

of text division for the whole Bible would necessarily involve people all over the world who have an interest in the Bible, not least those who use it and uphold it as a message of love from God.

Before this day of rethinking arrives, it is desirable that common language translators and reviewers should at least be given some advice like what is in the following:

- Text rearrangement and verse merging need to be exercised with much caution.
- There are obviously good reasons for model texts such as GNB and CEV to sometimes lump verses together. But they should not be followed blindly. What sounds natural and logical in one language may not sound the same in another language.
- Until a better, officially approved new system is put in place, the current chapter and verse numbering system should be maintained as far as possible.

These were the points I shared as well with the members of the Khmer Old Testament Project team.

D.J. CLARK

## **PARABLE OPENINGS**

**Dr David J. Clark** is a UBS Translation Consultant based in England

Do we understand the parables as well as we think we do? Many of the parables are among the most familiar parts of the Bible, and many people have known them since childhood. We often take it for granted that because we know the story, we also understand it. In case we should forget, the section headings in the Good News Bible (and several other versions) are always there to remind us. The purpose of this article is to question some of these assumptions; we shall look at the parables themselves, especially in the Gospel of Luke, and see what clues they give to their interpretation. In particular, we shall look at the opening words of the parables as a means of establishing the focus of the parable in the eyes of the writer.

### **Passages considered in this study**

What exactly is a parable? In the absence of any generally agreed definition, we start by admitting all the passages in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke which may have a claim to be included. It is more important to avoid leaving out something that might be relevant than to avoid including something that might not. Nevertheless, the boundary between a parable and an extended metaphor is not easy to define, and the limits of this study must be somewhat arbitrary. The list of passages considered is given below. This is set out with parallel passages shown in parallel columns. The references follow the order of Luke's Gospel

since that is the major theme of this study. The passages from Matthew and Mark are listed in biblical order as far as possible.

<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>Name</b>
9.16-17	2.21-22	5.36-39	New Cloth & New Wine
7.24-27		6.47-49	House on Rock
11.16-17		7.31-32	Children Playing
		7.41-42	Two Debtors
13.1-9	4.1-9	8.4-8	Sower
	4.26-29		Seed Growing Secretly
13.24-30			Weeds
		10.29-37	Good Samaritan
		11.5-8	Friend at Midnight
		12.16-21	Rich Fool
		13.6-9	Barren Fig Tree
13.31-32	4.30-32	13.18-19	Mustard Seed
13.33		13.20-21	Leaven
13.44-46			Hidden Treasure & Pearl
13.47-50			Dragnet
22.1-14		14.15-24	Great Supper
18.10-14		15.3-7	Lost Sheep
		15.8-10	Lost Coin
		15.11-32	Lost Sons
		16.1-9	Unjust Steward
		16.19-31	Lazarus & Rich Man
		18.1-8	Unjust Judge
		18.9-14	Pharisee & Tax Collector
18.22-35			Unforgiving Servant
20.1-16			Labourers in Vineyard
25.14-30		19.11-27	Pounds
21.28-32			Two Sons
21.33-46	12.1-12	20.9-19	Wicked Tenants
24.32-36	13.28-32	21.29-33	Fig Tree
24.45-51			Good & Bad Servants
25.1-13			Ten Virgins

**Observations on Mark**

Mark has only seven parables, and while some of their openings are similar in their wording to parables in Matthew and Luke, the sample is too small to show up significant internal patterning, and will be left aside.

**Observations on Matthew**

Matthew's interest is especially in the **Kingdom of Heaven**, which features in ten parables out of twenty-one. Seven of these ten occurrences are in the nine parables peculiar to Matthew. In all ten of these cases some form of the term "(is) like" or the related verb ("compare ...

with”) is used, and this also occurs in two more cases (7.24; 11.16). Two parables have “What do you think?” (18.12; 21.28). Fifteen have “a man” and/or some other equivalent term such as “children” (11.16), “a woman” (13.33), “a merchant” (13.45), “a king” (18.23; 22.2), “a householder” (20.1; 21.33), “a servant” (24.45), “maidens” (25.1), but in only one case is this accompanied by a form of the indefinite pronoun *tis* “someone”, “a certain person” (18.12, but the term is not translated in English versions). There is one occurrence of *oudeis* “no one”, which may be considered as a negative equivalent (9.16), and a repetition of this term is understood in the parable immediately following (9.17, compare Mark 2.22; Luke 5.31). Twelve parables follow up the topic word of the opening by some form of “who” or “whoever”, including six of the nine parables peculiar to Matthew. If we construct a typical configuration for the opening of a parable in Matthew, it will have four possible elements:

