet. A servant attends to a bearded figure with a fly whisk in...
particularly ceremonies, and so forth.

During the Early Dynastic periods, the banquet scenes depicted mythological-cultic figures accompanied particularly by wild animals. It is not atypical to find herds of domestic animals as part of the banquet procession, in addition to musical instruments, dancing, and attendants with objects and vases. Figure 2 shows the “peace panel” of the so called Ur standard which consists of three registers.

It is not uncommon to find, especially on seals with two registers, a second banquet scene, which though similar in basic features, is usually different in some ways. Frequent additional motifs are vegetables or vases, the moon crescent, and scorpions or stars. The scene is not a mere repetition, but a variation of the first scene.

hand. A musician plays on a stringed instrument. The figure has a cup in hand. Two people drinking through tubes are also usually associated with a funerary banquet.


3In the upper panel a rather large figure, maybe the king, dunned in a flounced skirt, is seated facing six other figures (presumably, guests who might be captains). Each of the guests has a cup in the right hand. There are at least three attendants: a lyrist, a woman with black hair, and a server. In the two lower registers, food is brought in abundance—animals and spoil, perhaps captured in warfare. Observe the bull led by two men, three goats led by one man, a man with four fish, and three men leading another bull. In the lower register, a man carries a bundle on his shoulder, and a man leads four donkeys, among other details.

4See ibid., Pl. IIf (Cylinder seal from Ur [U.10939]. London, BM 121544): Wiseman, Western Asiatic Seals, pl. 25c).
Some of the motifs in the Sumerian panel are consonant with the Egyptian pictorial scene. One or more personages (of different or of the same sex) are sitting (in the same direction), sometimes in the presence of loaded tables, or in front of big jars, sometimes drinking from tubes, or they may hold a small cup in one hand. Servants are present, who bring objects to the scene. Attendants provide service such as music and dancing.


Although the typical banquet scene is essentially the same in terms of basic banquet elements, there are noticeable differences between the Sumerian and Egyptian banquets. Sumerians appear to have a greater proclivity for variation. Their banquets carry a greater variety of themes, such as a military theme, a libation, celebration of
victory or coronation (as the Egyptian), an inauguration of a building, a funeral, or a plurality of themes. Even in the banquet mural shown, the last register reveals a high consciousness for variation. The Sumerian banquet has an added feature of animals.

Two hymns found in Sumerian texts record banquet scenes. In “The Hymn to the Temple of Enki in Eridu,” Enki travels to Nippur to celebrate the construction of the temple E-engurra. There he hopes to win the favor of the god, Enlil, by preparing a great banquet for him and other gods. The gods sit in ranking order:

In the shrine Nippur, Enki prepared a banquet for his father Enlil
An sat at the ‘place of honor.’
Enlil was next to An
Nintu sat at the ‘big side’ (of the table)
The Anunnas seated themselves at their places.1

In the second hymn, “The Installation of Ningirsu of Lagash,” Gudea celebrates the reconstruction of the É-ninnu shrine for Ningirsu in Lagash. Gudea prepares an exquisite banquet to welcome Ningirsu’s return from Enki in Eridu. He, too, invites the gods. An, Enlil, and Ninmah are seated in places of honor:

For Ningirsu he (Gudea) prepared a fine banquet.
An sat at the ‘big side.’
Next to An was Enlil,
Next to Enlil was Ninmah.2

These two banquets were hosted by important characters. They celebrated temple


building projects. Seating arrangements were carefully laid out as to make sure the chief
guest was honored.

In another Sumerian text composed about B.C.E. 2000, an aspiring young scribe
convinced his father to invite his teacher for dinner. The teacher was offered the “big
chair” during the meal and was given exceptional treatment:

Pour for him *irda*-oil, bring it to the table for him.
Make fragrant oil flow like water on his stomach (and) back;
I want to dress him in a garment, give him some extra salary, put a ring on his hand.1

After the meal, the teacher changed his disapproving opinion of the student.2

In the three texts an important figure prepares a banquet. There exists a patron-
client relation in the narratives.3 In all the cases the host or the one he represents seeks to
win a favor, either for himself, or for the one for whom he advocates. In each instance,
the chief guest is seated in a place of honor, while the other invitees are positioned in
ranking order. In the account of the school boy, apart from the meal, the motifs of oil,
change of garment, extra salary, and a ring on the hand are specifically mentioned.

1 Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary
Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: University of
Pennsylvania Press, 1972), 237. See also, idem, *School Days: A Sumerian Composition
Relating to the Education of a Scribe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,


3 People in the ancient world were constantly seeking patrons and clients in order
to secure a safe and steady supply of limited goods of life. Patrons often distributed food
to clients and expected public praise in return. For further details, see Jerome H. Neyrey,
"Meals, Food, and Table Fellowship," in *The Social Sciences and New Testament
also Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the
Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 74-76.
The Akkadian Banquet

A surviving text from ancient Mesopotamia, which has received extensive recognition, is the Enuma Elish. In it Marduk prepares a banquet in celebration of the building of the city Babylon and his magnificent palace, Esagila. In Tablet VI, Marduk is depicted as:

The lord being on the lofty dais which they had built as his abode,
The gods, his fathers at his banquet he seated:
“This Babylon, the place that is your home!
Make merry in its precincts, occupy its broad [places].”
The great gods took their seats,
They set up festive drink, sat down to a banquet.¹

Marduk is the important figure in this account, hosting a banquet for the gods of honor. The importance of the seating arrangement is highlighted thrice in this narrative. No doubt, Marduk is indulging the gods, asking for some favor. This patron-client relationship is prominent in the Sumerian texts. In the first line there is an inference that Marduk himself is elevated. Merriment and festivity are dominant themes. This banquet commemorates a building project.

The Assyrian Banquet

In the Neo-Assyrian period an archaic banquet scene is attested in glyptics. In these, a royal personage is represented either sitting or holding a cup in his hand, or even standing, holding a cup in one hand and a bow or staff in the other. He is usually placed in front of a full table or a stand with a jar. On the other side there is a standing attendant

who holds a whisk or fan. This suggests a libation setting, and not a full-fledged banquet. These are attested in the reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II in the North-West Palace at Nimrud.

A genuine banquet relief can be seen in the North Palace at Nineveh. It is commonly known as the banquet of Ashurbanipal, as indicated in figure 3.

King Ashurbanipal is seen reclining on a high couch while he drinks from a bowl.

1Ibid., Pl. Iig (Cylinder seal form Tell el-Rimah [TR. 4416] Baghdad, IM 70492: Parker, Iraq 37 [1975] pl. XV, 49, Late Assyrian).

2Pinnock, 17.
and holds a blossom in his left hand. Jean-Marie Dentzer points out that this is the first incidence for the "reclining" banquet, as opposed to the more common "seated" posture, evidenced until that time. She also notes that the posture becomes more complicated by the time this practice turned into the Greek symposium. At the foot of the couch sits the queen (apparently, women sat in the lower position). Attendants play music, sing, dance, whisk flies, and serve food. In the scene can be seen all types of verdure, with birds perched, and the head of a man, probably that of Te-umman, king of Elam.

In 1951 a sandstone block with an inscription of an unusual arrangement was discovered next to the doorway of the throne room in the palace of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 B.C.E.) in Calah. The account recounts the victories of king Ashurnasirpal, and especially the conquest of the city of Calah, his rebuilding of it, and its royal garden. The final aspect of the inscription deals with a description of a banquet that celebrated the inauguration of the royal palace. King Ashurnasirpal invites the god Ashur, the great lord, and the gods of his entire country to this gargantuan dinner, which lasted for ten days. The banquet menu is described in full detail, and the total number of guests entertained was 69,574. In the final sentence, the author ensures that the reader understands that the king provided the guests with means to clean and anoint themselves, and that they returned healthy and happy to their own countries.


From the above banquet scenes a few conclusions may be drawn. The constants of music, song, and dance are an integral aspect of the Assyrian banquet. As in the previous banquets, an important figure (a king) hosts the Assyrian banquet. He invites guests. Like the Sumerian banquet, the relief of Ashurbanipal's banquet depicts animals, and the cup motif is given some prominence. From the available evidence it seems that the reclining position for dining came into existence under the Assyrian sovereignty. Assyrian banquets seem to be held for different occasions as were the Sumerian banquets. Ashumasirpal's banquet seems to be unique in two ways—its grandness and the emphasis on the king's provision of means so his guests could clean and anoint themselves. The narrative ends as a typical good story, where everyone went his way healthy and happy.

**Banquets in Ugaritic Texts**

Banquet feasts played a significant role in Ugaritic mythology. An interesting banquet scene is depicted in the palace of 'El:

'El prepared game in his house,  
Food in his palace.  
He summoned the gods to dine.  
The gods ate and drank,  
They drank wi[ne] until satiated,  
New wine till drunk.¹

This banquet is prepared for a divine assembly of the gods. Invitations are sent out.

There are food and drink in abundance. 'El, himself, presides over this banquet.¹

In another scene, a feast is ordered at the start of the building of Ba'îl's temple and at the end of its construction. Ba'îl invites as his chief guest of honor, Kothar-wa-Hasis, the god who helped him to defeat his adversary, Yamm. He also invites a pantheon of gods to the celebration. The text is as follows:

Afterwards Kothar-wa-Hasis arrived; they set an ox before him, a fatling too in front of him; They made ready a seat and he was seated on the right hand of mightiest Ba'îl while [the gods] ate and drank.²

Again, an abundant supply of food (flesh) is presented before the guest of honor. The guest of honor is given the seat of honor, on the right side of the host.³

A brief background to the next banquet scenario will provide a context for understanding its significance. The saga of Keret is a royal epic which shows King Keret's surmounting of difficulties in establishing his dynasty. This story is analogous to the epics of Homer and early narratives of the Bible. It begins with the destruction of


²Dietrich, Loretz, and Sanmartín, 1.4.V.44-48. For the feast following the construction, see 1.4.VI.16-59.

³Though there are some affinities to the banquet described in Isa 25:6-10, there are also some marked differences. While Ba'îl invites an array of gods, Yahweh invites all peoples. Yahweh, the divine one, prepares the meal himself, and mortal beings receive the high status of honored guests. The best portions are not reserved for the host, Yahweh himself, but, rather, Yahweh serves the best portions to all the people. See comment on Isa 25:6-10a in sub-section, "The Eschatological Banquet," below.
Keret’s house. Keret loses all his children and his wife disappears. Heartbroken and distraught, Keret resorts to the god El, the head of the pantheon, for help. Following El’s orders, Keret wins back his estranged wife and regains his progeny. Not long after, misfortune befalls Keret a second time. He failed to fulfil his vow to the goddess Asherah, and as a result, he suffers a life-threatening sickness. Furthermore, his impious son, Yašib, is bent on usurping his father’s throne.

And so the grievously ill Keret commands his wife, Hurrai, to prepare a feast for the "bulls" and "gazelles" of Hbr,1 to help him recover from the disease that Asherah has brought on him. Hurrai follows her husband’s instructions, and prepares a great banquet for the Lords of Hbr (128: IV:1-28):

(1) [He sets his] fe[et on the footstool]
(2) Aloud [he shouts] to [his wife]:
(3) "Hear, [O Lady Hurrai]!
(4) Slaughter the sle[ekest] of thy fatlings!
(5) Open [fla]gons of wine!
(6) Invite my seventy bulls
(7) My eighty [ga]zelles
(8) The bulls of [Gre]at Hbr
(9) Of [Little] Hbr.

(four lines broken [maybe Keret continues his speech?])

(14) Lady Hurrai hearkens.
(15) She slaughters the sleakest of her [fat]lings
(16) She opens flagons of wine
(17) Into his presence she ushers his bulls
(18) Into his presence she ushers his gazelles

1"Bulls" and "gazelles" are probably grandees and magicians from the city-state of Hbr, somewhere in the region of Syria-Palestine. See Cyrus H. Gordon, "Poetic Legends and Myths from Ugarit," Berytus 25 (1977): 34, 49.
(19) The bulls of Great Hbr 
(20) Of Little Hbr. 
(21) They enter the house of Keret 
(22) To [his] dwelling [they come] 
(23) They proceed to the 
(24) She stretches a hand into the bowl 
(25) A knife she puts into the meat. 
(26) And Lady Hurrai announces: 
(27) "I have invited you [to eat], to drink 
(28) Keret, your lord, [has a feast]."

(twenty lines broken)

The surviving text reveals the following sequence of actions: the king instructs the queen to prepare a feast, the king instructs the queen to invite the guests, the queen prepares the feast, the queen ushers the guests in, the guests enter the house, the guests partake(?), the queen starts dividing the meat, the queen addresses the guests (and perhaps explains the purpose of the feast).

The following text (128.V:6-29) suggests that Hurrai prepared a second feast:

(6) [ ] dwelling [ ]
(7) She [stret]ches a hand into the bowl
(8) She puts a [knife into] the meat [t]
(9) [And] Lady Hurrai [announces]:
(10) "I have invited you [to eat], to drink
(11) [ ] bless [ ]
(12) Ye shall weep [over] Keret.
(13) [Even as] the bulls had said
(14) [ ] the dead, ye shall weep
(15) [ ] and in the heart ye shall bu[ry]
(16) [ ] dead, finger[s ]."

In this surviving text there appears to be a repetition of some elements of the banquet scene with some variation: (1) the guests enter the dwelling (?) (2) the queen starts dividing the meat while, (3) the queen addresses the guests (and perhaps explains the
purpose of the feast). In addition, the queen calls on the guests to bless and weep (over Keret).

In the next twelve lines, the impending death of Keret is announced together with the news that Yasib, his son, will soon rule. After a break of about eighteen lines, hope for Keret is somehow rekindled, as a vision is received. So the banqueting continues (128: VI:1-8).

1. "Hear, O [ ] - - - - - [ ] - - -
2. They are still [eating]g (and) drinking
3. And Lady Hurrai announces:
4. "I have invited you to e[a]t and to dr[ink]
5. [Keret], your lord, [has] a fea[st]."
6. Into the presence of Keret they come
7. As the bulls had said
8. They spoke in a vision [ ] Keret

(rest broken)

In this third fragment of text pertaining to the banquet there is another announcement by Keret’s wife about the purpose of the invitation, and the mention of a vision.

In this text there are recurring motifs: the invitation motif is repeated three times, perhaps to three different groups of guests.¹ There is repeated mention of fatlings and wine.² There are also similar plot sequences, each with a variation to create suspense and advance the plot. They share all the same characters—Keret, Hurrai, bulls, and gazelles (except in the last episode). These three episodes reveal a miniature type-scene situation.


The basic components of this type-scene are instructions to summon the guests, summoning of the guests, coming of the guests, enjoyment of the banquet, and speech(es) concerning the business at hand. It is obvious that the writer in a literary reflex is describing a common practice of banquets in palaces of the ancient East.¹

Banquets in the Old Testament

While several texts refer to banquets in the Old Testament, they do not give a full elaboration of an entire banquet celebration.² Some of these texts, however, supply small vignettes and capture certain aspects of the banquet scene that are significant for the study of the banquet type-scene. A study of God as host in the Pentateuch provided some interesting insights. Robert Stallman looked at the anthropomorphic model of God as host, and studies him from a metaphorical perspective.³

Starting with creation, Stallman showed that God as host provided food for all creation and invited humanity as his guests to eat what he provided for them—seed-bearing vegetation (Gen 1:28-30). A second invitation, this time a stronger one, was given to eat again, but within certain parameters (Gen 2:16-17). An intruder, the Devil,


²For example: Joseph's Banquet, Gen 43:24-34; A Table before Enemies, Ps 23; Belshazzar's Feast, Dan 5:1-31; Feast of Tabernacles, Zech 14:16-19.

entered the "banquet" scene. Adam and Eve partook of a meal that God did not provide, and so insulted him as host. This was tantamount to rejecting the one who gave it. The outcome was a demotion of Adam as distinguished guest, and the loss of access to God's table. Having violated the code of behavior at God's banquet table, the inevitable consequences were alienation from God, expulsion from the garden, and consignment to a life of hardship. Again, God is divine host for human guests in the flood narrative (Gen 6-9), and again, he sets the parameters for what is kosher to eat. Through the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy God also acts as a host providing food and water for his rebellious guests in the wilderness.¹

The Feast of the Passover

The feast of the Passover is first encountered in Exod 11. Connected with this feast were two other practices mentioned in Exod 12 and 13—the feast of Unleavened Bread and the consecration of the firstborn. All three of these celebrations were connected with the escape of Israel from Egypt, but the Passover sacrifice, followed by the meal in Exod 12:1-13, is the best known of the three.²

¹Ibid., 172-270.

²Originally, the Passover sacrifice was an act of family worship, but when Israel occupied Canaan and the Temple was completed and dedicated, the first feast celebrated was the Passover. For the Jews in the time of Jesus, the sacrifice of the Passover animal at the Temple and the eating of it during the evening meal became the central focus in the Passover celebration. After the destruction of the Temple, the Passover sacrifice no longer served as the center of the Passover celebration, but was superceded by the Passover meal. Anthony J. Saldarini, Jesus and Passover (New York: Paulist, 1984), 5-15, 41.
Exod 12 contains a mixture of legal and historical elements. On the tenth day of the month in which Moses was to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, each household was to quarantine a one-year-old kid or lamb without blemish for four days. If the household was too small to consume the animal, it could join another. On the fourteenth day the animal was to be slaughtered “between the evenings.” Then, each family was to paint their doorframes with the blood of the victim. That same night they were to roast the animal whole over the fire and eat it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. There were to be no leftovers for the morning, and the meal was to be eaten in haste, in traveling attire. For subsequent generations the Passover meal was to be the first of a seven-day feast called the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod 12:15).

In some ways the Passover meal parallels a banquet scene. First, the meal was “Yahweh’s Passover” (vs. 11); Yahweh was its host. A specific time was given for the start of the meal. No foreigner was to eat of this meal, only the selectively invited. A special garment was required for participation in the meal—loins girded, sandals on feet, and staff in hand. There was a detailed menu—roasted meat, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. This “bitter-sweet” menu carried rich symbolism. While the meal in one sense connoted a celebration—the defeat of the gods of Egypt—in another sense it reminded the Israelites of their sufferings and bondage in Egypt. The meal was to be eaten in one house and no meat was to be taken outside the house. Those who participated in this meal were to be “honored” by being liberated from Egypt, while those who did not partake were “cast into outer darkness.”
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The Meal at Sinai

In Exod 24, a covenantal relationship between God as host and Israel as guests\(^1\) is ratified by a divinely catered meal in vss. 9-11. After Israel received the moral code (20:1-17) followed by the covenant code (20:22-23:33), God summoned Moses together with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders\(^2\) of Israel to ascend Sinai. After setting up an altar, presenting offerings, reading of the "Book of the Covenant" (24:7), and sprinkling of blood upon those who consented to obey the words of Yahweh, Moses and the three plus the seventy men ascended Sinai to dine with Yahweh. There, Yahweh hosted a special meal for the leaders. After this meal Yahweh would summon Moses to a forty-day legislative session.

Having witnessed an anthropomorphic manifestation of Yahweh, Moses and his companions "ate and drank" with Yahweh.\(^3\) This dinner account is very short.\(^4\) Apart

\(^{1}\)This narrative along with those found in Exod 19:1-25, 20:18-21, and chaps. 32-34, punctuate the legal material of Exod 19-40 with the confirmation of the Sinaitic covenant, resulting in a regular alternation between law and narrative. See Stallman, 227.

\(^{2}\)Cf. the seventy bulls invited to Keret's banquet. J. B. Lloyd notes that the two accounts present a remarkable similarity. He also makes mention of the seventy sons of Asherah whom Baal invited (Dietrich, Loretz, and Sanmartin, 1.4:VI:45ff.). See J. B. Lloyd, "The Banquet Theme in Ugaritic Narrative," *Ugaritic-Forschungen* 22 (1990): 188.

\(^{3}\)For discussion on whether the elders literally ate with God or merely came in his presence, see Stallman, 233.

\(^{4}\)Nicholson denies that 24:11 refers to any meal whatsoever. He argues that the combination of "eating" and "drinking" is a standard word pair used in parallelism and indicates only the general process of living one's life. See Earnest W. Nicholson, "The Origin of the Tradition in Exodus XXIV 9-11," *Vetus Testamentum* 26 (February 1976): 149-150.
from the selective invitation by Yahweh, matters such as seating arrangement, menu, and duration of the feast are not mentioned. What is made manifest in this short banquet narrative is the role of a generous host and grateful guests who accepted the invitation to dine. Continued observance of the covenant would create an ongoing healthy relationship between the divine host and human guests, resulting in covenantal blessing in the form of food.1

The Banquets of Wisdom and Folly

Two contrasting banquets are mentioned in Prov 9:1-6, 11 and 9:13-18: Lady Wisdom’s invitation to her banquet, and a counter-invitation by Lady Folly. Wisdom is presented as an antithesis to Folly, where Wisdom invites "the simple" (9:4), those who have not yet accepted wisdom. The banquet celebrates the completion of Wisdom’s house (9:1).2 The maidens issue the invitation in the upper city, where the palaces are located, the place where the common people are likely to be found.3 The menu is flesh, bread, and wine.

Lady Folly’s invitation is open also to "the simple," but no maidens are sent to give the invitation. She has no building to dedicate. She only mimics Lady Wisdom. She is depicted as an adulterous woman, who lures her guests to temporary satisfaction

1Stallman, 272.

2Cf. Ba’ll’s banquet in1.4 VI.16-59.

which only leads to death (9:17-18). In these two banquets, invitations are given to all who are "simple." Lady Wisdom offers flesh and wine that enable her guests to live. Lady Folly offers only clandestine pleasure.

Esther's Double Banquet

In the story of Esther, the king and Haman were invited to a banquet hosted by Esther (Esth 5:4). The invitation was accepted and the second opportunity was given to her to make her request to the king (5:6). She delayed her petition and invited them again to attend another banquet on the next day (5:7-8). Again, they accepted the invitation. Haman joyfully made preparation for the banquet (5:9-14) as also did Esther. Haman was hurried to the banquet (6:14). While they were at the dinner table, Esther, for the third time, was asked to reveal her request (7:2). When the king heard her petition, he was enraged and left the banquet room (7:3-7). When he returned, he ordered the execution of Haman.

In this banquet scene, a woman gives an invitation to attend a banquet. Two selected guests are invited. The motive for this invitation is to seek a favor of the most honored guest, the king, and to reveal the sinister moves by the other guest, Haman. In the end, one is honored, the other is dishonored, and the host highly honored. The wine motif is highlighted.

The Eschatological Banquet

Of the Old Testament banquet texts, only one text relating to a banquet scenario and at the same time depicting an eschatological banquet can be found in the Old
Testament: Isa 25:6-10a. The feast is placed in a coronation or enthronement context.¹ Yahweh prepares a banquet for all peoples, “a concept without parallel in the Hebrew Bible.”² This invitation must be recognized not only for its universality, but also for its particularity. The author juxtaposes the universal alongside of the particular, “creating an intricate tapestry of salvation.”³ He does this by making repeated emphasis on the all-inclusiveness of Yahweh’s guest list, using such expressions as “all peoples,” “all nations,” “all faces,” and “all the earth.” At the same time these descriptions are placed in a context of specificity, using expressions such as “this mountain,” “his people,” and “our God.”

The menu for God’s banquet feast is šmānim (rich foods) and šmārim (well-matured or aged wine) considered by Middle Eastern standards to be first-quality food and drink.⁴ The best portion was commonly given to the guest of honor.⁵ Likewise, the


⁴Ibid., 29-30.

best portions of the sacrifice were normally reserved for Yahweh.¹

When compared with previous banquets found in other texts under this section, this eschatological banquet is significantly different. While the hosts in the other texts generally invite selected guests, Yahweh invites all peoples. Yahweh also prepares the meal himself, and all of his guests receive a high standing. This is a distinct variation of the typical banquet scene.

The Funerary Banquet

Philip King investigated the banquet scene depicted in Amos 6:4-7.² He concluded that the scenario portrayed in that banquet constitutes the description of a funerary meal, defined by scholars as a marzeh³ This could suggest, according to King, that the Israelites and Judeans as early as the eighth century B.C.E. engaged in funerary meals. Although details of this type of meal-scene are fragmentary, King provides some valuable insights. In this type of meal, guests normally reclined to eat,⁴ they were anointed with oil, consumed meat, listened to singing and music, and partook in


⁴For a detailed study of reclining at funerary meals in commemoration of the dead, see Jean-Marie Dentzer, Le motif du banquet couché dans le proche-orient et le monde grec du VIIIe au IVe siècle avant J.-C. (Rome: École française de Rome, 1982), 23-25.
excessive drinking of wine.¹

From all appearances, the Old Testament banquets studied in this section (except the funerary banquet) are stunningly different from the foregoing ones in several ways. Yahweh, the host in all these scenes, is not seeking a favor from his guests, rather, evidently, he is doing them a favor. Also, there is no emphasis on seating arrangement and the invitation is all-inclusive in one instance (the eschatological banquet).

Banquets in Intertestamental Literature

In intertestamental literature, three banquet scenes readily stand out. They are found in the books of Joseph and Aseneth, and Tobit, and the writings of Qumran. These three narratives are dealt with in seriatim in this section.

Joseph and Aseneth

Joseph and Aseneth is virtually unfamiliar to the average reader.² The book tells the story of the daughter of an Egyptian priest who undergoes a process of transformation which qualifies her to become the acceptable bride of the biblical Joseph. Aseneth, the

¹King, 41.

daughter of Pentephres, the priest of Heliopolis, is portrayed as a beautiful eighteen-year-old virgin who refuses the hand of many suitors, including the Pharaoh’s first-born son. She would fall in love only with Joseph. The theme and purpose of Joseph and Aseneth is perceived variously by different scholars.  

Several dinners are mentioned in *Joseph and Aseneth*. Upon hearing the proposed visit of Joseph to his house, Pentephres summons his steward to hurry and make his “house ready and prepare a great dinner, because Joseph, the Powerful One of God, is coming to us today.” After Joseph’s departure, Aseneth, shattered by the sight of Joseph, retires with seven virgins, and undergoes a transformatory period during which she

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encounters a heavenly man. She invites the angel to recline at her table. She then sets before him bread and wine, both old and new. A week later, Joseph pays Pentephres a second visit. Joseph sends a forerunner to announce his arrival. Again an order is given to “hurry and make the house ready and prepare a good dinner, because Joseph the Powerful One of God is coming to us today.” This time the order comes from Aseneth, and the dinner is described as “good.” Aseneth then dresses in a special (wedding) robe, called the first robe, puts on much ornamentation, and washes her face with spring water.

She invites Joseph to this “good” dinner; she grasps him by his right hand and leads him into the house and seats him on Pentephres’ throne; she brings water and washes his feet; Joseph recoils at the idea that his bride-to-be should wash his feet, and suggests that the virgins do it. But she retorts, “Your feet are my feet, and your hands are

Based upon the activities of Aseneth during her transformatory period, one may assume that “entry in Judaism may well have been performed by a period of fasting, praying, meditating, washing, a symbolic changing of clothes (and perhaps of name), and celebrating a festive meal. But corroborative evidence is needed before we can be certain of this.” James H. Charlesworth, ed., The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983-1985), 2:193.


Jos. Asen, 18:3-11. Aseneth’s periodic changes of clothing raise the question of whether the author through this symbolism is trying to intimate an initiatory practice among the Jews.

Cf. Abigail and David’s emissaries, 1 Sam 25:41; The woman who anointed Jesus, as an act of deference, Matt 26:7; Mark 14:3 = Luke 7:37-38 = John 12:3.
my hands, and your soul my soul, and your feet another will not wash.” Joseph makes his short speech, grasps her right hand and kisses it; Aseneth then kisses his head and sits at his right hand.1 Her parents come in from the fields and see her sitting with Joseph and dressed in a wedding garment. After this they eat and drink and celebrate. Then Pentephe res says, “Tomorrow I will call all the noblemen and the satraps of the whole land of Egypt and give a marriage feast for you, and you will take my daughter Aseneth for wife.” But Joseph insists that he must inform Pharaoh. He leaves.2

Pharaoh agrees with the proposal, and gives a marriage feast, a great dinner, and a big banquet (symposium) for seven days (conventional length in Judaism). Pharaoh calls all the important people of Egypt, all the chiefs of the land, and all the kings of the nations and makes a decree. The seven days were to be like a Sabbath week and the violator was subject to death.3

Meal language is used six times in Joseph and Aseneth.4 In three of the six instances a triadic sequence of bread-cup-ointment is followed; the other three follow a dyadic bread-cup order. This allows us to speak about a stereotypical formula with some variations. The major posture up until the 1960s analyzed the bread-cup-ointment triad as

1Cf. the woman who anointed Jesus’ head and feet, and kissed his head. Cf. also the obligations of Jewish wives to wash face, hands, and feet of husbands, and to prepare their beds, in m. Ketub. 5.5 although this does not mention foot-washing, but bread baking, wool working, and bed making.


an allusion to some sort of ritual meal. Chesnutt and others, such as Jeremias, Burchard, and Schnackenburg, contended for an ongoing common meal in a Jewish context. Sänger and Collins espoused the same idea with variations. They argued that this order of events was not representative of a fixed cultic, initiatory meal, but reflected an ongoing conduct of life representative of the common Jewish meal.

In the story of Joseph and Aseneth, it appears that the writer was familiar with conventional wedding banquet motifs, being fully aware of the order in which these motifs were normally set. Though every individual banquet scene does not present a complement of motifs for a full-scale banquet scene, each one bears some type-scene constants. In the first banquet, the typical scene begins where an instruction is given to hurriedly prepare a banquet for an important figure (Joseph). In the second, Aseneth

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3 Cf. Ps 23:5, where the order is bread, oil, and cup. For further details on the banquet motif in Ps 23, see Ferris Lee McDaniel, "The Relationship between the Shepherd and Banquet Motifs of Psalm 23" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), 80-110.
encounters a heavenly man. Bread and wine are featured, and the being reclines to dine. In the third dinner, the motifs are the same as the first, but this time with some additional elements. This time a wedding robe is put on by Aseneth and some ritual washings are done. The host (Aseneth) washes the feet and hands of the chief guest, after which the kissing of hand and head follows. The final banquet is a great marriage feast where special guests are invited. In three instances the standard motifs of bread, cup (wine), and ointment (perfume) are mentioned.

Tobit

Three incidents depict a banquet scene in the book of Tobit. When Tobias arrives at Raguel’s home, he receives him warmly, and slaughters a ram of the flock, and then they “bathed and washed themselves and...reclined to dine” (Tob 7:9). After the initial meal, Tobias asks Raguel for his daughter Sarah in marriage (7:9-10). When the contract has been written, they “began to eat and drink” (7:14). The marriage takes place in spite of the fear that Tobias will die on his wedding night, as have Sarah’s previous seven husbands (7:11). When Tobias survives, Raguel gives a wedding feast, for which his wife bakes “many loaves of bread” and he has two steers and four rams slaughtered (8:19-20).

Feasting lasts for fourteen days. Tobias receives half of his father-in-law’s property immediately; the other half is to be received after his in-laws’ death (8:21). Raphael is given the bond for the money in trust and is sent to Gabael (9:1-5a). Raphael

1Cf. Jesus as host, washing of the disciples’ feet in the Last Supper.
receives the entrusted money (9:5b). Gabael comes to the wedding celebration, meets Tobias reclining at the table, and greets him with weeping and blessings (9:6).

Then Tobias, with his wife, and Raphael return home (10:10-13). Tobias and Raphael, when almost home, run ahead and prepare the house to receive the new bride (11:1-4). Following Tobit's recovery of sight (11:10-15), a seven-day celebration of Tobias's wedding ensues. During this time the couple receives many gifts (11:18).

Some constants of the banquet scene are highlighted in Tobit. As in the story of Joseph and Aseneth, the wedding feasts are long: fourteen days in the first instance and seven in the second. Bread and meat comprise the main course. Washings, followed by reclining, are mentioned in the first feast.

The Communal Meal at Qumran

Jewish speculation about the end time includes the picture of a great banquet for the faithful ones, which has often been described as an eschatological banquet. Attestation to this notion can be cited in Jewish apocalyptic literature and the writings from the Qumran. The Messianic Rule (1QSa = 1Q28a) dates to about the middle of the

1 En. 62:14; Syr Apoc Bar 29:5-8.
2 1QS 6.1-10; 1QSa 2.11-22.
3 Barthelemy was the first to publish "The Messianic Rule" in 1955. See D. Barthelemy and J.T. Milik, Discoveries in the Judean Desert (DJD): Qumran Cave I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 107-118. It was originally located in a scroll along with "The Community Rule." Barthelemy designated the work, "The Rule of the Congregation." Vermes has dubbed it "The Messianic Rule." For three sound reasons for naming the work as such, see Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, rev. and ext. 4th ed. (London: Penguin, 1995), 119. LaSor sees no convincing reason for its being described as a "messianic banquet," in spite of Burrows's questioning: "What is the
first century B.C.E. It describes the rules that the community of believers (Yahad) must enact in preparation for the messianic war against the nations (the Gentiles) in the last days. One remarkable feature of this document is its description of a banquet feast governed by strict regulations, in which all Israel is expected to participate in the Last Days. The meal is associated with the arrival of the “Messiah of Israel,” “the war lord” who was to be a descendant of David. This climactic banquet appears to be the epitome of the yahad’s ordinary practice of the less glorified, initiatory communal meals.

In the Qumran Community, the communal meal was of utmost importance. This is evident in that only the fully initiated ones, whose behavior demonstrated a serious commitment to their profession, were permitted to participate in the common meal. Josephus describes the communal meals of the Essenes, though his account is scant.

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After five hours of strenuous labor during the morning (between around 6 and 11 o'clock), they would assemble in one place. They would gird their loins with a white cloth and bathe their bodies in cold water. They then entered a refectory where only initiates were allowed. They sat in silence and waited to be served bread according to rank. Then a plate with a single course (cooked food) would be set before each partaker. The priest gave the blessing, after which each might partake. After the meal was eaten (apparently water was drunk), another benediction was pronounced. The participants then laid aside their white raiment, and returned to the fields until the evening. At the end of the day, they returned to perform the same routine for supper. Guests might join them, but not the uninitiated.¹

¹Josephus Jewish Wars 2.6.5. Another group, identified as the Therapeuts, took their weekday meals alone in their huts, eating only cheap bread flavored with salt or hyssop and drinking only water. Some members, however, fasted for three or even six days in contemplative rapture. They also held a “Pentecostal feast” every forty-nine days, perhaps in anticipation of a symbolic “jubilee” on the fiftieth day. They ate only bread seasoned with salt or hyssop. They abstained from wine and ate no flesh. For further details on the Therapeuts, see G. R. Driver, The Judean Scrolls: The Problem and a Solution (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), 122ff. Vermes has identified the Therapeuts as identical with the Qumran Community and the Essenes. The major ground for this assumption is that both names, Therapeuts and Essenes, may be translated “healers.” And the accounts of these three groups have more in common than there are differences. Vermes, 111-117. Many scholars propose that these three groups (and their sub-groups) sprang from a widespread movement of Jewish or para-Jewish nonconformity. The Therapeuts are described by Philo and Eusebius as Jewish people who predominantly lived in the vicinity of the Mareotic Lake, but who also settled in small, scattered groups in and about Egypt. Philo Contemplative Life 1.2; 2.11-4.39; 8.64-9.90; Eusebius Ecclesiastical History 2.7:3-23. They adopted a mode of life comparable to that of the Essenes and the Qumran community. They did not live, however, in communal housing, but in small huts in which a separate sanctum was set apart for each family. In the midst of these huts a central building was built for communal meeting and worship.
performed the ceremonial ablutions. Following this, he underwent another two years of indoctrination and training, after which he made his vow as a bona fide member. Only then could he touch “the Banquet of the Many.”

The yahad believed that two messiahs would appear in the Last Days from among them. One was to exercise the priestly role and the other a military function. The banquet was to be hosted by the yahad and men of noble repute when the invitation would be given. The priestly Messiah (Chief Priest) would enter first, as the head of the congregation, trailed by a community priests. They would sit after him in ranking order. Then the heads of clans would sit in ranks before the priests. The communal table was to be set with bread and wine poured out. The priest would reach for the bread first. The priest would bless the bread, then the wine. Afterward, the Messiah of Israel (different from the priestly Messiah) would reach for the bread, and a blessing would be given by each member of the congregation by order of rank. This was to be practiced, provided that at least ten men were gathered together.

From the brief description of meal scenes among the Qumran community certain recurrent motifs appear: washings, use of white garments, invitation to the “Banquet of the Many.” The chief priest acted as the host of the meal, members sat in ranking order, and bread and wine were the two invariables of the banquet.

1QS col 6.8b-23.

21QSa 2:11-22. The Messianic banquet bears some affinities to some Old Testament references (See Exod 18:12; Deut 12:7, 18; 27:7). More vivid echoes may be seen from Ezek 44:3 where Ezekiel describes a Messianic prince, who after the gate of the Temple is shut and “because he is the nasi, he may sit in it to eat bread before the Lord.”
Greco-Roman Banquets

During the Greco-Roman period banqueting was a complex and important social institution. The principles and practices of dining of the Greeks and Romans in some ways parallel those of preceding cultures. However, they added new dimensions which appended new meanings. The Greek culture, as the forerunner of the Greco-Roman culture, espoused most of its rules and regulations of commensality from literature written by Greek authors such as Socrates and Plato. The Romans more or less followed similar practices, except to describe meal practices differently, using Latin nomenclature instead of Greek. Plutarch and Lucian’s writings give rich insights into the Roman practice of commensality. Consequently, in this section, both Greek and Roman practices have been studied together.

In the Greco-Roman world, banquets manifested themselves in a common meal tradition, which carried certain social implications. Each common meal was adapted to various settings. Thus, the hosting of a banquet could extend from a get-together with friends, business colleagues, or religious associates, to a grand public feast. A banquet might be held to honor a friend before he departed to another place or after his arrival from a long journey.¹ Guests who come from foreign lands might be treated with an exquisite banquet. Banquets were sometimes held solely for common members of clubs. One type of club was the trade guild called collegia, whose members were individuals of

the same trade or occupation.¹ It was not uncommon to host a banquet in celebration of a religious festival. Some banquets were kept in honor of patron deities. The occasion might be a state holiday, a military victory, or the initiation of a public official.²

Banquets were commonly held on important family occasions, such as birthdays, weddings,³ and funerals.⁴ Weddings were the largest of these celebrations.⁵ There was


³Plutarch pinpoints, "Of all the occasions for a banquet, none is more conspicuous or talked about than a wedding. When we offer sacrifice to the gods, or honor a friend on the eve of a journey, or entertain guests from abroad, it is possible to do so unnoticed by many of our intimates and relatives; but a wedding-feast betrays us by the loud marriage cry, the torch, and the shrill pipe, things which according to Homer (Iliad 18.495f) even the women stand at their doors to watch and admire." Plutarch *Table Talk*, 4.3.666F-667A.

⁴Meals usually accompanied the funeral, commemorating the dead. Homer records that Achilles slaughtered a host of cattle, sheep, goats, and pigs, when the burial rites were administered for Patroclus. The meats were roasted and eaten by the participants in the funerary rites. *Iliad* 23.111. Cf. b. *Ketub.* 8b.

⁵In Plutarch's *Table Talk* Theon says that wedding banquets are "not merely for friendly entertainments but important family occasions, which solemnize the incorporation of a new set of relatives into the family. What is more important than this, at the union of two houses, each father-in-law regards it as a duty to demonstrate good will to the friends and relatives of the other, and so the guest-list is doubled. Besides, many or most of the activities relating to a wedding are in the hands of women, and where women are present it is necessary that their husbands also should be included." Plutarch *Table Talk* 4.3.667A-B.
also the notable communal meal practiced by the philosophical schools, after which philosophical dialogue would ensue in the drinking party. This classic form of commensality came to be associated with the classic definition and form of the symposium.¹ Thereafter, the literary form of the symposium served as a frame of reference whenever reference was made to meals, whether real or imaginary.

As a norm, the average banquet would be held in a host’s home for friends and associates. However, sometimes it could be held in a public facility (of course, only for citizens) in the city (perhaps in the temple complex). Invitations would normally be sent out the day before the banquet.² In some cases, it appears that the invitation was made orally.³ There are some instances of formal written invitations to attend feasts found in second- and third-century C.E. Egyptian papyri:

1. To a wedding in a temple: Oxyrhynchus papyrus 2678 (3rd century C.E.)

Dioscoros invites you to dine at the wedding of her son on the 14th of Mesore in the temple of Sabazius from the ninth hour, Farewell.

2. To a wedding in a house: Oxyrhynchus papyrus 111 (3rd century C.E.)

Heraios requests your company at dinner in celebration of the marriage of her children at her house tomorrow, the 5th, at 9 o’clock.

3. To a wedding, most probably in a house, and followed by a feast: Oxyrhynchus papyrus 927 (3rd century C.E.)


³As was the case of Xenophon Symposium 1.2-7.
Eros invites you to a wedding tomorrow the 29th at the 9th hour.

4. To the celebration of the birth of a child at the Serapeum: Oxyrhynchus papyrus 2791 (2nd century C.E.)

Diogenes invites you to dinner for the first birthday of his daughter in the Serapeum tomorrow which is Pachon 26 (? or 16), from the eighth hour onwards.

5. To the *epicrisis* (the official initiation of a thirteen-year-old to the privileged class; it heralded the attainment of puberty and the entry upon the duties of a citizen) of a son at the house: Oxyrhynchus papyrus 2792 (3rd century C.E.)

Horion invites you to the *epicrisis* of his son on the 15th at his own house from the 8th hour onwards.

6. To the *epicrisis* of oneself in this instance at his house: Oxyrhynchus papyrus 926 (3rd century)

Heratheon invites you to dine with him, on the occasion of his examination, at his house tomorrow, the 5th, at the 9th hour.

