

2024

The Gospel of Thomas

PARABLES OF THE NONCONICAL GOSPEL OF THOMAS

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GOSPEL OF THOMAS, APOCRYPHAL (NONCANONICAL) GOSPEL CONTAINING 114 SAYINGS
ATTRIBUTED TO THE RESURRECTED JESUS, WRITTEN IN THE MID-2ND CENTURY.

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Overview of the Gospel of Thomas

The Gospel of Thomas is without question the most significant book discovered in the Nag Hammadi library. Unlike the Gospel of Peter, discovered sixty years earlier, this book is completely preserved. It has no narrative at all, no stories about anything that Jesus did, no references to his death and resurrection. The Gospel of Thomas is a collection of 114 sayings of Jesus.

The sayings are not arranged in any recognizable order. Nor are they set within any context, except in a few instances in which Jesus is said to reply to a direct question of his disciples. Most of the sayings begin simply with the words “Jesus said.” In terms of genre, the book looks less like the New Testament Gospels and more like the Book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible.

Like Proverbs, it is a collection of sayings that are meant to bring wisdom to the one who can understand it. In fact, the opening statement indicates that the correct understanding of these sayings will provide more than wisdom; it will bring eternal life. “These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke, and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote them down. And he said, ‘He who finds the meaning of these words will not taste death’” (Gosp. Thom. 1).

The Jesus of this Gospel is not the Jewish messiah that we have seen in other Gospels, not the miracle-working Son of God, not the crucified and resurrected Lord, and not the Son of Man who will return on the clouds of heaven. He is the eternal Jesus whose words bring salvation.

Who is Didymus Judas Thomas, who allegedly penned these words? We know this name from other ancient Christian sources, such as the Acts of Thomas. Both “Didymus” and “Thomas” are words that mean “twin” (the first is Greek, the second Semitic); Judas is his proper name.

According to the Acts of Thomas, he was a blood relation of Jesus, the same one mentioned in the New Testament (Mark 6:3). Thus, Didymus Judas Thomas was Jesus’ twin brother (see Box 13.2). Who better to relate the secret words of Jesus that can bring eternal life than his own twin brother?

Many of the sayings of Jesus in this Gospel will be familiar to those who have read the Synoptic Gospels: “If a blind man leads a blind man, the two of them fall into a pit” (Gosp. Thom. 34); “Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of Heaven” (54); “The harvest is great, but the workers are few; but beseech the Lord to send workers to the harvest” (73). Somewhat more than half of the sayings in Thomas can be found in the Synoptic Gospels.

Other sayings sound vaguely familiar, yet somewhat peculiar: “Let him who seeks not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds, he will be troubled, and when he is troubled, he will marvel, and he will rule over the All” (2).

Still other sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas sound quite unlike anything known from the New Testament: “. . . On the day when you were one, you became two. But when you have become two, what will you do?” (11); “If the flesh exists because of spirit, it is a miracle, but if spirit exists because of the body, it is a miracle of miracles.

But I marvel at how this great wealth established itself in this poverty” (29); “I stood in the midst of the World, and I appeared to them in the flesh. I found all of them drunk; I did not find any of them thirsting. And my soul was pained for the sons of men because they are blind in their hearts, and they do not see that they came empty into the world. . . .When they have shaken off their wine, then they shall repent” (28); “His disciples said, ‘On what day will you be revealed to us and on what day shall we see you?’

Jesus said, ‘When you undress without being ashamed, and you take your clothes and put them under your feet as little children and tramp on them, then you shall see the Son of the Living One, and you shall not fear’ (37); “If they say to you, ‘Where did you come from?’ say to them, ‘We came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own and established itself and became manifest through their image.’ If they say to you, ‘Is it you?’ say, ‘We are its children and we are the elect of the living father’” (50); and one of the most telling sayings of the entire book:

“Jesus said, ‘Whoever has come to understand the world has found only a corpse, and whoever has found a corpse is superior to the world’” (56).¹

Roughly half of the sayings in Thomas are also found in the synoptic gospels—Mark, Matthew, and Luke—often in forms that are very simple and unburdened with explicit interpretation. Other sayings in the gospel, however, assert a strong interpretive framework holding much affinity with other early Jewish wisdom theologians, especially those oriented to Plato, such as Philo of Alexandria.

There is only one complete manuscript of this gospel: a Coptic translation found in Codex II of the Nag Hammadi Library; a cache of early Christian texts discovered in 1945 near the modern town of Nag Hammadi in Upper

¹ The Gospel of Thomas: An Overview, The Bart Ehrman Blog, August 28, 2018, ehrmanblog.org

Egypt. However, three Greek fragments also survive from the famous papyrological discoveries of Grenfell and Hunt at Oxyrhynchus.²

Like many other canonical and extra-canonical documents from the first and second centuries, the Gospel of Thomas contains a number of parables. Gospel of Thomas has more or less three kinds of parables: those with almost exact parallels with Matthew, Mark, or Luke; those with similar story-lines to canonical gospels but with strikingly different meanings; and those that have little or no similarities to canonical gospels.³

Organization and Layout

In assembling the nineteen parables contained in this work, I feel much like Saint Luke by gathering writings and information from others. I have organized each parable in order to provide a consistent flow of information formatted as follows:

- The text of each parable (saying) in English along with a copy of the Nag Hammadi Coptic Text.
- “Synoptic Gospel Parallels” are provided for each parable, except for the two parables unique to the Gospel of Thomas. The associated scriptures presented are according to the New Catholic Bible.⁴
- “Scholarly Quotes” provide commentary on each parable from several identified scholars.
- “Other Insights” reflect blog comments by lay people on each parable.

In addition, sermons or other reflections are provided on a few of the parables in order to gain a preacher’s perspective.

Happy Reading!

² “Gospel of Thomas,” by Stephen J. Patterson, January 26, 2023, www.oxfordbibliographies.com

³ Gospel of Thomas, Parables, Shirley Paulson, PhD Blog, January 27, 2020, <https://earlychristiantexts.com/>

⁴ New Catholic Bible (NCB), Copyright © 2019 by Catholic Book Publishing Corp. All rights reserved.