±like ±Kingdom ±man ±who

Of the twenty-one parables, seven have all four elements, and a further five have three of them. Of the nine parables peculiar to Matthew, four have all four elements and a further three have three. Of the six parables Matthew shares with Luke two have four elements and two have three. Of the four parables Matthew shares with both Mark and Luke, only one has all four elements. Thus, while we cannot lay down any obligatory elements for the structure of a parable in Matthew, we can say that the more a parable tends to be distinctive of Matthew, the more it tends to conform to the above formula. Only two of the twenty-one parables contain none of the typical elements, and not surprisingly, these are both in the group shared by all three synoptic evangelists (13.3; 24.32).

We may sum up our observations on Matthew’s parables by citing one of the seven parable openings which can be designated as typical of Matthew: the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who ... (18.23).

### Observations on Luke

Luke’s gospel contains twenty-four parables: six shared with Matthew and Mark, six shared only with Matthew, and twelve peculiar to itself. In contrast with Matthew, Luke mentions the **Kingdom** only twice (13.18, 20), and uses the formula “(is) like” only five times (6.47, 49; 7.31; 13.18, 20); none of these occurrences are in his unique material. He follows up his topic word with some form of “who” only five times (6.47; 7.31; 13.18, 20; 16.1); only one of these occurrences (16.1) is in his unique material. His favourite form is “a man” or some other equivalent term (“children”, 7.31; “two debtors”, 7.41; “a woman”, 13.20; 15.8; “a judge”, 18.2; “a widow”, 18.3; “two men”, 18.9) which occurs in seventeen parables (twice in three of them), and is to be understood in two more (11.5; 13.6). It is followed by a form of the indefinite pronoun “someone”, “a certain ...” nine times, of which one is textually doubtful (20.9). “No one”, which is the negative equivalent of “someone”, occurs three times (5.36, 37; 9.62). Some form of the question word “Who?” occurs three times (11.5; 15.4, 8).

Thus, the main feature of Luke's parable openings is the occurrence of "a man" or equivalent. It is found in two of the six parables Luke shares with both Matthew and Mark, and in all the six parables he shares only with Matthew; of the twelve parables peculiar to Luke it is found in nine, and it is present without being expressed in words in two of the other three. In three of the parables Luke shares with Matthew or Mark, he uses the formula "a man who ...", where the other gospel has something else (14.16; 19.12; 20.9). In sum, then, although we cannot construct a formula for Luke like that given above for Matthew, we may say that with Luke both his shared and his peculiar material tends to bear the stamp of his own style.

Luke is the only one of the first three gospel writers who we can say with reasonable certainty was a native speaker of Greek. It would be generally agreed that Luke's Greek is the most polished of the gospel writers, and it is reasonable to think that this polish includes a complete mastery of discourse features. So it appears that Luke's preference for the opening "a man who ..." is motivated by a desire to present the main topic of a parable in its first word or words. We can test this suggestion by examining the parables in detail.

**GROUP (A)** We begin with a group of parables where recognition of topic in the opening word(s) raises no problems, and reinforces standard interpretations.

(1) 16.19-20 "there was a (certain) rich man ... and there was a (certain) poor man ..."

Clearly the parable centres on the two men and the contrasts between them, and this is reflected in the way they are introduced. The rich man is in major focus, and the poor man is really only mentioned to provide a contrast. The narrative part of the parable ends at the end of 16.22 with the rich man again in focus.

(2) 18.2-3 "there was a (certain) judge ... there was a (certain) widow ..."

This is a parable of analogy, with the meaning stated in 18.6-8. The major focus is on the judge and his attitude, and we may note that the parable goes full circle, so to speak, with the judge recurring as the last word of the parable also: "me" in 18.5.