7. To a feast given by a cavalry officer: Oxyrhynchus papyrus 747 (Late second or third century)

The decurion invites you to his party on the sixth day before the Calends at the eighth hour.

8. To the crowning of the host's son on his entry upon some civic office:

Eudaemon invites you to dine at the Gymnasium on the crowning of his son Nilus on the 1st, at the eighth hour.

From the above examples of invitations, several conclusions may be drawn:

1. Invitations were normally sent out the day prior to the event.

2. Giving short notices, in terms of time, was a common practice.
3. Parties could be held in the house, temple, or public building—secular or religious.

4. Dinners could be held for different events—birth, wedding, initiation.

5. General dinner hours were the 8th or 9th hours, but most often at the 9th hour.

6. There was no closing time; guests could stay as long as they wished.

7. Dinners were always held in honor of someone.

8. Punctuality for banquets seemed an issue.

Repeated invitations could be sent to an honored guest, just before the banquet began, and especially if it became apparent that the guest would be late. The guests, especially the most honored, were expected to be appropriately garbed. Not to do so was tantamount to insult. Caution had to be exercised in inviting the right guests, so as not to

1This is a typical practice of my Muslim father who goes out to meet his tardy guests at the roadside, insisting that they enter his home for his well-prepared dinner. This practice is still a part of the cultural traditions of my Indo-Trinidadian people, who came to the West Indies as indentured immigrants during the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

2Socrates is slow to arrive at the banquet because he is absorbed in his philosophical thoughts. Agathon, the banquet host, sends his servants to hasten him to the dinner. Socrates retreats to a neighbor's porch and is oblivious of his appointment. Agathon insists that his servants encourage him to come, "You must go on bidding him, and by no means let him go." Aristodemus advises that he must leave Socrates alone, for this is his habit of standing anywhere, and he will come when he is ready. Agathon gives many orders subsequently to his servants to fetch Socrates. Aristodemus, his friend, will not allow it. Finally, Socrates arrives but without any apology for being late half-way through the dinner. Plato Symposium 175A.

3Finely trimmed Socrates gets himself up in a "handsome style in order to be a match for his handsome host, Agathon." Plato Symposium 174A-B. People of Sybaris have their invitations sent to women one year in advance, so as to give them enough time to prepare themselves with jewelry and clothes. Plutarch Dinner of the Seven Wise Men.
offend in the slightest way the honored guest.\textsuperscript{1} It was not conventional for a person to attend the banquet feast uninvited,\textsuperscript{2} though it was not unusual for the "tables" to be interrupted by the forced entry of a banquet "parasite."\textsuperscript{3} Yet, if someone who had not been invited came with an invited friend, an excuse must be ready for his appearance.\textsuperscript{4} Not only must the invited one, who brought along the uninvited guest, be prepared to excuse his friend's presence at the banquet, but his friend must be able to answer for

\begin{enumerate}
\item Plato gives sound advice on the selection of appropriate guests. See Plutarch Table Talk 5.5.679C-D.
\item Plato speaks of Homer's breach of convention, when he makes the "spiritless spearman," Manelaus, attend the sacrificial banquet of the hero, Agamemnon, "so the worse man was the guest of the better." Plato Symposium 174C.
\item "Parasites" were charlatans and jokers who had a cunning talent for showing up at a banquet forcing their company on guests, who would undergo any indignity for the chance of a good dinner. They were usually foppishly garbed. Becker speaks of a jester, Stephanos, who "begged to inform the company that he was plentifully provided with everything requisite for enjoying an abundant repast at a stranger's table." Becker, 92. They were a necessary appendage at the tables of the rich. See Lucian The Parasite 58. Plutarch speaks of female parasites. See Plutarch Adultery 192.
\item This was a necessary requirement for warding-off banquet "leeches." Epictetus scorns the hounding for invitations to banquets as a vehicle for social elevation. See Epictetus Encheiridion 25.4-5. Conversely, a banquet host might establish control over another person by giving him a place of high honor and feeding him to the full. See Plautus Twin Menaechemi Act 1, Scene 1, lines 90-95.
\end{enumerate}
himself also, and be willing to take a seat behind the guests.

In preparation for the feast there was great excitement and commotion. Upon the arrival of the guests, the door was swung wide open, while servants waited to wash and then escort the guests to the dining room or *triclinium*, furnished with couches where the guests reclined. The notion of status and rank was evident in the seating arrangement at the banquet table. This could pose a challenge for the host and could even embarrass him, if he made an oblivious blunder in assigning seats. Orderliness and good

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1On his way to a banquet Socrates sees his friend Aristodemus and requests him to come along with him uninvited. See Plato *Symposium* 174B. Cf. Becker, 90-92. Charicles sees his friend Ctesiphon on the way to the banquet hosted for him by Lysiteles, and invites Ctesiphon to come along with him. Cf. also Lucian *Symposium* 13.

2Agathon tells Aristodemus he is welcome to the banquet though he did not receive an official invitation. The invitation was sent to Aristodemus the day before, but he could not be found. Plato *Symposium* 174E.

3For the full details of the preparation of a Greek banquet (in this case for the return of a childhood playmate—a friendship feast hosted by Lysiteles for his friend Charicles) and the definitude by which items were selected, see “The Sixth Scene: The Banquet.” Becker, 89.

4Plato *Symposium* 174E-175A. Plato speaks of an attendant washing him and making him ready for reclining. Washing of hands and feet before reclining was a normal part of Greco-Roman banquet customs. On the walls in a dining room in Pompeii, Italy, an inscription reads: “The slave shall wash and dry the feet of the guests; and let him be sure to spread a linen cloth on the cushions of the couches.” M. Grant, *Cities of Vesuvius* (New York: Penguin, 1978), 117. Athenaeus alludes to this in 14.641d where he quotes from Aristophanes (*The Wasps* verse 1216), “water over the hand, tables brought in.” “Tables brought in” is a figurative expression meaning “food was brought in.” Athenaeus *Deipnosophists* 14.641d. Cf. Periander’s dinner of the seven wise men where each invited guest received "a carriage and a pair fashionably comparisoned" at the door, because of the dirt in the path preceding the hall. Plutarch *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* 146D.

5Periander, for instance, assigns an ignominious position to Alexidemus—the representative of Thrasybulus. This served as an insult to Thrasybulus. Thales advises,
organization appeared to be the main requisite for hosting a banquet.

It was customary to seat the officials of highest status at the highest position.¹

“When we have taken our places, we ought not to try to discover who has been placed above us, but rather how we may be thoroughly agreeable to those placed with us, by trying at once to discover in them something that may serve to initiate and keep up friendship, and, better yet, by harboring no discontent but an open satisfaction in being placed next to such persons as these. For, in every case, a man that objects to his place at table is objecting to his neighbor rather than to his host, and he makes himself hateful to both.” Plutarch Dinner of the Seven Wise Men 148F-149B.

On another occasion, Plutarch refers to a situation where a distinguished guest arrived late at the banquet. Upon discovering that a position not commensurate with his rank (he had a train of servants and wore extravagant clothes) was reserved for him, he would not enter the banquet hall, and left in anger. The banquet was hosted by Plutarch’s brother, Timon, who bade his guests—all sorts of people—to sit wherever they wished. Despite attempts to bring him to the banquet chamber, he refused. Thereupon, the guests at the table acknowledged his decision and responded with much laughter as “there were many who had had a little something to drink.” Thereafter, Plutarch’s father reprimands Timon for not following his instructions, and appoints Plutarch to judge the matter, for his household was now brought “under suspicion of disorderliness and liable to public audit.” See Plutarch Table Talk 1.2.615D. Cf. The Parable of Places at a Feast, Luke 14:8-11. This parable warns against taking a “place of honor” at the table, lest a higher-ranking guest arrive later and claim that position.

¹According to Plutarch, different nations held different places of honor. For the Persians, the most central place was occupied by the king. In the case of the Greeks, the honored place was the first place on the couch. The Romans held the last place on the middle couch, called the consul’s place, as the most important position. The people in the Pontus region esteemed the first place of the middle couch as the best place. In the Roman tradition the consul, after establishing the rule of conduct and procedures for the banquet, at a democratic level steps down from the royal central place, in order that not even this mark of their office and their power should remain to offend their associates. Two couches are given to the guests; the third couch and the first place on it certainly belongs to the host, for here, he is favorably placed to watch over the service and is not prevented from entertaining and conversing with those who are present. Of the places closest to him, below him belongs to his wife and children, while above him was given properly to the guest of honor in order that he might be near his host. This place seemed to have peculiar advantage for the transaction of business. See Plutarch Table Talk 1.3.619B-619F.
Normally, diners would share couches as may be seen in Greek paintings and literature.⁴ Figure 4 depicts banqueters in reclining positions while dining. Diners reclined parallel to each other on their left sides and ate with their right hands.² Guests around the banquet

¹Normally, a couch could hold two to three persons. Generally, the number of couches would be about three arranged around the low three-legged tables on which the servants put the food. In a discussion with his grandson, Plutarch, Lamprias criticized the showy thirty-couch dining room of the wealthy as it made for unsociable and unfriendly banquets. Plato Symposium 174A-B.

²Cf. John 13:23 “lying close to Jesus breast” (on the right—a position of honor); and Luke 16:22, Lazarus in “Abraham’s bosom” (blessing of afterlife is equated with a
table drank from a large vessel, circulated from left to right. There were two major courses in a banquet, the *deipnon*, ("supper" or "banquet") which was the meal proper, followed by the *symposium* ("symposium"), which was the drinking party. Between the *deipnon* and the *symposium* there was a series of ritual performances. The banquet procedure was punctuated by periodic washing of the hands.

The *symposium* adhered to strict rules of decorum, both explicit and implicit. Formal order characterized the nature of the *symposium* which was "distinguished not so much by the entertainment as by the setting and the fare of a festive banquet).

1Plato *Symposium* 223C.

2There were three courses: *gustos* (*hors d'oeuvres*), which included tasty snacks of olives, shellfish, or vegetables; the main course, a variety of meat and fish dishes served together or in sequence; and the dessert, which usually was comprised of fruits and nuts. Nicholas R. E. Fisher, "Greek Associations, Symposia, and Clubs," in *Civilisation of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 2:1205. For the practice of eating appetizers, see Athenaeus *The Deipnosophists* 2.58b-60b. See also an allusion to this in early Jewish practice: "When they bring him food, he dips the lettuce in vinegar before he comes to the breaking of the bread." *Mishnah Peshalim* 10:3. Cf. Matt 26:23; Mark 14:20.

3This form is reflected in the Lord's supper traditions in the New Testament in which the wine is drunk "after supper [deipnon]" (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).

4The food was removed and the wine bowl was brought in for the mixing of the wine. The proportion of water to wine varied, but the more common practice was five parts of water to two parts of wine or three parts water to one part wine. To mark the start of the symposium a libation was given to the gods accompanied by other religious ceremonies and the singing of hymns. See Plato *Symposium* 176A; Plutarch *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* 150D.

5Neyrey, "Meals, Food, and Table Fellowship," 161-162.

6Plutarch *Table Talk* 1.2.616A-B. For some extensive work done on the nature and function of symposium in antiquity, see Walter Burkert, "Oriental Symposia: Contrasts and Parallels," in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann
much for its banquet as for the extended colloquium and drinking that followed.”¹ It could become “a tipsy affair,” with flute girls insinuating debauchery and mad carousing.²

The major features of the symposium were leisurely drinking accompanied by entertainment: songs,³ music, dance, drama of mythical stories, erotic liaisons with one’s couch mates or with the flute girl. Convivial philosophical conversations ensued.⁴

Athenaeus in the Deipnosophists makes mention of an ideal symposium described by Xenophanes of Colophon (ca. 570-478 B.C.E.) as “full of delight”:

Now, at last, the floor is swept, and clean are the hands of all the guests, and their cups as well; one slave puts plaited wreaths on their heads, another offers sweet-smelling perfume in a saucer; the mixing bowl stands full of good cheer; and other wine is ready, which promises never to give out—mellow wine in jars, redolent of its bouquet; and in the midst the frankincense sends forth its sacred fragrance; and there is water, cool and fresh and pure. The yellow loaves lie ready at hand, and a lordly table groans with the weight of cheese and luscious honey; an altar in the middle is

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¹Neyrey, "Meals, Food, and Table Fellowship," 161.

²Plato Symposium 176E. A girl (Cleobulina) is noticed parting the hair of an invitee (Anarcharsis). She pays loving attention to him. Thales ventures to think that while she is bestowing this affectionate attention on Anarcharsis, she is gaining some knowledge through further conversation with him (cf. the woman who anointed Jesus). Plutarch Dinner of the Seven Wise Men 148C-E.


⁴See Plato Symposium 176A, where Socrates dines at Agathon’s banquet. Symposium 176E shows that Plato prefers to be entertained by philosophical discussions. The Romans discussed more humane and friendly subjects during the symposia than the Greeks. This tradition is very important when one attempts to appreciate the role of table fellowship in the Early Church. It was not uncommon for a philosopher to have a meal with his disciples.
I banked all round with flowers, and singing and dancing and bounty pervade the house. But men of good cheer should first of all praise the god with pious stories and pure words; they should pour libations and pray for power to do the right (for that is the duty closer to hand); 'tis no sin to drink as much as you can hold and still get home without an attendant, unless you be very old. Praise that man who even in his cups can show forth goodly thoughts, according as memory serves him and his zeal for virtue is at full stretch. In no wise is it good to relate the fights of Titans and Giants nor of Centaurs, the fictions of men aforetime, or their violent factions, in which there is nought that is wholesome; but it is good ever to have regard for the gods.¹

This account suggests an atmosphere that is a blend of religious solemnity and festivity.² Foss's reconstruction of a triclinium in Pompeii provides a rich appreciation of a banquet scene in the first century. See figure 5.

As can be seen, the Greco-Roman banquet was a formal banquet that was highly structured both in terms of specific roles for the participants (a host, chief guest, other guests) and specific courses of foods (hors d'oeuvres, main course, and dessert; postprandial conversation and drinking). Presumably, the regulations that governed a social group's practice of commensality reflect that body's self-understanding and worldview in relation to other social structures and networks.³ Smith and Taussig have found conventional patterns of social relations that make up the Greco-Roman banquet ideology.⁴

¹Athenaeus The Deipnosophists 11. 462c-f.
²Thomas, 41.
³The squabble in Corinth over individual portions apparently was more than being avaricious. Indubitably, the size of a member's portion meant the amount of the member's worth in the eyes of the group. In other words, the portion one received was commensurate with his worth, providing a kind of social barometer. See 1 Cor 11:20-22.
⁴Smith and Taussig, Many Tables, 30-35.
POMPEII IX.1.7, room (e) Casa di Paccius Alexander

LECTUS MEDIUS

Reconstruction of the triclinium and the arrangement of diners, couches, and table are based on the size and placement of couch niches.

key to couch position:
1: locus summus
2: locus medius
3: locus imus

Lectus imus #1 is the place of the master of the house.

Fig. 5. Reconstruction of the Standard Order of Reclining Diners in Triclinium (e) of the Casa di Paccius Alexander, IX.1.7. Reprinted, by permission, from Pedar William Foss, no pages, accessed 5 June 2000; available from: http://acad.depauw.edu/romarch/hgender.html; Internet.

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1. Social bonding. The meal created a special tie among diners.\textsuperscript{1} To refuse a meal was to engender offense and grave insult. To abstain from what was offered was enough evidence for labeling the offender as being eccentric.\textsuperscript{2}

2. Social obligation. The community ties led to ethical obligations. Symposium laws were formulated to govern behavior and conversation. Common etiquette was classified as an important component of the symposium laws. Quarreling and abusive behavior were prohibited.\textsuperscript{3}

3. Social stratification. The diners were always cognizant of their social ranking order.\textsuperscript{4} In Greco-Roman society, “not only was food a significant marker of social status, but dining was also the primary means for social advancement in winning favors and ________________

\textsuperscript{1}The sharing of meals resulted in the establishment of friendships. See Plutarch, \textit{Questiones Convivialis} 612C-D. About 43 B.C.E., in his letter to Papirius Paetus in Napes, Cicero exalted the place of food as a commodity which created social harmony and generated relaxed and friendly conversation. Cicero \textit{The Letters to His Friends} 9.24.

\textsuperscript{2}Thus, Seneca disapproves of some philosophers who practice asceticism, for this behavior only earns one the disrepute of being hostile and ridiculous in the eyes of the common people. Commensality was designed for fellowship, and to engender a feeling of belonging to the community. See Seneca \textit{Letter} 5:4.

\textsuperscript{3}Cf. Paul’s instructions to forbid factions in 1 Cor 11:17-34; Sir 31:15, where the Jewish sage devotes a section to meal etiquette.

\textsuperscript{4}See Xenophon’s \textit{Symposium} 1.8, where Autolycus’s father reclines and he sits next to his father, although the banquet is in honor of Autolycus. Reclining as a sign of high social standing may be also inferred from the Jewish passover liturgy recorded in the \textit{m. Pesah}. 10.1, “And even the poorest Israelite should not eat until he reclines at his table.” A sign of “good order” was the positioning of guests around the table reflecting their social rank. The Essenes practiced rank order in their communal meals. See \textit{Rule of the Congregation} 1QSa 2.11-22.
benefits from one's superiors."¹ In the Hellenic period only free citizens could attend the public banquets. Women, children, and slaves were forbidden to attend. The laws became more relaxed during the Roman period.² Lucian, in a fling of satire, describes a fictitious philosophical banquet where women were present and evidently reclined.³

4. Social equality. While hierarchy in the social order was assumed, there existed also a sense of social equality among the diners.⁴ Plutarch makes reference to a banquet where social ranking was abandoned and each invitee reclined at leisure wherever he wished. This, according to Plutarch, makes the dinner a democratic affair without vanity and ostentation, and not a viceregal one, where the rich man reclines and lords it over the meaner folk.⁵ In this new social order the equality among men is preserved.

The Roman satirist Petronius, in his work Satyricon (one of a small group of


²Respectable women did not attend the symposia. But in Roman dinner parties respectable women could participate, though the privilege to recline became acceptable only years later. Fisher, "Greek Associations," 1174.

³When an invited guest arrived late for the banquet, his couch was occupied and he was invited to sit rather than recline. In an indignant retort, he prefers to recline on the floor, for sitting at the table is "womanish and weak." See Lucian Symposium 13.

⁴As early as Homer the concept of “equal banquets” was practiced among heroes (see Iliad 1.468, 602; 2.431), and as late as the second century “equal privilege” at the table was practiced among the worshipers of Zeus Panamoros. J. Hatzfeld, “Inscriptions de Panamara,” Bulletin de correspondance hellénique 51 (1927): 73. See also Plato Symposium 175B where Agathon institutes a banquet of equality, at which each guest sits in any position he wishes.

⁵Plutarch Table Talk 616C-F.
writings about men and women who had to live by their wits), describes a famous meal hosted by Trimalchio, a wealthy and ambitious freedman. This was offered in honor of his new rich acquaintances. This account offers rich insights into the cultural traditions of Greco-Roman commensality. It suggests a comparison with Early Christian meals. Richard Pervo asserts that "Trimalchio is a classic caricature of status dissonance." "Unlike many hosts, Trimalchio refused to grade his guests by different quantities and qualities of food. He had experienced too much social slight to engage in such a practice. Trimalchio is at heart generous, but does not know how to make a proper use of his generosity."

Pervo provides an interesting and noteworthy analysis of Trimalchio's banquet, and a social analysis of banquets in general: "Food is a social substance and currency. What one is able (and chooses) to serve expresses one's own position and helps define one's relationship to others. What you, the guests, are offered is a measure of your standing in the eyes of society and your host."


3There is a messianic aspect to his banquet: free and abundant food for all (cf. Matt 22; Luke 14), complete with (culinary) marvels. The poorer among the Christians at Corinth would have appreciated this generosity.

4Pervo, "Wisdom and Power," 313. "Early Christianity was admirably equipped with suitable instructions and instructors for just this sort of situation." Ibid.

5Ibid., 311.
All the sources used in this section offered *compendious portraits*, *tableaux vivants*, as it were, of the typical banquet scene among the ancient Greeks and Romans. I have analyzed these findings and synthesized them into a summary of the typical banquet scene, illustrative of the manners and customs of the Greco-Roman world.

In the Greco-Roman world, different occasions prompted the hosting of a banquet. Selected guests may include loved ones or associates and may be held in public or private. An individual was invited to a banquet for a specific time. It may be held in his honor or someone else's. Repeated invitations were sent out, to remind guests of their appointment. The guests were supposed to dress for the occasion and may be accompanied by friends, who must be prepared to take a low-ranking position.

Upon arrival at the banquet hall, the door was usually found opened. The guests were greeted and ushered in (by servants or the host). Feet and hands were washed and guests reclined in order of rank, after which the food was brought in. The menu included meat, fish, vegetables, fruits, and nuts. The meal might be interrupted by the late arrival of a gaudily clad guest who has forced his entry into the company of the guests. The guests ate at leisure, after which hands were washed again, the tables moved, and the floor swept. A bowl was brought in which undiluted wine was poured in for a libation while pretty flute-girls entered. The host took a draft of the wine and passed the cup around from the highest guest of honor to the lowest in ranking order. On this, the party waxed merrier.

In the Greco-Roman society, the treatment of the banquet guests by a host was proportionate to the guests' standing in the eyes of the public. The Greco-Roman banquet...
was used as a medium to create social bonding, social obligation, social stratification, and social equality. Trimalchio undermined the conventional mode of social ranking in banquets, thereby creating a new social order.

New Testament Banquet Narratives Outside of the Parables of Jesus

The shared meal is a central feature in the New Testament. Neyrey posits: "What the cross is to Jesus, the meal is to the Early Church: its primary symbol."\(^1\) The common meal is located in a number of diverse settings serving different functions, according to its context. In the different contexts, the meals are never easy to read, for, as Neyrey says, "much more communication is put forth than is apparent in the passing of plates and the eating of food."\(^2\) An important question, it seems, in New Testament times was, "Who eats what with whom, under which circumstances?"\(^3\)


\(^1\) Neyrey, "Meals, Food, and Table Fellowship," 168.

\(^2\) Ibid., 169.

\(^3\) Ibid., 170.
The meal materials may be classified under three related themes: (1) the impartial generosity of God (Wedding at Cana, John 2:1-11; the Woman at Simon’s Feast, Matt 26:6-13 = Mark 14:3-9 = Luke 7:36-38 = John 12:1-8); (2) God’s care for the outcasts (Jesus dines with Levi and Zacchaeus, Luke 19:1-10; Many Reclining with Abraham, Matt 8:11); and (3) the establishments of new social relationships (The Last Supper, Luke 22:14-28). This section uses these two taxonomies—functions and themes—in its analysis of the meals under study. Only meals that assume a banquet scenario and are outside the parables of Jesus, and which provide elements that are useful for the development of the banquet type-scene, are considered.

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2 Robert Karris, Luke: Artist and Theologian (New York: Paulist, 1985), 47-78. Note that the third theme overlaps with the first, and especially with the second function.

3 Four short accounts that describe banquet scenes but are not amenable to the type-scene analysis are the ταγεία meal referred to in Jude 12, the eschatological banquet in Matt 8:11, "the marriage supper of the Lamb" in Rev 19:9, and "the great supper of God" in Rev 19:17-18. Yet, they are worth mentioning as they bear a few elements common to the banquet scene. Also, they are well-known passages in the New Testament.

The ταγεία meal (2 Pet 2:13) or love feast or Christian fellowship meal created an opportunity for the false teachers—"spots in the feasts"—who through greed, disorder, and immorality, like "sunken reefs," waited to shipwreck the unwary. Many scholars see this meal in the Early Christian Church as referring to the Lord’s Supper.

The eschatological meal in Matt 8:11 deals with a saying of Jesus on membership in the kingdom of heaven. There is an open invitation even to the Gentiles to this dinner. Those originally invited, the Jewish people, may even find themselves excluded. The Hebrew patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, probably preside at this banquet.

"The marriage supper of the Lamb" anticipates and stands in sharp contrast to "the great supper of God" in Rev 19:17-18. Those invited to "the marriage supper of the Lamb" are described as "blessed" and represent the faithful saints. "The great supper of
The Dinners of Levi and Zacchaeus

In the Gospels, Jesus is often seen participating in table-fellowship with the outcasts of society, mainly toll collectors and sinners.\(^1\) They were treated as social undesirables and were disenfranchised and ostracized by the leading members of the community, especially the Pharisees.\(^2\) Levi's scene is definitely a great banquet, and it is likely that Zacchaeus's dinner constituted no small table. Both of these would-be disciples of Jesus were toll-collectors.

Important for the development of the banquet type-scene are the common characteristics these two scenarios share. First, Jesus invites them to follow him. Then, God\(^a\) is a parody of the messianic banquet alluded to in Ezek 39:17-20. Some banquet constants in these two accounts are the bride, garments, and catchwords such as κάλεω, ἐρχομαι, ἐσθιόω, and σάρξ. καθομαι is used to suggest the judgment theme.

\(^1\)Scholars are divided on the exact identification of "sinners." This may refer to those who violated the ceremonial prescriptions enforced by the rabbis (E. Earle Ellis, The Gospel of Luke, The New Century Bible Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981], 107) or those who were involved in degrading occupations, because of their propensities to encourage connivance (John R. Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners: An Attempt at Identification," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 33 [1971]: 39) or those who simply became contaminated by coming into contact with those objects that were unclean (J. Massyngbeard Ford, My Enemy Is My Guest: Jesus and Violence in Luke [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984], 72).

The New Testament is silent on the subject of tax collectors. The word τελώνης is used to mean the tax farmer or tax collector. Josephus distinguished two types of tax farmers: the official who raised the poll (tributum capitas) and the land taxes (tributum agri), and the one responsible for the sales taxes, customs taxes, transport taxes, and other minor taxes (toll collector). See Josephus Antiquities 18.4. The Pharisees despised the toll collectors for their common dishonesty and uncleanness. For further details on tax and toll collectors, see Donahue, "Tax Collectors and Sinners," 39-61. See also Malina and Rohrbaugh, 82-83.

Jesus and his disciples openly eat with these outcasts. This is reminiscent of the open invitation to Yahweh's banquet in Isa 25:6-10a. Both men received him with joy. The Pharisees and scribes become indignant and begin to murmur. The narrative closes with Jesus making a statement concerning his mission and redemptive purpose, thus refuting the dissenters' objections.

Feast of Simon

Another group of people with whom Jesus is recorded as having table-communion is the same who opposed his association with the tax collectors and sinners—the Pharisees. On at least three occasions in the Gospels, Jesus dines with Pharisees. Only one of these gives sufficient narrative material to warrant an investigation into the banquet type-scene. An exceptional attribute of this narrative is its exemplification of all of the four functions and three themes of meals mentioned earlier. When all the synoptic parallels of Simon’s banquet feast are considered, certain notable characteristics emerge.

At the beginning of the narrative, Jesus receives an invitation by a Pharisee. Jesus is the supposed chief guest. Other honored guests are present (religious leaders). Jesus takes his reclining position at the table. An uninvited female guest (a sinner) sneaks in. She stands behind Jesus. She performs some questionable actions (flute-girl imagery).


Those in the company become indignant (she may be cast out). She is reproached. She is commended by Jesus (her gesture is interpreted as a good one by the narrator). The host is rebuked (the lavish wastage of ointment stands in contrast to the meager gesture of the host). Her work is described as having purposeful and redemptive value.

Some constants of this banquet scene are as follows: A man prepares a banquet. Selective invitations are sent out. The invitations are accepted. The chief guest and other guests take their positions around the table. An uninvited guest enters and interrupts the meal. While this narrative supposes the basic elements of a banquet type-scene, it presents a variation to the typical Greco-Roman banquet scene in the following ways: The chief guest is not fully honored; his feet are not washed; perfume is not poured on his head or his feet; an uninvited non-virgin does a good act; there is a reaction by other guests. This type-scene reveals the complex relationship that existed between Jesus and the Pharisees. The plot demonstrates the constant conflict and tension between the two parties. It reveals the Pharisees' hypocrisy as opposed to the outcast's sincerity, their unwitty opposition to Jesus as opposed to his wisdom.

The Wedding Feast at Cana

This account is found only in the Gospel of John (John 2:1-11). A marriage takes place in Cana. The mother of Jesus is an invited guest. Jesus, as well as his disciples, is also invited. The wine supply diminishes, and Jesus, though being a guest, is called upon to provide the duty of the host—to replenish the supply of wine. Failure to supply wine at such an auspicious occasion was cause for great social embarrassment. Jesus
proceeds to have six large ceremonial jars filled to the brim with water, after which, he
instructs the servants to draw some and take it to the ruler of the feast (the consul, in the
Roman tradition). A miracle occurs as the servants carry out the command of Jesus in
which the water turns into wine. The miracle is attested by the response of the man in
charge of the banquet. He calls the bridegroom and praises him for the fine wine which
he has reserved for last.

Some elements of this narrative that are important for the development of the
banquet type-scene are: A wedding banquet is prepared. Selected guests are specifically
mentioned: the mother of Jesus, Jesus, and Jesus’ disciples. Some regular banquet
motifs are wine, water, servants, and bridegroom. There seems to be an implicit contrast
between the water used for ceremonial cleansing according to Jewish purification rites
and the new wine provided by Jesus. This account presents a variation to the typical
banquet scene. It is shocking to see an invited guest providing the refreshments for the
banquet guests—the provision of which was normally the responsibility of the host. The
presence and role of the ruler of the feast suggest that the banquet was influenced by
formalities of the Greco-Roman banquet.

The Last Supper

The Last Supper is the expression used to describe the last meal Jesus ate with his
disciples on the evening before his death. This meal is preserved in several versions in
the Synoptic Gospels.¹ Additionally, two sources in the New Testament can facilitate a

historical reconstruction of the Last Supper.\footnote{John 13:1-30; 1 Cor 11:20-34.} Two main questions govern the
reconstruction of the events of the Last Supper. First, what kind of meal was it? Second, what was the accurate order of events during the meal?

Several views have been espoused by scholars as to what type of meal Jesus’ Last Supper was. There are those who believe that it was an ordinary, simple Jewish meal, but that Jesus’ impending death gave it a special meaning.\footnote{Driver, 515. Driver vigorously argues that all meals of Jewish antiquity, “whether Essenes or of Covenanters (Qumran community) or of Pharaisc ‘association,’ whether Paschal meal or qiddūš, whether Last Supper of Eucharist, were or arose out of the ordinary evening meal of any pious Jewish group; but a special character was given to them when any event was brought into connection with them” (515). His main position is that all the ceremonial Jewish meals originated from regular Jewish meals, and were then adapted to particular rites of specific events. To say, for instance, that the Lord’s Supper had its antecedent in the Messianic Banquet is a travesty of the facts, because all Jewish and even Christian ritual meals find their provenance in the ordinary Jewish meal. H. H. Rowley, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament (London: Talbot, 1964), 16; Hugh Anderson, Jesus and Christian Origins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 294-297.} Others contend that it was a qiddūš meal, where a blessing was said at the beginning or during the meal on the eve of the Sabbath or any feast day.\footnote{Yngve Brilioth, Eucharistic Faith and Practice, Evangelical and Catholic, trans. A. G. Herbert (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 10, 38-39; G. H. Box, "The Jewish Antecedents of the Eucharist," Journal of Theological Studies 3 (1902): 368.} Similarities between the Last Supper and the Qumran sacred meal are recognized by some scholars.\footnote{These similarities are the bread and wine, the blessing, and the eschatological significance. See Matthew Black, The Scrolls and Christian Origins (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1961), 168; F. F. Bruce, "Jesus and the Gospels in the Light of the Scrolls," in The Scrolls and Christianity, ed. Matthew Black (London: Talbot, 1969), 77-78; Cyrus H. Gordon, Adventures in the Nearest East (London: Phoenix House, 1957), 141; Kuhn, 84-85. Stauffer maintains that these similarities are as a result of Jesus’ direct or indirect

\footnote{Stauffer maintains that these similarities are as a result of Jesus’ direct or indirect}
Supper was a fellowship meal in memory of Jesus and which started a new era that would be completed in the future.\textsuperscript{1} Dodd and others advocate that it was an eschatological meal in anticipation of the Messianic banquet to be celebrated in heaven.\textsuperscript{2} Finally, many other scholars claim the Last Supper was a farewell meal within the setting of the Passover meal, which anticipated the eschatological meal to be eaten in the Kingdom.\textsuperscript{3}

The Passover meal is favored by most conservative scholars. Some of the more prominent proponents of this view are Smith, Saldarini, Marshall, Jeremias, Albright, and Mann.\textsuperscript{4} All three Synoptic writers seem to identify the meal as a Passover meal.\textsuperscript{5}

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Furthermore, early Christian tradition suggests that it was a Passover meal.\(^1\)

Undoubtedly, it would not have been strange for the early Christian believers and writers, who actually were Jews, and who still practiced the Jewish traditions, to link this meal with the Passover celebration and use Passover symbolism and allusions to understand Jesus' actions.

Scholars agree that the order of events at the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples, though sketchy, offers some parallels to the Jewish Seder (order of the meal).\(^2\) However, if one wishes to use the Jewish Passover as a paradigm to understand the Last Supper, two major challenges are faced. First, by the time of Jesus the Passover had undergone a long period of development, often difficult to trace. In the first century, Passover practices were not always uniform. Thus, one must be cautious of reliance on a single textual tradition as evidence for actual practice.\(^3\) Second, the account of the Passover meal is found only in m. Pesah. 10:1-13 and its counterpart in the Tosefta 10:1-13. This is problematic, since the question is still unanswered whether these two sources

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\(^1\)Jeremias did one of the most outstanding studies on the Passover feast. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 84. Thurian, who believes that the Last Supper was probably an ordinary meal, supports the notion that it was set within the framework of the Passover meal. Max Thurian, *The Eucharistic Memorial*, trans. J.G. Davies (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1968), 2:1, 87.


\(^3\)Cor 5:7.


can be used to reconstruct a typical first-century Passover meal since they originate from the post-70 A.D. period.

The accounts of the Last Supper in the New Testament are varied and sometimes confusing. There are differing degrees of support for the different accounts. Some claim Mark preserves the original account.\(^1\) Others prefer Luke's narrative as the most accurate form.\(^2\) Some scholars argue for the precedence of the more liturgical or institutional account found in First Corinthians, owing to its date of composition.\(^3\) Over against these claims is the view that the different narratorial forms originate from one primitive form. To bring added confusion to the historical account is the attempt to harmonize Johannine chronology with that of the Synoptics.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) A partial list of scholars who contend that there is no synchronic correspondence between John's chronology and that of the synoptic writers is as follows: G. Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua* (London: SPCK, 1929); S. Zeitlin, "The Last Supper as an Ordinary Meal in the Fourth Gospel," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 42 (1951/52): 251-260; idem, "The Time of the Passover," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 42 (1951/52): 45-50; George Ogg, "The
From the observations made above, one realizes that an enquiry into the issues regarding the order of events and dating of the Last Supper is no small task. It can lead far afield—from the Old Testament to the New Testament; from ancient Judaism to rabbinic Judaism, the study of patrology, not to mention the problems of calendar reckoning, in addition to the range of languages one must encounter. Therefore, an exact reconstruction of its chronology may not be totally practical, as the sources outside the New Testament are voluminous and those within the New Testament are at times tenuous. Consequently, any order of events and dating of the Passover meal must allow for a degree of error in its reconstruction.

Because of the uncertainties of the chronology of events in the Last Supper, no attempt is made to delineate a sequence of actions in the narratives. However, a few


Annie Jaubert, whose work is described as a watershed in research into the chronology of the Passion week, tried to resolve the issue by arguing that John was using a different calendar (the Essene) from the Synoptic writers and that Jesus actually hosted the meal a few days prior (Tuesday evening) to the actual Passover. However, not many scholars are convinced of this position. See Annie Jaubert, The Date of the Last Supper (Staten Island: Alba House, 1965), 119-121.

1For a concise overview of the extensive nature of the problem, see Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, s.v. "Feasts."
constants in the banquet scene are worth mentioning. Some conventional motifs in the
Last Supper narratives are: the invitation of the selected guests (presumed), preparation,
banquet hall, washings, a host, guests, cup, wine, bread. The guests were all washed.
They all reclined. They partook of bread and wine. Jesus acted as host in this banquet
scene. A definite variation of the banquet scene is the host’s gesture of washing the feet
of the guests, a task usually delegated to servants. From all indications, this was a
Jewish meal influenced in certain ways by Greco-Roman practices of commensality.
Evidently, banquets in the New Testament era displayed the basic elements of all pre-
New Testament banquets, yet are most influenced by the Greco-Roman banquets.

**Banquets in Early Christian Noncanonical Literature**

The literature of the Early Christian Era also deserves attention, as the milieu of
thinking was predominantly static during the very early centuries. Three narratives are
continuous with a banquet scenario during this period. Two are found in the *Acts of
Thomas*, and one in *5 Esra*.

**Two Banquets in the Acts of Thomas**

An outstanding banquet scenario is related in the *Acts of Thomas.* Much of the

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1 Cf. Aseneth’s gesture as host in washing Joseph’s feet in *Joseph and Aseneth.*

2 Testimonial evidence for the existence of the *Acts of Thomas* is somewhat late
and is cited by Church Fathers Epiphanius and Augustine (Epiphanius *adversus LXXX
Haereses* 2. 47. 1; Augustine *de Sermone Domini in monte* 1. 20, 65). These patristic
references object to the heterodoxy of the Acts. Judas Thomas (or Didymus, the twin
brother of Jesus) is mentioned as its author, who has secret knowledge comparable to the
Thomas in the *Gospel of Thomas*. Edessa, Syria, is perhaps the place of origin. The
interest in *Acts of Thomas* lies in the odes and sermons. The narrative begins with Judas Thomas being sold to the merchant Abban and taken to India. In this way he is comparable to Joseph and Jesus, who were “sold,” but finally saved many.\(^1\) As in the biblical tradition of Thomas’s doubting character, Thomas refuses to go. When he finally arrives by boat at the royal city of Andrapolis, he hears the melodious sounds of music. He inquires to the meaning of this celebration. He is informed that the king is having a wedding banquet for his daughter.

All men are invited to the feast by heralds, “both rich and poor, bond and free, strangers and citizens.\(^2\) But if anyone should refuse and not come to the marriage, he is answerable to the king”\(^3\) (*Acts Thom.*, 4). The author of *Acts of Thomas* repeats the response of Abban and Judas, “Let us also go . . . . Let us go” (4). Abban, the merchant, is known by the community, but Judas is a stranger, yet he is invited.\(^4\) They enter the banquet hall, and sit in different places: Abban, the master, apparently sits in a higher

earliest fragmentary MSS of the *Acts of Thomas* extant today go back to the fifth-sixth century in Syriac. The date of the original *Acts of Thomas* is probably the third century.


\(^2\) Cf. Isa 25: 6-10a; Jesus’ open invitation to all classes of people.

\(^3\) Literally, "everyone who does not come to the feast, is in danger of the anger of the king." This is the theme of judgment. Apparently, a town was invited to a Jewish wedding by heralds. See Samuel Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, 3 vols. (Hildesheim: Olms, 1966), 1:40-41.

\(^4\) Cf. Greco-Roman banquet invitees under the section "Greco-Roman banquets," above.
position.

The dinner begins, but Judas will not eat. When asked the reason for his abstinence, he says it is so he "might accomplish the will of the king" (5). Judas then repeats the judgment of those who failed to listen to the heralds. After this he anoints himself with perfume, wears a purple wreath, and holds the palm branch. Apparently he portrays himself as a groomsman.¹ About that same time, a Hebrew flute girl enters and plays for a while over his head (6a).² A cup-bearer then strikes Judas, who promises forgiveness in the world to come.³ Judas then begins a wedding song (6-7); metaphorical allusions serve as the interpretive key which makes it possible to read the poem at two levels, the figurative and the literal.

The song (6, lines 1-50) gives a detailed description of the bride. Her fingers show the gates of the city (Jerusalem).⁴ Seven groomsmen, seven bridesmaids, and twelve others minister to her. The bridegroom is gazed upon by the attendants.⁵ They are


³Comparable to Jesus’ words on the cross.

⁴And the city is called Andrapolis, meaning “man-city.” So the king represents God.

⁵Cf. the parable of The Ten Virgins.
privileged to sit down with the princes, abide at the supper, put on royal garments, and rejoice while eating and drinking.\(^2\)

After the wedding hymn, Judas’s appearance changed. He “kept his eyes only on the ground,” being oblivious to anyone about him, “waiting for the time when he might take his departure” (8).\(^3\) It is possible that the author interjects the narrative of the wedding of the king’s daughter with the wedding hymn, to figuratively describe the marriage of Christ to the Church, “the daughter of light,” in line 1.\(^4\) In lines 23-29, the hymn speaks about the bridal chamber, but does not mention the wedding.\(^5\) Also, in lines 30-39, in the Greek version, the universe participates in the heavenly joy, but in the Syriac version the church alone is described.

Another banquet scene is found in *Acts of Thomas* 146. In prayer, Thomas refers to several New Testament parables to demonstrate that he did the will of God. He says:

> When called to the dinner I have come, released from the field and wife; may I not, then, be cast out, but blamelessly taste of it! To the wedding have I been invited, and have put on white robes;\(^6\) may I be worthy of them and not go out, bound hand and

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\(^1\)Cf. the parable of the Wedding Garment (denotes royal dignity).

\(^2\)Cf. the Heavenly Banquet. For further details on the hymn see, Klijn, 168-176.

\(^3\)Schneemelcher believes that the first clause refers to the dead Christ on the cross, and the last clause represents the ascension from the cross. Schneemelcher, 335.