The Parable of the Fish (Saying 8)

He said, "The human being is like a wise fisher who cast a net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisher found a fine large fish and cast all the little fish back down into the sea, easily choosing the large fish. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"⁵

8. (1) ΑΥΩ ΠΕΧΑΥ ΧΕ ΕΠΡΩΜΕ ΤΝΤΩΝ ΑΥΟΥΩΖΕ ΡΡΜΝΖΗΤ
ΠΑΕΙ ΝΤΑΖΝΟΥΧΕ ΝΤΕΦΑΒΩ ΕΘΑΛΛΑCΑ ΑΥCΩΚ ΜΜΟC ΕΖΡΑΙ ΖΝ
ΘΑΛΛΑCΑ ΕCΜΕΖ ΝΤΒΤ ΝΚΟΥΕΙ (2) ΝΖΡΑΙ ΝΖΗΤΟΥ ΑΥΖΕ ΑΥΝΟC
ΝΤΒΤ ΕΝΑΝΟΥΥ ΝCΙ ΠΟΥΩΖΕ ΡΡΜΝΖΗΤ (3) ΑΥΝΟΥΧΕ ΝΝΚΟΥΕΙ
ΤΗΡΟΥ ΝΤΒΤ ΕΒΟΛ Ε(ΠΕ)CΗΤ ΕΘΑΛΛΑCΑ ΑΥCΩΤΠ ΜΠΝΟC ΝΤΒΤ
ΧΩΡΙC ΖΙCΕ (4) ΠΕΤΕ ΟΥΝ ΜΑΛΧΕ ΜΜΟΥ ΕCΩΤΜ ΜΑΡΕΥCΩΤΜ 6

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁷

Luke 8:8 And some fell onto good soil, and when it grew it produced a crop of a hundredfold." After saying this, he cried out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Matthew 13:47-50 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net cast into the sea where it caught fish of every kind. When it was full, they hauled it ashore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish into baskets but discarded those that were worthless. Thus, will it be at the end of the world. The angels will go forth and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Scholarly Quotes:⁸

Funk cites Aesop as follows: "A fisherman drew in the net which he had cast a short time before and, as luck would have it, it was full of all kinds of delectable fish. But the little ones fled to the bottom of the net and slipped out through its many meshes, whereas the big ones were caught and lay stretched out in the boat. / It's one way to be insured and out of trouble, to be small; but you will seldom see a man who enjoys great reputation and has the luck to evade all risks. (Perry, 1965: 9-10)" (*New Gospel Parallels*, v. 2, p. 110)

⁵ "The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁶ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁷ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

Funk also refers to Philoxenas as follows: "Then one will see the fisherman cast his net into the sea of the world and fill it with fish, small and great. . . . At that time, he will draw his net and bring it up to the shore of the sea, as he set it, and he will choose the good fish and will put them in his vessels, . . . and he will throw away the wicked ones into utter darkness, where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (IDB Supplement: 903a)" (*New Gospel Parallels*, v. 2, p. 110)

Ron Cameron refers to Herodotus, History 1.141: "Once, he [Cyrus] said, there was a flute-player who saw fishes in the sea and played upon his flute, thinking that so they would come out on to the land. Being disappointed of his hope, he took a net and gathered in and drew out a great multitude of the fishes; and seeing them leaping, 'You had best,' said he, 'cease from your dancing now; you would not come out and dance then, when I played to you.'" ("Parable and Interpretation in the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 2.2 [1986], p. 29)

Cameron also quotes a parallel in Clement of Alexandria, Miscellanies 6.11.95.3: "the kingdom of heaven is like a person who cast a net into the sea and, from the multitude of fish that were caught, chose the better." ("Parable and Interpretation in the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 2.2 [1986], p. 28)

John Dart writes: "One scholar, Claus-Hunno Hunzinger, says 'the Man' [in Guillaumont's translation] can be understood as a gnosticizing substitute for 'the kingdom of heaven.'" (*The Laughing Savior*, pp. 94-95)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "'Man' is a keyword link to 'man' in 7.1, 2. Instead of 'man', originally 'kingdom of the Father/God' probably stood in v. 1." (*Jesus After 200 Years*, p. 594)

Ron Cameron writes: "The opening words of The Fishnet ('the person [P.RWME] is like a wise fisherman') are striking, for the making of a comparison to a person is generally assumed to be anomalous in the parables of the Jesus tradition. It is the overwhelming consensus of scholarship that the reference to 'the person' in Thomas has supplanted the original, more familiar reference to 'the kingdom.' This is particularly the judgment of those who consider this 'person' a gnosticizing substitution for that 'kingdom.' Accordingly, 'the person' (frequently translated 'the man') who is said to be compared to a 'wise fisherman' in GThom 8.1 has been variously

identified as (1) the 'Son of Man,' (2) the gnostic 'Primal Man' (ANQRWPOS), (3) the individual Gnostic, or (4) the gnostic Redeemer." ("Parable and Interpretation in the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 2.2 [1986])

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "Thomas contains a parable about a 'wise fisherman' who threw away all the little fish he caught and kept only a large and good one (Saying 8/7); this may be contrasted with the parable of the Dragnet in Matthew 13:47-50, where good and bad fish are kept together until the end of the age." (*Gnosticism & Early Christianity*, pp. 188-189)

F. F. Bruce writes: "This, the first of many parables in the *Gospel of Thomas*, bears a superficial resemblance to the parable of the dragnet in Matthew 13.47-50,, but its point is closer to that of the parables of the treasure concealed in a field (Saying 109) and the pearl of great price (Saying 76), to gain which a man sells all that he has (Matthew 13.44-46). In this context the big fish is either the true Gnostic, whom Christ chooses above all others, or the true knowledge for which the Gnostic abandons everything else." (*Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 115-116)

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "We should expect to read that 'the kingdom' is like a fisherman (cf., Sayings 20, 76, 93-95, 104, 106); but for Thomas, true, inner man is *equivalent* to the kingdom. Moreover, Thomas sharply modifies the meaning of the parable in Matthew 13:47-48, on which he relies for some details. There the kingdom is like the net which brings in fish of all sorts, good and bad alike (a very un-Gnostic notion!). Thomas tells of the 'experienced' fisherman who can select the best one of his catch (compare the 'sheep' of Saying 104). The parable ends with the admonition, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear'; Matthew uses a similar admonition twice in the chapter in which he tells the parable of the dragnet (13:9, 43). Like Matthew, Thomas wants to show that there is a hidden meaning in the parable (see Sayings 22, 25, 64, 66, 93). The meaning is that only Gnostics are selected by Jesus or the Father, or that Gnostics select Christ." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, pp. 126-127)

R. Michel Wilson writes: "By printing the opening words in the form 'The Man is like a wise fisherman,' the official translation inevitably suggests an association with the Gnostic Anthropos, in which case the parable would refer to the election of the Gnostic. He is the large and good fish which is

selected while all the rest are thrown back into the sea. It is also possible, however, to interpret this story as a parable of the Gnostic, the fish in this case being *gnosis* and the parable constructed on the model of the synoptic parables of the pearl of great price and the hidden treasure, both of which also occur in Thomas, to teach that the Kingdom of God (or in Thomas *gnosis*) is of such supreme value as to be worth any sacrifice." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 40-41)

