

Parables

Parables were not a new form of teaching invented by Jesus, they had been used for centuries before his time.

The Hebrew word '*mashal*', meaning parable, can also mean riddle – there is the story to be told, but there is a deeper meaning hidden within.

In 1 Samuel 12 we read:

12 ¹ and the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, “There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had very many flocks and herds; 3 but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. 4 Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man’s lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.”

Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; 6 he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

7 Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; 8 I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. 9 Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife."

Another example comes from Ezekiel 17

17 The word of the LORD came to me: ²O mortal, propound a riddle, and speak an allegory to the house of Israel. ³Say: Thus says the Lord GOD:

A great eagle, with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colours, came to the Lebanon. He took the top of the cedar, ⁴broke off its topmost shoot; he carried it to a land of trade, set it in a city of merchants.

⁵Then he took a seed from the land, placed it in fertile soil; a plant by abundant waters, he set it like a willow twig. ⁶It sprouted and became a vine spreading out, but low; its branches turned toward him, its roots remained where it stood. So it became a vine; it brought forth branches, put forth foliage.

⁷There was another great eagle, with great wings and much plumage.

And see! This vine stretched out its roots toward him; it shot out its branches toward him,

so that he might water it. From the bed where it was planted ⁸it was transplanted to good soil by abundant waters, so that it might produce branches and bear fruit and become a noble vine.

A list of some Old Testament parables or riddles:

Of Balaam - Concerning the Moabites and Israelites.	Mount Pisgab	Num 23:24
Jotham - Trees making a king.	Mount Gerizim	Jdg 9:7-15
Samson - Strong bringing forth sweetness.	Timnath	Jdg 14:14
Nathan - Poor man's ewe lamb.	Jerusalem	2Sa 12:1-4
Woman of Tekoah - Two brothers striving.	Jerusalem	2Sa 14:1
The Smitten Prophet - The escaped prisoner.	Near Samaria	1Ki 20:35-40
Jehoash, King of Israel - The thistle and cedar.	Jerusalem	2Ki 14:9
Isaiah - Vineyard yielding wild grapes.	Jerusalem	Isa 5:1-6
Ezekiel - Lion's whelps.	Babylon	Eze 14:2-9
The boiling pot.	Babylon	Eze 24:3-5
The great eagles and the wine.	Babylon	Eze 17:3-10
The lioness and her cubs		Eze 19:2-9