\(^6\)White robes may be outfits for wedding banquets. Cf. the parable of the Ten Virgins, Matt 25:1-13.
foot, into outer darkness! My lamp shines with its light; may its Lord preserve it (keep it burning) until he leaves the bridal house and I receive him; may I not see it extinguished for lack of oil! Let mine eyes behold thee and my heart rejoice, because I have fulfilled thy will and accomplished thy command! Let me be like the wise and God-fearing servant, who with careful diligence did not neglect his vigilance! Watching all the night I have wearied myself, to guard my house from robbers, that they might break in. My loins have I girded with truth and my shoes have I bound to my feet, that I may not see their thongs loosened altogether. My hands have I put to the yoked plough, and have not turned away backward, that the furrows may not be crooked. The field is become white and the harvest is at hand, that I may receive my reward. My garment that grows old I have worn out, and the laborious toil that leads to rest I have accomplished. I have kept the first watch and the second and the third, that I may behold thy face and worship thy holy radiance.1

Early Christian thinking is evident in the Acts of Thomas. Writers of early Christian noncanonical literature liberally used material from traditions originating from the Old and New Testaments and adapted them to fit their thinking. Thus, an open invitation for all to attend the banquet is made by the king (God). Dire consequences are met by those who receive the invitation and refuse to attend. The wedding imagery—the bride and the bridegroom, the bridesmaids (and groomsmen); the change of garments, the rejoicing and eating and drinking—reverberate with biblical narratives. The imagery in the Wedding Hymn and Thomas’s citation of several parables echo the parables of the Ten Virgins and the Wedding Garment.

The Banquet in 5 Esra

Another non-canonical Early Christian document that brings some light to the banquet study is 5 Esra.2 The book provides an invective against the Jewish people in the

1 Acts Thom. 146-147, line 8.

2 5 Esra complements 6 Esra. They were written around A.D. 200. The former is a Christian Apocalypse introduced in the first two chapters of the Latin MSS of 4 Esra.
first section (1:4-40), followed by comforting promises to Christians in the second (2:10-48). The writer instructs his readers to

arise and stand and behold the number of those who are sealed at the banquet of the Lord. Those who have withdrawn from the shadow of this world have received shining garments from the Lord. Receive, O Zion, thy number and embrace those who are clothed in white, who have fulfilled the law of the Lord. The number of thy children, whom thou desirest, is complete; beseech the rule of the Lord that thy people, whom I have called from the beginning, may be sanctified (2:38-41).

Then the author describes the innumerable company singing on Mount Zion. In the midst of them stood a tall, outstanding figure—the Son of God (2:42-48).

From all indications, literature that depicts the Early Christian banquet scene finds its antecedents in earlier sources, especially in the New Testament banquet imagery, and should be studied from that viewpoint. What actually took place in the life of the Early Church was a creative adaptation of the common banquet tradition to fit the specific needs of the local, social, and cultural situation.

Banquets in Rabbinic Literature

Banquet scenes are common in rabbinic parables. Although rabbinic parables are dated by scholars more than a century after those in the Gospels, some of the authorities cited in these parables are roughly contemporary and even earlier than the Synoptic texts.

Thus, responsible Bible scholars would be amiss in totally ignoring the echoes of Jewish culture, tradition, and theology, as preserved in Jewish rabbinic literature in the study of

The latter is the concluding chapters (15 and 16) appended to the same Latin MSS. For further study on the dating, contents, and significance of 5 Esra and 6 Esra, see Schneemelcher, 2:641.
the parables of Jesus.

As early as 1914, Adolf Büchler presented several instances in rabbinic literature that bear similarity in circumstances and manner to Gospel parables. Later, Louis Finkelstein and Judah Goldin argued that the Tannaitic midrash, Abot de Rabbi Nathan, preserves an earlier Jewish tradition. This midrash recounts how R. Eleazar b. Arach masterly used a parable to console R. Johanan ben Zachai who was grieving over the death of his son. In Finkelstein’s view, this tradition must be ascribed an earlier date owing to the prominence given to R. Eleazar b. Arach, although he later abandoned the sages.

However, Jacob Neusner adamantly disagrees with this stance. In his magisterial work on Pharisaic traditions before 70 A.D., Neusner dealt an enduring blow to the use of second-century rabbinic parables to understand and interpret the parables of Jesus. His contention is that there is no evidence of rabbinic parables like those of Jesus prior to A.D. 70. He criticizes Bultmann’s comparison of Jesus’ parables with what he thinks did not exist and insists that rabbinic parables cannot be used legitimately as a source for

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Jesus' parable in any diachronic or genetic sense.¹

Since Bultmann and Jeremias, it has been customary to compare certain of Jesus' parables with those of the rabbis after A.D. 70. A study of Johnston's 325 Tannaitic parables reveals that there are more similarities than differences between the parables of Jesus and those of the rabbis.² Thoma and Lauer's work on rabbinic parables has ably demonstrated the close parallels that exist with the Gospels' parables. There is similarity in structure and teaching techniques.³ Blomberg argues that the form and structure of the

¹Neusner remonstrates: "As to similitudes and similar forms, we find no equivalent. ... Paradox is not a dominant characteristic of the Pharisaic-rabbinic sayings. ... Hyperbole and metaphors are not common. As to such similitudes as servant/master, tower/war, lost sheep/lost coin, the thief, faithful servant, children at play, leaven, seed growing of itself, treasure in the field, pearl of great price, fish net, house builder, fig tree, returning householder, prodigal son, unjust steward, two sons, and the like—we have nothing of the same sort. It is true that later rabbinic materials make use of similitudes. But the Pharisaic stratum is notably lacking in them. Bultmann's rabbinic parallels are all from masters after 70." Jacob Neusner, "Types and Forms in Ancient Jewish Literature: Some Comparisons," *History of Religions* 11 (1972): 376.

²See Johnston, "Parabole Interpretations Attributed to Tannaim," especially 526-555. Cf. John Dominic Crossan, *Cliffs of Fall*, 19. Crossan supports the notion that the parables of Jesus cannot be studied against the backdrop of rabbinic parables. Using Johnston's schema, he argues that "in the light of subsequent rabbinical parables after his period, one might have expected the syntactics of Jesus' parabolic presentation to have appeared. ... What is evident is that point (1), the illustrand, is usually the Kingdom of God ... and not a moral problem or a scriptural difficulty. And while points (2) and (3) ... appear also in Jesus' format, the absence of points (4) and (5) is very striking." Crossan reasons that whenever points (4), the terminal application, and (5), the Scriptural Application, are present in Jesus' parable, the Early Christian Church apparently is responsible, since "Christian transmission tends to add them to original parables." Crossan fails to recognize that forty years after the ministry of Jesus, development, if any at all, in parabolic structure would have been negligible, in an environment where change was rather slow.

rabbinic texts remained relatively constant after the first century. His premise is that since from the second to the sixth century forms of rhetoric remained practically static, it is unlikely that the first century would have employed drastically different methods of illustration and debate.¹ Perrin also recognizes that rabbinic parables are the closest in "literary form and function" to Jesus' parables.² Scott has gone so far as to use ninth-century rabbinic texts to illuminate first-century beliefs.³

Scholars whose studies concentrate on Jewish background, such as Petuchowski and Flusser, insisted that a synchronic correspondence lies between the theological outlook of rabbinic and Gospel parables.⁴ Flusser's approach used the scientific method to make comparisons between Gospel parables and those of the rabbis. His student Brad Young is unswervingly convinced that "not only do the rabbinic parables and those of the Gospels have a common structure, similarities in motifs, parallel in themes, identical forms, and like plots; they also frequently betray the same theological message."⁵ This observation is important for the support for this study, as it confirms the relevance of comparing the rabbinic parables with those of the Gospels.

²See Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, 95-96.
³See Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 18.
⁵Young, *The Parables*, 33.
I have grouped the rabbinic parables according to their common structure and homogeneous components. The interpretation given in some of the parables is not the major concern of this section. The structural elements that help to facilitate the banquet type-scene are given greater attention.

Abundant Food for All

**Bar Maayan’s Banquet: y. Sanhedrin 23c, ch. 6, halakah 8**

But when Bar Maayan, the village tax collector died, the whole town took time off to mourn him . . .

Now what was the meritorious deed which Bar Maayan the village tax collector had done?

Heaven forfend! He never did a meritorious deed in his life. But one time he made a banquet for the counselors of his town but they did not come. He said, "Let the poor come and eat the food, so that it does not go to waste."

In this parable, an invitation for a special group was given. The invitees did not attend, so Bar Maayan invited the poor and the needy to attend. Though Bar Maayan was a tax collector and hated by many, he was eulogized for his single act of great charity.

**The Great Banquet for Many: Midrash I, Ps 25:9**

R. Eleazar told a parable of a king who prepared a great banquet and charged his steward: "Invite me merchants; do not invite me artisans." Thereupon, his steward

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said: "My lord king, so abundant is thy banquet that the merchants will not be able to eat it all, unless the artisans are part of the company." Even so, David said: "According to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness sake, O Lord," as is said, "the Lord is good to all" (Ps 145:9).1

A king prepares a great banquet. Here is another instance where an important figure instructs his steward to invite a selected group of people. The steward advises him to invite the common folk also, for there is abundant food for all.

The Banquet and the Guests: *Midrash I, Ps 25:9.*

R. Jose bar Chanina told a parable of a king who prepared a banquet and invited guests. The fourth hour passed, and the guests did not come. The fifth and sixth hours passed, and still the guests did not come. By evening the guests began to arrive. The king said to them: "I am beholden to you. Had you not come, I would have had to throw the whole banquet to my dogs. Even so, the Holy One, blessed be he, says to the righteous: I consider this a great favor on your part, for I created my world because of you; and were it not for you, all the goodness which I have prepared for the future, of which it is said, 'Oh how abundant is thy goodness, which thou has laid up for them that fear thee' (Ps 31:20), to whom could I give it?"2

A king is the host. He prepares a banquet. Selected guests are invited. Invited guests are slow to arrive. There is suspense as it becomes later. The feast would have been given to strangers, if the invited guests had not come.


Trickles from the Palace: \textit{t. Sotah} 11:3

It is like a king who had a large palace. The doors were shut, but over the doors protruded a balcony, upon which were food and drink, delicacies, and all possible abundance. Upon another balcony, next to the first, were figs, grapes, pomegranates, and every kind of delicious thing. Next to this, on another balcony, were silken garments and every kind of vestment. The people outside came and had sufficient from what came out of the palace of the king. What did the passers-by say? From what comes out of the palace of the king thou canst imagine what is inside the palace of the king.

Even so canst thou learn from the chastisement of the righteous in this world the degree of the punishments of the wicked in the world to come; and from the prosperity of the impious in this world canst thou learn the reward of the righteous in the world to come.

Again, the imagery in this parable reflects the plenitude in the king’s house. There is enough for all, even for those on the outside. The shut door, food, and garment motifs are highlighted.

The Wise and Foolish Guests

The Wise and Foolish Invitees: \textit{b. Šabbat} 153a
(R. Johanan b. Zakkai, 1)

We learnt elsewhere, R. Eliezer said: "Repent one day before your death" [cf. Sir 5:7]. His disciples asked him: "Does one know on what day he will die? He said: "Then all the more reason that he repent today, lest he die tomorrow, and thus his whole life is spent in repentance. And Solomon too said in his wisdom: "Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack ointment" (Eccl 9:8).

R. Johanan b. Zakai said: "A parable. It is like a king who summoned his servants to a banquet without appointing a time. The wise ones adorned themselves and sat at the door of the palace, ['for,'] said they, 'is anything lacking in a royal palace?' The fools went about their work, saying, 'can there be a banquet without preparations?' Suddenly the king desired [the presence of] the servants: the wise

\footnote{The designations and translations of the parables from this point onward are taken from Johnston’s “Parabolic Interpretations Attributed to Tannaim.” Although these designations have little relevance for this study, they serve the purpose of identification in subsequent sections.}
entered adorned, while the fools entered soiled. The king rejoiced at the wise but was angry with the fools. ‘Those who adorned themselves for the banquet,’ ordered he, ‘let them sit, eat and drink. But those who did not adorn themselves for the banquet, let them stand and watch.’"

R. Meir’s son-in-law said in R. Meir’s name: "Then they too would merely look on, being in attendance. But both sit, the former eating and the latter hungering, the former drinking and the latter thirsting, for it is said: 'Therefore thus saith the Lord God: 'Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty; behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed; behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart.' (Isa 65:13ff).

In this instance, the king not only summons his servants (normally, it would be special guests) to a banquet, but does not indicate the time. This is a variation in the normal plot of a banquet story. Preparation with appropriate dress and readiness for when the banquet door opens are the main requisites for entrance into the banquet. The wise servants prepare themselves and the foolish do not. Suddenly, the announcement to enter is made. The wise entered adorned, and the foolish soiled. The king inspects and distinguishes the wise from the foolish. He is pleased with the wise, but becomes indignant over the foolish. There are rewards for the wise and punishment for the foolish. Cf. Matt 22:11-14; 25:1-13. This parable carries an eschatological ring.¹

The Wise and Foolish Invitees: Ecclesiastes
Rabbah 9:8:1 (R. Judah ha-Nasi, 5)

"Let the garments be always white; and let thy head lack no oil" (Eccl 9:8). R. Johanan b. Zakkai said: "If the text speaks of white garments, how many of these have the peoples of the world; and it speaks of good oil, how much of it do the peoples of the world possess! Behold, it speaks only of precepts, good deeds, and Torah."

¹Cf. Sanhedrin 97a-b, which expresses a high level of messianic expectation in the Tannaitic period.
R. Judah ha-Nasi parabled it: "A parable [or, R. Judah ha-Nasi: "They parable a parable"]). Unto what is the matter like? It is like a king who made a banquet to which he invited guests. He said to them: ‘Go, wash yourselves, brush up your clothes, anoint yourselves with oil, wash your garments, and prepare yourselves for the banquet.’ But he fixed no time when they were to come to it. The wise among them walked about by the entrance of the king’s palace, saying: ‘Does the king’s palace lack anything?’ The foolish among them paid no regard or attention to the king’s command. They said: ‘We will in due course notice when the king’s banquet is to take place, because can there be a banquet without labor and company?’ So the plasterer went to his plaster, the potter to his clay, the smith to his charcoal, and washer to his laundry. Suddenly the king ordered: ‘Let them all come to the banquet.’ They hurried the guest, so that some came in their splendid attire and others came in their dirty garments. The king was pleased with the wise ones who have obeyed his command, and also because they had shown honor to the king’s palace. He was angry with the fools who had neglected his command and disgraced his palace. The king said: ‘Let those who have prepared themselves for the banquet come and eat of the king’s meal, but those who have not prepared themselves shall not partake of it. You might suppose that the latter were simply to depart; but the king continued: ‘No, [they are not to depart]; but the former shall recline and eat and drink, while these shall remain standing, be punished, and look on and be grieved.

Even so in the Hereafter [at the time to come], as Isaiah says: ‘Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry’ (Isa 65:13).

This is an elaboration of The Wise and the Foolish Invitees: b. Sabb 153a. A king makes a banquet and invites guests. The guests in The Wise and the Foolish Invitees b. Sabb. 153a are called "servants" while here they are not so called. The occupations described are all menial, making a sharp contrast with the treatment given to those who were prepared. The unprepared invitees, who did not wash or perfume themselves, must stand and be punished with hunger. Again there is no fixed time. The diligent prepare, but the foolish take the instructions lightly, each tending to his occupation (cf. the parable of the Great Banquet, Matt 22:5; Luke 14:18-19). The king arrives suddenly and, again, he rejoices over the wise, but becomes angry over the foolish. The wise enter the banquet, recline, and dine. The foolish stand, grieve, and are punished. This is an added
The Wise and Foolish Dinner Guests:
*Semahot* 8:10 (R. Meir, 4)

This parable follows the description of the slaughter of the Jews, which came within twelve months of Akiba's martyrdom.

R. Meir said: "They parable a parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like a king who made a banquet and invited guests without fixing a time when they should leave. The shrewd among them left at the ninth hour [3 p.m.], returned home and went to bed while it was still light. Others left at sunset while the shops were still open and lamps burning, entered their homes, and went to bed by the light of the lamps. Still others left at two or three hours in the night when some shops were open and some shut, some with their lights alight and some with their lamps extinguished, entered their homes and went to bed in the dark. Those remaining at the banquet became intoxicated, and wounded and killed each other; as it is said: 'I saw the Lord standing by the altar; and he said: 'smite the capitals, that the posts may shake; and break them in pieces on the head of all of them; and it will slay the residue of them with the sword'" (Amos 9:1).

In this parable, there is a twist to the element of time. The variation has to do with lingering too long at the banquet. In this case, the king fixed no time for the departure of the invited guests. The parable describes four categories of guests, from the wisest to the most foolish. The wisest left early while it was still day, and the most foolish stayed all night until they got drunk and murdered each other.

The Best Gift

The Son Who Got the Best Gift: *Sifre*
on Num 119

"I am thy portion and thy inheritance" (Num 18:20). At My table thou eatest, at My table thou drinkest.

A parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like a king who distributed gifts among his sons, but to one of them he gave nothing. He said: My son, I have not given thee any gift, but thou shalt eat at my own table and at my own table thou shalt drink.
So it says [concerning the priests]: "I have given it to them for their portion of my offerings made by fire (Lev 6:17). Again it says: "They shall eat the offerings of the Lord made by fire and his inheritance" (Deut 18:1).

This parable demonstrates that table-fellowship with the Lord is more important than any other bestowed gift. Standing in the King’s eyes is what counts (cf. the elder brother in Luke 15:25-32, especially, 31).

**Intemperate Guests**

**The Gluttonous Prince: Sifre on Deut 43**

(Anonymous)

If you do this then will “the anger of the Lord be kindled against you (Deut 11:17)

A parable. It is like a king who sent his son to a banquet; and he was sitting and charging him and saying to him: "My son, do not eat more than you actually need, and do not drink more than you actually need in order that you may return home decently. But the son did not heed this advice. He ate and he drank more than he needed, and he vomited and fouled the banquet guests. Then they bundled him by his hands and his feet and threw him down behind the palace."

Even so the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, to Israel: "I brought you into a good and wide land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to eat its fruit and to be satisfied with its good things and to bless My name for it. You did not remain by the good, so now you are under punishment.”

In this parable, the son of the king goes to a banquet. He receives a charge to be temperate. He dishonors the host, as well as the other guests, by inappropriate table etiquette, an intolerable offense. He is thrown out of the party (cf. Matt 22:13 = “bind him hand and foot . . . and cast him into outer darkness”). In this instance he is thrown behind the palace. Athenaeus advised that a banqueter must drink no more than would allow him to be able to return home without an attendant.¹

¹Athenaeus Deipnosophists XI. 462f.
The Unsophisticated Dinner Guest: *Sifre*
on Deut 53 (R. Joshua b. Karha, 4)

“Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse” (Deut 11:26).

R. Joshua b. Karha says: A parable. It is like a king who made a banquet and-invited the guests. And his dear friend was partaking improperly amid their taunting. And he [the king] was gesturing [to him] how to handle the portion correctly, but he had no understanding.

And thus it says: “I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you” (Ps 32:8)

Again, here is portrayed the offensive demeanor of a dinner guest. No mention is made of his removal from the banquet, but this outcome is most inevitable.

Slighting Royalty

The Two Men Who Slighted Royalty: *t. Baba Qamma* 7:2

[Isa 29:15; Ps 34:7; and Ezek 8:12 quoted]

Rabbi Meir said: “They parable a parable in the name of Rabban Gamaliel. Unto what is the matter like? It is like two men who planned a great wedding feast in the city. One invited the inhabitants of the city, but did not invite the king. The other invited neither the king nor the inhabitants of the city. Whose punishment will be the greater? That of the one who invited the inhabitants of the city but not the king.”

From all appearances there seems to be a geminate element in this parable. On this occasion the host is not the king. He is only a potential invitee. In both instances, the king is deliberately not invited.

Act of Dedication

The Dedicatory Banquet: *t. Sanhedrin* 8:9

(Anonymous) Rabban Gamaliel, 2.

Discussion of why man was created last. Another explanation: That he might

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1Cf. *t. Baba Qamma* 79b.
enter the banquet at once.

They parable a parable. Unto what is the matter like? It is like a king who built a palace and dedicated it, and prepared a banquet and afterwards he invited guests.

And so it is written: “The wisdom of women has built her house” (Prov 14:1)—this is the King of kings of kings, blessed be He, who created His world in seven days by Wisdom. “She has hewn out her seven pillars” (Prov 9:1b)—these are the seven days of Genesis. “She has slaughtered her beasts and mingled her wine” (Prov 9:2)—these are the seas and rivers and deserts and the rest of the needs of the world. And afterwards: “She has sent out her maids to call from the highest places in the city: whoever is simple, let him turn in hither; and to him who is without understanding, etc.” (Prov 3, 4)—this is Adam and Eve.

The king builds then dedicates his palace. He first prepares the banquet, then invites guests.

**Banquet Cancellation**

**The Great Banquet and the Simple Meal:**

*Sukkah 55b (R. Eleazar)*

R. Eleazar said: “To what do those seventy bullocks [which were offered during the seventy days of the Festival] correspond? To the seventy nations. To what does the single bullock [of the eighth day] correspond? To the unique nation.

A parable. It is like a king of flesh and blood who said to his servants: “Prepare for me a great banquet.” But on the last day he said to his beloved friend: “Prepare for me a simple meal that I may derive benefit from you.”

Instruction goes out for the preparation of a big banquet. The king changes his mind at the last minute. Cancellation of the banquet is a variation of the typical banquet expectation.

**The Aborted Wedding Celebration:**

*Sanhedrin 108a (R. Joshua b. Karha, 4)*

“And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, (both man and cattle)” (Gen 7:23). If man sinned, how did the beasts sin?

A Tanna taught in the name of R. Joshua b. Karha: “A Parable. It is like a
man who made a bridal chamber for his son, and he prepared a banquet with every variety of food. Subsequently his son died, whereupon he arose and broke up the feast, and said: 'Have I prepared all this for any but my son? Now that he is dead, what need have I of the banquet?

Also (ap) the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "Did I create the animals and beasts for aught but man? Now that man has sinned, what need have I of the animals and beasts?

The occasion is a wedding for a certain man's son. This parable is similar to the parable of the Great Banquet and the Simple Meal except that, in this case, the banquet is stopped immediately after the death of his son (cf. the Parable of Wicked Tenants, Matt 21:33-43; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-17).

Summary

The study of the rabbinic banquet parables revealed some homogeneous structural elements and patterns. Each parable was resilient to variations (subtle or transparent) that were used by its author to create interest and meaning in the narrative. All the parables portrayed the hero in the narrative as a king, except in two instances, where the king was the potential guest in The Two Men Who Slighted Royalty and Bar Maayan's banquet. The theme of a royal banquet is common in rabbinic parables. Some motifs surfaced regularly: An important figure prepares or instructs his servant to prepare a banquet; an invitation is sent out; the guests attend or do not attend; there is food in abundance; a change of clothes may be required (washing and anointing); the wise fulfill the requirement, but the foolish do not; the king summons unexpectedly; the king rejoices

and becomes angry; reward and punishment are meted out to the wise and the foolish respectively.

The parables of the "abundant food for all" apply the familiar motif of inviting selected guests to the banquet. They suggest the common theme of plenteous mercy (food) for all who would come to the banquet. The "wise and the foolish" parables are associated with the garment motif in parables. Two parables deal with the cancellation of a banquet. This is a variation on the typical banquet incidents. Another two parables reveal the intemperance of the guest, and his ultimate expulsion from the banquet. One parable deals with slighted royalty, and another relates to the dedication of a building.

Summary/Conclusion

A banquet in antiquity could be held for a variety of celebrations. It could be public or private. The event could be a marriage or a funeral, a birthday or an *epicrisis*, a celebration in honor of a friend or loved one, a libation to a god, an annual festival, a coronation or a conquest, a building project, an occasion to win a favor from one in authority, or a time to solidify an eschatological expectation.

Some definitive constants for most banquets and banquet scenes described in antiquity are worth mentioning. The necessary characters are a royal figure (a god, a king, a priest, or a well-to-do man) who acts as host; a chief guest of honor; other guests who may or may not come or come on time; servants who administer the washings or whisk flies (sometimes this role is fulfilled by an important woman, such as the queen [Lady Hurrai] or bride-to-be [Aseneth]); and flute and/or dancing girls who provide
entertainment.

Motifs commonly found in the banquet or banquet scene may be divided into three categories: (1) concrete objects such as wine (cup), meat, bread, ointment, door, garment, and so forth; (2) sensory qualities such as the joy and anger of the king, the nonchalant attitude of the foolish guest and the earnest response of the wise, and the preparedness of the guest; and (3) actions such as the order to prepare a meal, hastily preparing the meal, sending the invitation to special guests, refusal or acceptance of the invitation, arrival of the guests whether late or on time, opening the door for the guests, announcing the arrival of the host, punishing or rewarding the guests, casting out the undesired guest, washing the prepared guests, reclining of the guests, social ranking of the guests, partaking of food and drink, entering of an uninvited guest, entering of the entertaining servants, singing and dancing, philosophical discussion, and so forth. These motifs are not all present in every banquet or banquet scene in antiquity. Some banquet details, murals, or narratives embrace more motifs than others. But each banquet or banquet scene, whether given in general information, pictorial, or narrative form, contributes as it were a piece of the jig-saw puzzle, to arrive at a banquet type-scene convention in the literature of antiquity outside the parables of Jesus.

As we traced the banquet scenarios in the different periods, from different locations in different texts, we saw certain developments in the banquet scene, for example: the Egyptian banquet portrays banqueters sitting on high chairs. The first evidence of a reclining banquet is seen in the Assyrian portrait. Women are seen in banquets in the Egyptian banquet scene, but were not prominent in Assyrio-Babylonian,
Jewish, and Greek banquets, until their reappearance in Roman banquets. Perhaps one of the reasons for this observation is that there are more literary works dealing with the subject as we get closer to the time of Jesus (especially in the Greco-Roman period).

In this study procedure was our main interest. But not in every instance did banquet procedure in narratives follow a stereotypical order of events. In fact, there were several instances of variations—the common characteristic of the type-scene convention. Pictorial banquet scenes gave some insights into the banquet setting, but they were limited. General information about banquets helped to fill in the blanks when narratives were not available.

From the study of banquet imageries surveyed in the foregoing material from antiquity, some findings are arrived at:

1. All banquet scenes appear to have two structural elements constant: the preparation and selective invitation. This is typical of all banquet scenarios.

   a. Preparation: An important figure (king, god, priest, or a well-to-do


   2Enki and Gudea in Sumerian texts; Marduk in Akkadian texts; El in Akkadian texts; Ba’l in Ugaritic texts; God in Eden, the Flood, the Wilderness narratives; Yahweh in Isa 25:6-10a.

   3The priestly Messiah in Qumran; Jesus in the Last Supper.
person,\(^1\) prepares (or instructs his servant to [hurriedly]\(^2\) prepare) a lavish banquet meal (it may be for a marriage\(^3\) or a funeral,\(^4\) birthday or *epicrisis*,\(^5\) a celebration for friends and/or associates,\(^6\) a libation,\(^7\) an assembly of the gods,\(^8\) a festival,\(^9\) a coronation or conquest,\(^10\) a building dedication,\(^11\) to win a favor from one of


\(^2\) Pentephres and Aseneth hurry to prepare the banquet for Joseph in *Joseph and Aseneth*; Tobias and Raphael hurry ahead to prepare for the new bride in Tobit; Jesus hurries Zacchaeus to go to his house (The irony of this account is that though Jesus is Zacchaeus’s guest, he acts as host of the redemptive meal he was about to provide).

\(^3\) In Assyrian banquets; Pharaoh’s banquet for Joseph’s marriage to Aseneth; Raguel’s banquet for Tobias and Sarah; Tobias’s wedding at his father, Tobit’s house; the marriage of the king of India’s daughter; Thomas’s parables in the *Acts of Thomas*; The Two Men Who Slighted Royalty; The Aborted Wedding Celebration.

\(^4\) In Assyrian banquets; Amos 6:4-7; Archilles for Patroclus.

\(^5\) Oxyrhynchus papyri 2791 and 926, respectively.

\(^6\) In Greco-Roman banquets; The dinners of Levi and Zacchaeus; The Last Supper; Bar Maayan’s banquet; The Unsophisticated Dinner Guest.

\(^7\) Enki to the god, Enlil.

\(^8\) *Ēl*’s banquet.

\(^9\) In Assyrian banquets.

\(^10\) Thutmose III for his conquests in Asia; coronation of Thutmoses I; Celebration of Victory, Fig. 2, and King Ashurbanipal’s banquet, Fig. 3.

\(^11\) Ashurnasirpal II inaugurating his royal palace; Gudea, for the reconstruction of the *Ē-ninnu* shrine for Ningirus in Lagash; Marduk in celebration of the building of the city, Babylon and his glorious palace; Ba’l’s temple; The Dedicatory Banquet.
higher standing,¹ to express gratitude,² or anticipation of an eschatological event).³

There seems to be a variation in the banquet scene such as Keret’s banquet, where the queen takes the place of the servant. In Proverbs, wisdom and folly, personified as women, host the banquet. In the two rabbinic parables of the Wise and Foolish Invitees, the first invited guests are servants. The coordination and preparation of a banquet meal for club members and philosophical schools were probably done by those appointed by their members.

b. Selective Invitation: He invites selected guests.⁴ Apparently, most of the invitations in the Mesopotamian texts are sent to the gods. There seems to be a variation in Isa 25:6-10a in which Yahweh invites all peoples instead of selected

¹The father of the aspiring scribe; Keret seeking help from the grandees and magicians of Hbr; Pentephres for his daughter Aseneth; Aseneth for Joseph’s approval; Aseneth for the heavenly man.

²Simon the Pharisee.

³Isa 25:6-10a; The Messianic Rule of the Qumran Community.

⁴King Ashurnasirpal invites the great god, Ashur, and thousands of other guests; Enki invites the gods, Enlil, An, Nintu, and the Anunna; Gudea invites the gods, Ningirsu, An, Enlil and Ninmah; the aspiring young scribe invites his son’s teacher; Marduk invites the gods; ¹El invites the gods; Ba’l invites a pantheon of gods; Keret invites the grandees and the magicians (on three occasions); God invites Adam and Eve, and the children of Israel; Pentephres and Aseneth invites Joseph the Powerful One of God; Pharaoh invites the chiefs of the land of Egypt; Raguel invites Tobias; the Yahad invites the community members; servants invite the guests in Greco-Roman banquets; Simon, the Pharisee, invites Jesus and other guests; Jesus invites his disciples for the Last Supper; Bar Maayan invites the councilors; in The Great Banquet For the Many the king invites merchants; in The Banquet and the Guests, The Wise and Foolish Dinner Guests, The Unsophisticated Dinner Guest, The Dedicatory Banquet, the king invites selected guests.
invites himself to Zacchaeus's table. Another variation is seen where the king of India, invites "both rich and poor, bond and free" to his daughters marriage. Their seems to be another variation, in which the king in the two parables of The Wise and Foolish Invitees invited servants. In the parable of The Two Men Who Slighted Royalty, one host invited the inhabitants of the city and not the king; the other invited neither.

2. The plot of each banquet scene seems to branch off, from that point onwards, into other plot sequences. As a result three regular banquet type-scenes seem to stand out:

Type-Scene A: The Eminence of Guests Type Scene (this scenario is typically seen in Mesopotamian banquets)

a. Preparation

b. Selective Invitation

c. Food Description: Abundant food\(^1\): flesh, wine, bread, etc.

d. Guests' Position: Attending guests are ushered (door is opened at this point) to their assigned seats in ranked order. Chief guest reclines in his place of

\(^1\)In Egyptian banquets; in Assyrian banquets (King Ashurbanipal's banquet; King Ashurnasirpal II detailed menu); in Ugaritic texts: food in 'El's palace; ox and fatling in Ba'il's banquet; fatlings and wine in Keret's banquet (twice); seed-bearing vegetation in the Garden of Eden; fatty foods and wine on the lees in Isa 25:6-10a; bread and wine (cup) in Joseph and Aseneth; Raguel slaughters a ram for Tobias, and Raguel's wife bakes bread and slaughters two steers and four rams for the wedding feast of Tobias and Sarah in Tobit; hors d'oeuvres, wine and bread, and desserts in the Last Supper.
honor; other guests repose in their places;¹ uninvited guests sit. Guests receive washings and the pouring of ointment,² and allocation of portions.³

e. Guests’ Consumption: Leisurely eating and drinking.⁴

A variation is seen where the prince dishonored the guests by his bad eating habits in The Gluttonous Prince, and the dear friend who was partaking improperly in The Unsophisticated Dinner Guest. Entertainment servants (flute and/or dancing girl/s) may enter at this point and an unwanted guest may intrude at any time.⁵

Type-Scene B: The Guests and Host Response Type Scene

a. Preparation

b. Selective Invitation

¹In Sumerian texts: An sits in the place of honor, Enlil sits next to An, Nintu at the "big side" of the table, and Anunna in their assigned seats; An sits at the "big side," Enlil sits next to An, and Ninmah sits next to Enlil; in Akkadian texts: Marduk appoints seating arrangement for the gods; in Ugaritic texts: Kothar-wa-Hasis sits on the right hand of Ba’l; in the Last Supper: the beloved disciple reclines on Jesus’ breast, and Judas dips and eats by his side.

²Oil is poured on the teacher of the aspiring scribe; ointment is featured heavily in Joseph and Aseneth; a variation with Aseneth (the hostess) washing the hands and feet of Joseph the chief guest; Tobit is bathed and washed; another variation, where Jesus (the host) washes the disciples’ feet.

³Lady Hurrai divides the meat for Keret’s guests; Petronius’s account of the banquet of Trimalchio, the freedman, offers a contravention to the convention of appropriating quantities and qualities of food for special guests; Jesus breaks and passes the bread to the disciples in the Last Supper.

⁴The gods of Marduk set up festive drink; the gods of ’El ate and drank wine; the gods in Ba’l’s banquet ate and drank; the heavenly being in Joseph and Aseneth reclines to dine; Tobit reclines to dine; the Greco-Roman banquets.

⁵See Egyptian and Greco-Roman banquets; the woman who anointed Jesus in the Feast of Simon.
c. Notification: the host notifies the guests (through his surrogate or
servants).

Actually, this is the second invitation. He may even send out several reminders. The servant announces that the dinner is ready. He may read out the notification. This notification usually bears the actual time the guest must arrive at the banquet.

d. Guests’ Reaction: The guests come, come late, or do not come.

One’s presence in a banquet was crucial for honor and saving face in a Middle-Eastern community. To arrive late to the banquet feast might engender a frown, but not to appear at all was tantamount to insulting the host. However, this seems not to have been a common occurrence. In fact, all the accounts prior to the rabbinic literature indicate or imply that the invited guests attended the banquet. Among the banquet narratives under study, only one account relates the non-attendance of guests. From this we may gather that it is a shocking variation to the banquet type-scene.

e. Host’s Reaction: In the unlikely event that the invitees do not show up

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1In Greco-Roman banquets.

2See Oxyrhynchus papyri.

3Ashurnasirpal guests numbers 69,574; all of Enki’s, Gudea’s, the father of the aspiring scribe, the gods of Marduk, the gods of ’El, the gods of Ba’l, and the grandees and magician of Keret come; Joseph indulges Aseneth’s meal; Tobias accepts Raguel’s invitation; invitees to the Messianic banquet respond to the invitation for the "Banquet of the Many"; Jesus dines with Zacchaeus and Levi, and attends Simon’s feast; the disciples are present in the Last Supper; Judas joins Abban, his master in the marriage feast.

4Socrates’ tardiness in attending Agathon’s banquet; the guests who arrived past the sixth hour in the parable of The Banquet and the Guests.

5The councilors invited to the banquet do not attend Bar Maayan’s banquet.
for the banquet, the host sends his servants to invite other guests.¹

Type-Scene C: The Wise and Foolish Invitees Type Scene. This type-scene is mainly deduced from the two narratives of the Wise and Foolish Invitees.

a. Preparation: In this type-scene the host is usually a king.

b. Selective Invitation: The king summons his servants.

c. No Time Information: He does not give a starting time.²

d. Dress Requisition: Washing, perfuming, and adorning are required.³

e. The Wise/Foolish Preparation: The foolish ignores; the wise prepares.

f. Unexpected Injunction: The king suddenly requests the appearance of his invitees.

g. The Wise/Foolish Ingression: Both groups enter; the wise adorned, but the foolish soiled.

h. Host’s Inspection: The king detects the shortcomings of the foolish.

i. Host’s Reaction: He rejoices at the wise, but gets angry with the foolish.

j. Hosts Condemnation/ Compensation: He punishes the foolish and

¹Bar Maayan invites the poor. See also an inference to inviting the "dogs" in The Banquet and the Guests (note that the invitation given to the dogs served only as a last resort, but not as an alternative); the inclusion of the artisans in The Great Banquet For Many; the excess for the outsiders in The Trickles From The Palace.

²A variation to this time element is seen in The Wise and Foolish Dinner Guests where no time was given for the departure of the guests from the banquet.

³Cf. Aseneth’s washing of her face, ornamenting herself, and putting on her wedding robe in Joseph and Aseneth. Cf. also The Garments of the King’s Son in which a garment of fine wool is symbolic of obedience, and an olive-presser’s garment is comparative to disobedience.
rewards the wise: the wise sit and dine, while the foolish stand and watch; or the foolish may be thrown out.¹

Common motifs in this type-scene are king, garments, wise and foolish servants, joy vis à vis anger, and punishment/reward.

From our interaction with the literary and pictorial witnesses of banquet imagery in antiquity, certain elemental components and structural patterns emerge. There seems to have existed a common banquet tradition in terms procedure that allowed for creative adaptations in different geographical locations over time. These influenced the literary productions of each writer or artist of banquet narratives or images. Changing circumstances over time in the socio-cultural contexts sometimes forced the type-scene convention to mutate. But the elemental structure and theme of the banquet scenario remained dominantly static.

The writers and artists in antiquity were aware of the conventional patterns and constitutive elements that comprise a banquet scene in the place and period in which they lived. Thus they set motifs and themes in the order that were known by their audiences. The artfulness of the writer or artist is seen in the ability to vary, alter, or modify the convention in a way that developed interest, suspense, and surprise, as well as interpretation to the banquet scene. The type-scene of the banquet was a well-established literary tool in antiquity comprising of conventional motifs and themes which the various authors took the liberty to repeat and vary to bring about certain responses from their readers.

¹Cf. The Gluttonous Prince; The Unsophisticated Dinner Guest.
CHAPTER V

TYPE-SCENE IN THE BANQUET PARABLES OF JESUS

The purpose in this chapter of the dissertation is to create a context for an appreciation of the workings of the type-scene convention in the parables of Jesus that depict banquet scenarios. Seven parables have been determined as banquet parables amenable to the study of type-scene. Four occur in one of the Synoptics (two in Matthew and two in Luke); three occur in two of the Synoptics (Matthew and Luke). One has a parallel in the Gospel of Thomas.

First, a diachronic critical analysis is done for each narrative, using the basic tools of biblical exegesis. Such an analysis is essential in order that its findings can be compared with and evaluated against the findings of the synchronic analysis. The extent of the diachronic analysis is accounted for, as its findings are gleaned mainly from other

1Parables were selected based upon certain criteria. They have a narrative structure, and one or more common elements found in banquet narratives and banquet images in antiquity: banquet motifs (see p. 232, above); banquet characters (see p. 231, above); and banquet procedure (implied or explicit). Parables chosen were also pliable to a type-scene analysis vis à vis the three sub-categories of the banquet type-scene discovered in chapter 4.

The promised blessing for the watchful who await their master’s return from a wedding feast (Luke 12: 36-37) in the parable of the Servants of the Returning Lord (Luke12:35-48) is an opportunity to recline with the master and be served by him in the eschatological banquet. The actual banquet scene consists of one verse (vs. 37) and, therefore, does not qualify as banquet parable with a story line. Cf. Luke 22:27.

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commentators. The analysis includes a study of the literary context, tradition analysis, historical analysis, an exegetical commentary, and a summary statement of what the parable meant.

Second, a detailed analysis and application of the type-scene are performed using the basic components of the type-scene (literary structure, plot, characterization, and theme) as a framework for the study. The findings of the two analyses of each parable are then summarized and conclusions drawn.

Third, a study of the function of the banquet type-scene in the parables within the context of its Gospel narrative is performed. This further demonstrates the usefulness of the type-scene in analyzing the parables of Jesus. In the entire process, I have interacted with material and findings from the previous chapters. The type-scene analysis should demonstrate how this narratorial mode of exegesis may be useful in interpreting the parables of Jesus.

**The Ten Virgins: Matt 25:1-13**

**Diachronic Critical Analysis**

**Literary Context**

The immediate context for this parable is the Eschatological Discourse (Matt

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1In this section, a running commentary and textual analysis of each parable is undertaken, highlighting the major significant details that are important for understanding the parable. The commentary follows my personal translation of each unit in the pericope using the 4th edition of the UBS Greek New Testament. The commentary interacts with the parallel versions (if any) in the other Synoptic Gospels and the *Gospel of Thomas.*
24:1-25:46). The note on the readiness for the unexpected coming mentioned in Matt 24:42 is dealt with more vigorously in 24:43-51 with two short parables, the Householder and the Thief, and the Wise and Foolish Servant. The first, in vs. 43, is a simple metaphor of the thief whose success relies on his ability to surprise the master of the house. This parable sets the stage for the call to "be ready" in vs. 44. Following this call is another parable in vs. 45-51, rendering a more vigorous description of the sudden return of the master. These two mini-parables set the stage for a further elaboration on the unexpectedness of Jesus' coming in the parable of the Ten Virgins in chap. 25. Still, another parable of the Talents continues with the same note in 25:14-30. Being ready at all times for the unexpected return of the master is a major theme of all of the four parables. Being ready or not will determine whether the disciples of Christ will be included in or excluded from the kingdom.