Helmut Koester writes: "One may wonder whether Thomas refers to the synoptic parable of Matt. 13:47-48 at all. There is an almost exact parallel to Saying 8 in the poetic version of the Aesopic fables by Babrius, who, in the first century A.D., dedicated his work to the son of King Alexander, whose tutor he was." (*Trajectories through Early Christianity*, p. 176)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "The catch varies. When the fisherman throws his casting-net into the shallow water by the bank, weighted with lead round the edge, it falls into the water like a bell. The net often remains empty several times running. A modern observer counted twenty to twenty-five fish in one catch. In the parable, when the fisherman drew his net to shore he found a great number of small fish in it, but among them one fine large fish. Although he might have hesitated about keeping a few of the small fish in his bag, yet in his joy over the CALLICQUS [Thus Clem. Alex., *Strom.*, I, 16.3 with reference to our parable.] he cast aside all such hesitations and threw all the small fish back into the lake. Thus, it is when a man is overwhelmed with joy over the glad Good News; all else becomes valueless compared with this surpassing value." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 201)

Other Insights:⁹

- "The world sea is full of small truths (fish, viewpoints) about God (Ultimate Reality). When you catch (are gifted with, discover) a larger more comprehensive truth which allows you to see into the nature of the smaller truths as being part of the larger truth, abandon the small truths in favor of the encompassing greater truth."
- "Mankind are the fish, many in quantity, only God will sift through the "catch" to find the deserving to bring to heaven."
- "The possibilities of this saying as an allegory are interesting, but it is also worth noting that Jesus was never above giving pragmatic as well

⁹ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

as spiritual advice, and this parable could also be interpreted as a way to preserve the stock of fish, a very valuable resource.”

- “Note that the text is very explicit about the fisherman being a wise fisherman. So only the truly wise will have no trouble in discerning the truth among everything else, because only they know how to. Because a fisherman is chosen you might also want to think about the possibility that he became wise through fishing (experience).”
- “If we keep the reincarnation motif as told in 'Conversations With God' it makes a lot of sense to say that we (people) are the fish. On a practical level, we all have thoughts, ideas, and theories swimming around in our minds. It makes a lot of sense to throw back the little ones and let them grow.”
- “Discernment and selectivity are good. Learn how to know what is correct for you, is an ability that has to be taught.”
- “To me this seems to say that man, endowed with the (easily abused) power to harvest his livelihood from nature also would be wise to treat that source of life with respect: by replacing the smaller fish, he encourages them to grow to full size, perhaps reproduce (surely a fish's sacred goal in life), and hopefully return to the net later - as larger fish.”
- “In fishing, cast forth your net and see what you catch. You will certainly catch many small fish, but in catching one (or two) large fish, you have all you need for a time and allow the small fish to grow to a size where they can provide for you in the future. (Speak to the masses, draw them in, but only those who are mature enough will understand and can be brought in to develop the understanding necessary for the faith to grow, and they can then nurture the smaller "fish" to the point where they can learn and understand.)”
- “This seems to go along with the "I will make you fishers of men" statement in the Bible. To be efficient in converting people to the truth, one should concentrate not only on who is receptive but who can make an impact and influence others below them. It's like the spiritual trickledown effect.”
- “I think we're all correct but here's my take on the parable. You, myself, man in general casts nets out all the time. Sometimes we cast nets for love, jobs, and knowledge. As we all know, when we seek or cast a net out sometimes you don't get quite what you're looking for, i.e. you get

little fish. But when you do find what you're looking for then, ahh, the big fish that sustains.”

- “The big fish is fully grown, able to comprehend the truths, to accept and understand the abstract, the smaller ones are set free in order to develop and better their abilities. When they are prepared and able to accept the truth, they meet the wise fisherman.”

The Parable of the Sower (Saying 9)

Jesus said, "Look, a sower went out, took a handful of seeds, and scattered them. Some fell on the roadside; the birds came and gathered them. Others fell on the rock; they didn't take root in the soil and ears of grain didn't rise toward heaven. Yet others fell on thorns; they choked the seeds and worms ate them. Finally, others fell on good soil; it produced fruit up toward heaven, some sixty times as much and some a hundred and twenty."¹⁰

9. (1) ΠΕΧΕ Ιϸ ΧΕ ΕΙCΖΗΗΤΕ ΔΑΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ Ν̄ΟΙ ΠΕΤCΙΤΕ ΔΑΜΕΖ
ΤΟΟΤϸ ΔΑΝΟΥΧΕ (2) ΔΖΟΕΙΝΕ ΜΕΝ ΖΕ ΕΧΝ ΤΕΖΙΗ ΔΥΕΙ Ν̄ΟΙ
Ν̄ΖΑΛΑΤΕ ΔΥΚΑΤϸΟΥ (3) ΖΝΚΟΟΥΕ ΔΥΖΕ ΕΧΝ ΤΠΕΤΡΑ ΔΥΩ
ΜΠΟΥΧΕ ΝΟΥΝΕ ΕΠΕCΗΤ ΕΠΚΑΖ ΔΥΩ ΜΠΟΥΤΕΥΕ ΖΜC ΕΖΡΑΙ
ΕΤΠΕ (4) ΔΥΩ ΖΝΚΟΟΥΕ ΔΥΖΕ ΕΧΝ Ν̄ΩΟΝΤΕ ΔΥΩCΤ ΜΠΕΘΡΟC
ΔΥΩ ΔΠϸΝΤ ΟΥΟΜΟΥ (5) ΔΥΩ ΔΖΝΚΟΟΥΕ ΖΕ ΕΧΝ ΠΚΑΖ
ΕΤΝΑΝΟΥϸ ΔΥΩ Δϸ† ΚΑΡΠΟC ΕΖΡΑΙ ΕΤΠΕ ΕΝΑΝΟΥϸ ΔΑΕΙ Ν̄CΕ
ΕCΟΤΕ ΔΥΩ ΨΕΧΟΥΩΤ ΕCΟΤΕ

11

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:¹²

Luke 8:4-8 When a large crowd gathered together as people from every town flocked to him, he said in a parable: "A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some of the seed fell along the path and was trampled upon, and the birds of the sky ate it up. Some fell on rock, and when it came up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some fell onto good soil, and when it grew it produced a crop of a hundredfold." After saying this, he cried out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Mark 4:2-9 Then he taught them many things in parables. In the course of his teaching, he said to them: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. As he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where there was little soil. It sprouted quickly, since the soil had no depth of but when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it lacked roots, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it produced no crop. But some seed fell onto rich soil

¹⁰ "The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

¹¹ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

¹² <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

and brought forth grain, increasing and yielding thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was sown." He then added, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Scholarly Quotes:¹³