(3) 12.16 "of a (certain) rich man the land bore plentifully"

The focus of the story is indeed on the man rather than his land. Thus the expression "a (certain) man" is placed at the start, even though it is not the grammatical subject of the sentence. We may once more note that the man is mentioned again in the last sentence of the parable (12.20).

(4) 13.6 "someone had a fig tree"

The parable clearly focuses on the tree rather than the owner, and in Greek "a fig tree" is placed at the beginning even though not the subject of the sentence. The use of "someone" without "man" here is probably because the man is not in focus. Note again that the tree is mentioned as the last word of the parable ("it", 13.9).

(5) 18.9 “Two men ...” (The Greek word order is “men two”.)

Both men are in focus, but the major focus is on the one mentioned second. The double focus perhaps corresponds with the introduction of both in a single phrase before they are mentioned separately as “the one” and “the other” (compare “two sons ... the younger ... the elder” 15.11, 12, 25). Both are mentioned again in the last sentence (“this man ... rather than the other”) in a way which separates and contrasts them.

(6) 7.41 “two debtors”

Note the contrast of word order between this example and the previous one. Why is the “two” first here? Perhaps to conceal which debtor the focus is on. The two are mentioned together in one word “them both” at the end, and in application Jesus asks Simon, his hearer, to decide which man the focus is on: “Now which of them ...?” (7.42; but contrast Matthew’s word order in a similar parable: “sons two ... which of the two of them ...?” (Matt 21.28, 31).

GROUP (B) consists of three parables (or perhaps only two) which open in a negative way with the word “no one” which is equivalent in meaning to “there was not a man”.

(1) 5.36 Since the first word is the grammatical subject “No one” that is to say, a person who does not exist, we should probably look for focus to the next element which is “tears a piece from a new garment”. This is indeed repeated at the end of the parable with “the piece torn from the new”. There then the focus seems to be on the patch.

(2) 5.37 This time “no one” is followed by the verb “puts” which is echoed in the final word in Greek, “must be put”. In this case the focus would appear to be on the event rather than on the participants.

(3) 9.62 Perhaps we should include this verse, though it is so short that it is doubtful whether it qualifies to be called a parable anyway. In this case “no one” is followed by a participle “who puts”, but there is no echo of this at the end of the sentence. This may be another indication that we are not really dealing with a parable here.

GROUP (C) consists of three more parables which also make negative statements, but do so indirectly by asking a question to which the answer expected is clearly “nobody”.

(1) 11.5 “Who of you having a friend ...?”

The question form seems to hint that an impossible and ridiculous situation is coming up (compare Kenneth E. Bailey: *Poet and Peasant*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1976). We may understand the parable proper to end at 11.7, with 11.8 being Jesus’ comment on it, introduced by “I tell you.” Thus the last word of the parable is “to you” which may be a faint echo of “you” in “who of you” of the opening.

## (2) 15.4 “What man of you, having a hundred sheep ...?”

Again the situation imagined is absurd, and again the answer is “nobody”. The parable ends at 15.6, and 15.7 is Jesus’ comment, again introduced by “I tell you.” There is no direct link between beginning and end here. Whereas in 11.5, the question word “Who?” occurred alone, in 15.4 it is the same Greek word followed by “man”. Probably this is to prepare the way for a contrast with “what woman ...?” in 15.8.

## (3) 15.8 “what woman having ten coins ...?”

Again the parable describes an unthinkable situation and again the answer to the opening question is “nobody”. The parable ends at 15.9, and Jesus’ comment in 15.10 is again introduced by “I tell you.” There is no direct link between beginning and end.

With this group of parables it is harder to state just what the focus is. Perhaps the focus is actually on the question form rather than any particular element in the parable, the “who?” being the first word in each case. The use of questions rather than negative statements encourages audience participation and involvement. (Compare the occurrences of “What do you think?” in Matt 18.12; 21.28. In both of these cases the parable is followed by “truly I say to you”.)

We may note the change in order in Greek from “having a hundred sheep” in Luke 15.4 to literally “coins having ten” in 15.8. Perhaps this is due to joining the two parables together. The first one establishes a losing/finding situation, and the second one puts the object at the start to change the scenery rather than the event.