In the larger context, the parables of the Wise and Foolish Servant, The Ten Virgins, and the Talents (Matt 24:45-25:30) are significantly placed between Jesus' woes against the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23) and the passion narrative (Matt 26-28). The atmosphere in Matt 23, leading up to the Eschatological Discourse, heightens the conflict between Jesus and his Jewish opponents, mainly the scribes and Pharisees. In fact, conflict between Matthean Christians and rivals in Judaism underlies Matthean parables¹ just prior to the woes. In Matt 26-28, Matthew also heightens the role of the Jewish

leaders in bringing about the suffering and death of Jesus. Therefore, it becomes easier to recognize that the parables of Jesus in Matt 24:45-25:30 are placed in the same context, that is, heightening the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. From this perspective it would be easier to agree that the inclusion/exclusion theme is highlighted in the parable of the Ten Virgins.

** Tradition Analysis**

This parable is found only in the Gospel of Matthew. Though Matt 24 has a parallel in Mark 13, none of the material in Matt 25 appears in Mark. Luke 19:12-27 has a sort of parallel. The pursuit for the primitive form of the parable has generated a great deal of discussion. Some scholars maintain that the parable was spoken by Jesus, others hold that it was composed by the Early Church. Matthew as the composer of the

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parable is held in some quarters.¹

Those who hold that the parable was composed by the Early Church or Matthew himself base their major argument on its strong allegorical features, such as the marriage feast meaning the eschatological banquet of the Messiah and his people, the bridegroom signifying Christ, the bridegroom’s delay and sudden arrival denoting the delay and unexpected *parousia*, the closed door representing judgment, and the maidens symbolizing the wise and foolish Christians. However, the imagery of a marriage feast as a metaphor for the kingdom is not foreign to Jesus’ discourses,² and the portrayal of God as a bridegroom (or husband) is used in the Old Testament.³ It is not improbable that Jesus used the traditional picture of the wedding feast, the bridegroom, his delay, and abrupt appearance as imagery to present his teaching about his second coming and connected it with those who would be included in or excluded from the kingdom.

**Historical Analysis**

The hovering question about the first *sitz im leben* (that of Jesus) in which this parable was told is whether Jesus intended for his hearers (the disciples and his


³Isa 54:5-8; 62:5; Jer 31:32; Ezek 16:8-14; Hos 2:1-23.
opponents) to understand that the contents of this parable were speaking about his actual soon return. Evidences in the Gospels suggest that Jesus had this idea in mind, and that the disciples had a good grasp of the *parousia* concept.\(^1\) In two of his earliest letters, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Paul spoke vigorously about the *parousia*. This notion is highlighted, not only in the discourse in Matt. 24 and 25, and especially in the probing question of the disciples in 24:3, "Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" but also in Luke 12:35-48; 17:20-37; and 18:8. For Jesus’ disciples this understanding was a definite possibility. However, the Jewish opponents present could have understood this parable as a "cry of warning in view of the imminent eschatological crisis."\(^2\)

In the second *sitz im leben* (that of the early church), this parable and the other

\(^1\)Dodd gives all of the "eschatological" parables an application within the context of the ministry of Jesus. He maintains that these parables were intended to enforce Jesus’ appeal to men to recognize that "the kingdom of God was present in all its momentous consequences, and that by their conduct in the presence of this tremendous crisis they would judge themselves as faithful or unfaithful, wise or foolish." Dodd, *The Parables of The Kingdom*, 174. Cf. John Hargreaves, *A Guide to the Parables* (London: SPCK, 1968), 104. Jeremias claims that this concept of the *parousia* occurred in the second *sitz im leben* (that of the early church) and that the parable was used allegorically by Matthew to promote this *parousia* concept. He further argues that Jesus’ audience could have hardly applied the figure of the bridegroom in the parable to the Messiah, for there were no antecedents of the bridegroom representing the Messiah in the Old Testament and the literature of late Judaism. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 52. This view, though plausible, does not disqualify the use of such a symbol, as Jesus could be describing an actual wedding where the coming of the bridegroom was an apt illustration of the element of suddenness of his coming as were the sudden inundation of Noah’s flood, the unexpected entry of the thief (Matt 24:43), and the abrupt arrival of the master of the house (Matt 24:45-51). Cf. Charles Smith, 115.

\(^2\)Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 53. However, Jeremias’s audience is extended to a general crowd.
eschatological parables are revealed to signify the consciousness of the "delay of the parousia." The delay is reflected in Matt 24:48; 25:5; 25:19 with the frequent use of the phrase, "after a long time." No doubt the early church believers had outworn the sense of the imminence of the second return of Jesus. What loomed high in their minds, then, were questions about its delay. Believers had begun to lose hope in the imminence. As a response to these concerns, it is apparent that the Early Church leaders, through these parables, sought to warn against an attitude of self-complacency, for in each narrative the notion of a sudden appearance after the delay is accentuated.

Exegetical Commentary

25:1 Τότε ὁμιλωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν δέκα παρθένων, αἵτινες λαβοῦσαι τὰς λαμπάδας τινῶν ἔξηλθον εἰς ὑπάντησιν τοῦ νυμφίου.¹

Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

τότε may be accounted for on the grounds of the distant future envisaged by the church and may owe something to the apocalyptic passages that precede them in chap. 24.² The kingdom of heaven should be understood as comparable to a wedding scenario, and not the ten virgins. Here is a situation in which there is a "transference of the point of comparison." The virgins function as modern-day bridesmaids, and their virginity is not

¹MSS such as D 0 f add καὶ τῆς νύμφης, "and the bride" probably because copyists imagined the bridegroom escorting the bride to his home for the wedding.

²Barry Smith, The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels, 116.
of any relevance to the parable.¹ The parable is not clear on their roles in the wedding, whether attending the bride, serving in the bridegroom’s house, or just following the wedding procession. However, one thing is certain: They were to accompany the bridegroom in a torchlight procession into the wedding, presumably, the marriage banquet.² The bridegroom is best seen in this context as referring to Jesus,³ and the virgins as his mixed audience, or in the case of the Matthean community, the mixed congregation. The bride is noticeably absent, probably so that the representation of the ten virgins would not be confused with the bride.⁴ In any case the presence of the bride is not germane for the development of the narrative and what it is trying to teach.

And five of them were foolish and five were wise.

The number of the virgins seems to carry no special significance other than its sheer appropriateness to the occasion. It was the custom among the Jews to have at least ten persons participate in any public function.⁵ It follows, also, that one must not suppose that the division of the ten into two equal groups of five must be interpreted as half of the believers will enter the eschatological banquet of the Lord and half will not. The

¹Cf. Rev 14:4 where men are described as virgins.

²For further discussion on the place of the banquet, see commentary on vss. 5-6.


⁴The bride in 2 Cor 11:2 is described as a pure virgin.


3 αἱ γὰρ μοραὶ λαμπάδας αὐτῶν οὐκ ἔλαβον μεθ' ἑαυτῶν ἔλαυν. 4 αἱ δὲ φρόνιμοι ἔλαβον ἔλαυν ἐν τοῖς ἀγγείοις μετὰ τῶν λαμπάδων ἑαυτῶν.

For when the foolish took their lamps they did not take oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels along with their lamps.

The mark distinguishing the wise from the foolish is that the wise recognized the need to prepare in readiness of a possible crisis, the delay of the bridegroom. Two possible meanings for the λαμπάδας have been proposed. Either they were oil-soaked rags wrapped around the upper end of a stick, necessitating jars of oil to dip in before lighting,\footnote{Cf. John 18:3. Scholars like to refer to them as torches. See Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 14-28, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 728; Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 174; Gundry, 498; Richard T. France, "On Being Ready," in The Challenge of Jesus' Parables, ed. Richard Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 181; Leon Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 620.} or metal or clay vessels furnished with wicks.\footnote{Davies and Allison, 3:395-396; Donfried, 417; Jülicher, 2:448; Albrecht Oepke, "λάμπω," TDNT 4:17; Senior, 275.} The wooden stave is the likely alternative for the lamps, as girls would normally dance for the bridegroom and his guests.
for as long as their torches lasted.¹ In any case, any choice for the meaning of the lamp would not affect the significance of the lamps in the narrative.²

Now while the bridegroom delayed, they all grew drowsy and began to sleep.

Two reasons are possible for the delay. If the bridegroom is coming from the bride’s house, the parents of the bride may be bargaining for a higher dowry and demanding more costly gifts for the exchange of their daughter. And, too, the bridegroom may take pride in the notion that the parents are disinclined to part with their daughter.³ Second, there might have been a great distance between the bride’s house and the bridegroom’s.⁴ In any case the reason for the delay is not important. The delay is occasioned in the parable to facilitate the dozing of the virgin.

But at midnight there was a shout: behold the bridegroom, go forth to meet him.

Scholars have differing opinions relating to the virgins’ point of departure. Were they going out to meet the bridegroom from the bride’s house or the bridegroom’s house?


²Lamsa suggests that the parents of the bridegroom, neighbors, friends, and strangers provided abundant light for the wedding night for it was a symbol of happiness, and no wedding was properly conducted without plenty of it. George Lamsa, *Gospel Light* (Philadelphia: Holman, 1939), 137.


⁴Barry Smith, *The Parables of the Synoptic Gospel*, 100.
This can be determined if it is decided where the wedding banquet was held. Jeremias points out that bridal customs varied in details in different parts of the country in Jesus’ day. But one feature that was common to all wedding celebrations was "the subsequent nocturnal entry of the bridegroom into the paternal house."1 Normally, the wedding banquet was held at the bridegroom’s house2 or his parents’ house3 and lasted for seven days.4 By this time, the marriage had been celebrated at the bride’s house or some other location,5 and the bride and bridegroom were returning for the marriage feast to the bridegroom’s house. As the bridegroom approached the outskirts of the village he would send word ahead of his expected arrival. A band of maidens would come out to meet

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3 Gundry, 498; Barry Smith, The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels, 98-99. Cadoux claims that the action and expression, "I do not know you" (vs. 13), would scarcely be typical of a bridegroom, and only suggest that the banquet took place in the father’s house. A. T. Cadoux, The Parables of Jesus: Their Art and Use (London: James Clarke, 1930), 70.


5 See 1 Macc 9:37-39 of an instance where one party accompanied the bride and another group followed the bridegroom. Both parties went out to meet each other at an unidentified location where the marriage was conducted.
Occasionally, a wedding feast might take place at the bride's house, probably when the bride's new home was a distance away. Those who maintain that the virgins went to meet the bridegroom from the bride's house, see the clue in vss. 5 and 10, where the bridegroom is pictured coming from abroad, and presumably, the virgins go to escort him to the bride's house where the festivities would take place. If the typical ancient Jewish wedding custom is accepted, the weight of the evidence would suggest that the virgins were going out of the bridegroom's or parents' house.

No stress should be put on the place of the banquet feast, as it appears that it is not the narrator's purpose to elaborate on its location. He merely assumes the reader knows about the stages in the wedding celebration. The narrator's interest is only in the bridesmaids whose duty is to receive the bridegroom, and whose hope is to participate in the banquet feast.

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1Guthrie, 33; Pentecost, 153.

2Judg 14:10, Tob 8:19. See also Barry Smith, The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels, 98.

Then all those virgins awoke and put their lamps in order. And the foolish said to the wise: "Give us of your oil, because our lamps are going out." But the wise answered saying: "By no means, for there will not be enough for you and us. Go rather to those who sell and buy for yourselves."

κομέω is best translated "to arrange" or "set in order," as an army for battle, or a table for eating (Wis 29:26). The present passive of αόωνυμι suggests that the lamps were going out one by one. Matthew’s use of the lamp imagery may have been influenced by Prov 13:9 (cf. Job 18:5). The wise virgins appear to act in a churlish manner, but given the situation they could justify their actions reasoning that "the duty for which we are all here will not be done at all, and the bridegroom will be left unwelcomed and dishonored." Garland puts it: "The parable is an allegory about spiritual preparedness, not a lesson on the golden rule." The wise virgins’ tactful refusal to share is based on reason, not callous indifference. The foolish are irresponsible.

But while they were going to buy [oil] the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in with him into the wedding [feast] and the door was shut.

The foolish virgins’ futile attempts to obtain new supplies on time resulted in their missing the procession and being shut out of the feast. Drury points out that the arrival of

1Hermann Sasse, "κομέω," *TDNT*, 3:867; Goebel, 389; Gundry, 500.

2The ὁδὴμὴ suggests emphatic negation. This reading is supported by B C D K W Δ Я. MSS such as κ A L Z Θ and Я support the milder ὁδὲ.

3Cadoux, 151.

the bridegroom is an imagery already portrayed by Mark in 2:19-20. It conveyed the idea of Christ's coming—a symbolism already explored by Matthew in 9:15 and 22:1-14. The shut door points to the time when it will be too late to change the outcome: inclusion and exclusion from the messianic banquet. This clearly reveals the inclusion/exclusion theme.

Vss. 10c-12 resemble Luke 13:25-27, which occur in a collection of sayings. These two readings appear to be variants of a common tradition drawn upon by both Gospel writers. The vain plea, κύριε κύριε, echoes back to Matt 7:21 and the grim reply


3 Some MSS such as C³ f³ TR vgmas add ἐν ἧ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔρχεται, meaning “in which theSon of man is coming.” It is likely that a copyist added this to the text to accord with Matt 24:44.

echoes back to Matt 7:22-23. οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς is the formula of ἔξις (the teacher’s order, forbidding his scholar access to him for seven days); hence the phrase literally means: "I will have nothing to do with you."1 The language in vss. 11-12 seems to impair the everydayness of the parable. The unsympathetic response of the bridegroom does not appear to be the customary response of congeniality associated with an ancient Middle Eastern village wedding. It is clear that the story has shifted from the verisimilitude to the direct, in order to accommodate the judgment motif.

Vs. 13 echoes back to Matt 24:42 (cf. Mark 13:35). It is seen by some scholars as another of Matthew’s addenda. 2 However, it is not improbable that this verse, along with vss. 10-12, consisted of the traditional ending of Jesus’ parable which Matthew reworked to reach his community. The connective phrase οὐ indicates that the subsequent words make up the main point of the parable. γρηγορεῖτε in its present active imperative mood may literally mean "continue to be in a state of readiness." It calls for a continual, habitual alertness3 in view of the delayed arrival of the bridegroom. According to the evidence, the foolish as well as the wise fell asleep. Their folly then was not in their going to sleep, but in their unpreparedness for the unexpected delay of the bridegroom.

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1Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 175; cf. Ps 6:8.

2Davies and Allison, 3:400; Gnilka, Das Matthäusevangelium, 2:348-349; Lambrecht, Out of the Treasure, 205; Barry Smith, The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels, 104.

Summary Statement of What the Parable Meant

In the parable of the Ten Virgins the *parousia* is delayed. No one knows the time of the arrival of Christ, the Bridegroom. Therefore, one must be in a state of readiness at all times. When the Bridegroom comes there will be only two camps of professed followers: those who made preparations for the delay and would be included in the messianic banquet, and those who did not make ample provision for the delay and who would be excluded from entering the banquet of the Lord.

Type Scene Analysis

Literary Structure

The structure of the parable reveals rabbinic parallels:

Transition phrase: vs. 1a ("Then")
Introductory Formula: vs. 1a
Parable Proper: vss. 1b-12
Application: vs. 13

The parable exhibits an interesting structural sequence:

A. Introduction: Virgins go out to meet the bridegroom (vs. 1)

B. Five are foolish (vs. 2a)
   Five are wise (vs. 2b)
   Foolish take lamps and no oil (vs. 3)
   Wise take lamps and oil (vs. 4)

C. Bridegroom delays (vs. 5a)
   Virgins sleep (vs. 5b)
   Bridegroom approaches (vs. 6)
   Virgins rise (vs. 7)

D. Foolish request oil (vs. 8)
   Wise refuse oil (vs. 9)
E. Foolish go out to buy oil (vs. 10a)
   Bridegroom arrives (vs. 10b)
       Door opens for the wise (vs. 10c)
       Door is shut for the foolish (vs. 10d)
   Foolish return with oil (vs. 11a)

F. Foolish request from bridegroom (vs. 11b)
   Bridegroom rejects the foolish (vs. 12)

G. Conclusion: Final admonition (vs. 13)

   This structure reveals a series of antithetic inverted parallelisms typical of
   Matthew’s style, in which the acceptance/rejection or inclusion/exclusion theme is made
   known. This theme is held in balance with the theme of readiness in case of delay. The
   foolish virgins are contrasted with the wise in step parallelism in section B. In section C
   a double antithetic parallelism contrasts the delay and arrival of the bridegroom with the
   sleep and rise of the virgins. Section D contrasts the request of the foolish with the
   refusal of the wise, which anticipates the request of the foolish again, and the rejection
   from the bridegroom in Section F. In an antithetic mode, the open and closed door
   highlight the acceptance of the wise and rejection of the foolish against the background of
   the need to be ready at all times for the delayed arrival of the bridegroom in Section E.
   The concluding verse gives the final punch to be ready at all times.

Plot

   In the larger plot of Matthew’s eschatological narrative, the parable of the Ten
   Virgins operates as a kernel that continues Matthew’s warnings about the unknown time
   of the parousia and readiness for the final judgment. This emphasis is maintained in the
   plot that governs the parable of the Ten Virgins. The motifs in the Wise and Foolish
Invitees type-scene are strikingly similar to those found in this parable. From all appearances, this type-scene is enacted using different variations to help create the plot. Comparing the type-scene with the narrative plot of the parable reveals some interesting features.

In this type-scene the preparation of the banquet is not mentioned but assumed. The banquet constitutes a marriage feast to bring about the eschatological concept. The specific mention of the virgins suggests that they were special guests. If they are the bridegroom's servants then they coincide with the king's servants in the typical banquet scene. Congruent with the Wise and Foolish Invitees type-scene, no time is given for the start of the banquet. The wise as well as the foolish prepare, but the foolish do not prepare enough for the delay. In the typical Wise and Foolish Invitees type-scene the foolish simply ignore the preparation. This variation to the type-scene makes allowances for Jesus' mixed audience and Matthew's mixed congregation, who are all making preparation for the messianic banquet. The announcement of the sudden arrival of the bridegroom coincides with the unexpected injunction of the king that his invitees appear before him. The trimming of the lamps synchronizes with the garment motif of the regular Wise and Foolish Invitees banquet type-scene. The lamp (oil) motif is conveniently added to align with the context of the marriage feast.

In the typical Wise and Foolish Invitees type-scene, both groups enter the banquet hall. The host's rejection of the unprepared guests follows. In this scene, as in the parable of the Narrow Door (Luke 13: 24-30), the rejection takes place before the entry into the banquet hall. This variation is significant. The shutting of the banquet door
before the arrival of the tardy guests is dramatic and heightens the lateness of the virgins. Unpreparedness is juxtaposed with readiness to provide the context for the eschatological banquet. The late arrival of the foolish virgins resulted in their being shut out from the banquet.

In the familiar Wise and Foolish type-scene the guests are judged while they are in the banquet hall, but in this instance the judgment comes to the late-comers while they are outside. This heightens the inside/outside (inclusion/exclusion) theme. In spite of the foolish virgins’ pleas, they are denied access to the banquet table with the somber response, "I do not know you." No anger is mentioned but this is not improbable as the grim reaction of the bridegroom may well suggest this emotion. He supposedly rejoices at the wise and uncompromisingly rejects the foolish. The wise virgins went into the banquet celebration and, technically, the foolish were cast out.

As in every good plot, this parable develops the narrative with tension followed by resolution. The delay of the bridegroom triggers the tension in the plot. The sudden and short announcement of the coming of the bridegroom heightens the tension. The solicitation of the foolish virgins and the subsequent refusal of the wise add further to the suspense. Getting the oil seemed not to be a problem, but acquiring it on time was. There seems to have been a glimmer of hope that the oil could be acquired and they could be still on time. Again, timeliness is an issue that generates suspense. The bridegroom’s surprise arrival and the subsequent entry of the wise bring resolution to the plot.

The parable portrays a tragic plot with flashes of comedy. The amusing part of this plot is that all the virgins may have anticipated a delay, as this was typical of most
wedding celebrations. So they dozed off. But the foolish seemed not to think ahead, and then wanted to take advantage of the others to the detriment of the whole wedding reception. Making excuses and scrambling at the last minute, hoping to get the same results as those who made it their duty to prepare, are certainly comical.

Characterization

The descriptions of characters in this parable are rendered only to the extent that they facilitate the plot. In other words, characterization is subordinate to the plot. Even the plot-scheme provides a sequence of action that is sufficient to make the point of the parable. Direct characterization of the ten virgins is voiced by the omniscient narrator. From the narrator’s conceptual point of view, five were wise and five were foolish. Later in the narrative, the implied reader is left to make his/her own conclusions about the accuracy of this judgment. Surely, the virgins’ actions and speeches reveal these traits. These contrasting traits are important for the development of the plot.

Characterization is best seen in the contrasting parallels of the wise and foolish in this type-scene. All of the ten virgins, wise and foolish, are participants in the wedding from the start of the parable. Primarily, by means of the technique of showing, and secondarily, through the medium of telling, the narrator demonstrates the dissimilarity between the wise and the foolish. Their graphic actions and words reveal their attitudes:

1. The wise had foresightedness; they made preparations for a possible extended delay.

2. The foolish thought the bridegroom's delay would not be that long; they made
no provision for a prolonged wait.

3. Not the mere possession of oil, but of additional oil, shows the wisdom of the wise.

4. Not the lack of any oil, but of extra oil reveals the folly of the foolish.

The wedding itself is not described by the narrator. Only an incident in the periphery of the wedding is highlighted. No mention is made of the bride. She plays no role in this peripheral action. But even the bridegroom does not really stand in focus. A deliberate ploy of characterization is seen in substituting the king with the bridegroom. The bridegroom is conveniently used to facilitate the wedding situation which actualizes the *parousia* concept. Though he is a main character in the narrative, he appears only at the start of the narrative, is mentioned briefly in the middle, and reemerges at the end. To be more precise, it is not the bridegroom but his approach that is important, for with this begins the service for which the bridesmaids were appointed. Only at the very end does the bridegroom stand out.1 Only once does he speak. The note of his absence becomes practically the fulcrum of the judgment when the bridegroom arrives.2 The dealers may be described as mere functionaries in the narrative.

The narrator makes regular use of direct discourse in the narrative. Technically, all parables are direct discourses, although within the parabolic discourses themselves, there may be additional direct discourses and dialogues. Direct discourse is found in five

1Heinrich Kahlefeld, *Parables and Instructions in the Gospels* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 120.

of the twelve verses of the parable proper (vss. 6, 8, 9, 11, 12). By means of these direct discourses the narrator shows (rather than tells) the inner life and personal attitudes of the virgins. In vs. 8 the plea, "Give us of your oil, because our lamps are going out," shows the carelessness of the foolish. This is shown in stark contrast to the diligence of the wise in vs. 11: "By no means, for there will not be enough for you and us. Go rather . . ." The diligence of the wise is predicated upon their desire to welcome the bridegroom and make the banquet a success, and not merely a crass refusal to the appeal of the foolish.

Points of view, especially in the case of the virgins, add luster and drama to the type-scene. From the perceptual point of view of the foolish, the wise have oil to spare; from their conceptual viewpoint the wise should share their oil. From the perceptual point of view of the wise, there is not enough oil to share, and the foolish should go to the dealers; from their conceptual viewpoint the bridegroom is about to arrive and their oil supply has to be sufficient for the banquet. The bridegroom’s response in vs. 12 betrays a conceptual viewpoint which explains the reason for the exclusion of the foolish from the banquet: "I do not know you." The narrator’s comment after the answer of the bridegroom gives final closure to the application of the parable.

**Theme**

The structure of the finished form of the text displays an inclusion/exclusion theme, and by extension the judgment theme. This theme is contiguous with a second theme, contrasting readiness with unpreparedness. The parable may be characterized as a story of readiness and unreadiness, with either inclusion or exclusion as the end result.
The readiness of the wise, followed by their inclusion in the banquet, climaxes in vs. 10c. The unpreparedness and subsequent exclusion of the foolish from the banquet are consummated in vss. 10d-12.

Some common motifs found in this type-scene are the wise and foolish, virgins, oil, garment (lamp), and door motifs. The word "wise" is used four times, and "foolish," thrice. Though the word "wise" is mentioned more often than the "foolish," the activities making specific reference to the foolish engage the same number of verses (vss. 2, 3, 8, 10, 11) as those that involve the wise (vss. 2, 4, 8, 9, 10). Interestingly, in each case there are five instances regarding the wise or the foolish. The frequent repetition of this motif is intended to emphasize the folly of unpreparedness and the wisdom of readiness. Prudence and preparedness are juxtaposed to folly and unpreparedness.

The virgin motif is used three times, as well as the oil motif. Though the virgin motif was common in wedding stories of antiquity, they were normally portrayed as flat characters, while the bride took the role of the main character. However, in this parable the ten virgins are the round characters who represent Jesus' audience and Matthew's church, and who are invited to the eschatological banquet. They are required to perform specific roles. They are substituted for the bride in the parable. Five virgins set the stage for the inclusion theme and five virgins for the exclusion theme: five were prepared and five were not. The oil motif stands in conjoint relationship with the lamp motif. The lamp motif is representative of the garment motif in the traditional Wise and Foolish

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1Cf. the seven virgins in the story of Joseph and Aseneth; the seven bridesmaids in the banquet in the Acts of Thomas.
Invitees type-scene.\(^1\) Being ever alert and attentive for the *parousia* corresponds to the oil and lamp metaphor in this parable.

The door motif is not common in the banquet type-scene. However, the open/shut door imagery is present in the Wise and Foolish Invitees type-scene. The door motif is significant in this type-scene for it intensifies the judgment theme.\(^2\) The door represents salvation. Only an instant response to the arrival of the bridegroom guarantees entry into the salvific banquet. A late response results in the exclusion from the banquet. Inclusion precedes exclusion.\(^3\) The chief message is to be ready to enter into the joy of the Lord, for it may be too late when the door of salvation is shut. Whoever is ready will be included; whoever comes late will be excluded. Exclusion follows inclusion. The exclusion theme has the greater emphasis.

**Summary**

The findings of the diachronic critical analysis of the parable of the Ten Virgins were consonant with the findings of the type-scene analysis. When compared to the diachronic approach to the interpretation of the text, the synchronic approach arrived at similar conclusions, especially, in terms of its theme. The diachronic critical analysis of

\(^{1}\)Cf. the parables of the Wise and Foolish Invitees.

\(^{2}\)Cf. the parable of The Narrow Door (Luke 13:24-30). The judgment theme is heightened in the parable of the Narrow Door. The imagery of the shut door is more vivid and dramatic in this parable. See the sub-section dealing with the parable of the Narrow Door, below.

\(^{3}\)Capon mentions a principle of inclusion before exclusion—the rule that any characters who are made outsiders at the end of the story must always be shown as insiders at the beginning. Capon, *The Parables of the Judgment*, 155.
the parable revealed that preparation for the delay of the *parousia* qualifies the believer for entrance into God's eschatological banquet; unpreparedness disqualifies the believer. The type-scene analysis of the parable showed parallels with the Wise and Foolish Invitees type-scene. The narrator in innovative ways has used this type-scene with definite variations to bring about the concept of the readiness for the *parousia* and to create a condition for the inclusion/exclusion theme in this parable. Evidently, a complementary relationship exists between the synchronic and diachronic approach to the parable.


**Diachronic Critical Analysis**

**Literary Context**

The parable of the Narrow Door,


David Moessner, in his work on the Travel Narrative's literary and theological significance, goes so far as to title

1Though the parable is not so classified by Luke, its metaphors combine to create a mental picture which is of parabolic character.

2In the house of Mary and Martha, Luke 10:38-42; in the house of a certain Pharisee, 11:37-54; the parable of the Narrow Door, 13:24-30; in a chief Pharisee's house, 14:1-24, where three parables are told: Places at a Feast (wedding banquet, 14:7-11), The Choice of Guests (14:12-14), and The Great Supper (14:16-24); the banquet for the Prodigal Son, 15:22-24; a feast in the home of Zacchaeus, 19:1-10; cf. 22:7-27; 24:13-35.

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his book *Lord of the Banquet*.¹

Luke 13:22 marks the second mention of Jesus making his steady journey to Jerusalem (the first mention is in 9:51). This mention of the journey, followed by the question concerning the scarcity of those who would be saved in vs. 23, provides the immediate background leading up to the parable of the Narrow Door. From Luke 11:37 onwards, the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders are slow to acknowledge the teachings of Jesus. The shut-door warning is directed to them. After this parable, Jesus issues a lament because the nation does not respond (Luke 13:31-35).

** Tradition Analysis **

Chronology and topography in the Travel Narrative sometimes lack details, and according to Pagenkemper, "it is reasonable to assume that Luke has pieced together several events in the life of Christ all around the general rubric of his moving toward death in Jerusalem."² Luke 13:22, 23 is exclusively Lucan. Parallels of vss. 24-30 may be seen in the other Synoptic Gospels, especially in Matthew.³ Critics see these parallels as a valid reason to claim that this parable is a Lucan composition of a complex mix,⁴ a

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²Karl E. Pagenkemper, "An Analysis of the Rejection Motif in the Synoptic Parables and Its Relationship to Pauline Soteriology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1990), 89.


secondary fusion,¹ a mosaic² with pieces of all sorts put together,³ or even an artificial⁴ or semi-parable.⁵ Vs. 24 seems to originate from a tradition similar to Matt 7:13-14, which is adapted to link vs. 24 to 25.⁶ Bock argues that this parallel is only conceptual, and suggests independent sources used by Matthew and Luke.⁷ However, Bock does not give a satisfactory explanation to account for the close correspondences of the subsequent traditional elements.

¹Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 95-96, 110. Jeremias claims that the parable is a fusion of the conclusion of one parable (Matt 25:10-12) with three similes which are related to it in illustrative content (Matt 7:13-14, 22-23; 8:11-12) creating a new parable. Any attempt to discover the original meaning of the parable must discard all these secondary connections. Ibid., 96.


³Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 130. Bultmann posits that Luke links the saying of the narrow door (vs. 24) with the rejection of Jesus’ contemporaries by using the door motif from a parable analogous to the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-13) in vs. 25. He argues that this is clumsy, for the door in vs. 25 is quite different from that in vs. 24 where the πολλοὶ certainly do not seek the door.


⁵Cadoux, 232. Cadoux insists that it is an elaborated metaphor bordering on allegory in which the important thing is to depict rather than prove. Ibid., 235.

⁶Matt 7:13 is concerned with the Two Ways; Luke with one door, and the issue is which side of the door one is on.

Vs. 25 echoes the tradition behind Matt 25:10-12. A parallelism is created in vss. 26-27 that corresponds with Matt 7:22, 23. Vss. 28-29 reflect Matt 8:11-12. Lastly, vs. 30 may be considered along with Matt 19:30, 20:16, and Mark 10:31. If Luke is combining several materials his sources were likely Mark, Q, and L. While it may make sense to assume that Luke is arranging his material to suit his own purpose, it does not discount the possibility that Jesus himself could have made such a synthesis.

**Historical Analysis**

In the first *sitz im leben*, Jesus' hearers would likely be a mixed crowd who understood this parable in different ways. For the Jewish leaders, Jesus was warning about the imminence of the eschatological kingdom. The Jewish leadership was rejecting him. In the same way, as the householder he would reject them. They would be shut out from the eschatological banquet. For the disciples, he was speaking about the door of salvation. It is not improbable that they interpreted the parable against the

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2Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 53.
background of the *parousia*, an interpretation similar to that of the *sitz im leben* of the parable of the Ten Virgins.¹

In the second *sitz im leben*, the Early Church would have understood this parable as urging them to strain every effort to be ready at all times, for the door of salvation does not stay open indefinitely.² The time will come when the door will be shut. Here, the eschatological motif is accentuated.

**Exegetical Commentary**

13:24 ἀγωνίζεσθε εἰσελθεῖν διὰ τῆς στενῆς θύρας, ὅτι πολλοί, λέγω ὑμῖν, ζητήσουσιν εἰσελθεῖν καὶ οὐκ ἴσχύσουσιν.

Strive to enter by the narrow door, because many, I say to you will seek to enter and will not be able.

ἀγωνίζεσθε is present imperative which suggests that the believer must continually labor hard,³ making every effort to enter. It reflects the language of struggle found in Hellenistic contests, debates (diatribe), or legal suits.⁴ This language may also

¹Mussner holds that the original situation was not clear to Luke because of his use of several logia to formulate his composition. See Franz Mussner, "Das 'Gleichnis' vom gestrengen Mahlherm (Luke 13:22-30): Ein Beitrag zum Redaktionsverfahren und zur Theologie des Lukas," *Trierer theologische Zeitschrift* 65 (1956): 141. However, Luke's formulation shows his awareness of the original context of the parable in the ministry of Jesus by his use of passages such as Luke 12:35-41, especially 41; 12:54-59, especially 54; 13:1-9, especially 1; 13:10-17, especially 17.

²The shutting of the door may be paralleled with the suddenness of the shutting of the door in Noah's flood. See Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 53.


be seen in Jewish and early Christian exhortation. The striving is not intended "to enjoin competition with others struggling to enter, but determination to enter at all costs before the door is shut." The image of the door is often related to the entry into God’s eschatological banquet. Luke seems to be combining the idea of narrowness with the imagery of the door to establish the point that not only is the way narrow, but soon the door to the heavenly banquet will be closed.

When once the householder gets up and closes the door, and outside you will begin to stand and knock on the door saying: "Lord, open for us," then, answering he will say to you: "I do not know you, where you are (come) from."

The parallel verses in Matt 25:10-12 suggest that Matthew, as well as Luke, was drawing from the same Jewish imagery which portrays the exclusion theme. It is not an "either/or" situation; the door is narrow and will shut soon. One needs to decide while

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1See 3 Macc 4:11; 4 Macc 11:20; 17:10; John 8:36; 1 Cor 9:25; Col 1:29; 4:12. The usage of this imagery in 1 Tim 4:10; 6:11-12; 2 Tim 4:7-8, as in this parable, has eschatological connotations.

2Cadoux, 236.

3Matt 7:7-8, 13, 14; 22:12; 25:10, 21, 23; Luke 14:23. However, in Matt 7:13, 14 the image is a gate which probably hints of an earlier tradition of the Two Ways. Cf. Jer 21:8; Ps 1:6; Prov 14:2; Sir 21:10; 2 En. 30:15; Avot 2:12-23; and especially, 2 Esd 7:1-9; 1QS 3:20-21; Did. 1:2; 5:1; Barn. 18:1.

4This relative clause states a supposition which refers to the future, suggesting some probability of its fulfillment. See Robert Hanna, A Grammatical Aid to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 125.

5The καί is probably paratactic. See Nolland, 734.
there is still time.¹

26 τότε ἀρέσεθε λέγειν ἐφάγομεν ἐνυπίτων σου καὶ ἐπίσκεψαν καὶ ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις ἡμῶν ἐδίδαξας· 27 καὶ ἐρεῖ λέγων ἡμῖν ὦκ οἶδα [ὑμᾶς] πόθεν ἔστε· ἀπόστητε ἀπ' ἐμοῦ πάντες ἐργάται ἁδικίας.

Then you will begin to say: “We ate and drank before you, and in our wide streets you taught;” but he will say to you: “I do not know you, where you are (come) from; go away from me all workers of unrighteousness.”

Vss. 26-27 begin the applicatory section of the parable which continues on to vs. 30. These two verses clearly highlight the rejection theme. The excluded ones, especially the Jewish leaders, will appeal to their casual ties with the Lord of the house, "We ate and drank in your presence,² and you taught in our streets," to be included in the messianic banquet, but the answer will be, "I tell you I do not know you." The parallel in Matt 7:22-23 appears to be a reformulation of a secondary nature.³ In this case, the false Christian teacher is rejected.⁴

28 ἐκεῖ ἦσται ὁ κλαυθμός καὶ ὁ βρυγμός τῶν ὁδών των, ὅταν δῆσητε Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰακὼβ καὶ Παύκη καὶ πάντας τοὺς προφήτας ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ, ὡς δὲ ἐκβαλλόμενος ἦστε. 29 καὶ ἤσοισαν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ ὄρων καὶ ἀπὸ βορρῶν καὶ νότων καὶ ἀνακλίθησατε ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ.

Then, there will be loud crying and grinding of teeth, when you see Abram and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves are being

¹Bock, 1236.
²This anticipates the banquet scenario in vs. 29. It gives a hint that the setting of the narrow door is a banquet feast.
³Matthew’s addition of ὁμολογεῖω supports this notion. See Nolland, 734.
⁴Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 117.
⁵ἐκεῖ is used here in a temporal sense. See Hanna, 125.
cast outside. And they will come from the east and west and from the north and south and recline (at the table) in the kingdom of God.

Those who expected to partake in the eschatological banquet are now described with exclusion vocabulary (ὁ κλαυθμός καὶ ὁ βρυγμός τῶν ἀδικτῶν; ἐκβαλλόμενος) commonly used by Matthew. In rabbinic literature loud crying was indicative of remorse for rejection of the ungodly. The grinding of teeth was an expression of anger. Being cast out into outer darkness was a judgment motif in Judaism.

Inclusion vocabulary follows the exclusion vocabulary. The mention of the cardinal points indicates the inclusiveness of the eschatological banquet. In the Old Testament this imagery usually reflects the expected eschatological gathering of the elect, when the conquered and dispersed Gentiles would worship God in Zion to mark the sovereignty of Israel. In this context, the tables are turned; they who labor intensely, including the Gentiles, may enter the narrow door of salvation. They will dine with the

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2 Sipre 103 on Num 12:8.


4 1 En. 103:7-8; Ps Sol 14:9; 15:10; Leviticus Rabbah 27:1; Exodus Rabbah 14:2.

5 Matthew has the reverse of this order: inclusion followed by exclusion (Matt 8:11-12).

6 1 Chr 9:24; Pss 96:3; 107:3; Isa 2:2; 25:6-10; 40:5; 43:5-6; 45:6, 14; 49:12; 51:4; 52:10; 55:5; 56:7; 59:19; 66:19-20; Mic 4:1-2; Zech 2:13; Mal 1:11. Cf. the exclusiveness of the communal banquet at Qumran in the sub-section, "The Communal Meal at Qumran," above.
three revered patriarchs of Judaism.\(^1\) \(\Delta ν\aleph \kappa\lambda\iota\nu\omega\) suggests that the door in the parable refers to one leading into a banquet hall.

\(30\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \iota\delta\omicron\upsilon\ \varepsilon\iota\sigma\iota\varsigma\alpha\tau\omicron\omega\iota\ \varepsilon\iota\sigma\omicron\nu\tau\alpha\iota\iota\varsigma\ \pi\rho\omicron\varsigma\tau\omicron\ \iota\iota\varsigma\iota\varsigma\alpha\theta\omicron\tau\omicron\iota\). And behold, they are last who will be first, and they are first who will be last.

This verse clearly shows the reversal motif,\(^2\) and brings the parable to a pointed summary.\(^3\) Many Jews who depend upon their status as a pass to the eschatological banquet will be surprised to realize that the Gentiles have occupied their place; believers who think that their standing in the kingdom depends on their casual relationship with Jesus will be sorely disappointed that they did not enter the kingdom, while others whom the believer thinks are less qualified are present.

**Summary Statement of What the Parable Meant**

This parable depicts the judgment theme juxtaposed by the disappointment of human expectations. Salvation is like a door. God opens and shuts the door at will. The door is narrow, but all have access to it. Man must make every effort to enter while the door is still open. Manson aptly describes this effort as a case of struggling through and not strolling in.\(^4\) Those who refuse the message of Jesus, yet claim their religious or

\(^1\) Cf. the eschatological banquet of Isa 25:6-10 (pp. 172-174, above).

\(^2\) Mark and Matthew reverse the sequence: Mark 10:31; Matt 19:30. Cf. Barn. 6:13 and Gos. Thom. 4.

\(^3\) It is not a wandering logion as Nolland suggests. Nolland, 735.

\(^4\) Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 125.
social standing as a guarantee for entrance, will be disappointed (exclusion). Even the
enjoyment of fellowship with Jesus avails nothing if one's works have been evil. Only
those who labor seriously and sincerely will be let in (inclusion), and once the door is
shut by God himself, those on the outside will not be able to enter. There will be many
surprises in God's end-time banquet.

Type-Scene Analysis

Literary Structure

Luke 13:22-23 facilitates the transition from the parables of the Mustard Seed
(13:18-19) and the Leaven (13:20-21) to the parable of the Narrow Door. In terms of
Johnston's structure of rabbinic parables, there is no illustrand or introductory formula.
The parable proper consists of vss. 24-27. The application is interwoven with several
scriptural citations in vss. 28-30. The structure may be analyzed as follows:

A. You strive to enter the door (vs. 24a)
   Many will seek to enter and are not able (vs. 24b)
B. When the householder shuts the door (from inside) (vs. 25a)
   You will stand and knock on the door (from outside) (vs. 25b)
C. You will begin . . . saying: Open up to us (vs. 25c)
   He will say: I do not know you (vs. 25d)
   You will begin to say: "We ate and . . . " (vs. 26)
   He will say: "I do not know you . . . " (vs. 27)
D. Conclusion: vss. 28-30
   You yourselves will be cast out (vs. 28)
   Many will enter the banquet (vs. 29)
   Summary Quote (vs. 30)
      They are last who will be first
      They are first who will be last.

Luke presents a design that consists of a series of parallelisms that are structurally
antithetic to reveal the exclusion/inclusion theme. The invitation to strive to enter is in
tension with the many who will not be able to enter (Section A). Section B describes the householder shutting the door from the inside, which counterbalances the guests standing and knocking from the outside. In Section C a graphic antitheism is evident, by means of the repetition of words with variation. Freely used are words such as ἀρχω and λέγω, and phrases such as καὶ . . . ἐρεῖ ὑμῖν and οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς πόθεν ἐστέ (ἀρέσηθε . . . λέγοντες; καὶ . . . ἐρεῖ ὑμῖν; οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς πόθεν ἐστε; ἀρέσηθε λέγειν; καὶ ἐρεῖ λέγων ὑμῖν; οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς πόθεν ἐστε).