Marvin Meyer writes: "In each occurrence of the parable in the New Testament, the author has added an allegorical interpretation of the parable and placed it on the lips of Jesus (Matthew 13:18-23; Mark 4:13-20; Luke 8:11-15). Stories similar to the parable are known from Jewish and Greek literature. Thus Sirach 6:19 says, 'Come to her (that is, Wisdom) like one who plows and sows, and wait for her good crops. For in her work you will toil a little, and soon you will eat of her produce.' In his Oratorical Instruction 5.11.24, Quintilian writes, 'For instance, if you would say that the mind needs to be cultivated, you would use a comparison to the soil, which if neglected produces thorns and brambles but if cultivated produces a crop. . . .'" (*The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, pp. 72-73)

F. F. Bruce writes: "This is another version of the parable of the sower (or the parable of the four soils), recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (Mark 4.3-8; Matthew 13.3-8; Luke 8.5-8). The worm that attacked the seed sown among thorns is peculiar to this version. The 'rock' instead of 'rocky ground' is distinctively Lukan; the statement that the seed sown there 'sent forth no ears up to heaven' has been recognized as a Naassene thought. [Hippolytus (*Refutation* v.8.29) reproduces the Naassene interpretation of the parable.] The statement that the first lot of seed fell 'on' (not 'by') the road probably reflects the sense of the Aramaic preposition used by Jesus in telling the parable (the preposition may be rendered 'on' or 'by' according to the context)." (*Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 116)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "Here, as additions to the synoptic form of the parable, we have the antithesis '(did not strike root in the earth and sent up no ears to heaven)', the mention of the worm and the increase in number, 120." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 28)

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "Thomas adds a few details. The sower 'filled his hand' before he cast the seed; this looks like no more than an attempt to indicate the fullness or completeness of the sowing (of souls or spirits). But when we read that the seed which fell on 'the rock'

¹³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

(so only Luke) not only had no root but also 'put forth no ear up to heaven' we are confronting a combination of this parable with the Naassene doctrine of the heavenward ascent of the good seed. The seed which fell upon thorns was not only choked but also eaten by the worm - presumably the worm of Gehenna (cf., Mark 9:48), though Thomas does not say so, since, like other Gnostics, he doubtless holds that hell is on earth. The good fruit, unlike the bad, is brought forth 'up to heaven,' sometimes sixty-fold, sometimes one-hundred-twenty-fold. Thomas feels free to give these figures since Matthew has one hundred, sixty, and thirty; Mark has thirty-sixty-one hundred; and Luke has simply one hundred. His figure is more logical; one hundred twenty is twice as much as sixty." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, pp. 127-128)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "In particular he [Quispel] claims as evidence [for primitivity] the reading 'on the road,' for which he has found parallels in Justin Martyr and in the Clementine literature. Moreover, Clement of Rome quotes the opening words in this form rather than that of our Gospels. Bartsch, however, argues that the chance is a correction of the synoptic version, and regards the differences in Thomas as the result of condensation in the paraenetic tradition. Luke's version indeed is an intermediate stage between those of Mark and of Thomas. The correction is certainly very natural, and scholars have long recognized that the synoptic 'by the wayside' goes back to a misunderstanding of the Aramaic; but this does not necessarily preclude the possibility that two Greek versions were current. The question should probably be left open since the evidence is scarcely decisive either way. Grant and Freedman see here only a few additions to the canonical parable and quote the Naassene exegesis; the form in which the Naassene cited the parable was apparently not exactly that of Thomas, but 'based on a mixture of Matthew and Luke.' In this connection it is interesting to see what the Gnostics, or others like them, could make of an apparently innocuous parable: Puech quotes in another connection, and Doresse adduces at this point in his commentary, an interpretation given by the Priscillianists, to the effect that this was not a good sower, or he would not have been so careless; in fact, he was the God of this world, sowing souls into bodies. The passage is quoted by Orosius (c. A.D. 414) from the *Memoria Apostolorum*, a work of uncertain date, and it is not clear how far back this interpretation can be traced. We cannot say that this was how Thomas understood the parable, but such an exegesis is certainly in the Gnostic tradition." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 98-99)

Funk and Hoover write: "Thomas has preserved what the Fellows take to be the form of the parable that is closest to the original. The seed is first sown on three kinds of ground that fail to produce: the road, the rocky ground, and among the thorns. When sown on good soil, the seed produces yields at two different levels: sixty and one hundred twenty. Originally, the yields were probably thirty, sixty, one hundred, as Mark records them, although the doubling of sixty to one hundred twenty may have been original. The structure probably consisted of two sets of threes: three failures, three successes." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 478)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "The comparison between the versions of Mark and Thomas indicates that there is a far-reaching agreement, with two exceptions: *first*, the conclusion differs in that Mark speaks of fruit thirtyfold and sixtyfold and one hundredfold, while Thomas speaks of sixty and one hundred and twenty measures. *Secondly*, in mentioning the rocky ground on which the seed fell Mark additionally writes that the rising sun contributed to the withering (Mark 4.6), whereas Thomas is silent about this. On the whole we must regard the version of Thomas as older than that of Mark, because it is simpler." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 28)

Other Insights:¹⁴

- "It is unclear in the scholarly quotes how this is being taken. It appears perhaps that it is being taken that the sown seed are souls who prosper or not dependent on where they are sown. I believe the sown seed refers to the words of wisdom spoken by Jesus (or others) which can either be heeded and understood producing good fruit, ignored on stony soil, lost among the weeds of competing thoughts, or perverted into something else entirely."
- "If this is to be interpreted at all and not just basic agriculture, I'd say: keep an open mind, concentrate on what you're doing, do not dismiss new things and you will see, you will learn and find, thus becoming aware of being the living father's child."
- "It seems to me that the use of 60-fold and 120-fold in Thomas is good evidence that at least some of Thomas is not derived from the synoptic Gospels but is a separate tradition branching off at least prior to Mark. The original parable was probably spoken in Aramaic, which I believe

¹⁴ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

used the Babylonian base-60 number system. In this system, the progression 30, 60, 120 would have been natural whereas 30, 60, 100 would not. The use of 100 in the synoptic gospels was probably a mistranslation from the time of Mark.”

