

The teacher and advanced student of the Old Testament will find Walton's organizational and bibliographical work a valuable resource.

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Westermann, Claus. *The Parables of Jesus in the Light of the Old Testament*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990. 211 pp. \$12.95.

This book was originally published in German in 1984 and was developed from a paper presented at a meeting of the Society of Old Testament Study in July 1983. In this book Westermann first studies the parables in the OT and then seeks to apply the results to the NT parables.

Westermann questions the basic assumption of parable studies that parables serve to illustrate. His study of OT parables show that parables have different functions depending on their contexts. And their contexts are limited primarily to the prophetic books and the Psalms.

In Gen 49 and Deut 33 the parable has the function of praise or censure. In the Song of Songs in the context of love songs it functions as homage or praise. In the Proverbs, it serves to provide insight and understanding.

In the prophets primarily from Amos on the functions of parables are to intensify the indictments or accusations and the announcement of judgment. In the Psalms in the God-laments, they serve to radicalize the indictment against God and in the confessions of trust to confirm one's trust. The parables in Job's laments serve the same function as the God-laments in the Psalms, i.e., to intensify the indictment against God.

Turning to the NT, Westermann insists that the understanding of Jesus' parables can only come about by establishing the contexts in which they were uttered. In his critique of NT parable interpretation, he emphasizes that the assumption of most NT scholars that the function of parables is to illustrate and clarify has to be abandoned. Their use must be determined from the context. He rejects attempts to study the parables from a timeless and unhistorical linguistic phenomenon called "metaphor" (Ricoeur, Juengel, Weder).

In studying the NT parables he first groups them in order to determine their contexts. He has four groups: 1) Stories involving sudden change; 2) Parables of growth; 3) Announcement of judgment in a parable; 4) Instruction for present action.

He sees that by grouping the parables in this way, one can see their different functions. These groups can be broadly categorized into two groups, one dealing with God's activity and the other with instructions for human action. The first of these two groups can be divided to the saving acts of God and to the blessing activity of God. The second group can also

be divided into two, those dealing with actions having to do with the present and those which refer to a return of the Lord.

These groups show that the parables have different contexts and therefore different functions and different messages. It shows also that they cannot be approached from a single perspective, i.e. eschatologically or christologically.

He emphasizes the preliminary nature of his study yet he has provided some provocative, stimulating insights which can be used as a springboard for further investigations. He has suggested the need to study the comparisons in the Gospels with those in the Epistles.

It seems clear that Westermann is right especially with the parables in the OT, i.e., that their function was not merely illustrative. It is clear in the prophets, e.g., that they were used to intensify the indictments or accusations and announcements of judgment. However, in looking at his groupings and his explanation of the Parables under these groupings, it does not seem that the results obtained from his approach advances parable interpretation perceptibly. He does not set forth the functions for the various groups as explicitly here as in the OT parables. He connects Jesus' announcement of judgment to those of the prophets and instructions on actions to those in Proverbs.

I find it hard to rid the parables of the illustrative function even though that may not be the only or even main function. Westermann provides the context for the parable of the Prodigal Son but does not explicitly indicate its function. He says that it is an exposition of Ps 103:13 and is referred to in the Praise of God's Mercy in the Psalms. Is the function, then, to intensify the mercy of God? Or is its function to defend Jesus against the charge that he was associating with sinners? Westermann is correct in not simply looking at it as an illustration but it is very difficult to deny the illustrative element in the function of parables. One can say that the parable by an illustration functions to defend Jesus against the charges made against Him.