The conclusion presents two antitheisms. The first describes those (the Jewish opponents who believe they have the legal right to be included in the kingdom) who will be cast out, against the many (the Gentiles) who will be included in the banquet. This mellows the assertion in vs. 24 that many will not be able to enter. In the second instance, there is a neat chiasm which summarizes the parable: A reversal of fortunes will be the final outcome.

Plot

As Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem (Luke 13:22), an anonymous inquisitor asks him, "Lord, are there a few who are being saved?" (13:23). The question begs for an answer that would elaborate on the number of people who would be saved. The plot of the parable reveals that Jesus refrains from answering the question posed to him. Instead, Jesus clarifies what it takes to enter the eschatological banquet, who are excluded from it, and who are included in it. He demonstrates that the anonymous question is not the right question. Rather, the question should have been, "How may I be saved?" or in the
context of parable, "How can I be included in the messianic banquet?" The answer is given in the parable of the Narrow Door: Entrance into the messianic banquet requires "striving" through the narrow door.

The parable seems to be aware of a tradition behind the door imagery. The image of the door is crucial for the main point Jesus desires to make in response to the question put to him. The narrator is not interested in the entire banquet scene; he expects the audience to fill in the blanks that make up the banquet story. Although no actual mention is made of a banquet, the depiction of the householder getting up (likely, from his couch) and the placement of the word "recline" in vs. 29 suggest a banquet scenario. The mention of the householder as the one who shuts the door hints that the banquet is probably a house banquet and not a wedding feast as in the parable of the Ten Virgins.

The plot of the parable of the Narrow Door has echoes in the Eminence of Guests type-scene, the Guests and Hosts Response type-scene, and, especially in the Wise and Foolish Invitees type-scene. When using the Eminence of Guests type-scene, only the opening of the door for the eminent guests is mentioned. While the door motif is not specifically mentioned, it is alluded to in the Wise and Foolish Invitees type-scene. In the Guests and Host Response type-scene, the narrator uses the imagery of the host welcoming other guests.

The banquet is supposedly prepared by the householder. The selective invitation is given to the Jews or the disciples. The notable variation in this type-scene is the

\footnote{Cf. the parable of the Trickles from the Palace: t. Sotah 11:3.}
striving to enter the door. Invitees to a banquet were normally welcomed to the banquet with a wide-open door as in the case of the Eminence of Guests type-scene. Struggling to enter the banquet seems to be a variation created by combining the narrow gate concept (cf. Matt 7:13-14) with the open/closed banquet door concept to bring about the eschatological judgment theme.

As in the parable of the Ten Virgins, the door motif relates to the exclusion/inclusion theme outside of the banquet hall and not inside the banquet hall (see above). In so doing the narrator is heightening the drama of the judgment motif. Upon the shutting of the door by the householder, the cry of the rejected ones (the foolish ones, using the characterization in the parable of the Ten Virgins) is met with the same reaction of the bridegroom in the parable of the Ten Virgins: "I do not know you . . . ." However, the exclusion theme of the foolish (the Jewish opponents) is more vivid and dramatic in this parable. The anger motif is no doubt present. The foolish will see (stand and watch) the patriarchal triad in the banquet celebration, and, ultimately, they will be cast out (condemnation). The accepted ones (or the wise ones [the Gentiles]) join the banquet (compensation) and recline at the table with the patriarchs.

The plot in this parable begins with suspense. At first, the challenge to enter the narrow door seems almost impossible. The shutting of the door, followed by the knocking and pleading of the rejected, precipitates the tension. It is too late to strive at that time. The host's response sounds harsh and cold: "I do not know you, where you are

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1In the case of the Ten Virgins, the sequence is reversed: inclusion/exclusion.
from." He envisages a plea from the rejected that their association with him warrants a place in the banquet. So he inoculates their thinking: "Then you will begin to say, we ate . . . " The plea magnifies the earnestness of the rejected invitees. The householder's second response further amplifies the condemnation of the rejected and reveals the severity of the judgment: "I do not know you, where you are from; go away from me all workers of unrighteousness." Here we see repetition and enlargement of the earlier response of the householder. The question lingers for the reader: "If not the opposing Jewish leaders, who will be included?" or "Who is able to enter the banquet?" The prophets will be on the inside, while the foolish will be on the outside. Furthermore, the surprise is that the Gentiles will join the prophets on the inside, while the Jews will remain on the outside. This brings the plot to a fine resolution.

The plot in this narrative may be seen as a tragic plot with a touch of comedy. The dramatic cries of the rejected, rejected by the hopeless response of the host, define the tragedy. The comic aspect of the narrative is revealed by the unwarranted claims of the rejected of their right to banquet fellowship because of their casual acquaintance with the householder. They are portrayed as being very confident of their position at the banquet table, but their light reasoning and superficial relationship with the host are laid bare and ridiculous before him. They think they are a privileged class because of their former friendship with the host, but their shallow association dictates their fate. Strangers from every corner of the earth will enter the eschatological banquet before them.
Characterization

The narrator exploits the technique of contrasting characters to depict characterization. A good example of characterization in this type-scene is seen in the contrasting behavior of the rejected¹ and the householder. Both characters are full-fledged round characters. As the plot develops, the narrator intensifies the contrasting roles of both characters. The householder gets up and shuts the door; the rejected stand and knock. The rejected cry for the opening of the door; the householder rejects their cry. The rejected advance a reason for their claim to table fellowship; the householder advances a reason to disclaim their reasoning. Moreover, the householder casts judgment on the rejected ("go away from me . . .") and goes on to graphically describe the fate of the rejected.

Ironically, this episode in the narrative describing the failing attempts of the rejected to enter the banquet after the door is shut shows their "strivings" by increments. By the same token, the episode describes the householder's response to the pleas of the rejected by increasing harshness. The narrator's use of repetitive phrases with variations in introducing direct discourses ("You will begin saying/to say . . ." and "He will say . . .") conveys the ineffectiveness of the pleas, and maximizes the rejection theme.

Furthermore, the narrator's use of the different points of view of the characters makes the narrative descriptive. The interchange of the characters' points of view makes the characters' traits stand out more distinctly.

¹The rejected ones are identified in the second person plural: "you."
The rejected may be also compared with those from around the globe who will recline and dine in the kingdom. These foreigners are cast in a better light than the rejected who strove relentlessly. Though they are cast as flat characters in the narrative, they become the honored guests in the kingdom. This is a reversal of fortunes. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are also flat characters whose function in the narrative is to focus on the stark reality of the lostness of the Jewish leaders.

Characterization is also seen in the contrasting responses of the householder to the ones who will be excluded from the banquet and those who will be included in the banquet. In the parable proper, the householder is cast in a merciless light by the narrator, but as the narrator gets to the application section of the parable, he presents the householder in a shockingly different light. Though selected invitees were spurned, strangers from the world over may have full table fellowship. The implied reader's judgment of the householder's severity changes to one of magnanimous benevolence. This surprising shift of judgment escalates the credibility of the householder in the narrative.

Theme

The exclusion/inclusion theme governs the finished form of the text. This theme reveals two aspects of the verdict of God: exclusion for those who failed to do their utmost to enter, yet claim their place in the kingdom; inclusion for those who labored intently to enter the eschatological banquet. The parable is a dialectic between human
responsibility and the priority of God’s grace and invitation.\(^1\)

The door motif creates a picture of judgment.\(^2\) In this scene the banquet door of salvation is open until the householder decides to shut it. To strive to enter after the door is shut is failure. Vying to enter must be done prior to the closing of the door, for when the door is shut no amount of pleading, no matter how reasonable, justifies the reopening of the door. The host rejects the unprepared by excluding them from the banquet, while he accepts the prepared by including them in the banquet. The sequence of the host’s action in terms of the theme of the narrative is exclusion/inclusion. In Matthew’s parable of the Ten Virgins the sequence is inclusion/exclusion, in line with Matthew’s emphasis on the rejection of the Jewish leaders. However, in this parable the sequence is reversed in line with Luke’s emphasis on the inclusion of the Gentiles. This sequence sets the pace for the other banquet parables that follow in Luke’s Gospel.

**Summary**

Since the author has put together a combination of different sources to form this parable, this banquet type-scene is also made up of different elements. It is a synthesis of all the banquet type-scenes into a unique narrative that reveals the context of Jesus’ ministry and Luke’s audience. The diachronic analysis and the type-scene analysis revealed that the parable exposes the disappointment of those who believe they have a

\(^1\)Nolland, 734.

\(^2\)See comment in the subsection, "Theme" on the parable of the Ten Virgins, above.
right to be included in the kingdom. They will be excluded in their self-complacency.
Those who struggle earnestly to enter will eventually qualify to dine with the patriarchs at
the banquet table of the Lord. The fate of human beings depends not on their patrilineal
ancestry or station in life but on their response to the invitation to enter into the messianic
kingdom.


Diachronic Critical Analysis

Luke 14:7-11 is commonly called the parable of Places at a Feast.¹ Vss. 12-14 are
generally considered as a separate pericope, which serves as a link between the parable of
Places at a Feast and the parable of the Great Supper in vss. 15-24.² Scholars are slow to
assert that Luke 14:12-14 is actually another parable, contiguous to vss. 7-11.³ It appears
that this is a situation in which a geminate context is created for the single working of two
parables. It is suggested in this section that Luke 14:7-14 consists of two parables

¹ Although this pericope may be seen as a simple parenetic instruction, it qualifies
as a parable. First, the Gospel writer introduces the unit with the word παραβολή.
Second, vs. 10 echoes Prov 25:6-7, and a parable may be understood as a proverb. Third,
it is a wisdom saying whose attributes verify its parabolic nature.

² Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 361; Marshall, The Gospel of Luke,
583; Nolland, 748.

³ Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 325-326; Cadoux, 95-96; R. C. H.
Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1946), 770,
Timothy Lee Noël, "The Parable of the Wedding Guest: A Narrative-Critical
juxtaposed in an antithetical fashion to create beauty, order, and meaning.1 For this reason I have chosen to handle these two parables simultaneously.

The major issue in parable research concerning these parables is the question of their literary unity and placement in the Lucan Travel Narrative. While Bultmann and Crossan acknowledged the literary unity of the two pericopes, they argued that the situation is artificial.2 Jeremias, supported by Crossan and Funk, claimed that the parables should be interpreted apart from their Lucan contexts, and that an interpretation from the Lucan context should be appreciated only in a secondary sense.3 The following study shows that these parables are appropriately placed in their immediate and larger contexts, and that their literary unity is evident.

**Literary Context**

Blomberg proposes that these parables and the parable of the Great Supper lie at

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2Bultmann described Luke 14:7-24 as "a series of passages linked by a quite external relationship to a feast." Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 325. Crossan maintained that there were several disjunctions in the text. He claimed that "the literary situation is as elegant as it is artificial." Crossan, *In Parables*, 69.

the center of Luke’s chiastically arranged Travel Narrative.¹ Jesus is resolute about getting to Jerusalem. After giving the parable of the Narrow Door, he laments over Jerusalem. The immediate context is a banquet situation in the life of Jesus, presumably a short distance from Jerusalem. Jesus is invited to dine with a leading Pharisee (Luke 14:1). After healing the man with the dropsy, Jesus tackles the question of precedence of celebrating life over legalistic Sabbath keeping.² Those who sought to defame him are not able to answer him, as Jesus has bound them in a logical strait (14:2-6). Then Jesus reprimands the invitees who choose the best seats at the feast (14:7). His aphorism in vs. 11 speaks about the reversal of places in the eschaton. He then instructs with regard to the caliber of people one must invite to a banquet and the recompense for such a gesture (14:12-14). At this juncture, a macarism comes from an anonymous guest about eating

¹ Blomberg’s inverted parallelism appears as follows:

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<td>11:5-8</td>
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<td>11:11-13</td>
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<td>14:1-6</td>
<td>14:28-33</td>
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² The question of Sabbath keeping is raised several times in Luke culminating in the passage under study. See Luke 4:31; 6:1-5; 6:6-11; 13:10-17. These passages portray Jesus in conflict with the Pharisees. They show that the very outcasts whom the Pharisees despised are accepted and included by Jesus.
bread in the kingdom, to which Jesus responds with the parable of the Great Supper (14:16-24).

**Tradition Analysis**

This pericope is unique to Luke and is classified as L material. Members of the Jesus Seminar dismiss the greater part of this unit as not being authentic to Jesus. In fact, vss. 8-10 and 12-14 are color-coded black, while vs. 11 is rendered gray. Funk and Hoover contend that the passage reflects the Greco-Roman symposium literary tradition, and that its content reflects Lucan themes, such as humility and concern for the poor and afflicted. In addition, the passage draws on elements of Israelite wisdom. Regardless of their position, the theme of humility was common to Jesus’ teaching, and egalitarianism characterized Jesus’ ministry. We have also established in chapter 4 that banquets

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1Charles Talbert arranged Luke 14:1-24 into the following chiastic pattern to demonstrate the self-seeking attitude of Pharisees:

A Unconcern about others (humans) while having an appearance of being religious (1-6)

B Self-seeking as a guest (7-11)

B' Self-seeking as a host (12-14)

A' Unconcern about others (God) while giving the appearance of being religious (15-24).


2See Funk and Hoover, 350-351.

3Ibid., 351.


described in the New Testament basically followed the Greco-Roman banquet. ¹ Finally, it was also common among the rabbis to use Jewish wisdom themes. ² Therefore, it was not unlikely that Jesus would use these topics in his public discourses.

**Historical Analysis**

Jesus must have told these parables about three months before his crucifixion, in Perea in the house of a well-to-do Pharisee on the Sabbath day. Also present were a number of local Jewish dignitaries, invited that they might scrutinize his conduct and, if possible, repudiate his Messianic claims. Perhaps, after glancing around and observing the richly clad and well-conditioned guests, Jesus marked how they chose the places of honor. No doubt, the ambitious guests contended for the higher ranking seats. Perhaps, they were even uncouth about it—a behavior not becoming to their station in life. The one who was deprived of a higher seat would have had to step down a notch lower in rank. Jesus reacted by warning against heartless and hollow civilities, and gave a rule for table manners.³

Jesus then continues with instructions in table etiquette for the host of the banquet

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¹See the subsection, "Greco-Roman Banquets," above.


³Jeremias maintains that παραβολή (Luke 14:7) should be translated as "rule" because in this incident Jesus is giving directions for table etiquette. See Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 45.
and potential banquet hosts. Jesus instructs his host that his hospitality now will affect his status at the end-time banquet. A host must not invite those who can repay generosity shown but instead invite those who cannot repay.

While Jesus was advocating humility and generosity in the deportment of guest and host in these parables, he was also introducing an eschatological warning which looked forward to the heavenly banquet, where the guest and the host alike are called to renounce self-righteous pretensions and to exercise self-abasement before God.1 The Lucan community seemed to have adopted a similar understanding of the parables.

Exegetical Commentary

14:7 Ἑλεγεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς κεκλημένους παραβολὴν, ἐπέχων πῶς τὰς πρωτοκλίσιας ἐξελέγουσα, λέγων πρὸς αὐτοὺς·

And he began speaking a parable to the invited guests, when he noticed how they were choosing for themselves the places of honor, saying to them:

This parable seems to function as a piece of prudential advice. Guests chose the best seats for themselves instead of waiting to be assigned their places by the host (see pp. 191-192, above). ἐξελέγουσα may be either a tendential (conative) or durative (progressive) imperfect implying pre-mediated engagement and deliberation in the

1Cf. ibid., 193. Cadoux holds that the original meaning of the parable was that the Jews should humble themselves in the face of Roman domination. See Cadoux, 96. While oppression from the Romans was a true-to-fact historic situation of the Jews in the time of Jesus, it is unlikely that Jesus was addressing this issue in the context of this parable.
choosing of the seats. The ancient Jews paid close attention to protocol. Seating order for functions was meticulously arranged (see pp. 191-192, above). Banquets offered just another opportunity for exposure and social standing. Rivalry for special honor was probably widespread in ancient Mediterranean culture. For example, Theophrastus charges that an ill-bred desire for status is a petty ambition which is displayed by the guest who seeks the seat next to the host.

When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not recline in the place of honor; it may turn out that one who is more eminent than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you, both will come and say to you: Give a place to this man, and then you will begin with shame to go down to the last place.

When the guest who scrambles takes a seat of higher honor, all subsequent guests would take the intermediate seats. Thus, when the host dislocates the guest he is forced

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2Scholars agree that this banquet scenario followed the Greco-Roman symposium. See Funk and Hoover, 351. Cf. the sub-section, "Greco-Roman banquets," above.


4P75 b sa omit eis γάμους probably because the wedding feast seemed inappropriate for this context. In any case Fitzmyer suggests that γάμος is a term broad enough to describe any feast, including a wedding. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Luke, Anchor Bible, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 2:1046.

5Nolland's interpretation, "it may turn out that," fits in well with the staccato of the statement as μήποτε normally expresses a negative purpose, "lest." See Nolland, 748-749.
to go to the lowest seat. It was common for the most distinguished guests\(^1\) to make a late appearance,\(^2\) as this would give them the opportunity to make a grand entrance, and so make a good impression. To be asked to move to a lower seat when a more distinguished guest arrived would be most embarrassing.\(^3\) The construction τότε ἀρξῇ μετὰ αἰσχύνης τὸν ἔσχατον τόπου κατέχειν graphically depicts the shame felt with every step made by the guest dislocated from the esteemed position to a lower place.\(^4\) κατέχω is a variant for "recline" in vs. 8.\(^5\)

10 ἀλλ' ὅταν κληθῇς, πορευθεὶς ἀνάπασε εἰς τὸν ἔσχατον τόπον, ἵνα ὅταν ἔλῃ ὁ κεκληκὼς σε ἐρεῖ σοι 'φίλε, προσανάβηθι ἀνώτερον τότε ἔσται σοι δόξα ἐνώπιον πάντων τῶν συνανακειμένων σοι.

But when you are invited, go and fall back in the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he will say to you: Friend, come up higher; then there will be to you, glory before all who are reclining at the table with you.

In this verse open shame is contrasted with public honor. The literary background of this verse seems to have echoes from Prov 25:6-7.\(^6\) Strack and Billerbeck have come

\(^1\)Manson notes that the most important guests were distinguished by age and social standing. See Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 278. After A.D. 300 precedence depended more upon age. See Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 581.

\(^2\)Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 192.

\(^3\)Brian A. Nelson, *Hustle Won't Bring the Kingdom of God: Jesus’ Parables Interpreted for Today* (St Louis: Bethany, 1978), 87. Cf. the late arrival of a distinguished guest in Timon's banquet, p. 192, above.


up with a series of parallels to this verse.  

Scholars also see a close parallel of table manners in rabbinic literature. Rabbi Simeon ben Azzai (ca. A.D. 110) is quoted as saying, "Stand two or three places below your (proper) place and wait, until they say to you, 'Come up here.'" Some commentators question whether this teaching originated from Jesus, as it seems to promote a hypocritical humility and low ethical value. However, the main point is that it is better for others to recognize who you are than to suggest to them your "proper" (or improper!) place. In other words, "station should be suggested by others, not seized by oneself."

Because everyone who exalts himself will be made low, and the one who makes himself low will be exalted.

This verse has Old Testament and other Jewish parallels. The eschatological reversal is here portrayed. The proud will be excluded on the Last Day, while the humble will be included. Jeremias sees in this passage a proverb comparable to that of Rabbi Hillel (60 B.C.E. - 20 A.D.): "My abasement is my exaltation, and my exaltation is my Exalted, and my abasement is my exalted.

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1See Strack and Billerbeck, 1:916; 2:204.

2Leviticus Rabbah 1.5. Cf. Josephus Antiquities 15.2.4 §21.


4Bock, 1264.

5Ezek 17:24; 21:26; Sir 3: 19-23. See also Fitzmyer, 2:1047; Ernst, 439.

abasement."¹ For Hillel it is a piece of practical wisdom—pride will fall and humility will win in the end. For Jesus, this passage is "an eschatological activity, the humbling of the proud and the exaltation of the humble in the Last Day."² The two theological passives suggest that one will be humbled or exalted by God (cf. Luke 14:14).³

12 Ἔλεγεν δὲ καὶ τῷ κεκληκτῷ αὐτῶν ὅταν ποιῆς ἄριστον ἢ δείπνον, μὴ φῶνει τοὺς φίλους σου μηδὲ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς σου μηδὲ τοὺς συγγενεῖς σου μηδὲ γείτονας πλουσίους, μὴ ποτε καὶ αὗτοι ἀντικαλέσωσιν σε καὶ γένηται ἀνταπόδομα σοι.

And he also continued saying to the one who had invited him: When you make a breakfast or dinner, do not invite your friends, neither your brethren, nor your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they themselves also invite you in return, and there is repayment to you.

Having addressed the guests, Jesus now turns to the host. He directs attention to the question of reciprocation. His parable to the host is similar to the one for the guests, but now the focus is on whom not to invite and whom to invite, whether the occasion is a late breakfast or late afternoon meal.⁴ φῶνει in the present imperative, "do not make it a habit of inviting," suggests that exclusive invitations were a common practice. Jesus forbad this practice of inviting only those friends who are predisposed to reciprocating benefits to the host. Nelson points out that the guest was expected to bring a gift, as this

¹Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 192.

²Ibid., 192-193. The future tenses used here suggest the last judgment.


⁴Bauer, BAGD, s.v. "ἄριστον," "δείπνον." See also Johannes Behm, "δείπνον," TDNT, 2:34.
would help in recovering the cost of the food. Thus, the host could even end up with added assets. Otto Betz proposes that the words of Jesus in this verse are a Semitic rhetorical idiom, meaning "not so much x, rather y." Therefore, Jesus is not suggesting that one must neglect friends and other close company, for this goes contrary to the spirit of his own life.

13 ἀλλ' ὅταν δοχὴν ποιής, κάλει πτωχοὺς, ἀναπείρους, χωλοὺς, τυφλοὺς.

But whenever you make a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind . . .

dοχή is a reception, banquet, or a major meal (cf. Luke 5:29). The four categories of people contrast with the four types of invitees in vs. 12: friends, brothers, relatives, and rich neighbors (cf. Luke 14:21). Unlike the people of vs. 12, those of vs. 13 were excluded from the temple. The community at Qumran seems also to have rejected these unfortunate ones. Jesus undermines the conventional practice of reciprocation in favor of a hospitality and generosity in which no ulterior motives operate.

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1Nelson, 88.


3Bauer, BAGD, s.v. "δοχή."


51Q28a 2.3-10; 1QM 7:4. See also Nolland, 751; Bock, 1266; Gerhard Schneider, Das Evangelium nach Lukas, Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar 3, vol. 1 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1977), 315; Fitzmyer, 2:1047.

6For further details on the practice of reciprocation, see Malina and Rohrbaugh, 325.
and you will be blessed, since they do not have (the means) to repay you, for there will be repayment to you in the resurrection of the righteous."

Open table fellowship brings about a state of happiness which ultimately leads to full fellowship at the end-time banquet (Luke 14:16-24). At the resurrection, such hospitality and generosity will be paid back.¹ Bock purports that the passive ἀνταποδοθήσεται is suggestive of God being the source of the blessing (cf. Luke 14:11).² The double use of ἀνταποδίδωμι is emphatic, denoting that the outcasts are unable to pay back while only God can repay.³

Summary Statement of What the Parable Meant

These parables are about reversal of fortunes. Luke is comparing Jesus’ ministry with that of the Jewish leadership. The Jewish leaders sought only for the places of honor. However, in God’s eschatological hour, contrived ranking and distinctions of honor are undermined and overthrown. The attitude of showing hospitality only to a selective few is undermined, while open fellowship, in which no boundaries of class or rank exist, is encouraged. Table fellowship is an inclusive event. Those who rely upon such things as social rank, status, and reciprocity to assure them of standing will be disappointed on Judgment Day. The "tables will be turned"; the humble will be exalted

¹Cf. 2 Macc 7:9; Luke 20:35; John 5:29.
²Bock, 1267.
³Ibid.
and the generous will be blessed. The proud will be humbled and excluded from God's end-time banquet, while the humble and generous will be included in the kingdom. In the final analysis, there will be exclusion/inclusion in the eschatological banquet of God.

Type-Scene Analysis

Literary Structure

Each of the two parables embraces only two parts of the typical rabbinic structure of parables: the parable proper and the application. The application in the Places at a Feast consists also of the scriptural citation. Their antithetic structure is as follows:

When invited to a wedding feast
Do not take the place of honor
Lest a more distinguished guest is invited
And in humiliation take the lowest place
But when invited
Recline at the lowest place
You will be honored
You will be repaid: humiliation for the self-exalted; exaltation for the humble

When hosting a banquet
Do not invite the rich and relatives
Lest they invite you in return
And repayment comes to you
But when giving a banquet
Invite the poor, the maimed, etc.
You will be blessed
You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just

The close semblance of the two structures is a good argument that the unit dealing with inviting guests (14:12-12) is a parable (the Choice of Guests) akin to the parable of Places at a Feast (14:7-11). The parable of Places at a Feast instructs the banquet invitee to take a lowly place in a banquet feast, and the parable of the Choice of Guests instructs the banquet host to invite those who cannot repay. These instructions are presented in an antithetical fashion in the two passages: in the first instance, what not to do and what to do.

do as an invitee; in the second instance, who not to invite and who to invite as a host.

Plot

Those invited to the Sabbath banquet at the Pharisee's house (Luke 14:1) were scrambling for the best seats. This should not have been so as, typically, the guests would be ushered in and given their assigned seats followed by washings, pouring of ointment, and allocation of portions. Jesus observed this untoward behavior and began to articulate a parable whose narrative structure ran contrary to his hearers' expectations. As a backdrop for his parable of the Places at a Feast, Jesus uses The Eminence of Guests type-scene to formulate his teachings about humility versus self-seeking honor.

The traditional narrative structure of such a type-scene would require that each invitee be given a rightful place at the banquet table; then would follow leisurely eating and drinking. In this instance, however, Jesus undermined the conventional manner of thinking of banquet protocol. Not only did he contradict the inappropriate practice of scampering for seats, but he shocked his hearers by insisting that they repair to the lowest seat.

The plot of the narrative shows how Jesus foils this convention. Using the technique of contrasting characters, Jesus shows how self-exaltation will be brought low and humility will be exalted. One who rushes for the best seat is not truly honorable. He might be humiliated when a more distinguished guest arrives and the host asks him to retreat to a lower position. A truly honorable guest does not rush for a seat of honor in the banquet room. Rather, he withdraws to the lowest seat, to be later called up to a
higher seat where honor awaits him.

Jesus not only corrects the guests’ attitude, but reprimands the host. He does this using the parable of the Choice of Guests. The host must not use hospitality as a means of attracting honor for himself by inviting friends, relatives, and rich neighbors. Hospitality must not be done on a *quid pro quo* basis, for this has no merit. Instead, the host should invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. The guests must not be able to recompense the host, though God eventually will repay him.

This parable follows the same narrative structure as the parable of Places at a Feast. The parable of Places at a Feast gives instructions for invited guests; the parable of the Choice of Guests gives instruction on inviting guests. Again, the parable contrasts characters, degrading reciprocity and elevating generosity. However, in this instance, the backdrop for this parable is the Guests and Host Response type-scene. In this type-scene the expectation of the audience was that the outcasts of society were invited only if the selectively invited ones did not show up. Jesus contravenes this conventional thinking and practice. The recommendation is that a host must first invite the outcast, for in so doing the host will be blessed. To invite the less fortunate ones would be an act of honor that would pay rich rewards at the resurrection.

The key word that ties the two parables into an integrated plot is the repeated use of *καλέω*. In various constructs it is used nine times in the narrative (vs. 7, twice in vs. 8, vs. 9, twice in vs. 10, twice in vs. 12, vs. 13). Through the play and interplay of this word, the narrator has brought coherence to the plot of the two parables. The parable of Places at a Feast has to do with the attitude of invited guests; the parable of the Choice of
Guests has to do with the attitude of inviting guests. Accordingly, the plot may be described as one which addresses the matter of invited guests and inviting guests.

The plot of the two parables describes "a situation of polar reversals." This reversal of fortunes displays a tragic plot using the principle of cause and effect. In the parable of Places at a Feast, the Pharisees who exalt themselves in the banquet of earthly life will have to give way at the banquet of the hereafter to those who humbled themselves. In the parable of the Choice of Guests the Pharisees' inclusion only of their close associates will cause their exclusion from the eschatological banquet. Conversely, the inclusion of the outcast in table fellowship will result in inclusion in the eschatological banquet of the Lord.

Characterization

The characters in these parables dominate the movement of the narrative. The influence of characterization on the meaning of the parables suggests that the narrator is using a character-oriented plot. The guest stands out in the type-scene of the parable of Places at a Feast, representing those who were invited to the banquet: Pharisees and, presumably, other Jewish leaders. They are cast in a poor light. They sought only their honor in choosing the best seats. In a previous meal at another Pharisee's house (Luke 11:37), the Jewish leaders objected to Jesus' lack of observance of ceremonial washings before eating. Jesus reacted with a sharp reprimand: "Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogue, and the greetings in the market places" (Luke 11:43).

\[1\] Crossan, *In Parables*, 70.
Later, he would caution the people: "Beware of the scribes, who like . . . the chief seats in the synagogues, and the places of honor at banquets, who devour widows' houses . . . . These will receive a greater judgment" (Luke 20:46-47). Jesus condemns their self-seeking attitude.

The narrator has Jesus condemning the selfish attitude by allowing the host's point of view to arise: "Give place to this man, and then you will begin with shame to go down to the last place" (vs. 9b). This response brings life to the narration and drama to the condemnation. The characterization of the Jewish leaders stands in bold contrast to the ideal guest in Jesus' parable, the one who takes the lowest place. True status is gained by humble deeds. Again, the narrator has Jesus do this by accentuating the perspective of the host: "Friend, come up higher; then there will be to you, glory before all who are reclining at the table with you" (vs. 10b). Here we see the exclusion theme followed by the inclusion theme.

In the parable of the Choice of Guests, the host stands out in the type-scene. In this type-scene the host represents the individual Jewish leaders present at the banquet. Again, they are shown in a bad light. They invited the best guests in order that they might be honored by men. Their guest lists were filled with people of high social standing who could return the invitation. No provision was made for the less fortunate. This attitude of indifference to the outcast is seen at the start of the banquet, where Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath (Luke 14:1-6). The religious leaders of Jesus' day thought only of themselves, their status and their honor. They cared little for needy human beings. In contrast, the generous host is the one whose interest is not in reciprocal
benefits. He or she does not invite in view of a reciprocated invitation from the guest. In Jesus’ thinking, there is no blessing to be gained in so doing. Genuine honor is demonstrated in open generosity and compassion toward the outcasts.

In this banquet type-scene, two character traits shown in a poor light are contrasted with two character traits shown in a good light. The one who is self-seeking and without compassion will be abased and excluded from the eschatological banquet. The one who is humble and generous will be exalted and be repaid at the resurrection. That person would be included in the eschatological banquet.

Theme

The two parables sustain the theme of exclusion/inclusion. This coheres with Luke’s reversal motif in which the rich are degraded and the poor elevated; the high put low and the lowly exalted. The theme of the parable of Places at a Feast foreshadows the theme of the Last Supper (Luke 22:26-30). At the Last Supper, Jesus forewarns his disciples about becoming authoritative as the Gentile kings. Rather, they must humble themselves: "Let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as a servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:26-27).

In God’s eschatological program there is a reversal of roles. The greatest performs the lowest service. Greatness is revealed in acts of lowliness. The greatest

yields his position that others might be elevated. Great is the one who champions the cause of the poor. Conversely, self-seeking is seen in those who strive for rank. Self-seekers slight the poor and wretched. They who exalt themselves will be brought low in the eschatological hour. But the truly great will enter the banquet fellowship at the last hour.

The theme follows an exclusion/inclusion sequence. In the parable of Places at a Feast, the narrator deals first with the dishonorable guest in vss. 8-9. This is followed by the description of the honorable guest in vs. 10. Vs. 11 gives the verdict about the two types of guests: "Everyone who exalts himself will be made low, and the one who makes himself humble will be exalted." It is clear that exclusion precedes inclusion in this parable.

In the parable of the Choice of Guests, the narrator deals first with the dishonorable host in vs. 12. This is followed by the delineation of the honorable host in vs. 13. Vs. 14 relates the outcome: "You will be blessed, since they [the poor, etc.] do not have [the means] to repay you [indirectly alluding to the temporal repayment that the dishonorable host will get from his rich guests], for there will be repayment to you in the resurrection of the righteous." In this parable, the descriptions of the two characters follow the exclusion/inclusion sequence, but the narrator stresses inclusion in the concluding verse.

Summary

The diachronic and narratorial analyses of the parables of the Places at a Feast and...
the Choice of Guests yielded similar results. In the final analysis the self-seeking guest and the host whose interest is only in the well-to-do will be humbled and, by extension, excluded from the eschatological banquet. The genuine invitee is one who humbly takes the lowest place at the banquet table and the genuine host is one who generously invites the poor and destitute to the banquet. Ultimately, only the genuine guest and the genuine host will have the privilege of being included in the eschatological banquet.


Diachronic Critical Analysis

Three extant versions of the Great Banquet are found in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and Thomas. Considerable discussion has been engendered on the origin of the three parables, and more so on the two accounts in the Synoptics. Some scholars assume that there existed two separate traditions behind the pericopes in the Synoptic versions (M and L).¹ Two reasons advanced for such a position are: (1) the setting for each of the

parables is different: Matthew places the parable in the middle of Jesus' disputation with the leaders of Israel during the passion week, while Luke places the parable in the middle of the travel narrative during Jesus' journey to Jerusalem; (2) verbal similarity is lacking: only about seven words or phrases are found in common between the two accounts.

A major group of scholars, however, holds that the two Synoptic versions stem from a single original form (Q), which Matthew and Luke edited to fit their specific contexts. Scholars holding this view argue that behind the two versions in the Synoptics there was only one developing oral or written tradition, and that the original parable underwent a process of modification as it was transmitted in the early stages of the Church's development. They argue that the writers' use of the parable in different contexts authenticates the development of the oral or written tradition. In addition, while actual verbal similarities may be few, conceptual similarities are obvious.

Among the "single-tradition" advocates are those who think that it was not improbable that Jesus could have used one story in different forms to adapt to different contexts.


2Hill, 301.
contexts. The evidence, however, suggests that the most plausible explanation is that all
the Gospels are presenting versions of a core story that Matthew narrates in the most
distinctive and amended form. Luke, on the other hand, probably presents the closest to
the original form of the parable spoken by Jesus. Based on this view, the Lucan version
provides the backdrop from which the other versions are studied.

Literary Context

The context for this parable in the Lucan version has been dealt with in the
sections dealing with the parables of the Narrow Door, Places at a Feast, and the Choice
of Guests. Still, in the Lucan context, the parable seems to be anticipating another meal
scenario (Luke 15:1-2), where Jesus would tell three related parables concluding with The

Matthew situates the parable immediately after the accounts of Jesus’ Triumphal
Entry (Matt 21:1-11) and the Cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17), followed by the
Withered Fig Tree (21:18-22) and the Source of Jesus’ Authority (21:23-27). These four
preceding events, particularly the first three, are almost programmatic for the theme of the

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2Cf. Borsch, 49.

coming rejection of Israel and Israel's leaders.¹ This theme is played out in the three parables that follow, the last being the Wedding Banquet (21:28-32; 33-46; and 22:1-14).²

There is reason to believe that the three parables in Matt 21:28-22:14 are strategically placed. The parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32) is related to the previous pericope which concerns the scribes and Pharisees' challenge to Jesus' authority. This parable handles the question of "true sonship." Jesus not only establishes his authority as a true son, but annuls the authority of the scribes and Pharisees because of their disobedience. In the second parable, the Wicked Tenants (21:33-44), the theme of rejection is heightened, as Jesus pinpoints the culpable Jewish leaders and God's rejection of them. This parable of the vinedressers seems to clarify many details in the parable of the Wedding Banquet. The Wedding Banquet further emphasizes this theme of rejection—the Jewish nation rejecting the invitation, and God rejecting them for their slothfulness.

Unlike the canonical Gospels, the Gospel of Thomas does not sustain a narrative structure and development of its pericopes, though within some of the unitary passages there are narratorial elements, as in the case of this parable. Thus, it is impossible to arrive at a narrative context for the parable in the Gospel of Thomas.

¹Pagenkemper, 86.

²Matthew has a predilection for arranging his material in groups of three. For examples of this, see Davies and Allison, 1:62-72, 86-87.
Tradition Analysis

Though similar in basic plot features, the three versions of the parable bear considerable differences in terms of tone, content, and context. Luke's account seems more consistent and simple, has fewer intrusive elements, and is more restrained in the use of allegory than Matthew's. Cadoux postulates: "The liveliness of Luke's account of the guests' excuses is more likely to be original than Matthew's duller version, direct speech being characteristic of Jesus' parables." ¹ Although scholars believe that Luke preserves more closely the core story of the banquet tradition, it is evident that he adapts the parable to suit his own emphases and particular concerns.²

Luke seems to be more interested in those who are finally included than in the guests who refuse to come (although vs. 24 is addressed to the audience, and does stress the exclusion of the first invited). His primary concerns are with charity toward and inclusion of the outcast (the poor and the maimed, the blind and the lame, the marginalized, the ostracized, and the disenfranchised), and using the parable as a warning against worldly concerns that lead one to miss what is far more important. Luke's two subsequent invitations to two new groups may be seen as an expansion to cater for the Gentiles' place in the kingdom.

The wedding banquet in Matthew's account appears to be a variation on the great

¹Cadoux, 62.
²Borsch, 49.
Some of Matthew's redactional work may be seen in his additions and shifts of emphasis. His obvious accretions are king (vs. 2), marriage feast (vs. 2), servants (instead of servant) (vs. 3), two notifications to the guests; "the rest" who mistreated the envoy (vs. 6), the destruction of the city (vs. 7), "both good and bad" invitees (vs. 10), and finally, the much debated wedding garment story (vss. 11-13).

Matthew belabors the everydayness of the parable. Ordinariness is broken down when the excuses seemed universal and concerted, the servants are seized and killed, and the army is sent by a furious command to burn the city just for refusing to attend. The wedding feast is suddenly out of hand. Matthew's amplifications are on occasion blown out of proportion. The king becoming angry, the sending out of the army, and the burning of the city naturally distort the tale. Such expressive intensifications distort the

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1Capon holds that wedding imagery is present in both parables. In Luke's account it is found in the Parable of the Places at Feasts (14:7-8). He studies the parables in the larger context of the Marriage Supper in Rev 19:9ff. See Capon, The Parables of Judgment, 119. See also Pentecost, 92. Cf. Nelson, 54. Nelson supports the notion that the banquet of Luke was an elaborate wedding banquet with a long guest list given by a rich man for his son.

2Some see this pericope (vss. 6-7) as an interpolation. Schweizer sees it placed in after vss. 11-14 were appended to the original parable. He believes this was done to harmonize with the judgment theme in 11-14. Vs. 8, he argues, flows more naturally after vs. 5. See Schweizer, The Good News According to Matthew, 419. Cf. J. C. Fenton, The Gospel of Saint Matthew, The Pelican Gospel Commentaries (Baltimore: Penguin, 1963), 347. Fenton sees the influence of the Parable of the Tenants on these verses; Manson suggests that these verses just do not make sense being placed in this context. See Manson, The Sayings of Jesus, 129.

3Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 63.

4Charles Smith points out that the regal element in Matthew's account fits in with much difficulty. The man hosting the supper is postured as a king so that the account can account for the element of destruction. See Charles Smith, 120.
logic of the discourse. Absurdity arises from the fact that the wedding banquet still stands prepared after the military expedition which even includes the siege and storming of the city.\(^1\) The phrase "both bad and good" in vs. 10 probably reflects the challenge of the mixed congregation of the Early Church reflected in the parables of The Tares Among the Wheat (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43), The Dragnet (Matt 13:47-50), The Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-13), and The Wedding Garment (Matt 22:11-14).\(^2\)

Matthew seems to be making reference to the ongoing life of the Church. According to Jeremias, Matthew has transformed the parable into an allegorical mode, and thereby recapitulates "the plan of redemption from the appearance of the prophets, embracing the fall of Jerusalem, up to the Last Judgment. This outline of the history of the plan of redemption is intended to vindicate the transference of the mission to the Gentiles: Israel has rejected it."\(^3\)

Thomas's version is more secular and unallegorical than the Synoptic writers.\(^4\)

This is seen by scholars such as Crossan as evidence that the writer of this Gospel accessed an independent source which bore an early Christian tradition, and in some

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\(^1\)Kahlefeld believes that the difficulty is removed as soon as we reflect that the plane of the "'story drawn from life' is, at least at that point, already abandoned, and a higher meaning, that of the spiritual, has entered the action." Kahlefeld, 95. The lower plane creates an entrance for the higher truth.

\(^2\)Cf. Charles Smith, 120-121; Gundry, 438.

\(^3\)Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 69.

\(^4\)This is true of many of Thomas's parables. See Dominic Crossan, *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1985), 15-52.
instances, in a more original form than the canonical Gospels.\(^1\) In the *Gospel of Thomas* there is neither king nor wedding. The invitation is brief, while the excuses are described in detail. The emphasis is likely a warning against any commercialism that could preempt someone from entering the kingdom.

Thomas's account appears to be closer to the Lucan account than the Matthean account. Reasons for this point of view are its enlargement of the excuses, the exclusion of the merciless slaughter of the "rejection invitees" and the destruction of the city, and the lack of reference to the wedding garment. The emphasis seems to be on the reasons for the refusal, not so much on the actual refusals. The substantial difference with the other two accounts is that this account provides a gnostic spin to the whole parable. The phrase, "tradesmen and merchants shall not enter the places of my father," reflects the gnostic tendency against the accumulation of wealth.\(^2\)

The best solution to the question of possible sources (though not without a degree of speculation) lies in the notion that similarities between the three versions are adequate to satisfy a common tradition behind all the versions. The differences could, however,


indicate separate sources. In other words, Matthew and Luke did not share a common
source, but the versions they inherited came to them through traditions that had branched
apart earlier.\(^1\) C. H. Dodd articulates well the possible process behind the two versions in
the Synoptics: "The differences between the two versions of the parable make it unlikely
that the evangelists depended upon a single proximate source: but that they are following
variant traditions of the identical story is clear. The common nucleus of the story tells
\ldots\)\(^2\) In the case of Thomas's version, the author must have been familiar with the Lucan
version or the same source as Luke. An old parable, it seems, is given a new form for a
new occasion in each account.