- “I think the most likely interpretation of this is a caution to the missionaries that not everyone will be converted, and not to get dispirited by the failures as not everyone is "good earth." [This is the interpretation of Mark 4:13-20]”
- “The birds will gather, the rock will stand, the thorns will choke, and the worm will eat. If the seed is God's word, it will fall unto unwanted ears, some will hear what others will use, many will understand if they nurture and cultivate the word.”
- “The soil is the composite mind/heart/heaven, which is like a garden. The sower is the myriad of influences, especially the ego. The seed is the seed of virtue, or the means by which virtue is inculcated. These teachings are among those seeds, and due to their oblique nature cannot all take root in all minds. In some minds too many conflicting desires and ideas reside, thus many seeds are choked out and consumed by the worm of desire which lives at the root of our preferences. The well-worn road corresponds to the conditioned element of the mind which has hardened such that nothing can take root. Considering the individual as a myriad of selves and a composite of influences is essential to this interpretation.”
- “Cast forth the "seed" (teaching and understanding of the Lord). Some will be taken by the birds and beasts (consumed by the worries of the world), some will fall on rock and produce not (minds of rock, "Stupid mind like concrete, all mixed up and permanently set"), some will fall among thorns and were choked off and the worms ate them (the mind was fertile, but too fertile, and there were too many things pulling at the potential, and the "worms," false teachers, consumed them). Some seeds fell on good earth, were watered, and cared for, and grew to produce more seed (believers to spread the faith).
- “The seeds are of mankind. In the absence of self-knowledge, there is no everlasting life. The road, the rock, and the thorn, each in its own way, prevent spiritual realization. The represent Spiritual Ignorance, intolerance, and hate. The canon collectively seems to miss the point

in leaving out the original fates: Consumption by birds, starvation from lack of root and corruption by the worm.”

- “The author Thomas is creating a comparison between a handful of seeds and mankind. The sower in the parable seems to represent God, the one who creates life, and like a gardener or farmer he places seeds on to the earth. The earth in this parable is represented by four distinct elements, the road, rock, thorns, and soil. These four elements together represent the different conditions of the world, as well as different conditions that mankind faces. To elaborate an example can be provided, the thorns, which are prickly, and choke can represent a harsh, poor existence and so on. It seems that in this metaphor Thomas has an elitist view when it comes to idea of mankind and those who are true believers. The seeds, which represent mankind, cannot really become fruitful and live unless they are placed in the right conditions. This is obviously not in their power. And so, it is a small group of people who can truly recognize the true message of Jesus, and it is these few people like the seeds who can truly, grow, develop, and mature. It is these few who have been lucky enough to be in the right conditions. Thomas portrays a view that those who are truly illuminated or understand the message are so because of fate, and so they cannot really help being that way. This view creates a barrier between those chosen persons, i.e. the seeds that fell on the good soil, and all the other seeds, which represent the rest of mankind, which will not make it. This elitist view is evident in other sayings in the Gospel of Thomas.”

The Parable of the Mustard Seed (Saying 20)

The disciples asked Jesus, "Tell us, what can the kingdom of heaven be compared to?"

He said to them, "It can be compared to a mustard seed. Though it's the smallest of all the seeds, when it falls on tilled soil it makes a plant so large that it shelters the birds of heaven."¹⁵

20. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΜΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ ΝΙC ΧΕ ΧΟΟΣ ΕΡΟΝ ΧΕ ΤΜΝΤΕΡΟ
ΝΜΠΗΥΕ ΕCΤΝΤΩΝ ΕΝΙΜ (2) ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑΥ ΧΕ ΕCΤΝΤΩΝ ΔΥΒΛΒΙΑΕ
ΝΨΛΤΑΜ (3) (C)CΟΒΚ ΠΑΡΑ ΝΟΡΟC ΤΗΡΟΥ (4) ΖΟΤΑΝ ΔΕ
ΕCΨΑΝΖΕ ΕΧΜ ΠΚΑΖ ΕΤΟΥΡ ΖΩΒ ΕΡΟC ΨΑCΤΕΥΟ ΕΒΟΛ
ΝΝΟΥΝΟC ΝΤΑΡ ΝCΨΩΠΕ ΝΚΕΠΗ ΝΖΑΛΑΤΕ ΝΤΠΕ

16

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:¹⁷

Matthew 13:31-42 He proposed still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of plants and becomes a tree large enough for the birds to come and make nests in its branches. "And he offered them yet another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until it was completely leavened. Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables. Indeed, he never spoke to them except in parables. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden since the foundation of the world." Then he dismissed the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." He answered, "The one who sows good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are angels. "Just as the weeds are collected and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the world. The Son of Man will send forth his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all who cause sin and all whose deeds

¹⁵ "The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

¹⁶ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

¹⁷ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

are evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Mark 4:30-32 He then said, "With what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use to explain it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the greatest of all plants, and it puts forth large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

Scholarly Quotes:¹⁸

Joachim Jeremias writes: "The conclusion of the parable of the Mustard Seed in the Gospel of Thomas (20) runs as follows: '. . . it produces a large branch and becomes shelter (sceph) for the birds of heaven'. This is possible a free allusion to Dan. 4.9, 18; Ezek. 17.23; 31.6; 3.9, 18 Th., while in Matthew (13.32) and Luke (13.19) it is a free quotation from Dan. 3.18 Th. The unrealistic description of the mustard-seed as a tree, which only occurs in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark or the Gospel of Thomas, is also derived from Dan. 3.17." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 31)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "In the Gospel of Thomas (20), too, a similar introduction to the parable of the Mustard Seed: 'The disciples said to Jesus: Tell us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like', is secondary by comparison with Mark 4.30, where Jesus himself puts the question, since such questions from the disciples are characteristic of the Gospel of Thomas." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 98)

Helmut Koester writes: "The emphasis upon the contrast of the small seed and the large plant is missing in the Q form of this parable (Luke 13:18-19), which differs from the Markan version also in other respects: it speaks of the 'garden' into which the seed is thrown, and it says that it becomes a 'tree' (dendron) and that 'the birds are nesting in its branches.' Mark and Thomas use the appropriate term 'vegetable' (laxanon), and they correctly describe birds as nesting under the branches. One could also argue that the contrast 'small seed / large plant' is a structural element of the original parable that is lost in Q/Luke's version. In any case, Thomas's parallels with Mark do not

¹⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

require the assumption of a literary dependence; what both have in common are original features of the parable." (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 109)

Funk and Hoover write: "The Fellows judged the version in Thomas to be the closest to the original. It was therefore given a red designation. The three synoptic versions have been accommodated to a greater or lesser degree to the apocalyptic tree theme and so were designated pink. This parable is a good example of how the original Jesus tradition, perhaps shocking in its modesty or poorly understood, is revised to accommodate living and powerful mythical images drawn from the Hebrew scriptures." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 485)

J. D. Crossan quotes Pliny's *Natural History* 19.170-171 as saying: "Mustard . . . with its pungent taste and fiery effect is extremely beneficial for the health. It grows entirely wild, though it is improved by being transplanted: but on the other hand, when it has once been sown it is scarcely possible to get the place free of it, as the seed when it falls germinates at once."