Finally, although there is no direct verbal link between the beginning and the end of the parable in two of the three cases, we may note that in these two cases, the person referred to by the opening “who?” is the speaker of the closing words, and refers to himself/herself in the first person in 15.6 and 15.9.

GROUP (D) consists of those parables in which we may need to make a change in our understanding if we look for focus in the same way as we have in the previous groups, especially group (a).

## (1) 10.30 “a (certain) man was going ...”

We always call this the Parable of the Good Samaritan, but if the opening words really do mark the focus then we should be calling it “The parable of the Man who got Mugged”. Note that this does fit with the ending of the parable, which refers to the victim again in the words “the one who fell among robbers” (10.36). In this last sentence, Jesus asks the lawyer to decide which of the three passers-by did the right thing. That is, he uses a question form to get audience reaction as in group (c). The lawyer asked the question “Who is my neighbour?” with a view to restricting the answer. Jesus told the story with a view to enlarging the answer, and getting the lawyer to work it out for himself by means of the final question. If in our section heading we label this parable “The Good Samaritan”, we reveal the answer to the key question at the beginning, and rob the story of part of its challenge.

## (2) 14.16 “a (certain) man made a great banquet”

We call this the Parable of the Great Feast, but by the rules derived from and applied to the other parables of Luke, the focus is actually on the giver of the feast. When we look at the end of the parable, we find the phrase “my banquet” (14.24). In Greek putting the word “my” at the beginning of this expression is not the usual word order in a possessive noun phrase, and this change probably serves to give it more emphasis. Accordingly the parable would perhaps be more accurately entitled “The Parable of the Persistent Host”.

## (3) 15.11 “a (certain) man had two sons”

We call this the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but it is the father who is in focus according to the opening words. This is backed up by the fact that it is the father who speaks at the end of each half of this double parable. Bailey (see above) shows how the real point of this story is the father’s love for both his sons, and the focus on the father at both beginning and end matches this.

Although the two earlier parables in this chapter are different in the structure of their openings, perhaps we should consider whether they too need renaming. In the light of the close links between all the parables in Luke 15 a possible set of parallel titles would be “The Persistent Shepherd”, “The Persistent Housewife”, and “The Persistent Father”.

## (4) 16.1 “There was a (certain) man rich who had a steward”

We call this the Parable of the Dishonest Steward, but the opening suggests that it is rather the master who is in focus. This is backed up by the fact that at the end of the parable, the story returns to the master and his evaluation of the steward’s behaviour. The steward is a contrasting character to highlight the master’s leniency, and the story might better be called “The Parable of the Lenient Master”. This again fits with Bailey’s interpretation.

## (5) 19.12 “a (certain) man of noble birth”

We call this the Parable of the Pounds, but it is rather the nobleman who is in focus. This is backed up by the fact that at the end of the parable, he is not only speaking, but refers to himself in the final word “me”. It is less clear what a suitable title for the parable would be, but since this parable seems to join two originally separate stories, this is perhaps not surprising. The only thing said to describe the “man” here is that he was “noble”. This does not appear to relate to anything in the story, but perhaps arises from the setting. Jesus is trying to dampen popular apocalyptic expectation (19.11) and in such circumstances cannot call the figure that stands for himself a “king”. (But compare “kingdom” in 19.12, 15 and “to reign” in 19.14). Perhaps “noble” is used as a “next best,” hinting at his real status, but without being inflammatory. The next word is “went”, which focuses on the absence of the man (compare “going on a journey” in the parallel passage in Matthew 25.14). This might suggest “The Absent Nobleman” as a title for the parable, but it does not seem too apt, as most of the action deals with what happened

after his return! A more detailed possibility is “The Nobleman who Held an Audit”, though this does not really arise out of the opening in the same way as previous titles in this section. The emphasis of the parallel passage in Matthew is on faithfulness (Mt 24.45-51), but this is lacking in Luke’s version. At any rate, though we cannot readily suggest an alternative here, at least we can say that the traditional title does not seem to tie up with the focus as displayed in the opening words.