**Historical Analysis**

The original *sitz im leben* which informed this parable was Jesus' attempt to
vindicate before his critics his preaching of the good news to the poor.\(^3\) In his own
ministry, Jesus was inviting the Jews to "come, for the banquet is ready." According to
Jeremias, "because they [the Jews] are refusing salvation, God is calling the despised to
share the salvation of the people of God."\(^4\) Hultgren creates a more positive light for the

\(^1\) Cf. Borsch, 49.

\(^2\) Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 121.

\(^3\) Boucher, *Parables*, 104. See also Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 176;
Linneman, 91; Barry Smith, *The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels*, 203 (not before the
critics, but before the professedly religious). Funk understands these critics not to be
particular homogeneous groups, but the generic classes within a given audience: those
who heard Jesus gladly and those who murmured. See Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic,
and the Word of God*, 177, 181.

\(^4\) Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 45.
original setting, suggesting that the audience was general, yet included the disciples.¹

The historical settings of the Gospel writers are different. Luke transforms his story from vindication to warning (it may be too late), shifting from the eschatological to the hortatory.² In Luke, the primary context for understanding Jesus is a meal setting. On several occasions, Luke’s meals serve to show Jesus’ acceptance of outcasts, and demonstrate the grace and presence of the kingdom.³ At the table, Jesus responds to a man who pronounces a blessing on all who eat bread in the kingdom of God (vs. 15). In Luke’s program the eschatological age had dawned. The host of the messianic banquet was Jesus himself.⁴ The outcasts of Israel will take the place of the leaders of the Jewish community. And furthermore, the Gentiles will also receive the invitation. The parable no doubt reacts to an exclusivist attitude which limits entrance into the kingdom of God to pious Jews only.

Matthew is placing Jesus in a context after three days of sharp conflict with the high priests and elders. His trilogy of parables speaks of judgment on Israel (represented by its leaders), owing to its renunciation of John the Baptist (The Two Sons), of himself

¹Hultgren, 339.

²Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 45. Cf. Rudolph Bultmann, This World and Beyond: Marburg Sermons (London: Lutterworth, 1960), 143-154. Bultmann presents a variation to this focus: The parable warns the complacent to be ready for the call of God.


⁴"The eschatological banquet was a familiar motif that referred to the consummation of the age when all of God’s people would be brought together in the kingdom to enjoy the fruits of their faith." Pagenkemper, 74.
(The Wicked Tenants), and finally, of his messengers (The Wedding Banquet). The ecclesiastical establishment is in danger and, by extension, so is the nation of Israel.

Apparently, the Early Church found itself in a situation which demanded missionary activity, and so interpreted the parable in that context, hence, the reason for the incorporation of the Gentiles in the whole Christian mission. This is not to imply that Jesus may not have had the Gentiles in mind in the setting from which he told the parable, but perhaps, in a more eschatological context, rather than a missionary context.

In the case of the Gospel of Thomas, Gnostic Christians did not find it important to present stories or sayings so simplistic that interpretation was straightforward. Very often teachings were gnomically and deliberately presented in a mysterious fashion, since earthly entrapments distract the true gnostic from what is truly important. Eschatology had no significance, and it was easy for a Gnostic Christian to omit or expand or amend certain teachings of the Early Christian Church. This could explain the twist in the sayings.

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2Kahlefeld endorsed this view, stating that "it is highly probable that Jesus’ discourse was indeed directed at the authorities of Israel, but in such a way that in it Israel itself was addressed." Kahlefeld, 89.

3Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 64-65.

Exegetical Commentary

14:16 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἀνθρωπός τις ἐποίει δεῖπνον μέγα, καὶ ἐκάλεσεν πολλοὺς
And he said to him, a certain man was giving a great dinner, and invited many . . .

The parable\(^1\) is introduced by a pious outburst from an anonymous fellow diner at a banquet, "Blessed is he, who will eat bread in the kingdom of God" (v. 15). "To eat bread" is a classical Middle Eastern Hebrew idiom which means "to eat a meal."\(^2\) The kingdom of God motif has been operative in 13:18-30, is implicit in 14:7, and now becomes explicit in 14:15. Luke uses this formulation to provide the transition from 14:1-14, and especially vs. 14, to the banquet parable. Vs. 15 is linking banquet invitations to the poor in 12-14 to the banquet of God where the poor reign in vss. 16-24. Further, vs. 15 along with vs. 24 serves as an interpretive frame around the parable.\(^3\)

The figure of a banquet or a wedding feast was frequently used by Jesus to represent Israel’s millennial kingdom. In that kingdom the King would make bountiful provision for all the subjects of his kingdom. Matthew’s fondness of the imagery of "king" and "kingdom" transformed the dinner into a royal meal. His wedding feast seems

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\(^1\)Luke does not call the dinner story a parable, but it nonetheless qualifies as one. See Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables*, 24.


to be a twist on the Jewish messianic banquet which bore eschatological overtures.¹

Luke engages one slave for the task, while the king in Matthew employs slaves.

"Ερχομαι is present imperative, which literally means "continue coming" implying that the guests are already in the process of coming–getting ready for the banquet. Implied in the urgent summons to "come," Manson sees Jesus’ stress on "the immediacy of God’s will to bring in his Kingdom."³ Like Matthew, Luke is referring to Jesus’ invitation to his Jewish contemporaries.

A rabbinic midrash on Lamentations suggests that the people in Jerusalem would not normally attend a banquet unless they received two invitations.⁴ In the case of Matthew’s wedding banquet, Pentecost holds that because betrothals were normally held one year prior to the wedding and its banquet, the first invitation to attend the wedding


²Several variant readings are possible for this phrase: ἔτοιμα ἔστων (B P⁴⁵ it¹ TR); ἔτοιμα ἔστων (P⁷⁵ @¹ L Θ 579); ἔτοιμα ἔστων πάντα (A W Δ Ψ0233 f f¹ pl vg sa bo); ἔτοιμα ἔστων πάντα (@¹ l 1074); ἔτοιμα ἔστων (D it¹*). Whatever rendering is chosen will not alter the sense of its meaning in context, though the preponderant weight of witnesses supports ἔτοιμα ἔστων.


⁴See Midrash Rabbah Lamentations 4.2, Soncino, 216. In the context of the midrash, the purpose of the double invitation was to ensure that the first invitation was not a mistake. See ibid., 5.
would have been sent a year in advance. There was ample time to prepare.¹ At the completion of the betrothal period, and the marriage consummated, the bridegroom brought his betrothed back to his home for the banquet celebration. It was then that the second invitation (first notification, in table 4)² was sent out, when the banquet was ready.³

In Matthew’s account there are two notifications. The double notification exactly parallels the sending of the slaves in Matt 21:36, in the parable of Wicked Tenants. It signifies "a renewed attempt to win the same people."⁴ No doubt, Matthew wants his guests to understand the urgency of the invitation. The earnest invitation to come is seen by some as warranting a different name for the parable.⁵ For added emphasis, Matthew graphically describes the menu.⁶ Matthew’s meal is described as an ἀπριστόν (as opposed to Luke’s δεὶπνον), a meal that takes place early in the day,⁷ to make room for the

¹Pentecost, 92. Cf. women of Sybaris in the Greco-Roman period. See p. 189, above.

²Most commentators describe the notifications to come to the banquet as subsequent invitations. From the context of the narrative, however, they are indeed notifications of invitations that have already been sent.

³Pentecost, 92.

⁴Kahlefeld, 94.

⁵For instance, "The Invitation" or "God’s Gracious Call." See Young, The Parables, 173.

⁶The combination of oxen and fatlings echoes back to 2 Sam 6:13; 1 Kgs 1:9; Prov 9:1-5. The slaughter coupled with fatlings may even recall the parable of The Prodigal Son, Luke 15:23, 27, 30.

⁷Bauer, BAGD, s.v. "ἀπριστόν."
military assault on those who refuse the invitation, presumably in the afternoon.

18 καὶ ἤρξαντο ἀπὸ μίας πάντες παρατείνεσαι. ὁ πρῶτος εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἀγρὸν ἡγόρασα καὶ ἔχω ἀνάγκην ἐξελθὼν ἰδεῖν αὐτόν· ἔρωτῷ σε, ἔχε με παρητημένον. 19 καὶ ἄλλος εἶπεν, Ζεύγη βοῶν ἡγόρασα πέντε καὶ πορεύομαι δοκιμάσαι αὐτά· ἔρωτῷ σε, ἔχε με παρητημένον. 20 καὶ ἄλλος εἶπεν, Γυναῖκα ἔγημα καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐ δύναμαι ἔλθεῖν.

And they unanimously, with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, “I have bought a field, and I am constrained to go out and see it. I ask you, consider me excused.” And another said, “I have bought five yoke of oxen and I am going to test them. I ask you, consider me excused.” And another said, “I have married a wife and for this reason I am not able to come.”

Vs. 18 may be translated literally, "and they all from one began to make excuses." The phrase ἀπὸ μίας may be identified as an Aramaism meaning "all at once" or "unanimously." The three ludicrous excuses relate to possessions and domestic ties and fit well with Jesus’ teaching regarding the peril of allowing these factors to compete with one’s full allegiance to his discipleship. Luke’s excuses are somewhat elaborate.

The first excuse is proposed by some scholars as a priority judgment, based upon the word ἀνάγκην, where purchase of a property depended upon a postpurchase inspection. If this is the case, then "it is the judgment that other things are more valuable

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than Jesus’ ministry that will create the tragedy of missing the celebration.”¹ The second excuse is similar to the first, describing the recent purchase of some commodity by a well-to-do person—only in this instance, this property includes livestock. According to Jeremias, the second man would probably have possessed at least two and a half times more land than the first man.²

The third excuse is similar to the first and second excuses—describing a recent acquirement—only in this instance it is more than a thing or animal; it is a person, the most valuable of all, compared to the other purchases. In actuality, it is not an excuse at all; it is a blunt, rude retort. He just could not and would not come. He could have backed up his alibi with an appeal to Scripture.⁴ Albeit, attending a banquet was not forbidden by Deuteronomical standards. In the first excuse, the action of the man had not begun; in the second, the action was in progress; in the third, the action was

¹Bock, 1274.

²Jeremias reckons that one who owned five yoke of oxen would normally own 45 hectares of land, which was considerably more than what the average peasant would own. For further details on the estimated land holdings, see Joachim Jeremias, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, 176-177.

³The perfective aorist ἐγινεκα suggests that the marriage was recent.

⁴The Old Testament endorses a man’s leave of matrimonial absence for a whole year. See Deut 20:7; 24:5. Cf. m. Sotah 8:1-6. Darrett sees in the excuses, especially the third one, clues that the parable is making reference to the feast of victory which follows a holy war, so that the thrust of the parable is to conscript soldiers in advance to determine who is qualified to participate in the final war and partake finally of the victory feast. See Derrett, Law in the New Testament, 126-155. But this argument would hardly hold in the light of Palmer’s sterling observation, that the battle imagery in Matthew would have to adopt the excuses in Luke if this interpretation is adopted. See Humphrey Palmer, "Just Married, Cannot Come," Novum Testamentum 18 (1976): 241-257.
completed. It is the intent of the parable to demonstrate an increasing impudence in the guests’ responses. The parable portrays the shallowness of the excuses.

In Matthew’s account, the guilt of the Jewish leaders is heightened. No excuses are actually given; they simply "paid no attention" on the second notification (third invitation). One goes to his farm, the other to his business. Thomas is at variance with the triple mode, and adds a fourth. Three of the four excuses in the *Gospel of Thomas* have to do with financial matters; the other has to do with familial obligation. Apart from having the most number of excuses, Thomas’s version is the only one with a structure in which the servant reiterates the invitation formula ("My master invites you") to each guest. This suggests that the emphasis is on those who reject the invitation.

And the slave came [back] and reported these things to his master. Then the master-of-the-house became angry and said to his slave, “Go out quickly into the wide streets and alleys of the city, and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.”

On receiving the report, the host becomes indignant, for he has been publicly insulted. Luke’s use of οἰκοδεσπότης instead of the usual κύριος in the parable echoes back to the householder in the parable of the Narrow Door (13:25). "Εξελθε ταχέως is used here to show the readiness of the meal. Jesus’ kingdom is in view here, an offer that culminates in the meal of God’s blessing (14:24). Now the invitation is extended promiscuously to the outcasts of Israel, the "classless" from the community. Πλατείας are
wide streets,\(^1\) while \(\rho\omega\mu\alpha\varsigma\) are side streets.\(^2\) Those who are now invited are "the *ipso facto* beggars in the East."\(^3\)

In Matthew's account, the conflict is escalated when the slaves are mistreated and killed by the \(\lambda\omicron\pi\omicron\omicron\) (vs. 6).\(^4\) "The action indicates a complete and violent rejection of the king's authority and goodness."\(^5\) This intensifies the guilt of the Jewish leaders. The host also reacts with anger, but his response is different. Thomas is silent on the host's response.

In a bizarre move, the king sends out his army to destroy those murderers and burn their city.\(^6\) Some scholars believe that this odd expansion is an *ex post facto* reference to the destruction of C.E. 70.\(^7\) Gundry and others argue against a reference to

\(^{1}\)Bauer, *BAGD*, s.v. "πλατεία."

\(^{2}\)Ibid., s.v. "ρύμη." For the pairing of πλατείαι καὶ ρύμαι, cf. Isa 15:3; Tob 13:18.


\(^{4}\)λοιποί is also used to describe the ones who maltreated Jesus while he was dying on the cross (Matt 27:49), and is used as a description of the five foolish virgins (25:11).

\(^{5}\)Carter and Heil, 174.

\(^{6}\)Apparently, Luke is not so much interested in the meting out of judgment to offenders as Matthew; he is more concerned about describing the stupidity of people who rejected the offer of salvation. Ivor Powell, 396.

the catastrophic event of C.E. 70.¹ In fact, they are simply Old Testament imagery and vocabulary to demonstrate God’s hostility toward his enemies.² Robinson defends that it is stock language, and therefore does not require a knowledge ex eventu.³ Jeremias suggests that this part is allegorical, illustrating salvation history.⁴

Matthew’s slaves go "to the outlets of the streets," instead of Luke’s "wide streets and alleys," because the city has gone up in smoke. The outlets are places where the streets of the city pierce through the walls and turn into country roads.⁵ The invitation then goes out to "as many as you find"—"both the bad and good." This expression shows the "unelectedness of the new group.⁶ Thomas’s servant simply goes "outside to the streets."

22 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ δοῦλος, Κύριε, γέγονεν δ ἐπέταξας, καὶ ἐτι τόπος ἔστιν.

And the slave said, "Master, it is done what you have commanded, and still there is——


²Cf. Deut 32:27; Ps 74:3; Isa 5:24-25; 59:19; Lam 1:5; Ezek 36:2; Amos 9:4.


⁴Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 63. Jeremias draws attention to the preceding parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt 21: 33-44) where Matthew uses the narrative allegorical tendency toward a salvation history interpretation.

⁵Gundry, 438.

⁶Stock, 335.
Nolland says that in the original *sitz im leben* these verses anticipated "the open-ended and outward-looking future that Jesus' roving ministry continued to contemplate."¹

23 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ κύριος πρὸς τὸν δοῦλον. Ἥξελθε εἰς τὰς ὀδοὺς καὶ φραγμοὺς καὶ ἀνάγκασον εἰσελθεῖν, ἵνα γεμίσῃ μου ὁ οἶκος.

And the Master said to the slave, "Go out into the highways and hedges and insist [that they] come in, so that my house may be filled; . . .

αἱ ὀδοὶ are main roads running out into the country from the city,² while the φραγμοὶ are probably those enclosures around the vineyards in the rural areas outside the town³ where vagabonds loiter and mendicants slumber.⁴ ἀναγκαίζω can mean "to oblige one to,"⁵ or "to urge strongly."⁶ The slave was to use the strongest persuasion in his power to "move" people to come—not by outward violence or physical pressure, for one slave could not bring force to bear upon several invitees, but by insisting on the instant urgency of the invitation.⁷

¹Nolland, 757.


³Ibid.

⁴Bauer, *BAGD*, s.v. "φραγμὸς."


⁶Bauer, *BAGD*, s.v. "ἀναγκάζω."

⁷To illustrate how the "compelling" method may be applied in a Middle Eastern context, Bailey offers a typical scenario: A stranger in the countryside is suddenly invited to a great dinner, hosted by a chief citizen in the city. It is a delectable offer, but he thinks the messenger is not serious. For the first fifteen minutes he must refuse the
Since Matthew's and Thomas's versions make reference to one subsequent invitation, while Luke mentions two, Luke may have expanded his version of the parable in this regard. The intention of Luke is to delay the banquet meal\(^1\) and "to depict the host's purpose to have every place in his house filled at all costs."\(^2\) The doubling has sharpened the picture, because, for Luke, the introduction of the Gentiles into the Kingdom of God is very important.\(^3\)

In the Matthean account, Matthew has already alluded to the Gentiles in the previous parable in Matt 21:43. Matthew sees no need of highlighting two trips for new guests. Rather, he conflates the two trips of Luke, and the servants in this circumstance gather "all whom they found, both bad and good" (Matt 22:27). This insertion originates from Matthew's diction in Matt 4:1, and points to "the mixture of true and false—i.e., obedient and disobedient—disciples in the church and sets the stage for the further invitation as a matter of honor. To convince him of his appreciated presence the messenger holds his hand gently and pulls him along, until they get to the banquet hall. See Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 108.

\(^1\)Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 164.

\(^2\)Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 64.

\(^3\)Scholars who posit that Luke is alluding to the future acceptance of the Gentile populace in salvation history are Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 64; Bernard Brandon Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 34; Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 130; Boucher, *Parables*, 103-104; Crossan, *In Parables*, 71; Fitzmyer, 2:1053; Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 121-122. Bailey insists that the use of the word "compel" suggests the Gentile inclusion, and that the last group of invitees was from beyond the host's community, thereby, hinting a Gentile mission. See Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes*, 101-102. Cf. Luke 2:32; 3:6; 3:38; 24:47. Lemcio and Pagenkemper do not see a Jewish/Gentile distinction in the double subsequent invitation. To see it as such, they argue, warrants an allegorization of the parable. The distinction for them is with the "pious" and "sinners" of Israel. See Lemcio, 9; Pagenkemper, 92.
addition of vv. 11-14.¹ Ménard sees in the closing aphorism of Thomas's logion, "Businessmen and merchants will not enter the places of my Father," an inference to Thomas's expectation of the messianic banquet. "The places of my Father" were the resting place of the gnostic soul.²

²4 λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι οἵδεις τῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐκεῖνων τῶν κεκλημένων γεύσεται μου τοῦ δείπνου.

... for I say to you that not one of those men who were invited will taste of my dinner."

Scholars are divided on whether the phrase, ἔλεγο γὰρ ὑμῖν, is a part of the parable itself and therefore the householder speaking to his circle of servants or guests at his table³ or a concluding remark of Jesus addressing his audience.⁴ It is possible to understand the phrase either way. Those who argue for the latter position emphasize the shift to the plural, while the parable mentions only one servant in attendance. The host is always spoken of in the third person; here, the narrator uses the first person. If Jesus is speaking, it is an aphorism spoken by Jesus,⁵ indicating that "the leadership [of Israel]"
missed an opportunity to sit at the table of God's blessing, even though it appeared that they were at the head of the line."¹

Derrett understands that if the host is speaking, the phrase, "not one of those men who were invited will taste of my dinner," alludes to the portion of the meal that was sent to the host's leading friends if they were unavoidably absent.² In light of 13:24-30, it is reasonable to say that, from Luke's perspective, the host of the banquet in this verse represents Jesus.³

Summary Statement of What the Parable Meant

All three versions establish the main point: that inclusion in the kingdom depends on one's responsiveness to God's invitation and exclusion from it is determined by one's own deliberate rejection. Luke's version stresses the inclusion (of the Gentiles) in the eschatological banquet. Matthew emphasizes the exclusion of Israel (and more particularly the leaders of Israel), who blatantly rejected the invitation. Thomas also leans toward exclusion, but in this instance, the rejection is of "agnostics" whose lives are engrossed in business affairs and a life of profiteering.

In the Synoptic versions there is a reversal of fortunes in the eschaton. The religious aristocracy, who in their self-complacency presumed they were the elect and

¹Bock, 1278.

²Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, 141. Cf. Neh 8:10-12. However, in this instance, it was a blatant refusal.

³Nolland, 758.
were sure to be present at the end-time banquet, are shocked to know that the tables have turned and that the denizens and waifs of low estate have usurped their positions at the banquet table. For Scott the reversal in Thomas's version is described as "those who do not practice poverty will not participate in the heavenly meal, the mystery." Matthew justifies his rejection of the Jewish nation by recapitulating salvation history. Luke justifies his inclusion of the Gentiles by the elaboration of the excuses, the host's insistence on having a full complement of guests, and the delay of the banquet. Thomas justifies his exclusion by accentuating the mercantile alibis made by the first invitees.

Type-Scene Analysis

Literary Structure

A comparative study of all three versions of the parable using Johnston's structure of Rabbinic parables is presented in table 2. A quick scan of the table 2 reveals that all of the three versions fall short of the traditional five components of rabbinic parables. Furthermore, all three versions are lacking the first and fifth part, and only Matthew's version has an introductory formula. But all the versions have a parable proper and an application. As regards the illustrand, it is typical of Jesus' parables not to have this element. The matter to be illustrated, proved, or explained in all three versions may be classified as having a haggadic nature (i.e., homiletic or dealing with theological opinions), but fundamentally the Synoptic versions set out to reveal a historical truism, while Thomas's version, an experiential truism.

TABLE 2

COMPARISON OF JOHNSTON'S STRUCTURE OF RABBINIC PARABLES WITH THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition Phrase</td>
<td>16a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>line 1a¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Illustrand</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Introductory Formula</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Parable Proper</td>
<td>16b-23</td>
<td>2b-10</td>
<td>lines 1b-16a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Application</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>line 16b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Scriptural Quotation</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In terms of Young's six structural parts, table 3 presents a number of parallels with the parable. As can be seen, Young's psycho-literary structural model fits all the versions of this parable. Bailey divides the Lucan version into seven speeches (or scenes) enclosed by an inclusio with the motif of invitation and the same language occurring both at the beginning and at the end.¹

The basic conceptual structural sequence, common to all of the three versions, may be outlined as follows:

1. A well-to-do man hosts a dinner and invites guests.

2. A servant/servants is/are sent to notify the guests.

¹See Bailey, Through Peasant Eyes, 93.
3. The guests decline amid worldly excuses.

4. The servant/servants is/are sent out with an open invitation.

5. The unwilling guests receive their retribution.

**TABLE 3**

**COMPARISON OF YOUNG’S PSYCHO-LITERARY STRUCTURE WITH THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Prolegomenon</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Intro. of Cast</td>
<td>16-17a</td>
<td>2b</td>
<td>lines 1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Plot</td>
<td>17b ff.</td>
<td>3 ff.</td>
<td>line 2b ff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Conflict</td>
<td>18-21a</td>
<td>3b-6</td>
<td>line 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Conflict Resolution</td>
<td>21b-23</td>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>line 14-16a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Application</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>line 16b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences in structural elements are presented in table 4. From this table it is easily recognizable that common structural and stock elements are found in all three parables. This suggests that behind the three accounts there lies a common origin or tradition. This is strong evidence for the operation of a banquet type-scene. The differences may be accounted for by the varied interests and different immediate sources of the different writers. The significant differences have been accounted for in the discussions under the subheadings of "Tradition Analysis" and "Exegetical Commentary."
### TABLE 4

**COMPARISON OF STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS IN THE THREE VERSIONS OF THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>host</td>
<td>a certain man</td>
<td>a king</td>
<td>a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occasion</td>
<td>a great banquet</td>
<td>a marriage feast</td>
<td>a dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notification</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>excuses</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>explanation of excuses</td>
<td>elaborate</td>
<td>passing reference</td>
<td>very detailed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>types of excuses</td>
<td>possession, domestic tie</td>
<td>possession, business</td>
<td>business, possession, domestic tie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>treatment</td>
<td>no mention</td>
<td>slaves murdered</td>
<td>no mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>host’s reaction</td>
<td>becomes angry</td>
<td>becomes angry, and kills first invited</td>
<td>no mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subsequent invitation</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new groups invited</td>
<td>streets &amp; lanes, highways &amp; hedges</td>
<td>streets</td>
<td>streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>response of last invitation</td>
<td>no mention</td>
<td>good and bad</td>
<td>no mention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closing remark</td>
<td>&quot;For I tell you, none... who were invited shall...&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;For many are called, but few are chosen.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Businessmen and merchants will not...&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Plot**

The entire parable of the Great Supper may be treated as a *kernel* in a larger context of either Matthew or Luke, and the minor plot events in the parable as *satellites*.

In the book of Luke, the large context is an ongoing defense of the marginalized and
disenfranchised. Luke has designed his events in a way to show that the outcasts of Israel, along with the Gentiles, are potential candidates for the kingdom. In Matthew, there is an ongoing conflict between Jesus and the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Matthew’s emphasis is on the rejection of the Jews as the chosen people. However, because we are studying only the parable in detail, kernels may be discovered in the parable itself. They appear to follow the structural elements of the Guests and Host Response type-scene: Preparation—an important figure prepares a lavish banquet; Selective Invitation—he invites special guests; Notification—he notifies them that the dinner is ready (Matthew provides a variation by adding two notifications to the guests); Guests’ Reaction—the guests declined the invitation (a variation to the typical expectation); and Host’s Reaction—another group of guests is invited (Luke provides a variation by inviting two groups of guests). The satellites in the parable manifest themselves in the specific details of the excuses.

The magnitude of Luke’s dinner is, perhaps, analogous to the gargantuan dinner prepared by King Ashurbanipal. Matthew’s banquet takes the form of a wedding feast to create a context for the addition of the parable of The Wedding Garment. His feast includes a description of the menu: oxen and fat calves. The oxen and fatlings motif is seen in 2 Sam 6:13, 1 Kgs 1:9. It may even have echoes in the parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:23, 27, 30. Echoes may be seen also in the menu of Ba‘l’s banquet, Keret’s banquet (twice), and the banquet described in Isa 25:6-10a. Thomas’s banquet is described only as a dinner.

1An analysis of this parable is provided in detail in the following section.
Matthew has the servants going out twice, thus emphasizing the urgency of the invitation. This variation to the type-scene is necessary to demonstrate the king’s earnest desire to have the guests come to the banquet. This counterbalances his harsh decision to reject them upon their outright rejection of his invitation.

The guests’ declination of the invitation is not the usual expectation of the reader. It is rare for a guest to reject the final notification to attend the banquet except for justifiable circumstances. The rejection of the notifications in all three versions creates a tension in the plot. The plot, which begins with tension, anticipates a resolution. All three versions of the parable depict this tension/resolution mode. The conflict begins with the lame excuses of the invitees. There is an arousal of expectation upon the notification that the banquet is ready. But that expectation is not fulfilled when the excuses are made. Then finally the expectation is surprisingly fulfilled when an unexpected new group is invited. The resolution occurs when other guests fill the banquet hall. This is where the denouement of the plot occurs.\(^1\)

All of the accounts follow a cause-and-effect sequence typical of all good plots. The first major cause occurs at the invitation by the host to the dinner. This effects a negative response from the invitees. This action causes reaction by the host—he becomes angry and takes a certain course of action. Matthew destroys them and invites others; Luke and Thomas invite others. There is still room, which causes another response; another group of guests is invited.

Luke keeps the structural elements of the parable interconnected with the profuse use of the conjunction καί. Only at the start of the narrative, where Jesus reacts to the teasing question of the interrogator, does Jesus use the adversative δέ. With a series of eight coordinating conjunctions (καί) Luke moves from one action to the next.¹ A significant turn of events takes place when the host receives the report that the invited guests are not coming. The narrator uses the strong τότε. Luke then has the host send out two new invitations. This is a major variation on the banquet type-scene. As mentioned earlier, Luke is portraying the generosity of the host, who insists that he has a full complement of guests in the persons of the Gentiles.

Using Culley’s scheme of sequence of action, this narrative falls under the category of Punishment: injury/avenged. The first action of injury to the host effects a response by which the host’s honor is avenged—none of the first invitees will taste of the banquet. Not only is the response of the first invited guests injurious in Matthew’s account, but a vengeance much more severe is dispensed to them in return. Matthew definitely destroys the verisimilitude of the parable, by expanding on the reaction of the king. Not only does he get angry, but he displays his anger in a merciless massacre of the invitees. This increases the conflict and points to absolute rejection of the Jewish nation.

Embedded within the "punishment" sequence is another action sequence—the "announcement" sequence. There is an announcement to go out and invite other guests on two occasions in Luke, and one in Matthew and the Gospel of Thomas. This first

¹In totality, Luke uses καί seventeen times.
action of *announcement* is followed by a second, where the event *happened*—the house became full. Thus, the sequence of action may be diagrammatically portrayed as:

```
injury--------avenged
announcement------happened.
```

In the parable, one can find elements of surprise and suspense. Surprise begins the plot. Surprisingly, the invitees refuse to come to the banquet. This is not typical, especially when the invitation was sent out in advance, and now the notification to come is given. The host reacts with anger, but his subsequent action is kept in suspense until the end of the parable. The narrator carries the reader in suspense, especially in Luke’s account, where the narrator finally reveals the castigation for those men who rejected the invitation. They would not taste of the dinner. Matthew is suddenly dramatic, however, effecting mass destruction on those who refused to come to the banquet.

Scott sees a comic plot under the guise of tragedy in the parable.\(^1\) For him there are moments of pain and humor. Instead of the sedate feast of the elite, the host ends up with a socially outrageous mob. Even the imagery of beggars being escorted into the hall presents a somewhat amusing picture. The same is true of the flimsy alibis made by the original invitees and their desertion of the feast. For Scott, the excuses are burlesque elements designed to create audience entertainment.\(^2\)

The story begins with a comic prospect, and since all is prepared, there is little

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\(^1\) Scott, *Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom*, 38-39.

\(^2\) Funk sees the burlesque leading the story over the border of the everyday into a world of fantasy. See Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic and the Word of God*, 190.
doubt that the end will be no different. Nothing could possibly go wrong for a well-organized dinner. Any unexpected absence of a guest was prepared for in advance. But the unthinkable occurs—all of the guests decline. The host is in a quandary. This is a tragic moment for him. Humor and tragedy confront each other. He resorts to the outcasts, thereby risking tragedy or a possible comic outcome. He risks his community standing by going outside his social group. He risks also that the outcast will turn down his invitation. Furthermore, the atmosphere in this banquet will be quite different from the one originally proposed. The final feast will now have the appearance of a rump session. Notwithstanding, the host forsakes his orthodox viewpoint and roves into that of a stranger.

In Aristotle’s plot classifications, this parable is one in which a noble hero miscalculates, but only temporarily, and his ultimate vindication is satisfying. It falls also under Crane’s plot of thought, where the protagonist has a change in thoughts and feelings.

Characterization

Characterization in the three versions of this parable is very descriptive. To show status in the story there is a king or well-to-do man/servants or servant. Distinctive physical features of the invited are mentioned: the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame. They facilitate the plot in that the poor are shown in stark contrast to the elite

1In this case he changes his feelings about the Jews, and reaches out to the Gentiles. Thomas changes his feelings about the businessmen.
guests (the Pharisees). The people from the highways and hedges are also shown in
ccontradiction to the those who shelter themselves in beautiful houses but are not
partaking of the salvific meal provided. This confirms that the implied author of Luke’s
gospel is interested in the poor and disenfranchised. His heart is tender to the
marginalized and suffering.

The narrator in the parable acts at all times from an external point of view. On
this occasion he is reticent about the characters’ inner thoughts and feelings. He simply
describes their behavior and quotes their words objectively. The reader is left to make his
own conclusions about the characters in the narrative.

The three Gospel writers make liberal use of direct discourse in this parable. Half
or more of the material in this parable is comprised of direct discourse.¹ There are no
interior monologues in this parable in any of the versions.

The round (main) characters who facilitate the plot are:

1. The king/man is the main character or hero in the narrative. He is the unifying
character through each of his acts in the narrative. He prepares a big dinner; he invites
many guests; he notifies all of them through his surrogate. In texts of antiquity such as
Sumerian and Akkadian texts all the hosts seek to win some favor, but in the Gospels
there is a variation: the host is seeking to do a favor for the invitee. But his invitations

¹Out of a total of 163 words in Luke’s narrative, 81 are employed in direct
discourse. If vs. 24 is a part of the parable itself and not a closing remark by Jesus, the
number of words is 95, making direct discourse more than half the material.
are disregarded; he becomes hurt; he shows anger, makes a drastic decision, and takes drastic action. No matter how the invited guests respond, the purposefulness and inventiveness of the host propel him to find a way to bring about the festivities. But underlining the delectable moment of fun, food, and fellowship, there assail the elements of urgency and crisis. There is judgment and grace, warning and wooing, exclusion and inclusion, rejection and acceptance. The host is hostile towards those who reject the invitation, but generous to the outcasts. The narrator reveals the inner life of the king by allowing the reader to picture the king in anger, commanding the servants to go and find other guests. This reveals his insistence on having his banquet hall filled.

2. The first invitees who refused to come. The narrator, with his omniscient insight, reveals that the responses are excuses. He goes through his vivid descriptions of the reasons made by the three characters to show their frivolity and lameness (a concept repeated in the description of the second group of invitees). They are shown in a poor light of selfishness against the generosity of God. Their responses to the messianic banquet reveal that other mundane things are more important than salvation.

Gradation in repetition is best seen in the increasing intensity of the excuses in Luke’s account. Showing, rather than telling, heightens the suspense in the story.

Different points of view are seen in the technique of repetition with variation in the three

\[1\text{Cf. the anger of the king in the Acts of Thomas, the rabbinic parables of the Wise and Foolish Invitees, and the parable of the Ten Virgins.}

\[2\text{See the narrator’s use of παρατέωμαι. This word is again repeated in the first two responses of the first invitees.}\]
excuses. There is the three fold mode of repetition in the excuses, with the third achieving the turning point in the story. This demonstrates the invitees’ growing interest in the temporal. No doubt the patience of the host in the banquet narrative reached its limits upon hearing the third excuse reported by the servant. This excuse heightens the rejection of the invitation. The invitee blatantly rejects without apology. This spurs on the host’s anger. It is typical of Matthew to condense such tri-focal narratorial features when they do not have some other significant function. Thomas uses the 3+1 mode of repetition.

3. The second group of invitees—the poor, crippled, blind, and lame, who are specifically mentioned—are shown in a good light of acceptance by Luke. The poor motif in this type-scene is consistent with Luke’s program. Matthew’s second group of invitees includes "both bad and good" people; an addition which prepares the reader to distinguish the two classes of people among the guests who are highlighted in the parable of Wedding Garment. Thomas speaks about "those whom you find." It is important to note also that in the ancient banquets of Mesopotamia there is always the question of rank. In the parable there is a reversal of that motif.

4. The third group of invitees in the Lucan narrative—the people in the highways—is different from the second group, but is also shown in a good light. In the invitation to the third group Luke modifies the type-scene to suit his theological purpose.

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1Borsch, 52.

2Cf. the Acts of Thomas where both rich and poor, bond and free, strangers and citizens are invited to the king’s marriage feast.
His host invites two groups of people representing the outcast of Israel and the Gentiles. Luke’s all-inclusiveness of the banquet guests echoes Isa 25:6-10a.

The flat characters in the parable are the servants and the king’s son in Matthew’s account. The son in Matthew is only put there to facilitate the wedding motif. Nothing is said of him afterwards. The servants are only incidental and are placed to carry out the host’s orders and to portray his well-to-do position. They help only to put flesh onto the story.¹

The setting in Luke acts as a character in a certain sense. Jesus is speaking about an eschatological banquet scenario while he is participating in a temporal one. The setting creates the context for the workings of the parable. It heightens the mood and accentuates Jesus as the host of this parabolical banquet. In the temporal banquet, Jesus is portrayed as being in conflict with the Jewish leaders. This is not only true in Luke’s case but more so in Matthew’s. All along the Jewish leaders have rejected the messengers of God: John the Baptist, and now Jesus. They are fooled into believing that they have a divine prerogative to partake in the eschatological banquet. Jesus shatters their confidence. Only the simple-minded, the poor, and humble in heart will eat at the Lord’s banquet. The Jewish leaders will be excluded.

**Theme**

An examination of the finished text reveals that the theme emphasized in all three renditions of the parable is exclusion/inclusion (rejection/acceptance). Though the plot

¹Servants are always part of the imagery in banquet reliefs in antiquity.
structure of the parable in all of the three versions follows a linear sequence of actions, its theme adheres to a concentric pattern. This is demonstrated in the following constructs.

Luke’s Version

Inclusion of selected guests (vss. 16-17)

Exclusion (rejection) by selected guests (18-21a)

Exclusion of selected guests (21b)

Inclusion of new guests 1 (emphatic) (21c-22)

Inclusion of new guests 2 (emphatic) (23)

Matthew’s Version

Inclusion of selected guests (vss. 2-3a; 4)

Exclusion (rejection) by selected guests (emphatic) (3b; 5-6)

Exclusion of selected guests (emphatic) (7)

Inclusion of new guests (8-10)

Exclusion of new guest (The Wedding Garment) (11-14)

Gospel of Thomas

Inclusion of selected guests (lines 1-2)

Exclusion (rejection) by selected guests (emphatic) (3-14a)

Exclusion of selected guests (14b-15a)

Inclusion of new guests (15b-16)

From the above constructs, several observations may be deduced.

1. Concentrically, all the versions of the parable emphasize the exclusion theme flanked by the inclusion theme.
2. In the unfolding plot of each version of the parable, the linear structure reveals that any of the two aspects of the theme may dominate the narrative.

3. The concentric pattern of organization stands in conjoint relationship with the linear arrangement of the narratives.

4. Luke stresses the inclusion aspect. He includes two new groups in the subsequent invitation (though the aim of the host to fill every place in the banquet hall heightens the rejection theme. Presumably, if the original invitees on second thought decided to attend there would be no chance to make amends. Rejection on their part results in rejection on his part).

5. Luke’s rejection is directed toward those who were previously invited (the leaders of Israel) and the acceptance of those who were subsequently invited (the general populace: the outcasts of Israel, and the Gentiles).¹ No place at the messianic table is

¹In stark contrast, during the intertestamental period the idea that the Gentiles would be invited to attend the banquet was muffled. In I En. 62:1-16 the "kings, the governors, the high officials and those who rule the earth [implying the Gentiles] shall fall down before him [the Elect One, vs. 2/], on their faces, and worship " (vs. 9); and they "shall beg and plead for mercy at his feet" (vs.10). "Their faces shall be filled with shame, and their countenances shall be crowned with darkness" (vs. 11); and he will "deliver them to the angels for punishments in order that vengeance shall be executed on them—oppressors of his children and his elect ones" (vs. 12). After the exercise of "wrath of the Lord of Spirits" (vs. 13); they will "eat and rest and rise with the Son of Man forever and ever" (vs. 15); and shall "wear garments of glory which shall not wear out" (vs. 16). Cf. also the belief of the Qumran Community in 1QSa 2:3b-9a, "And let no person smitten with any human impurity whatever enter the Assembly of God. And every person smitten with these impurities, unfit to occupy a place in the midst of the Congregation, and every (person) smitten in his flesh, paralyzed in his feet or hands, lame or blind or deaf, or dumb or smitten in his flesh with blemish visible to the eye, or any aged person that totters and is unable to stand firm in the midst of the Congregation: let these persons not enter to take their place in the midst of the Congregation of men of renown, for the Angels of holiness are in their Congregation."
held indefinitely for anyone because of national priority.

6. Matthew’s rejection, on the other hand, is focused on the people of Israel, and more particularly, the leaders of Israel. In addition, rejection is the lot of those subsequently invited, if they are not appropriately garbed.

7. Matthew is emphatic on the rejection dimension. He totally rejects the first invited, to the extent that the consequence of their rejection is their immediate annihilation. Furthermore, he enlarges on the rejection theme by adding the parable of the Wedding Garment. The exclusion arises from no vagary of the host but from the fickleness of the would-be guests.

8. The *Gospel of Thomas* also accentuates the rejection facet, especially in the excuses of the first invitees.

9. The banquet type-scene is representative of inclusion in and exclusion from the kingdom. It could symbolize a curse or a cure for salvation.

Some additional insights into the Gospel writers’ use of *Leitwörter* and motifs will also help the reader to appreciate the theme of inclusion and exclusion in the parable. The inclusion theme manifested in Luke is augmented with his use of the catchword ἐρχομαι. It is used three times in the narrative: once "to come" (ἐρχομαι), and twice "to go out" (ἐξελθεῖ) - "come" to the first invited, "and go out" to the second and third invited (meaning come to the banquet). The word gives a ring of urgent invitation to be included in the banquet. The invitation motif is used in the imperative mood on the three occasions.

The rejection theme is accentuated with Luke’s three-time use of the verb καλέω,
used in two morphological forms—as an active verb and as a participle. In its active verb form (ἐκάλεσεν) it refers to the first invited guests who were originally called. The first participle in vs. 17 in its perfect participial form (καλλίμενος) again identifies the first invited guests who were given the notification to come that the dinner was ready, but rejected. Furthermore, in vs. 24 the perfect participial form (καλλίμενος) is used to describe the first invited who have been rejected or excluded from the dinner.