J. D. Crossan comments: "There is, on other words, a distinction between the wild mustard and its domesticated counterpart, but even when one deliberately cultivates the latter for its medicinal or culinary properties, there is an ever-present danger that it will destroy the garden. And, apart from those domesticated types, such as *brassica nigra* or *sinapis alba*, there is, as Douglas Oakman emphasizes, the wild mustard, charlock, or *sinapis arvensis*, whose 'plants have from time immemorial been found as weeds in grain fields' (1986:124). The mustard plant, therefore, is, as domesticated in the garden, dangerous and, as wild in the grain fields, deadly. The point is not just that it starts small and ends big but that its bigness is not exactly a horticultural or agricultural desideratum." (*The Historical Jesus*, p. 278)

J. D. Crossan concludes: "The point, in other words, is not just that the mustard plant starts as a proverbially small seed and grows into a shrub of three or four feet, or even higher, it is that it tends to take over where it is not wanted, that it tends to get out of control, and that it tends to attract birds within cultivated areas where they are not particularly desired. And that, said Jesus, was what the Kingdom was like: not like the mighty cedar of Lebanon and not quite like a common weed, like a pungent shrub with dangerous takeover properties. Something you would want in only small and carefully controlled doses - if you could control it." (*The Historical Jesus*, pp. 279-279)

Other Insights:¹⁹

- "Kingdom of Heaven" related to a mustard seed refers to the revolutionary quality of the message being taught by Jesus. If it falls on prepared ground and is understood, it grows without bound."
- "Guess that means that, contrary to typical Christian doctrine, Heaven is not an actual place you go to like a carnival or museum. It's a frame of mind, a sphere of consciousness, a sense of something, like compassion, which can be spread or ignored. Based on free will."
- "The seed is the kernel of one's innate self. Prepare the ground by becoming aware of one's repressed emotions and the innate self will flourish and shelter the lost fragments of oneself."
- "Let the record show, trivially I admit, that the mustard seed is not in fact the smallest of the seeds, but that the seed of the orchid is, botanically speaking, smaller."
- "Isn't it interesting that the mustard seed cannot be contaminated, all mustard seeds are made perfect and cannot be cross breaded. So, what does this insight bring to this parable? It may be the smallest of many other seeds, yet it is the purest. We are the seed in essence and have the potential to create shade for the birds of heaven, our own brothers, and sisters. May we all discover our inner potential. Amen."
- "The Kingdom of Heaven (which is in you, you are the Temple of God) is based on faith (mustard seed) worked in good ground (your knowledge of truth)."
- "The Kingdom of "Heaven" is as a small seed of concept that associates itself with all the truths and proofs of the tilled and fertile mind. From the *minim* of its existence, it spreads throughout the world, and spreads its seeds to others, where, if their minds are open and fertile, the Kingdom of Heaven grows in them as well."
- "The smallest of seed (the insignificant ones) falls on tilled ground (to till land you have to disrupt it, turn it over, upheaval, pain) but when they grow will become a mighty tree indeed. Being a true Christian involves some suffering or tilling in order to become who the Lord would want you to be."

¹⁹ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parables of the Field and the Bandits (Saying 21)

Mary said to Jesus, "Whom are your disciples like?"

He said, "They're like little children living in a field which isn't theirs. When the owners of the field come, they'll say, 'Give our field back to us.' They'll strip naked in front of them to let them have it and give them their field.

"So, I say that if the owner of the house realizes the bandit is coming, they'll watch out beforehand and won't let the bandit break into the house of their domain and steal their possessions. You, then, watch out for the world! Prepare to defend yourself so that the bandits don't attack you, because what you're expecting will come. May there be a wise person among you!

"When the fruit ripened, the reaper came quickly, sickle in hand, and harvested it. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"²⁰

21. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΜΑΡΙΖΑΜ ΝΙC ΧΕ ΕΝΕΚΜΑΘΗΤΗC ΕΙΝΕ ΝΝΙΜ (2)
ΠΕΧΑC ΧΕ ΕΥΕΙΝΕ ΝΖΝΩΗΡΕ ΩΗΜ ΕΥΘΕΛΙΤ ΛΥCΩΥΕ ΕΤΩΟΥ
ΑΝ ΤΕ (3) ΖΟΤΑΝ ΕΥΩΔΕΙ ΝCΙ ΝΧΟΕΙC ΝΤCΩΥΕ CΕΝΑΧΟΟC ΧΕ
ΚΕ ΤΝCΩΥΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΝΑΝ (4) ΝΤΟΟΥ CΕΚΑΚ ΑΖΗΥ ΜΠΟΥΜΤΟ
ΕΒΟΛ ΕΤΡΟΥΚΑΑC ΕΒΟΛ ΝΑΥ ΝCΕ† ΤΟΥCΩΥΕ ΝΑΥ (5) ΔΙΑ
ΤΟΥΤΟ †ΧΩ ΜΜΟC ΧΕ ΕCΩΔΕΙΜΕ ΝCΙ ΠΧΕCΖΝΗΕΙ ΧΕ CΗΗΥ ΝCΙ
ΠΡΕCΧΙΟΥΕ CΗΑΡΟΕΙC ΕΜΠΑΤΕCΕΙ ΝCΤΜΚΑΑC ΕΩΟΧΤ ΕΖΟΥΝ
ΕΠΕCΗΕΙ ΝΤΕ ΤΕCΜΝΤΕΡΟ ΕΤΡΕCΗΙ ΝΝΕCΚΕΥΟC (6) ΝΤΩΤΝ ΔΕ
ΡΟΕΙC ΖΑ ΤΕΖΗ ΜΠΚΟCΜΟC (7) ΜΟΥΡ ΜΜΩΤΝ ΕΧΝ ΝΕΤΝ†ΠΕ
ΖΝΝΟΥΝΟC ΝΔΥΝΑΜΙC ΩΙΝΑ ΧΕ ΝΕΝΛΗCΤΗC ΖΕ ΕΖΙΗ ΕΕΙ
ΩΑΡΩΤΝ ΕΠΕΙ ΤΕΧΡΕΙΑ ΕΤΕΤΝCΩΥΤ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗΤC CΕΝΑΖΕ ΕΡΟC
(8) ΜΑΡΕCΩΠΠΕ ΖΝ ΤΕΤΝΜΗΤΕ ΝCΙ ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΝΕΠΙCΤΗΜΩΝ (9)
ΝΤΑΡΕΠΚΑΡΠΟC ΠΩΖ ΑCΕΙ ΖΝΝΟΥCΕΠΗ ΕΠΕCΑCΖ ΖΝ ΤΕCΘΙΧ
ΑCΖΑCΗ (10) ΠΕΤΕ ΟΥΝ ΜΑΑΧΕ ΜΜΟC ΕCΩΤΜ ΜΑΡΕCΩΤΜ

21

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:²²

Luke 12:39-40 "But keep this in mind: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be

²⁰ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

²¹ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

²² <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

broken into. So, you must also be prepared, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

Luke 11:21-22 “When a strong man is fully armed and guards his palace, his possessions are safe. But when someone who is stronger than he is attacks and overpowers him, he carries off all the weapons upon which the owner relied and distributes the plunder.