(6) 20.9 “A (certain) man planted a vineyard”

This is the one case where the word *tis* “a certain ...” is textually uncertain. Its use in many of Luke’s other parables certainly supports its inclusion here. We call this parable “The Parable of the Vineyard”, but the opening suggests that the focus is on the owner rather than the vineyard and the title could more appropriately reflect this focus. In this connection we may note that Luke and Matthew both change Mark’s word order to put “a man” first. (Mark puts the vineyard as the first word.) Luke further takes the focus off the vineyard by omitting all the details of its construction (Matt 21.33; Mark 12.1).

Does the ending give any help here? It depends on where we say the parable ends. The most likely place is at 20.15, where Jesus asks the question that would involve the audience in applying the parable (compare this with 10.36). If this is accepted, then we may note that here in Luke the question is “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?” with the noun phrase referring to the owner in final position. This is in contrast to Matthew who has “What will he do to those tenants?” Matthew has the audience supply the answer (21.41) which supports the idea that the parable proper ends with the question. Luke followed Mark who has Jesus himself give the answer (Mark 12.9; Luke 21.16).

GROUP (E) consists of the five places (6.47, 49; 7.31; 13.18, 20) in which Luke uses the formula “is like”. There is no link in these parables between the beginning and the end. All of them also include some form of “who” and these account for five of the six occurrences of “who”, the other one being 16.1. All include “a man” or equivalent, but in no case is it accompanied by “a certain” which appears to be unnecessary when the “man” is not in focus. Not one of these parables occurs in Luke’s peculiar material.

### Summary

Both Matthew and Luke tend to have a typical form of parable opening, and the tendency to use it is strongest in the material unique to each. The parables shared by all three of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the ones which show least patterning in their openings. Indeed, this small group of six parables includes the only two which do not have any of the features typical of either Matthew or Luke in their other parables. These two are Matt 13.3 = Mark 4.3 = Luke 8.5 and Matt 24.32 = Mark 13.28 = Luke 21.29. Perhaps on this basis, these passages should not be classified as parables at all, though it is surprising that they include the parable of “The Sower”, which is generally regarded as the most typical of parables.



The parables peculiar to Luke show a strong tendency to link the end with the beginning, and this recursion is presumably a discourse feature of some significance which Luke controlled better than Matthew or Mark. If we pay more attention to this than we traditionally have, it affects our perception of the main point of several of the parables. This leads us to suggest alternative titles or section headings for the parables concerned. In turn, looking at a parable under a different title may well affect our approach to its structure in translation.

We might conclude that Luke is a more artful user of parables than Matthew or Mark. Matthew with his formula “the Kingdom ... is like ...” tends to give the key to the interpretation at the beginning. By avoiding this, Luke does more to let the story speak and convey the challenge for itself. It is surely no accident that the two best known and loved of all the parables both come from Luke’s unique material.

*[A fuller form of this article will appear in “I Must Speak to You Plainly”:  
Essays in Honor of Robert G. Bratcher. Carlisle, UK, Paternoster Publishing.*

*– Editor]*

C.D. GROSS

## **“JEALOUS” IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: the Hebrew *qana*’ and related words**

Dr Carl D. Gross is a UBS Translation Consultant based in Australia

*[Here is the second part of this article, continued from the April 1997 issue of  
The Bible Translator. For general discussion of the meaning of the term qana’,  
readers should refer back to that first part of the article. – Editor]*

### **(5) Psalm 73.3**

“For I was envious of the arrogant,  
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (RSV).  
“... because I was jealous of the proud  
when I saw that things go well for the wicked” (GNB).

The first 12 verses of this psalm appear to support the traditional interpretation of jealousy and envy. The Psalmist, in the midst of suffering and looking at the wicked who are healthy and prospering, almost desires to be like them. But he does not actually do so. In verse 2 he says that he had **almost** lost his faith, he had **almost** become like one of the wicked, but verses 13 and 15 make clear that he did not give in; to have done so would have been sin. The psalm goes on to describe God’s justice and care for his own people. Once again, like Psalm 37, it is a case of “God will take care of you – and the wicked!”

So the same general argument applies to this psalm as in the previous two examples. The traditional rendering may be just as restrictive here as it was there. Instead of feeling emotions of envy or jealousy, the