Summary

From a close look at the two analyses, it is obvious that the synchronic analysis of the banquet type-scene of the parable of the Great Supper and the diachronic historical analysis of the parable basically arrived at the same conclusions about the parable’s theme. Both of them support the theme of exclusion and inclusion. From the study of the diachronic critical analysis of the parable it was realized that there is a definite interrelatedness between the different versions. In the type-scene analysis, the stereotypical plot elements in the three accounts help to substantiate the fact that all originate from one common tradition or one banquet type-scene in antiquity.

The Guests and Host Response type-scene appears to be the operative paradigm for the parable of the Great Supper. In all of the versions of this parable can be found the constants of this type-scene in terms of a set order of motifs and theme, and the characters and "catchwords," used by the authors. Each writer, especially the Synoptists, manipulates his plot elements as to create the highest potency of the parable. Each narrator capitalizes on the shifts in points of view to enhance the drama in the parable.
Although, each version has enough elements to suggest a common type-scene convention, each account has enough differences to warrant a variation on the type-scene.

**The Wedding Garment: Matt 22:11-14**

Diachronic Critical Analysis

An important issue with regard to this pericope is whether this parable formed part of Jesus’ original parable of the Great Banquet. Some scholars hold that the parable of the Great Banquet, as originally told by Jesus, ended at Matt 12:10 (taking a parallel from the Lucan version).\(^1\) They contend that Matthew appended the parable of the Wedding Garment, and it therefore must be considered as Matthew’s interpolation (though Jesus could have used this parable in a different context).\(^2\)

To substantiate this position the scholars have put forth several convincing arguments. The parable is not mentioned in its parallel versions in either Luke or Thomas’s accounts. The wedding garment pericope appears to be set off from the main text. The emendation makes good sense in the light of a seemingly pointless impulse to grab a man from the highways, and still expect him to be dressed for the occasion.

It is further argued that though they are two separate parables, each stresses a

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\(^1\)For example, Beare, 436; Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 129; Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 65-66; Gundry, 439; Cadoux, 64; Garland, 222; Fenton, 349; Carter and Heil, 175; Hagner, 631; Albright and Mann, 269; Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable*, 95.

\(^2\)Patte observes that the tension seen in the transition from vs. 10 to 11 is typical of Matthew when he wants to convey a major point that is not only surprising for his audience, but what is unknown to them. He holds that this part of the parable expresses its main point. See Patte, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 301.
different aspect of the same general moral truth.\footnote{Streeter, 242.} The change from δοῦλοι in vss. 3, 4, 6, 8, 10 to διάκονοι in vs. 13, and the change of Matthew’s host as a man to a king in order to allow for the garment story, are also strong evidences for the addition. Furthermore, the garment account satisfies the expectation of Matthew’s audience, whose mind was already oriented to the pairing of "good" and "bad" vocabulary in the previous parable, and who knew that the time had come to separate the evil from the good. The evidences show that indeed the wedding garment material is an independent parable used by Matthew as an appendage to complement his parable of the Great Banquet.

**Literary Context**

The parable of the Great Banquet prepares the way for the parable of the Wedding Garment. It follows up on the theme of rejection in the three previous parables. In this instance, Matthew adds this parable to emphasize the importance of righteousness for those who would enter the kingdom and thus balance the point made in vs. 10, concerning both the "evil and good." It also gives added emphasis to the parable of the Vineyard in 21:33-44, which speaks about the producing of good fruit in its season.

**Tradition Analysis**

The evidences suggest that the whole of the parable of the Wedding Garment is an addition by Matthew. However, there is no evidence to disprove Jesus’ use of this parable probably in another context. As it stands, all one can conclude is that the parable

\footnote{Streeter, 242.}
of the Wedding Garment is an integral part of "Matthew's parable" and continues the banquet imagery of the parable of the Great Banquet.

**Historical Analysis**

In its original setting Jesus' use of this parable would have no doubt been targeted to his opponents and critics—the Jewish leaders. Thus, the expression "the good and the bad" posed no problem. However, in its second sitz im leben, when it was reapplied to the community of the early believers, it posed "the danger that the gospel of the free grace of God might be interpreted as freeing the baptized from their moral responsibilities (Rom 3:8; 6:1, 5; Jude 4)." According to Jeremias, "in order to remove any ground for such a misunderstanding, the parable of the Wedding Garment was inserted into the parable of the Great Supper, introducing the principle of merit, and emphasizing the necessity for repentance as the condition of acquittal at the Last Judgment." Thus, the context of the parable by the evangelist suggests that it was placed to fill a need arising out of the missionary experience of the Early Church.

**Exegetical Commentary**

22:11 εἰσελθὼν δὲ ὁ βασιλεὺς θεάσασθαι τοὺς ἀνακειμένους εἶδεν ἐκεῖ ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἐνδεχόμενον ἐνίσχυμα γάμου.

But when the king entered to view the ones who were reclining at the tables, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, . . .

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2Ibid., 66.
Lenski holds that the king came in, not as a judge with critical eyes but as a
glorious king to feast his eyes on the entire scene—the guests at the royal table. However,
an insulting sight attracted the attention of the king.\(^1\) Contrary to what Lenski assumes, it
is reasonable to argue that the deliberate intent of the king was to inspect the guests, since
he had no idea who the servants had brought in. \(\thetaε\alpha\omega\sigma\theta\epsilon\alpha\) connotes divine inspection,
suggesting the examination of professing disciples at the Last Judgment.\(^2\) In addition,
Matthew's strange placement of \(\omicron\nu\) instead of \(\mu\eta\) before the participle \(\epsilon\upsilon\delta\varepsilon\mu\varepsilon\omega\nu\)
suggests emphasis on the actual situation in the description, while the \(\mu\eta\) would make it a
hypothetical argument.\(^3\) The negation is clear-cut and decisive, thereby heightening the
judgment motif.

For any marriage festivity people would wear appropriate garments.\(^4\) Scholars are
divided over who was responsible for the provision of the garments: the king\(^5\) or the

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\(^2\) Gundry, 439.


\(^5\) The idea that the festal garment was provided by the king is supported by people such as A. Lukyn Williams, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, Pulpit Commentary, vol. 15, ed. H. D. M. Spence (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 358; William
invitees themselves, who were rushed to the banquet upon a moment’s notice. If it was
the king, there is no clear evidence of such a practice in ancient times. If the invitees
themselves were responsible, it seems impractical that a host would require immediate
compliance without having given the invitees enough time to make preparation. Besides,
the street people were most likely the poor, who would not be able to afford a banquet
outfit. There seems to be no consensus on the matter, yet one thing is certain, according
to Morris: “Suitable clothing was available and this man had not made use of the

Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 797-798; Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Parables

1 Lenski draws attention, however, to Gen 45:22; Judg 14:12, 19; 2 Kgs 5:22;
10:22; Esth 6:8; 8:15; Rev 19:8, 9. See Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s
Gospel*, 857. Lenski further asserts that Matthew’s use of the passive voice (ἐνδυθέναι
meaning “not having been garmented”) is suggestive of an action done to someone. He
suggests that is the action played by the attendants who garmented the guests for the
feast. The perfect participle carries the present force. He was not garmented and still
stands ungarmented. Ibid., 856. Klaus Haacker assumes that the custom of the king
providing the festal garment could have an allusion to a Palestinian folktale which tells of
three poor maidens who were invited to the palace, and who requested festal garments as
they could not provide for themselves. See Klaus Haacker, “Das hochzeitliche Kleid von
Matt 22:11-13 und ein palästinisches Märchen,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-

2 Beasley-Murray does say that the individuals in the second group were not in a
position to provide their wedding garments. He argues that Matthew says nothing
concerning the second group’s poverty and not having time to prepare, thus it might be
safe to assume that the man in the parable had the ability to present himself properly
garbed. See G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids:
Eerdmans, 1986), 121.

Gundry assumes that the missing wedding garment was probably a newly washed
Gundry, 439.
opportunity."1 The man in the parable is a representative figure denoting a group of people.2

12 καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Ἔταξε, πῶς ἐσόθηκες ὅτε μὴ ἔχων ἐνθύμια γάμου; ὃ δὲ ἐφιμώθη.

... and he said to him, "Friend, how did you enter here, not having wedding clothes?"3 but he was silent.

The king greeted the man as Ἐταξε: "a person who is associated with someone else, though not necessarily involving personal affection (as in the case of φιλός)."4 It indicates "a cool distance between the gracious benefactor and the recipient who fails to respond to the kindness shown."4 "How did you enter here?" the king asks. Gundry asserts: "The question deals with the right of entrance, not means of entrance."5 According to Jeremias, the host may allow guests to eat by themselves and then appear during the meal.6 The man was speechless. Literally, he was "muzzled," from φιμώω.

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1Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, 52.

2Sim argues for a composite figure representing two groups of people: the wicked invitees of 22:10 and the Jewish leaders who declined the invitation in 22:3-6. The wicked invitees represent the unworthy Christians, while the Jewish leaders stand for the Jewish opponents in Matthean community. See David C. Sim, "The Man without the Wedding Garment: Matt 22:11-13," Heythrop Journal (1990): 166. On the other hand, Manson argued that the man represented an individual, probably Judas or Paul. See Manson, The Sayings of Jesus, 226. This interpretation does not hold, as the phrase, "for many are called and few are chosen" in 22:14, implies that not just one individual will be expelled from the kingdom, but a number of people.


4Stock, 336.

5Gundry, 440.

6Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 187.
He had no excuse. Again, the judgment motif emerges.

Then the king said to the servants, “When you have bound him, feet and hands, throw him out into the darkness farthest out; there (in that place) will be loud crying and grinding of teeth.”

The absence of the wedding garment is clearly a serious offense to the host. It poses a discredit to the host; it is an insult to him. Because the garment is missing, the king gives an outlandish order to the servants. Matthew’s use of the word διάκονος instead of δοῦλος in the previous verses (3, 4, 6, 8, 10) is an indication of his usage of a different parable. Gundry asserts that “they (the servants) represent the same angels that do the judgmental work in the parables of the Tares and the Bad Fish, both of which are peculiar to Matthew.”

Gundry further suggests that a comparison be made with the unparalleled use of διάκονος also in 23:11, and of the cognate διακονέω in 25:44. As in the parable of the Tares, angels bind (δήσατε) the tares and throw (βάλοντες) them into the fiery furnace (13:30, 42), so also here, the servants are told to bind (δήσαντες) the man without a wedding garment and throw (ἐκβάλετε) him into outermost darkness. "Hands and feet" emphasizes the severity of the judgment.

1 A few MSS have ἀρατε ἀυτὸν πόδαν καὶ χεῖραν καὶ βάλετε (D it syσ); several MSS insert ἀρατε ἀυτὸν καὶ (C W TR syσ).

2 Gundry, 440.


often used to denote "the uncomfortable lodging of those who are rejected"\(^1\) or "the gloomy place of eschatological destruction."\(^2\) "There will be loud crying and grinding of teeth" describes the severity of the judgment meted out to the church member who fails in his righteousness. \(^3\)

14 πολλοὶ γὰρ εἰσὶν κλητοὶ, ολίγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοί.

For many are called, but few are chosen.

This logion seems to be the final and climactic conclusion to Matthew's trilogy of judgment parables (The Two Sons, 21:28-32; The Wicked Tenants, 21:33-44; The Great Banquet, 22:1-14). Like many proverbial summations to parables, this one does not fit exactly, yet it fits well enough to express Matthew's general intention. Marten avers that it "sums up the evangelist's more general view of judgment vis-à-vis Israel—namely, that Israel's calling cannot guarantee her election to salvation."\(^4\) According to Jewish understanding, "all Israelites have a share in the world to come."\(^5\) But Jesus objects to

\(^{1}\) Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, 552.


\(^{5}\) Sanhedrin 10:1.
this view. The gospel goes far and wide, but not everyone who hears it is one of God’s elect. More directly the judgment theme applies to the parables of the Great Banquet and the Wedding Garment—the first refers to those who have been "called," the second concerns those who will be "chosen" in the final judgment.

The "many" and "few" reflect a Semitic idiom that basically means that all are called but not all are chosen.1 "Many" must be understood as the "all," "both good and evil" whom the slaves "gathered together." The "few" must be understood as those professing Christendom who manifest the genuineness of their discipleship with works of righteousness.2 Morris clarifies: "Jesus is not saying whether the elect will be a tiny remnant or not; he is saying that not all the called will be finally chosen."3 ἐκλεκτοὶ is a technical term for "the messianic community of salvation."4 Garland points out that being chosen does not mean that some are chosen to participate while others are chosen not to participate. The ones who were originally invited were deemed unworthy because they chose not to come. While some spurn the invitation, others respond unworthily.

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1 See B. F. Meyer, "Many (=All) Are Called, But Few (=Not All) Are Chosen," New Testament Studies 36 (1990): 94-96; Morris reminds us that both Hebrew and Aramaic lack comparative forms of the adjective. And that comparisons are expressed by using expressions such as "large" and "small," and sometimes "many" and "few." Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, 552. Cf. 4 Esra 8:3, 41.

2 Gundry, 440.

3 Morris, The Gospel according to Matthew, 552.

The chosen ones are those who responded worthily; they are "choice."\(^1\)

**Summary Statement of What the Parable Meant**

The main point of the parable of the Wedding Garment is that inclusion in the kingdom depends on one’s readiness to enter it. Exclusion, in this instance, is not because of a deliberate rejection of the invitation as in the parable of the Great Supper, but a result of neglect of one’s personal readiness for the eschatological banquet. Readiness anticipates the theme of the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-13). The Jewish leaders had rejected the invitation in salvation history. Thereafter, the ones who accepted the invitation would be excluded if personal preparation were not made. Matthew’s addition of the parable of the Wedding Garment to the parable of the Great Supper was to teach that the acceptance of invitation for salvation, though available to all, is not adequate to guarantee it. Admission is conditioned upon prescribed requirements. A mere profession of allegiance to the Church is not sufficient for entrance into God’s kingdom; the fulfillment of one’s obligation to God is required.

**Type-Scene Analysis**

**Literary Structure**

Because Matthew is appending this parable to that of the parable of the Great Banquet, little can be said of the structure in terms of its components, except that vss. 11-13 form the parable proper, and vs. 14 presents the application. Again, for structural

\(^1\)Garland, 223.
purposes, due to the fusing of the two parables into one account, vss. 1-2 may serve as the
introductory formula, while vs. 14 seems to hold the application for both parables—the
Great Banquet and the Wedding Garment.

Plot

Matt 22:11-13 surprises the reader. The reader does not expect the story to take
such a turn. It runs against the reader’s expectations. A king could not expect a person
rushed from the street into his wedding feast to be prepared with an appropriate wedding
garment. From all evidences, the Gospel writer realizes that the successful but hasty
gathering of the "highway" people, both "good and bad," raises a new problem. The
goodness of the king, demonstrated by inviting a mixed crowd of good and evil, is not
good enough (the parable of the Great Supper). Personal qualification cannot be
dispensed with. Thus, the writer inserts the parable of the Wedding Garment in order to
stall any reasoning that everyone admitted to the banquet hall (called) will be entitled
guests (chosen). The division of guests is, therefore, determined when the king (God)
enters the banquet hall and examines (judges) the attendees of the banquet.

The narrator of the parable of the Great Supper in Matt 22:2-10 employs the
Guests and Host Response type-scene. The parable of the Wedding Garment applies, in
part, the Wise and Foolish Invitees type-scene. If Matt 22:11-13 is indeed a separate
parable and Matt 22:1-2 serves as the introduction of the parable, then the narrator
assumes that the implied reader is aware of all the events, that normally constitute the
Wise and Foolish type-scene, leading up to the assembly of the guests at the royal
banquet table.

The last events of the Wise and Foolish type-scene are enacted in this parable. The king inspects the guests, and discovers that one of them is not dressed for the occasion. Suspense is developed at this juncture. The reader is surprised by the king’s reaction. His reaction is not one of anger, but one of gracious inquiry: "Friend, how did you enter here, not having wedding clothes?"¹ The king addresses the man as "friend" though the man is acting in an "unfriendly" way. There is an appeal to that word (cf. Luke 14:10). This is a variation to the type-scene in which the host usually gets angry. With this strategy, the narrator mellows the judgment theme that follows. The narrator does not want the implied reader to get the impression that the king is merciless. The friendly tone of the host puts the king in a positive light so that the implied reader may be prepared for the harsh judgment that follows. The speechless response of the ungarmented guest indirectly suggests an atmosphere of judgment and the guest’s inexcusable destiny.

The overall plot of the two parables follows a logic of hierarchy, whose main point consummates in vs. 14. In successive episodes in the narrative, the number who participate in the banquet is diminished by stages. First, many are rejected (the first invited), then an individual is rejected. The narrator compares the mass rejection of the first invited with the single rejection of the man without the garment. In so doing, the implied reader would sense the impact of the rejection of first invited. The plot is tragic.

¹Cf. the use of "friend" in the parable of Places at a Feast, Luke 14:10.
Characterization

The king is the central character in the parable, who is cast in a stern posture tolerating no nonsense. He represents God in the eschatological judgment and is depicted as a serious judge. Yet, he is gracious when he addresses the guest without the wedding garment. The narrator's description of this guest portrays him as hopeless and without excuse. He is described as standing muzzled before the king. He is, perhaps, only one of many such men. \(^1\) The opponents of Jesus would follow the same fate. The guest without the wedding garment is aligned with the "many who are called." The call, many may hear, but a certain response to the call, only a few will qualify. The choice of the host is dependent on the preparedness of the guest. The servants function only as flat characters to perform the order of the king and represent the angels who help in the final judgment.

Theme

Motifs that suggest a judgment theme are "bind" (cf. Matt 13:30), "outer darkness" (cf. 8:12; 25:30), and "weep and gnash their teeth." \(^2\) The guest without the garment, though he is inside the banquet hall, is just as guilty as the first invitees in the previous narrative who did not honor the host when they rejected his invitation. Both suffer the same fate: They are called but not chosen. The exclusion theme is heightened here, and culminates with the verdict in vs. 14, "many are called, but few are chosen."

"To be chosen," according to Mounce, "does not mean to be thrust into the kingdom apart

\(^1\)Lenski, *The Interpretation of Matthew's Gospel*, 856.

from our decision and regardless of our conduct."¹

The garment motif functions as the essential for banquet fellowship. The narrative gives no particular hint in regard to the symbolism of the garment, whether meritorious works, imputed righteousness, or whatever. In Matthew’s context, however, it may symbolize "a life in keeping with God’s call, a life of justice, of doing God’s will."² Gundry avers: "God’s grace may not be taken for granted. God requires obedience, which does not merit salvation but is evidence of it."³ The parable warns that though the salvific door is open to all, personal qualification is imperative for entry into the eschatological banquet.

Summary

The parable of the Wedding Garment, whether studied from a diachronic critical approach or a literary approach, may be understood as a parable of judgment. Personal readiness to participate in the eschatological banquet is the condition for inclusion. A mere acceptance of the host’s invitation is not adequate to warrant a place at God’s banquet table. Religious affiliation does not meet the definite requirement prescribed by the banquet host. Inevitably, all who refuse to comply with the expected attire will be excluded from the kingdom.

¹Mounce, 207.
²Stock, 336. If it represents the righteousness of God, the host provided the garment.
³Gundry, 439.
The Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32

Diachronic Critical Analysis

The parable of the Prodigal Son is the paragon of all Gospel parables. Hunter describes it as "the pearl of all parables."¹ For centuries the parable has been called "Evangelium in Evangelio,"² for it "contains the Good News itself."³ The parable is not only the longest, but perhaps the best known and most studied.⁴ The attention given to this parable using diverse approaches to reach its interpretation can only be adequately described as "extravagant."⁵

¹Hunter, The Parables Then and Now, 59.
³Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 124.
In this study the focus has been on banquet type-scene elements in the parables and how they operate to create meaning and beauty for the reader. In the light of this approach it is not necessary that a full-scale diachronic critical analysis be done on the entire narrative. A verse-by-verse study may be adequately made, using well-recognized commentaries. Therefore, only those verses of the parable that deal directly with the banquet scene are analyzed.

**Literary Context**

In Luke 14, Jesus dines with Pharisees and welcomes outcasts into his eschatological kingdom. In Luke 15 he dines with them. The cluster of banquet parables in chap. 14 and, especially, the parable of the Great Banquet anticipates the festivities in chap. 15. In the parable of the Great Supper the gracious host desires to have his house filled. Thus, in vss. 1 and 2 of chap. 15, Luke creates a setting where Jesus is having table-fellowship with tax gatherers and sinners. However, the Pharisees and scribes are grumbling over Jesus’ association with these outcasts. Jesus responds with a series of Structural Interpretation,” *Semeia* 9 [1977]: 45-73; Daniel Patte, "Structural Analysis of the Parable of the Prodigal Son: Toward a Method," in *Semiology and Parables: An Exploration of the Possibilities Offered by Structuralism for Exegesis*, ed. Daniel Patte, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series, no. 9 [Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1976], 71-149); psychoanalytic (Mary A. Tolbert, "The Prodigal Son: An Essay in Literary Criticism from a Psychoanalytic Perspective," *Semeia* 9 [1977]: 1-20); psychotherapeutic (Richard Q. Ford, *The Parables of Jesus: Recovering the Art of Listening* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997]); and legal studies (Derrett, *Law in the New Testament*, 100-125). Along with these are the scores of commentaries, too numerous to mention.
parables that tell of things that were lost and found.¹

Several features in these parables indicate that they were intended by the Gospel writer to be read as a literary unit, part of Luke’s larger narrative of the Travel Narrative, in which Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem.² The parables of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-7) and the Lost Coin (8-10) constitute a characteristic pair,³ while the Prodigal Son (11-32) though related in subject is treated differently. The Prodigal Son is followed by the parable of the Unjust Steward in chap. 16 which some scholars see as having some sort of link.⁴

**Tradition Analysis**

The parable belongs to Luke’s L material. The origin of the parable or part of the


²Evidences for reading these parables as one literary unit are: (1) these parables share a common theme: God’s delight in a sinner’s repentance (vss. 7, 10, 24, 32); (2) the recurrence of words and phrases that unite these parables: repentance (vss. 7, 10, 18), joy/rejoice, make merry (vss. 5-7, 9-10, 23-24, 32), the lost is found (vss. 6, 9, 24, 32); (3) the story structure is similar for all these parables: loss, recovery, restoration, and celebration; (4) vss. 1-2 and 28-30 form an *inclusio* to the chapter. The complaint of the elder brother of his father’s acceptance of the prodigal son echoes the grumblings of the Pharisees and scribes who objected to Jesus’ association with "sinners." See Stephen C. Barton, "Parables on God’s Love and Forgiveness," in *The Challenge of Jesus’ Parables*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 201.

³They share a common structure: a man/a woman; one lost sheep/one lost coin; the sheep/coin is sought and found; a summoning of friends and neighbors for celebration; and a concluding lesson. Ibid.; cf. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 144-158.

parable has come under scrutiny by scholars. Some scholars view the parable as a purely Lucan composition and structured in a way to promote Lucan theology. However, a great many scholars differ, arguing that the parable belongs to a pre-Lucan tradition, though they accept that Luke had some stylistic influence on the material. Others maintain that Luke 15:11-24 originated from a pre-Lucan tradition while 15:25-32 is a


3Contra *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 6:4-5: "Tell me what sort of a father would give an inheritance to his son, and having received the money (the son) goes away leaving his father, and becomes an alien and in the service of aliens. The father then, seeing that the son has forsaken him (and gone away), darkens his heart and going away, he retrieves his wealth and banishes his son from his glory because he forsook his father."

In this picture God rejects the human race and reclaims his wealth. In the parable of the Prodigal Son the son spends all, comes to his senses, changes his thinking, and returns to his father who accepts him fully. This illustrates the love of an all-forgiving God. Cf. *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2:24: A King's son went out into evil courses, and the King sent his guardian (paidagogos) after him. "Return, my son," said he. But the son sent him back, saying to his father: "How can I return, I am ashamed." His father sent again saying: "My son, art thou indeed ashamed to return? Is it not to thy father that thou returnest?" Quoted from Israel Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), 142.
later expansion by Luke. However, there is no extant textual or compelling linguistic evidence for this assumption. Via posits that the first part (vss. 11-24) already has a rounded plot: beginning, middle, and end, and there is no reason to question vss. 25-32 as an original part of the parable. Luke 15:24 expresses the movement and meaning of the latter episode, bringing it within the thematic unity of the prodigal’s story.  

Jeremias explains it as a situation of a "double-edged" parable. In spite of the speculative notions about the parable’s historicity, the parable is widely accepted as authentically Jesus’. The quest for the origin of parables will continue to taunt the source critic for, in most instances, one is never quite sure about the process of transmission of parables.

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3 Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 131.

Historical Analysis

There is no reason to question the reliability of Luke’s account as fitting for the *sitz im Leben Jesu*.¹ The scene is one of conflict in which Jesus is verbally attacked by Pharisees and scribes for dining with "sinners." In response to their angry accusation, Jesus vindicates his association with, and proclamation, of the Good News, to the despised and outcasts against his critics.² In his actions, the love and forgiveness of God to the sinner are made effectual.³ In fact, the parabolic triad is a "justification of his [Jesus] mission to the last, the least, and the lost."⁴ The parable is a veiled assertion in which Jesus vindicates his authority; he is acting on behalf of God.⁵ The banquet imagery adds to this authority, and subtly points to the eschatological banquet. Jesus’ hearers must have recognized "that now is the time in which the lost come home" to feast in the eschatological meal provided by God, the host.⁶

In the *sitz im leben* of the evangelist, the call to repentance and the offer of

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²Jesus may have criticized the hypocritical practices of some Pharisees, but he did not attack Pharisaism as a religious movement. Cf. Young, *The Parables*, 136; idem, *Jesus and His Jewish Parables*, 143-154; John Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 38-42.

³R. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables*, 122.

⁴Hunter, *The Parables Then and Now*, 56.

⁵Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 128, 132.

⁶Linneman, 80.
salvation fits well with Luke’s general thrust of his Gospel. There is no reason to assume that he, too, could not have understood the parable with eschatological implications.

Exegetical Commentary

As mentioned earlier, the objective of this study would not require a diachronic critical analysis of the entire narrative, but only of the pertinent section that deals with the banquet scenario. Besides, the main story line in this parable is well known. Comments on the verses leading up to the banquet unit may be read in many sources. The banquet pericope involves vss. 22-28.

15:22 εἶπεν δὲ ὁ πατήρ πρὸς τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ, Ταχύς ἐξενέγκατε στολῆν τὴν πρώτην καὶ ἐνδύσατε αὐτὸν, καὶ δότε δακτύλιον εἰς τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ὑποδήματα εἰς τοὺς πόδας, 23 καὶ φέρετε τὸν μόσχον τὸν αιτετόν, θύσατε, καὶ φαγάντες εὐφραίνωμεν, 24 ὅτι οὗτος ὁ υἱὸς μου νεκρός ἦν καὶ ἀνέζησεν, ἡν ἀπολωλὼς καὶ εὑρέθη, καὶ ἤξεαυτῷ εὐφραίνεσθαι.

But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly bring out the best robe and dress him, place a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, and bring the fattened calf, slaughter it, and let us eat and be merry, because this my son was dead and has come to life again, he was lost and has been found.” And they began to be merry.

Earlier in the narrative, the younger of the father’s two sons asked for his share of the property. To the shock of the hearers, the father divided his property between the two sons. The younger son went off to live life his own way. We see him move from

1Stein, An Introduction to the Parables, 124.
2See the laws of disposition in Deut 21:15-17.
3For a detailed discussion on the appropriateness and feasibility of such an arrangement in the first century see Derrett, Law in the New Testament, 104-110; Bailey,
the bounty of his father's table to starvation in a pigsty, under the hand of a Gentile employer. He decided to return home, and prepared a homecoming speech, planning to ask to be taken on as a hired servant, the lowest kind of employee. At home, a waiting father recognized far in the distance his returning son. His love sent him running down the road, forgetful of his dignity and old age. In an impassioned embrace he warmly accepted the son into the family circle. The son was not able to finish his homecoming speech which he had rehearsed several times. The "impatient" father cuts him short.

In the touching scene that follows, the father commands his slave to supply tokens of forgiveness and reinstatement for the son. The expression στολήν τὴν πρώτην

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Poet and Peasant, 161-169. See also Stein, An Introduction to the Parables, 118-119.

There were three categories of servants in a household: (1) the bondsman (δουλος) who was regarded as part of the master's family and had a personal interest in the affairs of his master. He had considerable authority. Cf. the parable of the Wise and Foolish Servant, Matt 24:45-51 // Luke 12:42-46; (2) the bondservant (παιδος) who was one level lower below the bondsman. Bondservants were the abused servants in the parable of the Wise and Foolish Servant; and (3) the hired servant (μισθωτος) who was the lowest category of servants. He was regarded as an outsider having no access to or interest in the affairs of the family. He worked only when extra help was needed and could be dismissed at the pleasure of the master. He was regarded as inferior to the other servants and was subject to their direction. This is the position that the younger son requested. See Oesterley, 184. Cf. Neal Fisher, 66-67.


Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 130.
literally means “the first robe,” which could be “the first in quality”\(^1\); or “the foremost,”\(^2\) the best in the father’s wardrobe.\(^3\) It was a long flowing garment,\(^4\) the one described as used by angels (Mark 16:5) and glorified believers (Rev 6:11), and pictures formal attire.\(^5\) Bailey believes that it was the father’s ceremonial robe, the one he wore on feast days and grand occasions.\(^6\) Fisher adds that it is the type of robe a king would grant to a visiting official to mark the guest’s honor.\(^7\) The father’s robe-gesture assured the prodigal of acceptance by the community of invited guests at the banquet.\(^8\) According to Jeremias the robe was a symbol of the New Age,\(^9\) and carried with it eschatological significance.\(^10\)

\(^1\)Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 289.

\(^2\)Hultgren, 79. Nolland’s speculation that it was the “former” robe that the son wore before he left home and which was now restored to him as token of his reinstatement is arguable. \(στολή \, τήν \, πρώτην\) does not make any reference to \(αὐτοῦ\). See Nolland, 785.

\(^3\)Cf. *Jos. Asen.* 18:3; *Esth* 6:8; *Cant* 4:14; *Ezek* 27:22; *Amos* 6:6; *Acts Thom.* 6, line 5; 7, line 12.

\(^4\)Bauer, *BAGD*, s.v. "\(στολή\)."

\(^5\)Bock, 1314.

\(^6\)Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 185.


\(^8\)Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 185. See also Malina and Rohrbaugh, 372.

\(^9\)Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 130. The New Age in this context meant that the time of salvation had come. This event was to follow the Last Judgment. Ibid., 118-119.

\(^10\)Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 185.
Marshall regards it as an indication of status, reminiscent of Gen 41:42.1

The signet ring reinstated the prodigal as one who could once more mark documents with his own sign, thereby reinstating his authority2 and membership in the family.3 Bailey notes that now he was trusted in a remarkable way.4 δότε δακτύλιον translated "give a ring" is a hapax legomenon which reflects a Semitic idiom in the sense of "place a ring" (cf. Luke 12:51).5 The "sandals on his feet" implied two things for the prodigal: he was now a freeman,6 and not a slave,7 and he was now reinstated as a person of authority.8

The robe, ring, sandals, and guest of honor are motifs precursory to the banquet scene. The father's reunion with his son arouses a mood of festivity. He orders the


3Bock, 1315. However, Bock does not see here a transfer of authority in which the younger brother assumes the office of the elder brother.

4Bailey, Poet and Peasant, 185.


8The order that the slaves place the shoes on the prodigal's feet implied that they were to acknowledge him as their master. See Derrett, Law in the New Testament, 113-114.
slaughter of the fattened calf.\(^1\) τὸν μύσχον τὸν σίτευτον makes reference to an animal specifically fed and kept to be slaughtered on a special occasion.\(^2\) Meat was rarely eaten, except on special occasions.\(^3\) The meat provided for this banquet feast could feed a sizable company,\(^4\) and since the father wished to truly honor his son, a community of guests must be invited. The son becomes the chief guest of honor, a gesture designed by a loving father to reconcile a prodigal to his estranged community. Here is Jesus restoring honor to societal outcasts and, by extension, to Gentiles (in Luke’s fashion) in the community of faith.

Of all the emblems bestowed upon the prodigal by his father, none gave the prodigal greater honor in the eyes of the community than the banquet. By hosting the feast, the father truly honors his son. This banquet was a celebration of the life of a son who had been “dead” (malnourished), and now was alive. \(\epsilon\upsilon\phi\rho\alpha\iota\nu\omega\) is used four times in

\(^1\)Scott perceives that the killing of the calf and the feast alludes to the theme of nourishment. The starving son had been malnourished, now he would be well fed. Starving and feasting stand side by side to effect the restoration theme. The vocabulary of dead/alive and lost/found is convenient for the support of this theme. In famine the son faced death and in separation from his family he was lost. See Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 118.


\(^3\)Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 130.

\(^4\)Bailey conjectures that the meat could feed over one hundred guests, enough for the marriage of the elder son, or the visit of the governor of the province. See Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 187. Contra Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 130. Jeremias estimates that the meat was enough for the immediate family and the servants.
the narrative (vss. 23, 24, 29, 32) to heighten the joy motif.¹ The dead/alive and
lost/found motifs bring the first half of the parable to a rounded closure. The lost and
found motif suggests linkages to the preceding parables of Lost Sheep and Lost Coin.

25 Ἡν δὲ ὁ γαῖος αὐτῶν ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἐν ἀγρῷ καὶ ως ἐρχόμενος ἤγγισεν τῇ οίκῳ, ἦκουσεν συμφωνίας καὶ χορῶν. 26 καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος ἐκαὶ τῶν παιδιών ἐπιμεθάνετο τῇ ἐν εἰδή ταύτα. 27 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἦκει, καὶ ἔθεσαν ὁ παῦρ σου τὸν μύχον τὸν αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἔγναίνουτα αὐτῶν ἀπέλαβεν.

Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he
heard music and dancing, and when he had summoned one of the young boys he
began to question what might these things be? And he said to him: "Your brother
has come, and your father slaughtered the fattened calf, because he has received him
back in good health."

Vs. 25 begins the second half of the parable. The explicit reference to the elder
brother alludes to a folklore tradition of elder/younger brothers in antiquity.² Nolland
rightly posits that ἐν ἀγρῷ is quasi-adverbial and is best rendered "in the field."³ This
phrase implies that the older son is hardworking and loyal. Jesus is here hinting at similar

¹Cf. the joy motif in the parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin in vss. 6 and 9.
See also vss. 7 and 10.

²See a midrash on Ps 9: "R. Berechiah said in the name of R. Jonathan: . . . the
verse means therefore that God has set love of little children in their father's hearts. For
example, there was a king who had two sons, one grown up, the other a little one. The
grown-up one was scrubbed clean, and the little one was covered with dirt, but the king
loved the little one more than he loved the grown-up one." Braude, 1:131. Cf. stories in
the Old Testament where the younger son was the favorite: Cain and Abel, Ishmael and
Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and later Benjamin. See also Mal 1:2-3; Gal 4:22-31. At
the Seder meal the youngest asks the question of the mighty acts God did for Israel.

³Nolland, 786.
traits exercised by the Jewish leaders. The family depicted in this story is well-to-do,\(^1\) thus, the older son may be in the field in some supervisory capacity. It is rather strange that no one informs him of this celebration and he must find out for himself.\(^2\)

The translations of συμφωνίας καὶ χορῶν are many and varied.\(^3\) συμφωνίας could mean "(the sound of) music (loud singing and clapping),"\(^4\) "band or orchestra,"\(^5\) or "a wind instrument" such as a double flute,\(^6\) or double pipe.\(^7\) χορῶν may mean dancing (with choral singing)\(^8\) by the men.\(^9\) One thing is clear: a loud, boisterous, joyous celebration was in progress when the elder brother drew near the house. ἕνα τῶν παιδῶν is best translated "one of the young boys." Two evidences support this, according to

\(^1\)Peter Jones assumes that the father was a rural aristocrat with a herd from which to choose a fat calf and several servants. See Peter Rhea Jones, *Studying the Parables of Jesus* (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 1999), 234.

\(^2\)Marshall speculates whether he was on speaking terms with his father or might have been a workaholic. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 611. In any case, when interpreting the parables one must always be cautious about stretching the imagination too far to find explanations for missing links in the narrative, because events in the story sometimes go contrary to the reader’s expectations of events in common life.

\(^3\)Bailey mentions the varied explanations for the phrase in *Poet and Peasant*, 192.

\(^4\)Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 130.


\(^8\)Nolland, 786.

\(^9\)Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 130; see also Bauer, *BAGD*, s.v. "χορός."
Bailey: the older brother calls him from a group of children, perhaps playing outside the house while the servants are busy with the banquet inside the house; and the young boy calls the father, “your father.” A servant would rather say: “My master . . .”

But he became angry and was not willing to go in, but his father went out and kept on beseeching him.

ωργίσθη is an ingressive aorist, and ἤθελεν is a desiderative imperfect. He became so angry that he would have nothing to do with the party. The subsequent verses would show that he regards his father’s actions as “a sign of favoritism, especially in the light of his own faithfulness.”

Banquet custom necessitated the elder brother’s presence, acting as joint-host with his father. To abstain from this position and to refuse to participate in the banquet brought public shame and dishonor to the father. The repeated entreaty of the father, seen in the use of iterative imperfect (παρεκάλει), shows the father’s great desire to have the elder brother included in the banquet. Here is Jesus reaching out to the hard-hearted Jewish leadership. The door to the banquet was still open.

1See a detailed discussion in Bailey, Poet and Peasant, 193-194.

2Bock, 1316.

3Ibid., 195.

4P75 and B read ἐρίφιον. Either term means a young male goat, but the latter (a diminutive of the former) emphasizes how small the gift would be. The former has the weightier evidence, and the latter is considered an interpolation by a scribe to make a subtle interpretative point. See Bauer, BAGD, s.v. “ἐρίφος,” and “ἐρίφιον.” D renders ἐρίφος ἐξ αἰγών.
εὔφρανθω· 30 ὃτε δὲ ὁ υἱὸς σου ὁ ὁ κατάφαιων σου τὸν βιόν μετὰ πορνῶν ἤλθεν, ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ τὸν αὐτευτὸν μόσχον.

But he answered and said to his father, “Look, so many years I have been slaving for you and I never disregarded your command, and you never gave a kid to me, so that I might be merry with my friends. But when your son, the one who devoured your livelihood with whores, came, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.”

These verses tell us something about the thinking of the elder brother towards his father: he claims that in reality he is the long-standing faithful child and the father does not recognize that. He thinks that his father is ungrateful for all the obedience he has shown; and he judges that his father is partial in his treatment of the younger brother.

The older son’s repugnant attitude is revealed in the following: He does not address his father as “Father” as the younger son does in vss. 12, 18, and 21. He more or less exhibits the attitude of a slave, not a son, with the use of the expression, τοσαύτα ἔτη δούλευόν σοι. He boasts that he scrupulously keeps his father’s commands, yet he publicly insults him by violating the fifth commandment. The word ἐντολή probably makes ironic reference to the “commandment-keeping” Pharisees and scribes. The older son accuses his father of paternal favoritism by drawing attention to the fact that the rebellious brother gets a calf and he never got as much as a kid.

These verses also tell us something about his attitude to his brother: He prefers to

1οὐδέποτε ἐντολήν σου παρῆλθον is nearly identical to Deut 26:13 in the LXX (οὐ παρῆλθον τῇ ἐντολήν σου). The context here requires ἐντολήν translated as commandment.

2In New Testament times, a kid was worth about one-tenth as much as a cow. A goat was worth two-thirds of a shekel; a cow, ten shekels. See Edwin Firmağe, "Zoology," The Anchor Bible Dictionary (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1119-1120.
have a feast with his friends, rather than with his own brother. He casts aspersion at the younger brother, alleging that he led a promiscuous life with his father's subsistence (βίος), without finding out the details of the matter. His disparaging use of the expression ó υἱός σου οὗτος implies that he no longer counted the younger son as his brother.

31 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Τέκνον, σὺ πάντοτε μετ' ἐμοῖ εἰ, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐμὰ σὰ ἔστιν. 32 εὐφρανθήματι δὲ καὶ χαρῆναι ἔδει, ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφὸς σου οὗτος νεκρὸς ἦν καὶ ἐζησεν, καὶ ἀπολύσεως καὶ εὑρέθη.

But (he) the father said to him, "Child, you are always with me, and all my things are yours; but it was necessary to be merry and rejoice, because your brother, this one was dead and has begun to live, and had been lost and was found."

After such a tirade of words against the father, one would normally expect the father to retort with fury. Rather, the father responds with tender love and patient understanding. The use of τέκνον confirms the affection the father has for this son. The father's response using πάντοτε, which stands in contrast to οὐδέποτε in vs. 29, assures the son that all the father's possessions are still his. By this, the father seeks to clear up the son's doubt that he is in any way unfair. ἀδελφὸς σου οὗτος νεκρὸς appears to be a deliberate play on the older son's words in vs. 30 inviting gentle emphasis on "brother."

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1The word βίος means "life," "manner of life," or "means of subsistence," as opposed to οὐσία used in vss. 11 and 13 to mean "property." See Nolland, 782, 787.


In other words, “he is not just my son; he is your brother.”1 With this, the father renews his appeal for the brother to join the banquet celebration. The imperfect εἶτε reaches from the past to the present joy; it necessitates joy.2 With this, Jesus is reaching out to the hearers, especially the Pharisees and scribes, inviting them to the end-time banquet, and to “the proleptic celebration of the kingdom of God.”3 The elder brother’s response is open-ended. The question to Jesus’ hearers is “what is your decision now?”