Matthew 12:29 “Or again, how can anyone break into a strong man’s house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then indeed he can ransack the house.

Mark 3:27 “But no one can break into a strong man’s house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man; then he can ransack the house.

Scholarly Quotes:²³

Marvin quotes Hippolytus in Refutation of All Heresies 5.8.44 as a relevant passage: "For this, he says, is 'the gate of heaven,' and this is '<the> house of God,' where the good God dwells alone, into which no one will enter, he says, who is unclean, physical, or carnal, but it is reserved for the spiritual alone, where it is necessary for them, when they have come there, to cast off their clothing and all become bridegrooms, having been made male through the virgin spirit." (*The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, p. 78)

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "Here Mariham (the Mariamme of the Naessenses - Hippolytus, *Ref.*, 5, 7, 1 - also mentioned in Saying 112), asks a question and is told that the disciples are 'like little children' (Matthew 18:3; cf., 1 Corinthians 14:20). The children live in an alien field, which must be the world, as in Matthew 13:38. 'Leave our field to us!' recalls the command of the farmer in Matthew 13:30: 'Leave both to grow up together until the harvest.' Moreover, in Matthew 24:40-42 there are mysterious references to 'two in a field,' to one's being left, and to the coming of a master. Whatever synoptic reminiscences there may be, these have been subordinated to the notion of being naked (see Saying 38). The true Gnostic wants to strip off the body (contrast 2 Corinthians 5:4: 'not to be

²³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

stripped but to be clad upon') and leave the world." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 141)

Jack Finegan writes: "Here the little children who live in the field are presumably the disciples who live in the world. When they give back the field to its owners they 'take off their clothes before them' which, in the present context, must mean that they strip themselves of their bodies in death, an end, to the Gnostic, eminently desirable (cf. §§236, 357)." (*Hidden Records of the Life of Jesus*, p. 254)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "These verses are unique among the Jesus traditions and are hard to understand. If we begin with the evident recognition that the children symbolize the Gnostics, it is manifestly being said that they are staying in a strange field, namely the evil world, and that they are asking the owners for their own field. To this end, the exchange of fields, they bare themselves, which probably refers to baptism." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 601)

Funk and Hoover write: "The conclusion in v. 4 is a metaphor with several possible interpretations: (1) It may be an allusion to Christian baptism, which would reflect the concerns of the emerging Christian community. (2) It may refer to gnostic and other early Christian notions that upon death the soul sheds the body (clothing) and proceeds to the heavenly realm from whence it has come (compare Thoms 29; 87; 112). (3) Or it may symbolize the return to a primordial state of sexual non-differentiation, to an androgynous state (compare Thomas 37). At all events, the parable in its present form reflects theological concerns that did not originate with Jesus." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 485)

Robert Price writes: "This passage in Thomas is in turn derived from a vague memory quotation of two canonical gospel texts. The first is the parable of the wicked tenants in Mark 12:1-9 ('A man planted a vineyard . . . and lent it out to tenants and went away into another country. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard . . .'). The second is the parable of the unfaithful steward toward the end of the Markan Apocalypse, 13:34-37, which ends with the exhortation, 'Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house will come . . ., lest he comes suddenly and find you asleep.' Thomas' version makes the tenants into the disciples rather than the enemies of Jesus and

bids them acknowledge the claim of the field's/vineyard's true owner (perhaps Satan or the Gnostic Demiurge). Likewise, the owner of the house has become, not the one whose coming is awaited, but rather, the one who awaits the coming of another - a thief. Again, the allegorical counterparts have shifted roles. One awaits not God but the devil (cf. Mark 4:15)." (*Deconstructing Jesus*, pp. 131-132)

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "From the same context in Luke (as in Saying 100) comes the counsel, 'Gird your loins!' Thomas explains that this means to gird yourself with 'a great power' (the power of the kingdom) so that no robber may come to you (Luke 12:33). You will be given what you need (Luke 12:22-32). An 'understanding man' is mentioned in Luke 12:42. Because of such parallels, it is hard to believe that Thomas is doing anything but creating a mosaic of sayings chiefly derived from Luke." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 142)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "But the application of the parable to the return of the Son of Man is strange; for if the subject of discourse is a nocturnal burglary, it refers to a disastrous and alarming event, whereas the *Parousia*, at least for the disciples of Jesus, is the great day of joy. In fact the Christological application is missing from the Gospel of Thomas. Here the parable of the night-burglar has been preserved in two versions. The one contained in logion 21b resembles the Matthaean version, while the one which appears as logion 103 seems to be a very free repetition in the form of beatitude and exhibits some affinity with Luke 12.35 ff. Both versions agree in the fact that neither of them compares the breaking in of the burglar to the return of the Son of Man." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 49)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "On this Bartsch comments that not only is the text, and therefore the translation, at some points uncertain, the whole passage seems to resist a uniform interpretation. The Synoptic parallels are first Luke xii. 39, with a change of tense and the addition of 'of his kingdom'; then Mark iii. 27 (the specific reference to vessels (SKEUH) here and in Matthew xii. 29 has no parallel in Luke); the call to watchfulness, of course, can be readily paralleled from our Gospels, but the warning to beware of the world is not Synoptic. Bartsch thinks this, and the addition of 'with great strength' after Luke xii. 35 in the next line may be due to Gnostic influence; so also, he explains the following words, which have no Synoptic parallel. Finally, the reference to the sickle is an adaptation of Mark iv. 29; since this passage is

peculiar to Mark this would seem to add the final proof that if Thomas used our Gospels he employed all three Synoptics, and not merely Matthew and Luke. Luke xii. 40, it may be added, is an exhortation to readiness, but has been replaced by words from another context (e.g. Matt. xxiv. 42) before xxi. 35 is used. If this is a mosaic based on our Gospels, the author has ranged very widely. Bartsch, however, sees in this logion and in logion 8 (the parable of the Fisherman) a version of the Synoptic parables which over against the tradition hitherto known is thoroughly independent." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 73-74)

Helmut Koester writes: "The Q version has shortened the parable, leaving out the purpose of the coming of the thief, i.e., to steal the goods of the owner of the house. That Q's parable presupposed such a continuation of the parable and was not simply an expansion of the metaphor of the 'day of the Lord coming like the thief in the night' (1 Thess 5:2; Rev 3:3), is evident in the phrase 'to be dug into.' Thomas's version suggests that the parable was cut short in Q in order to add the reference to the coming of the Son of man." (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 98)