Summary Statement of What the Parable Meant

The parable is highly polyvalent. It makes several points about attitudes. They fall under five headings, describing contrasting attitudes displayed by God, sinners (outcasts), and the professed righteous (the outwardly pious). I find these attitudes to be:

1. The attitude of sinners toward God: sinners have deserted God and are called to repent;
2. The attitude of God toward sinners: God receives them with joy;
3. The attitude of the professed righteous toward sinners: a harsh and censorious attitude which is not befitting that of the pious;
4. The attitude of the professed righteous toward God: an ungenerous estimate of God that is not accurate;
5. The attitude of God toward the professed righteous: God reaches out to them with forgiving love.

God’s attitude stands out among all the attitudes. The father (representing God) is the main focus in the two parts and ties the parable into a unitary whole. He has the last

1Bock, 1319.
3Ernst Fuchs, Das urchristliche Sakramentsverständnis Vorlesungen (Bad Cannstatt: Müllerschön, 1965), 24, 38. Cf. Linneman, 80; Bailey, Poet and Peasant, 204.
word in each incident (vss. 22-24 in the first, and vss. 31-32 in the last). The first part of
the parable tells of God’s love and patience towards sinners and the joy with which he
receives sinners. The second part shows God’s utmost patience and love to the professed
righteous ones who cherish a censorious attitude toward sinners.

The banquet aspect of the parable subtly calls for a decision in view of the
imminent eschatological judgment. Each must decide how he or she will respond to the
love and call of God to enter the eschatological banquet. The decision one makes
determines the conclusion of the parable. In the first part, God invites the Gentiles and
outcasts of society at his banquet table (this was a reversal of normal human
expectations). In the second part, God pleads with the Jewish leaders to join in the
celebration of banquet fellowship.

Type-Scene Analysis

Literary Structure

The surface structure of the parable reveals two parallel parts, distinct from each
other. The first part deals with the younger son (12-24), and the second part deals with
the elder brother (25-32). The opening verse (11) functions as an overarching
introduction for the two halves of the parable. It introduces the three characters in the

1For a detailed structure, showing patterns of inverted parallelisms, see Bailey,
Poet and Peasant, 159-161 for the first part; 190-191 for the second part; and 204-205,
for a comparison of the two parts. Scott looks at the paratactic and participle/finite verb
patterns of the two acts in the parable. See Scott, Hear Then the Parable, 106-108.
story. In each part of the parable the son’s actions are followed by the father’s actions.1 The actual banquet scene appears between vss. 22-28: the last three verses of the first part, and the first four verses of the second part. The banquet scene provides the setting for the transition of act 1 in the parable to act 2. It unites the two parts into a smooth narrative flow.

Plot

As in the other banquet parables in Luke’s Gospel, the parable of the Prodigal Son functions as another kernel in Luke’s Travel Narrative. The plot of the parable revolves around its two major episodes. It is an example of a parallel-plot type of parable with one scene (the younger son and the father) standing in relation with the second scene (the elder son and the father). This plot encourages a comparison of the two episodes. This is clearly seen in Tolbert’s analysis of the parable in terms of alternation of narrated

1Some commentators support a three-part structure. Funk’s structure is based upon a tri-episodic pattern: (1) fall, return of the younger son (crisis); (2) father’s reception (response); and (3) older son’s reception (response). See Robert Funk, "Structure in the Narrative Parables of Jesus," 63. Blomberg’s structure revolves around the three main characters: (1) the younger son’s departure and return (vss. 11-20a), (2) the father’s welcome (20b-24), and (3) the elder son’s reaction (25-32). See Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 174. Cf. Cadoux, 123. Hultgren’s threefold structure displays the following: (1) the departure of the younger son from his father to a far country where he is wasteful and eventually in want (11-19), (2) the homecoming of the son and his welcome by the father (20-24), and (3) the episode between the father and the older brother (25-32). See Hultgren, 73; cf. Donahue, The Gospel in Parable, 152.

The main weakness of a three-part structure is that it is slow to recognize the unitary role the father plays in the entire narrative structure. The emphasis gravitates to the younger son as the main character, and not the father.
The parable abounds in surprises. A number of role reversals break normal expectations. The audience probably expects the elder brother to mediate for or even scold his impetuous little brother. Instead, he acts as a greedy hypocrite. One expects the son to die of starvation rather than shamefully return home. Upon the son’s return, the audience would expect the father to scathingly scold him for the abuse, dishonor, and heartache he has caused. The plot of the story is a lively drama of polar reversals that captivates the listeners and propels them to embrace the unconditional love of God.

The plot is modeled after the Guests and Host Response type-scene but with several major variations. A significant variation is seen in the reversal of the normal sequence rejection/acceptance of two groups of invited people. Within the parable is a subtle and nuanced narrative of God’s response to Jews and Gentiles, different from others found in the Gospels. In Luke’s previous banquet parables the acceptance of the outcasts and Gentiles typically followed the rejection of the Jewish leaders. However, in this instance, the dealings with the groups are reversed. Jesus offers acceptance to the outcasts and Gentiles first, followed by an offer to accept the self-righteous Jewish leaders next. On this acceptance offer Scott raises an interesting point. He surmises that if the Pharisees are rejected at the primary level of the narrative, and at the intermediate level of the narrative the elder brother is identified with the Pharisees, there is an implied rejection of the elder brother, though in the narrative itself there is no rejection of the

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1Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 98. More elaboration is made on this in the following section on Characterization.
elder brother.¹ If this is the case, it is a situation of acceptance/rejection
(inclusion/exclusion) of the two groups represented in the persons of the younger brother
and elder brother respectively. The inclusion of the younger brother is explicit and the
exclusion of the elder brother is implied.

The parable is also a character-oriented plot, in which the actions of the characters
determine the movement in the plot. The hero in the narrative is the father. His younger
son returns home. He summons his servants to put things in place for a banquet
(preparation). He hosts the banquet in celebration of the once-lost son. No selective
invitation is mentioned. The son’s sudden return precludes any prior invitation. No
doubt, the community members and the servants of the entire household were welcomed
to the banquet on short notice. There is no reason to doubt that the occasion called for an
open invitation. No notification was required in this case. Presumably, the community
guests came and the banquet proceeded with full pomp. Naturally, the younger son held
the high honor of being chief guest.

The elder brother returns from his hard day’s work on the farm. His surprise at a
banquet celebration without prior notice parallels the surprise of his younger brother. It
was a surprise for him as well as the younger brother. The narrator has had the elder
brother out of the picture until now, so that the reconciliation could take place with the
younger brother, his father, and his community (law of single perspective, in which the

¹Scott sees Luke 15 operating from three interrelated levels: the first or primary
level has its purpose in the vindication of Jesus’ association with sinners, the third level
are the three parables having their own separate characters and plots; and the second or
intermediate level, in which the primary level intertwines with the third level stories, to
make a completed narrative unit. Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 101-103.
reader is not allowed to watch more than one perspective at a time). Also, it is typical of
parables that an economy of not more than two characters must interface at any specific
time (law of stage duality). If other characters are present, they function only as agents
and are placed in the background.

The narrator would have the elder brother discover in a series of steps what
transpired while he was absent. At first, the elder brother acts suspicious. The narrator
has the servant repeat the cause for the event. This helps the reader to appreciate the
necessity for the occasion from a different point of view. This also brings out the anger
and true nature of the elder brother. The elder brother not only arrives late for the
banquet, but blatantly refuses to join in the celebration (guests' reaction). He becomes
furious. Here is a reversal of roles in the banquet type-scene.

The typical reaction of the host to a repulsive guest in the Guests' and Host
Response type-scene was to send the servants to find a replacement. A guest with such
an attitude requires zero tolerance for such disrespect to the host, especially when the host
is his father. However, the father, in this instance, entreats the stubborn guest. This is a
significant variation of the type-scene. It would have been an unexpected shock to the
hearers to hear that the host earnestly begs the protesting guest to join in the feast.

Subtly underlying the banquet imagery is the eschatological judgment. The warm
invitation to the elder brother in the parable mellows the eschatological judgment motif,
making the eschatological banquet available not only to "sinners" but also to the
"righteous." The door to the father's banquet stood open for both sons. The narrator
does not indicate that the elder brother entered the banquet. The parable's ending leaves
the hearer without an ending,\textsuperscript{1} demonstrative of the parable’s high art.\textsuperscript{2} The question arises: What did the elder brother do? Did he go in? Rather the question should be, What should he do? In the light of the previous banquet parables where the Jewish leaders are excluded from the banquet by their own refusal to attend, one can safely assume that the rejection theme is implied. This assumption is based upon the elder brother’s own persistent revolting behavior.

Characterization

This story has been commonly called the parable of the Prodigal Son. As a result of this title, the tendency has been to place the emphasis on the younger brother.\textsuperscript{3} Some scholars have reacted to this tendency, and claim that the greater emphasis is to be placed on the elder brother.\textsuperscript{4} However, most scholars today see the \textit{dramatis persona} as the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1}Scott, \textit{Hear Then the Parable}, 122.
  \item \textsuperscript{2}Geraint Jones, 169.
  \item \textsuperscript{3}In the French tradition it is called \textit{Le fils prodigue}. In the German tradition it is known as the parable of the \textit{Der verlorene Sohn}. Cf. Kahlefeld, 91.
\end{itemize}
father, generating such titles as the parable of "the Waiting Father,"\textsuperscript{1} "the Loving Father"\textsuperscript{2} "the Father's Love,"\textsuperscript{3} and "the Gracious Father."\textsuperscript{4}

There are three protagonists in the narrative. Blomberg describes the parable as a monarchic parable: a triadic structure in which the authority figure, usually a king, father, or master, typically acts as a judge between the two subordinates, who in turn exhibit contrasting behavior.\textsuperscript{5} Each plays a significant role in the drama. Of the three, the father gives most shape to the narrative; he is mentioned twelve times in the story. Since the father's actions serve as a unifying ingredient of the two divisions of the narrative, the main character must be the father, whose extraordinary love and patience are demonstrated for both sons.\textsuperscript{6} This is a parable of a father's forgiving love for his two lost sons.\textsuperscript{7} Hence, the parable is best titled: The Father of the Two Lost Sons.\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{1}Helmut Thielicke, \textit{The Waiting Father: Sermons on the Parables of Jesus} (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959); Hunter, \textit{The Parables Then and Now}, 59; Hillyer Hawthorne Straton, \textit{A Guide to the Parables of Jesus} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 75.


\textsuperscript{3}Geraint Jones, 172.

\textsuperscript{4}Stein, \textit{Introduction to the Parables}, 115.

\textsuperscript{5}Blomberg, \textit{Interpreting the Parables}, 171.


\textsuperscript{8}Cf. Young, \textit{The Parables}, 130.
Characterization is dramatic in this parable. As with many of Jesus' parables, the narrator of this one gives few clues with regard to the motivation of the characters. This determination is left to the reader to decipher by the words and actions of the characters. In the first half of the parable the focus is on the younger son; the second half tells of the older son. The two halves of the parable invite a comparison of the traits of the two brothers and their relationships with their father (cf. the parable of the Two Sons, Matt 21:28-32). The father's actions are revealed in the two parts, inviting a comparison of the traits of the father and the two sons, especially the older son, and his relationship with them.

The sons reveal their relationships with their father most vividly in their direct speeches: the younger, especially in his soliloquy;¹ the elder brother, especially in his dialogue with the young boy. Tolbert's findings in her comparison of these two characters in the parallel plot are interesting. Her study on the alternating use of the narrator's discourse (ND) and direct discourse (DD) reveals ten units: the first two setting the stage for the action, and the rest dividing into parallel sections of four units. The study shows the following:


2. DD: Younger son's request that divides the family (12a)

3. ND: Younger son's journey away (12b-16)
   DD: Younger son's decision to return (17-19)
   ND: Father's reception of younger son (20)
   DD: Younger son's confession and father's response (21-24a)

¹Cf. Exod 10:16; 1 Kgs 8:47; Prov 29:3; Hos 2:7.
As evidenced in this study the father's response to the two sons is the crowning act of the two sections. The younger son comes to himself, then comes to his father, his father goes out to him, while the elder brother comes to the house, but refuses to join the celebration, and his father goes out to him too.

The father's response and actions are extreme. The narrator portrays him seeing the younger son at a distance, which means that he must go out to meet him running. The father's generous reception of the younger son with kisses and embraces, his order to fetch a robe, ring, and shoes, and the hosting of a feast with a fatted calf demonstrate his "extravagance." Here is God's love reaching out to sinners—outcasts and Gentiles. The eschatological banquet door is held wide open for them. They are invited to join in table fellowship with Jesus.

The elder son does not come from the field until the feast is already underway. This allows for his protest to be revealed in his refusal to join in the feast. He is suspicious, so he asks for an explanation instead of joining the celebration. The young man's repetition of the father's actions in vs. 27 confirms the father's relationship with the younger brother. Through this repetition and change in perspective, the narrator shrewdly makes preparation for the son's rejection of the father's entreaty. The narrator also allows the reader to appreciate the action of the father from a different point of view.

1Tolbert, Perspectives on the Parables, 98.
The story to this point has been narrated from the father's point of view. Previously, the other two characters in the narrative are described as sons (vss. 11, 12, 13, 19, 21, 24, 25). For the first time in the narrative, the reader sees a son as a brother. This is expedient for the elder brother to challenge the father for his partial treatment of the younger brother.

The father's generosity is demonstrated in his gesture of going out to meet the elder son. In fact, he has gone out to meet the two sons. This is not typical of the banquet type-scene in which the servants go out to invite or to welcome the guests. The narrator took care to show the father's affection for the elder brother just as for his runaway son. As elder brother, the older son compares himself with his younger brother, and in so doing, he also compares his views with those of his father's. From his perspective, the younger brother is a prodigal while he has been as a faithful slave in all of his father's commands. However, from the father's point of view the prodigal was dead and had come back to life; he was lost and had been found. At this point, the story requires the listener to choose between the older son and the father. It forces the reader to reject the attitude of the older son and accept that of the father. In the historical context of the story the listener was forced to choose either the attitude of Jesus' critics or Jesus in dealing with erring fellowmen. In this way, the parable deals with the right and wrong attitude towards God.¹

The father is a veiled reference to God. His actions are surprising and, as such, they cut through the ordinary way of looking at things and point to God's ways. He is

¹Charles Smith, 80.
portrayed in terms of love and paternal indulgence. The father's patience is a gentle rebuke to the elder son, who represents the censorious scribes and Pharisees. Here we see God's attitude to those who refuse to enter the banquet. He patiently entreats them and yearns for them to enjoy the sumptuous menu he has prepared.

In response to the angry accusations of the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus teaches that true religion is not the separation of "sinners" from table fellowship, but separation from anything that inhibits a "full commitment to the God who is drawing near (cf. 14:25-33). It is not a status to be possessed and hedged around for self-protection, but a relationship to be celebrated and shared." Jesus introduces a new economy of eschatological reverberations—a reordering of priorities. There is to be no separation from the rich and poor, the lowly and the mighty. The coming of Jesus inaugurates the time of eschatological salvation when God offers his mercy to all, both prince and pauper. God loves both, Jew and Gentile, equally and refuses to choose between them, confirming each in turn as his son.

**Theme**

A number of obvious themes and interests are developed in this parable: wasting wealth versus storing it up, repentance and returning to God, the lost and found,

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2 Stephen Barton, 203.

3 Scott, *Jesus Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom*, 56.
compassion for the most wretched, broken family relationships,\(^1\) the wideness of God's mercy,\(^2\) God's dealing with sinners,\(^3\) God's attitude towards sinners,\(^4\) the extravagant goodness of God to sinners in his kingdom,\(^5\) rejoicing in the salvation of others,\(^6\) and the divine joy which accompanies human repentance and homecoming.\(^7\) The lists can proliferate. Described in a single word, these themes speak of "grace" or "acceptance." In the first half of the parable God's grace is extravagant. In the second half, the extravagant grace of God is contrasted with the joyless and unforgiving spirit of the self-righteous. God's grace takes in the entire spectrum from the most irreligious sinner to the most hard-hearted, miserable-spirited, outwardly pious saint.

The actual banquet scenario portrays an inclusion/exclusion theme, atypical of Luke's exclusion/inclusion sequence. The inclusion aspect is explicit, while the exclusion aspect is implied. Several banquet motifs support this theme. The reversal motif occurs where the sinner and outcast are honored, while the professed saint's faithfulness is rewarded according to his or her response. The robe, ring, and shoes

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\(^1\)Young, *The Parables*, 130.

\(^2\)Hunter, *The Parable Then and Now*, 52.

\(^3\)Wilfrid Harrington, *Parables Told by Jesus*, 132.

\(^4\)Pentecost, 100.

\(^5\)Hunter, *The Parables Then and Now*, 52.


motifs imply honor and authority for the accepted one and add color to the banquet setting. The veal on the menu indicates great rejoicing and high honor for the one who accepts the invitation.

The refusal and squabble of the elder brother with the father anticipate the narrator’s silence of his subsequent response to the father’s persistent invitation. What his response would be is left to the implied reader to decide. The exclusion dimension would be enacted only after the implied reader judges what the elder brother would do. In this parable exclusion lurks where inclusion is proclaimed.

Summary

The diachronic critical analysis and the narratorial analysis of the banquet section of the parable shared similar results. They reveal that the parable contrasts different attitudes toward the kingdom. They are God’s attitude towards guests at his banquet table and two kinds of responses from sinners to the eschatological invitation. Both analyses revealed the preeminence of God’s attitude towards sinners over the sinners’ responses to him. However, in the narratorial analysis, the literary skill with which the composer of the parable establishes God’s precedence is more outstanding.

The boundless love of God is demonstrated to both kinds of listeners: the sinner, outcast, or Gentile, and the super-religious, the Jewish leader, or outwardly pious saint. God invites all to his banquet table. In the final analysis, all depends on a decision to accept the invitation to the eschatological banquet of God or to reject it. One’s decision determines whether one is included or excluded at the banquet table. Once more, the
theme of inclusion/exclusion is highlighted in both approaches.

The Banquet Type-Scene within the Context of the Gospel Narratives

In the last section, the parables were analyzed looking at how the banquet type-scene functioned in each parable separately. This section shows how the banquet type-scene functions in the parables in their larger contexts in the narratives of the Synoptic Gospels. This gives the reader a greater perspective and appreciation on how the Gospel writers used the type-scene convention in effective ways to create meaning and beauty.

Matthean Context

The contexts for the banquet parables of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew are basically the same. In Matthew’s plot, there is a lack of response among the Jews. The Jewish leaders repeatedly challenge the authority of Jesus. Finally, the Jews, especially the leaders, reject the messiahship of Jesus. God, in turn, rejects them, and accepts the Gentiles into banquet fellowship. Two parables leading up to the parables of the Great Supper and the Wedding Garment foster Matthew’s plot of judgment.¹ The banquet parables serve as kernels in Matthew’s ongoing plot. Each type-scene in the parables helps to bring about the movement in Matthew’s plot to effect the judgment theme.

The parables of the Great Supper and the Wedding Garment create a situation of a clustered banquet type-scene.² Here we find a narrative frequency of the type-scene

¹The Two Sons, Matt 21:28-32; the Wicked Tenants, 21:33-44. See also the subsection, "Literary Context" in the parable of the Great Supper, above.

²See pp. 92, 98, above.
twice, in two narratives that share the common theme of inclusion/exclusion. The banquet type-scene (the Guests and Host Response) in the parable of Great Supper shows God's rejection (exclusion) of the Jewish nation (the first group of invitees to the eschatological banquet) and his open invitation (inclusion) to the Gentiles. There is also a lack of preparedness among believers in Matthew's church (the second group of invitees) concerning the *parousia*. The banquet type-scene (the Wise and Foolish Invitees) of the Wedding Garment, which follows the parable of Great Supper, elaborates further on the exclusion theme, at the same time emphasizing the necessity for readiness for the coming judgment.

The singulative type-scene (the Wise and Foolish Invitees) of the parable of the Ten Virgins in chap. 25 continues to address the question of who would be included or excluded in the judgment and readiness for the *parousia*. The inclusion/exclusion and readiness themes are also seen in Matthew's Eschatological Discourse, and especially, in the parables of the Householder and the Thief (Matt 24:43), the Wise and Foolish Servant (24:45-51), and the Talents (25:14-30). The parable of the Ten Virgins is the final pericope that emphasizes the need for preparation for the Last Judgment.

The three Matthean parables under study portray a wedding banquet. Their effectiveness is seen in the narrator's ability to use the banquet type-scene in varied ways to teach lessons about preparedness for the kingdom. They address the question of who would be included in the kingdom and who would be excluded.
Lucan Context

The arrangement of the banquet parables in the Gospel of Luke is purposive. These parables are situated in the Travel Narrative, in which Jesus is heading to Jerusalem. On his journey he is in constant conflict with Jewish leaders. They continually reject his ministry and his teaching, while the outcasts warmly receive him. The leaders will finally reject and crucify him in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 13:33). In Luke’s narrative, the narrator links a number of units in a way to reciprocate this rejection by highlighting Jesus’ rejection of the Jewish nation, especially the Jewish leaders, and his acceptance of the Gentiles and other outcasts. Luke uses the banquet parables to demonstrate the radical reversal of fortunes in the final Judgment. The workings of the banquet type-scene in the banquet parables of Luke help to reveal this polar reversal: The Jewish leaders or the unrepentant will be excluded and the Gentiles or the faithful will be included.

The parable of the Narrow Door (Luke 13:22-30) betrays a singulative banquet type-scene that anticipates the parables in Luke 14. In fact, it functions as an introduction to the banquets in chap. 14. First, the anonymous question (vs. 23) that provoked the parable is analogous to the anonymous macarism that provoked the parable of the Great Supper in 14:15. The repetition of the pronoun τοις in these two verses suggests a verbal


correspondence. Second, Jesus’ warning about the first being last and last being first (13:30) contemplates Jesus’ admonition in the parable of Places at a Feast that a banquet guest should not occupy the place of honor (first place), but go to the last place (14:8-10). Here, we see the use of πρῶτος and ἔσχατος as verbal links in the two parables. Third, the banquet type-scene in the parable in a way foreshadows the type-scenes of the banquet parables in chap. 14, being a composite of the three subtype-scenes that make up the banquet type-scene. Fourth, the type-scene of this parable is the first of the banquet parables in the Travel Narrative to support an exclusion/inclusion theme. When interpreted in the larger context of the journey section of Luke, this parable prepares the reader for a more involved discussion of the reversal motif and the theme of exclusion/inclusion.

There is a deliberate interplay of banquet scenes in the overall plot of Luke 14:1-24. The banquet scene functions at three levels. First, an actual banquet is the setting for Jesus’ discourses (14:1). Second, in the actual banquet, Jesus renders two parables about banquet etiquette (14:7-14). Third, in the actual banquet, three parables use the banquet metaphor to teach about the eschatological kingdom (14:7-24).²

The narrator’s use of a clustered banquet type-scene adds to the richness of the narrative, bringing beauty and meaning to Scripture. Words that serve to link the various 

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¹Mussner maintains that the response of such anonymous queries was analogous to the preaching style echoed in 4 Esra 8:1, 2. He goes so far as to say that the structure of the parable of the Great Supper is influenced by the formulation of the parable of the Narrow Door. See Mussner, 140-141.

units are "to eat bread" (14:1, 15), "wedding feast" and "dinner" (14:8, 12, 16), and "to invite" (14: 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 24). ¹ καλέω, in all its morphological forms, is used nine times, and seems to be the key word that binds the whole section together.

Funk recognizes that Jesus addresses those present at the banquet in the following order: the lawyers and Pharisees (vs. 3), the invited guests (vs. 7), the host (vs. 12), and, lastly, a guest reclining at the table (vs. 15).² Noël sees in this ordering an intentional design in which the function of vss. 1, 3, 7, 12, and 15 is to connect one small scene to another in the narrative.³ Each verse in this string of verses serves as a bridge to connect each banquet type-scene into a unitary whole.

Unitary links are formed in strategic ways by the narrator. Vss. 1 and 3 provide the setting for the entire narrative of Luke 14:1-24. The time is the Sabbath, the occasion is a dinner, the host is a leading Pharisee, the invited guests are lawyers and Pharisees (members of the Sanhedrin) and Jesus, and the immediate situation is that "they were watching him."⁴ The guests were closely watching Jesus to see whether he would heal the man of dropsy on the Sabbath. In a polar reversal in vs. 7, the narrator describes

²Ibid.
⁴Literally, "they were standing by the side and watching him" or "watching carefully as though trying to trap Jesus without him knowing it," from παρατηρεώ. See Rogers and Rogers, 145.
Jesus as watching\textsuperscript{1} them as they chose the places of honor at the banquet table.

In vs. 7 Jesus addresses the invited guests, "when he noticed how they were choosing for themselves the places of honor." His parable of Places at a Feast (vss. 8-11) brought to focus a startling rebuke to the Jewish leaders. Not only did he correct their unbefitting demeanor, but shocked his audience by articulating advice that went contrary to their expectation with regard to banquet procedure. Against the background of the Eminence of Guests type-scene, he shrewdly varied the convention to teach a lesson on humility versus self-seeking, and the reversal of places in the eschaton that put the leaders last and those they rejected first.

The parable of Places at a Feast prepares the way for the next parable, the Choice of Guests (vss. 12-14). Jesus now turns to the one who invited him to the banquet and offers advice on inviting guests. Of course the advice was meant also for the guests (the Jewish leaders) present who at some point would act also as hosts. Using the Guests and Host Response type-scene as his framework, Jesus veers from the conventional mode of thinking of that time by recommending that selective invitations must first be given to the outcasts of society. The mention of the outcasts (the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind) anticipates the repeated mention of them (vs. 21) in the upcoming parable of the Great Supper.\textsuperscript{2} Here is a clear indication of Jesus' interest in the outcasts, who will make

\textsuperscript{1}The word used is \textit{ἐπέλεγε} meaning that "he looked with intent" or "directed his mind on the situation." Fritz Rienecker, \textit{A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 183.

\textsuperscript{2}However, in this instance, there is a slight variation in the order (the poor, the crippled, the blind, then the lame).
up the guest list of God’s eschatological banquet. The lesson taught in this narrative is that in the final analysis there will be a reversal of destinies: The generous, whose concern is towards the poor, will be rewarded at the resurrection; the proud and status-driven will not.

Vs. 15 creates the connection for the parable of the Choice of Guests and the audience for the next parable of the Great Supper (16-24). An anonymous guest "reclining at the table with him . . . said to him, 'Blessed is he who eats bread in the kingdom of God.'" "Eats bread" picks up from vs. 1 where Jesus goes to "eat bread" at the Pharisee’s house. The kingdom of God motif connects with the parables of the Mustard Seed (Luke 13:18), the Leaven (13:20), the Narrow Door (13:28), Places at a Feast, and the Choice of Guests (14:7, implicit), and the Great Supper (14:15).

In response to the anonymous macarism, Jesus tells the parable of the Great Supper whose narration emerges from the tradition of the banquet type-scene, and more specifically, the Guests and Host Response type-scene. As a narratorial strategy, Jesus adopts the conventional mode of this type-scene, but advances an astounding variation to the surprise of his audience. Not only does the hero of this type-scene invite a second group of guests after the first group of guests has declined the invitation, but he goes on to invite a third group of guests. The first group who represents Israel, especially the Jewish leadership, is ultimately rejected because of their open refusal. The second group, who represents the outcasts of Israel, and the third group, who represent the Gentiles, are included in the eschatological banquet for their favorable response to God’s invitation. Here again is a situation of polar reversals. The wealthy, popular banquet guests, who
were loathe to associate with the poor and whose excuses relate to possessions and domestic ties, would switch places with the poor in God's eschatological banquet. Only those who by deliberate choice accept the invitation of God would ever partake in the end-time banquet of the Lord.

The rejection of the Jewish leaders is further elaborated in Luke 14:25-33. The same standards they cherish and by which they govern their lives are the same that would condemn them. A faithful disciple is one who is willing to give up possessions and sacrifice family ties for the kingdom's sake. Chap. 15 follows with the description of another meal setting. In this setting, Jesus tells another parable which portrays a banquet scenario.

The study of the clustered banquet type-scene in Luke 14 helps to forecast what takes place in the short banquet scene in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Tannehill considers Luke 15:22-32 as one in a series of imagery which points to the eschatological banquet (Luke 12-15).¹ Two groups of people are mentioned in the introductory verses of the parable: the tax gatherers and sinners, and the Pharisees and scribes. These two groups hark back to the two groups in the parable of the Great Supper in Luke 14:15-24. The tax gatherers and sinners represent the poor who were invited to the banquet, while the Pharisees and scribes represent those who made excuses for being absent from the banquet.

According to the narrative, upon the return of the prodigal to his father's house, a

banquet is celebrated in his honor. Open invitation is implied. Robe, ring, sandals (washing of feet), and fattened calf are common banquet motifs. The younger son, representing the Jewish outcasts or Gentiles, accepts the invitation, and joins the banquet. Later,¹ the elder brother, representing the Jewish leaders, refuses to join in the celebration. In fact, he assumes the role of the banquet host, and launches a bitter tirade against his father. 

To refuse to participate in a banquet hosted by one's father, much more to get angry with him in the gaze of the public, was tantamount to grave insult, humiliation, and shame.² The father is expected to punish the stubborn son, for such an insult is grave enough to provide a good reason for the sale of his property.³ In the typical Guests and Host Response type-scene, the son’s refusal to accept the invitation result would normally mean his outright exclusion from the banquet. A substitute guest might take his place at the banquet table.

In spite of the elder brother’s remonstrance, the father goes out, entreats him, and does not scold or rebuke him. The father pleads with the elder brother to join in the celebration. With open arms the host beckons the guest to share in the joy of the

¹The narrator has effectively orchestrated the absence of the elder brother at the start of the banquet to contrast the characters of the two sons, the last son being the one the narrator would like to emphasize (the law of end stress). Cf. Bultmann, History of the Synoptic Tradition, 192-196; Peter Jones, 219; Stein, An Introduction to the Parables, 121. Jeremias describes this emphasis on the second half of the parable as a situation of "double-edged parables." See Jeremias, The Parables of Jesus, 131.

²Bailey, Poet and Peasant, 196.

³Ibid.
moment. Here Jesus is reaching out to the hard-hearted Jewish leaders, whose legalistic
hardness would neither allow them to associate with outcasts nor accept the inclusive
ministry of Jesus. He longs to include them in his messianic banquet. The anger of the
elder brother and the pleading of the father is a shocking variation to the type-scene.

Did the elder brother go into the banquet? The narrator does not indicate. The
narrative is open-ended in this regard. The narrator would have the implied reader
answer that question. The invitation went out to both parties, and from all appearances
the younger brother (the outcasts and the Gentiles) responded. In the light of the theme
raised in the previous parables, the inevitable consequence of those who refuse to accept
the invitation would mean their exclusion from the eschatological banquet. Their
exclusion would come, not because of a lack of invitation on the part of the host, but from
their abject rejection of it. On the other hand, those who accept freely his gracious
invitation may enter and be included in the eschatological banquet of the Lord.
CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study has investigated the use of the type-scene convention in the parables of Jesus that depict banquet scenes. The type-scene is a narratorial device, written or oral, that narrators in antiquity used to establish meeting points with their audience in communicating a message. A narrator would deliberately use repetitive compositional patterns which were conventionally anticipated by the contemporary audience. These patterns, made up of catchwords, motifs, characters, and themes, were orchestrated in innovative ways to bring about new and interesting twists to conventional narratives and their meaning.

The study of type-scenes falls under the ambit of literary criticism, more specifically, narrative criticism (chapter 2). Narrative criticism is a synchronic approach to the interpretation of biblical text. It seeks to understand the text in its finished literary form. Although this study focused mainly on the synchronic approach to the text, it was shown that this approach can and should be complemented with the diachronic approach (the quest for the historical reality of the text) in the exegetical task.

In chapter 3, the components and characteristics of the type-scene were studied.
Four main components constitute the type-scene: key words, characters, motifs, and themes. In order to facilitate the workings of these components, other constants of narrative were employed. Plot as an element in "story" provides the framework upon which the type-scene materialized. Point of view as an element in "discourse" demonstrates how the narrator in creative ways reached the mind of the implied reader. Two major characteristics of the type-scene are repetition and variation. The dexterity of the narrator is seen in the narrator's ability to deviate from the expected sequence of motifs in the type-scene, reaching new horizons in the meaning of the narrative, without distorting the basic structure of the repeated narrative.

A survey of type-scene studies on secular and biblical narratives revealed that no work had yet been done on the banquet type-scene in the New Testament. The survey also revealed only one type-scene study on parables: the Master-Servant type-scene. The need for more type-scene studies on the parables of Jesus became evident.

Banquet narratives, banquet images, and general information about banquets in antiquity, outside the domain of Jesus' parables, were explored in chapter 4. A broad range of diachronic material was considered: Egyptian, Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, Ugaritic, Old Testament, Jewish Intertestamental, Greco-Roman, New Testament, Early Christian, and finally Rabbinic material. It was discovered that the banquet type-scene took different turns over time. At the time of Jesus the banquet type-scene had branched off into three sub-categories of the banquet type-scene: the Eminence of Guests type-scene, the Guests and Host Response type-scene, and the Wise and Foolish type-scene.

Seven parables amenable to the study of the banquet type-scene made up the
study of the fifth chapter: the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-13), the Narrow Door (Luke 13:24-30 [cf. Matt 7:13-14]), Places at a Feast (Luke 14:7-11 [cf. Matt 23:6 = Mark 12:39 = Luke 20:46]), the Choice of Guests (Luke 14:12-14), the Great Supper (Matt 22:2-10 = Luke 14:15-24 // Gos. Thom. 64), the Wedding Garment (Matt 22:11-14), and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The findings of the diachronic critical analyses of the parables under study synchronized with the findings of the type-scene analyses, especially in terms of their themes. All the banquet parables shared the common theme of exclusion from and inclusion in God’s eschatological banquet: exclusion of the opponents of Jesus, the Jewish people (especially the Jewish leaders), and the unprepared believers; inclusion of the disciples, the outcasts, the Gentiles, and the prepared believers.

In the Matthean banquet parables, the emphasis was on the exclusion dimension. For the Lucan banquet parables, the sequence was reversed, and the inclusion aspect dominated, except in the case of the parable of the Prodigal Son. In this parable, the inclusion aspect was introduced first and was explicit, while the exclusion aspect followed and was implicit.

The parables conveyed other themes which were complementary to the fixed exclusion and inclusion theme. As with the exclusion/inclusion theme, so these themes were portrayed by contrast. The parable of the Ten Virgins sustained a theme of readiness versus unpreparedness for the parousia. The parable of the Narrow Door juxtaposed the disappointment of human complacency with striving earnestly for salvation. In the final analysis there would be a reversal of places: the first would be last and the last, first.
The parables of Places at a Feast and the Choice of Guests were studied together because of their parallel structures and common features. They, too, emphasized a reversal of fortunes: The humble will be exalted while the proud, humiliated; the generous will be blessed, while the selfish will not. Again, the reversal motif is accentuated in the parable of the Great Supper: Rejection of God's invitation results in rejection at the eschatological banquet; acceptance of God's invitation results in acceptance at the eschatological banquet. The parable of the Wedding Garment underscored personal readiness versus unreadiness for the kingdom. The parable of the Prodigal Son was the most polyvalent in all the parables studied. Several polar reversals were recognized. The parable embraced several themes, all of which describe the "extravagant" grace of God reaching out to sinners and the unprepared believer.

The type-scene analysis of each parable complemented its diachronic critical analysis. The literary structure of each parable showed how its composer in artistic ways used literary devices, such as simple redundancy, 3+1 repetition, parallelisms, and chiasms, not only to create beauty but to clarify meaning. The type-scene analysis showed how the literary artists manipulated the banquet type-scene to help develop the different types of plots in each narrative. It also indicated how these artists, in very innovative ways, using techniques of repetition with variation, created movement and anticipation within individual parables and in their larger narrative contexts. The type-scene analysis demonstrated suspense and surprise as regular techniques used by the composers. Characterization in the banquet parables was most recognized in the use of contrasts. Different points of view were seen as a mechanism used to develop interest.
and help with the assimilation of values and attitudes in the parables.

Finally, the way in which the Gospel writers used the banquet type-scene in the context of the Gospel narratives was examined. The three banquet parables in the Gospel of Matthew depicted a wedding banquet. In the Matthean context, the study showed that the writer used a clustered banquet type-scene in the parables of the Great Supper and the Wedding Garment to facilitate the theme of judgment juxtaposed by the individual's readiness for the *parousia*. These two themes continued to dominate the singulative banquet type-scene in the parable of the Ten Virgins.

In the Lucan context, the banquet parables disclosed a polar reversal: rejection vis-à-vis acceptance. The singulative banquet type-scene in the parable of the Narrow Door in Luke 13 functioned as a prelude to the subsequent parables in Luke 14 and 15. The parables of Places at a Feast, the Choice of Guests, and the Great Supper in chap. 14 operated within the framework of a clustered banquet type-scene. Catchwords, connecting phrases, characters, motifs, and themes were ordered in innovative ways by the writer to link one banquet type-scene to the other. The outcome was the arrangement of a plot using the variations of the banquet type-scene to unite the narrative of Luke 14:1-24 into a whole in which the theme of exclusion/inclusion was the author's main concern.

The context of the banquet type-scenes and the movement of the plot in Luke 13 and 14 helped to anticipate the working of the banquet type-scene in the parable of Prodigal Son in chap. 15. This parable depicts the unfailing generosity of the host as opposed to the arrogance and selfishness of a guest (the elder brother). This type-scene
showed rejection at its worst (the guest), and acceptance at its best (the host). The suspension of the implied reader’s expectation with regard to the fate of the guest who refused the invitation (the elder brother) was intentional. The reader must make his/her own conclusions about this guest’s destiny in the context of all preceding banquet parables.

Conclusions

Based upon the findings in this study, some conclusions may be made regarding the purpose of this dissertation. It is clear from the study of the banquet type-scene in the parables of Jesus, that Jesus and the Gospel writers were interacting with fixed literary and oral conventions of their day. Jesus’ use of the banquet type-scene in his parables was deliberate and intentional in an attempt to reach the minds of his hearers through their conventional way of understanding traditional banquet stories. The banquet type-scene as a literary and oral convention in antiquity was mastered by Jesus in innovative ways in the formulation of his parables, to teach important themes of the Christian gospel. No doubt, his modifications of the banquet type-scene surprised his hearers, even shocked them; they would have interpreted the banquet type-scene in his parables in the context of his ministry.

The genius of the individual Gospel writers was seen in their ability to repeat the banquet type-scene that their readers could follow and identify, yet with enough variations to excite them to appreciate a different twist to the narratives. Luke, especially, repeats the banquet type-scene in Luke 13-15 in innovative ways that shows
creativity and meaning. The Gospel writers' use of the banquet type-scene was adapted to the historical context of their audiences.

The findings of this study have theological significance. The banquet type-scene in the parables of Jesus portrays the relationship between the banquet host and guest. It is not only natural, but legitimate, to understand this relationship in a metaphoric sense to describe the relationship that exists between God and human beings; God is represented by the host (the bridegroom, the king, the householder, or the father), and human beings, the guests.

The theme of inclusion and exclusion tells us something about the character of God and the response of human beings to his invitation to salvation. God is always inviting sinners, as well as saints to salvation. He is insistent that his eschatological banquet hall be filled with guests. God's constant invitation to his eschatological banquet is especially shown in the parable of the Prodigal Son. All have an opportunity to be included in his feast. However, after the banquet door of salvation is shut, the exclusion of those who refused the invitation will not be any fault of the host. Rather, it would be because of one's own lack of responsiveness and personal readiness for the banquet of the Lord. The exclusion dimension mitigates any kind of universalism.

Second, the flexibility with which Jesus and the Gospel writers used the banquet type-scene tells us something about the transmission of Scripture to mankind. In God's cosmic plan to reach human beings, he works through the mundane. He reaches out to human beings through their familiar associations. The type-scene confirms that the parables were carefully crafted stories taken from traditional narratives which were
familiar to the contemporary audience. In inventive ways, Jesus and the Gospel writers
gave theological importance to this traditional material which has influenced the lives of
human beings for over two thousand years.

The type-scene analysis is a valuable literary tool for the exegetical task. It
provides the exegete with a different template with which to study the biblical texts. The
type-scene analysis helps to account for the duplication of stories in biblical narrative. It
helps the Bible reader to see the implications of the immediate and larger framework of a
narrative. The study of plot, characterization, and theme in the type-scene analysis
brings life and interest to the Scripture. Through the play and counterplay of characters’
words and actions in the plot of a story, the reader is able to make inferences,
conclusions, and applications pertaining to himself or herself at the affective level.

Type-scene, as a literary or oral device, helps to bring coherence to narratives. As
patterned discourse, the type-scene creates audience expectation. This expectation is
heightened with the reader’s attention drawn to the crafty variation of the type-scene
created by the writer/narrator. Repetition, along with variation, operating in the clustered
type-scenes demonstrates the flexibility with which a writer can formulate his narrative.
Narratives in clustered type-scenes help to interpret each other.

Although the type-scene analysis may not provide historical background
information to the biblical text, its basic conclusions about the text, especially in terms of
theme, may equal those drawn from using the diachronic critical approach. The type-
scene analysis showed how a synchronic approach to exegesis not only produces equally
prolific results as the diachronic approach, but also proves itself to be a simpler and shorter approach to the study of the Scriptures.

**Recommendations**

The benefits derived from the type-scene study make allowance for a few recommendations for future research. More parables should be studied using the tools of narrative criticism. A heightened interest in the narrative beauty of the parables will lead to new and creative ideas and fresh insights into the meaning of the parables, especially for the simple reader who wants to have an encounter with the words of Jesus. A number of parables await the skillful pen of the type-scene analyst. Some possible type-scene studies on parables are: Building a Tower,\(^1\) Searching for the Lost,\(^2\) Finding Treasure,\(^3\)


the Laborers and Landowner,\textsuperscript{1} the Judge and Client,\textsuperscript{2} the Rich and Foolish,\textsuperscript{3} and the Growth of Seeds.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{1}The Workers in the Vineyard, Matt 20:1-16; the Two Sons, Matt 21:28-31.


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