J. D. Crossan writes: "The *metaphor* is clear enough and similar to that in Q/Matt. 24:43 = Luke 12:39. The awkward phrase, 'his house of his domain' (Lambdin: 120) or 'his house of his kingdom' (Guillaumont's, 1959:14-15; Wilson, 1973:513) is probably a Coptic mistranslation for an original 'the house of his domain/kingdom' (Quecke; Menard, 1975:112)." (*In Fragments*, pp. 61-62)

J. D. Crossan writes: "The *application* is more difficult since its translation is not too certain (Bartsch, 1959-1960:260). It is clear, however, that it warns about the world rather than the Parousia. And therein lies the difficulty: The *image* actually works better for the unexpected and momentary irruption of the end than for the expected and permanent onslaught of the world. Hence the concluding sentence's translation could be: 'for the difficulty which you expect will (surely) materialize' (Lambdin: 120) or 'because they will find the advantage which you expect' (Guillaumont's, 1959:16-17) or 'since the advantage for which you look they will find' (Menard, 1975:60)." (*In Fragments*, p. 62)

Funk and Hoover write: "This saying [Sickle & harvest] is an allusion to Joel 3:13. In Mark 4:29 it is attached to the parable of the seed and harvest. Its

appearance in two different contexts suggests that it circulated independently at one time. Both Mark and Thomas have given it an arbitrary location. The image is usually associated with the last judgment, which is what prompted some of the Fellows to vote black. However, it may also refer to the bountiful harvest that Jesus anticipates as a result of the providence of God who causes grain to grow (this is one way to read Mark's parable of the seed and harvest, 4:26-29). This possibility induced other Fellows to vote pink or gray." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 486)

Other Insights:²⁴

- "Let it be read thus: Mary asked Jesus "Whom are your disciples like?" He said: "They are like children who find themselves in a field that is not theirs. The masters of the field only say, 'Get out of our field!' Thus, the children shed their clothing, and leave the field. Thus, it is that my disciples shed their mortality, and go beyond the fields of life and death."
- "Know what is yours and know what is of the world. You live and the world is a dead product of the intellect. The dead cannot touch the living."
- "The little children are the conscious mind. The owners are the innate self. The conscious mind divests itself of self-destructive learnt attitudes and returns to itself. The thief is the self-destructive attitude, against which we must guard."
- "Technical --- adhere to the teachings of your teacher, allow time to pass for ripeness to develop, guard yourself well for your acquired understanding may be stolen from you by the world, and when you are fully ripe, your teacher will know and will come quickly "sickle in hand" ready to harvest, to bring to you The Knowledge of all that you were, are, and can become. The becoming ready may take 30 years yet the transition which he alone can bring, at the right time, may be dispensed by him in 30 minutes. The exhortation of those who have ears to hear, let them hear, is always a code phrase indicating that this understanding can only be acquired by those ready to receive it."
- "The shedding of clothes represents the dying of their "old man" (before they were saved). They are obedient. The house is your heart. Guard

²⁴ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

it well, or else the thief (Satan) will come and steal knowledge and understanding from you. When you learn something (ripened fruit) be sure to harvest it and guard it, or else someone will steal it (Satan again), and you will lose it.”

- “Let's remember the context and the many references to seeds, fields, and clothes. Jesus seems to be saying that the disciples are "wannabes". The truly enlightened own and work the fields and would be well-advised to arm themselves, harvest promptly, and deal with the troublemakers.”

The Parable of the Fortified City (Saying 32)

Jesus said, "A city built and fortified on a high mountain can't fall, nor can it be hidden."²⁵

32. ΠΕΧΕ Ιϸ ΧΕ ΟΥΠΟΛΙϸ ΕΥΚΩΤ ΜΜΟϸ ΖΙΧΝ ΟΥΤΟΟΥ
ΕΧΧΟϸΕ ΕϸΤΑΧΡΗ ΜΝ ΒΟΜ ΝϸΖΕ ΟΥΔΕ ϸΝΑΩΖΩΠ ΔΝ ²⁶

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:²⁷

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city built upon a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor would someone light a lamp and then put it under a basket; rather, it is placed upon a lampstand so that it may afford light to all in the house. In the same way, your light must shine so that it can be seen by others; this will enable them to observe your good works and give praise to your Father in heaven.

Scholarly Quotes:²⁸

Gerd Ludemann writes: "The saying has a precise equivalent in Greek. It seems overloaded by comparison with the parallel Matt. 5.14. Therefore Logion 32 may be of later date in terms of tradition. Gnostics had no difficulties in seeing themselves as inhabitants of a fortified city which could not be shaken." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 606)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "The saying is meant to encourage Jesus' disciples and preserve them from despondency. They are citizens of the lofty, eschatological city of God (Isa. 2.2-4; Micah 4.1-3), a city which no earthquake, nor hostile onslaught, nor even the Powers of Hell (Math. 16.18), can shake, and whose light streams through the night, needing no human efforts. Having the gospel, they have all they need." (*The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 217-218)

Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes: "There is no reason why the saying could not be regarded as authentic, but it is more likely a secondary expansion of Mt 5:14. I find it hard to see any connection between this saying and Mt 7:24-25,

²⁵ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

²⁶ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

²⁷ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

²⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

which has been suggested by various commentators." (*Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, p. 403)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "Fitzmyer also regards it as a secondary expansion of Matthew, while Grant and Freedman think it based on Matthew, but that 'it has become mixed up with something else in the course of transmission.' On the other hand, Puech notes that Vaganay, working on the basis of the Greek fragment, had already suggested that it came from independent tradition, and he himself suggests that it may be older and more complete than Matthew. Quispel has detected several parallels in other writings, some of them already noted by Harnack and others in their studies of the Greek, and these must lend support to the view that we have here an independent tradition." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, p. 61)

Funk and Hoover write: "The underlying saying about a city that cannot be concealed probably goes back to Jesus. It is based on a common sight in the Near East: one sees mounds protruding from the plain or valley floor everywhere; they mark the sites of ancient cities. When a city succumbed to an enemy siege, the new occupants simply leveled off the stones and clay bricks of which the walls and buildings of the previous city had been constructed and built on top of the debris. Over the centuries the mound (it is called a 'tell') would grow to considerable height since it was held together by the outer walls that were continually reconstructed to fortify the city. The saying about the fortified city on a hill is preserved by both Greek Thomas and Coptic Thomas as an independent saying. Since the original context has been lost in both Matthew and Thomas, we cannot determine what it meant on the lips of Jesus." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 492)

Other Insights:²⁹

- "It seems to me that this saying refers to the strength of faith as "a city built on the summit of a high mountain" and that through that faith, believers can neither be harmed in spirit, nor could they hide their faith."
- "If you fully understand the true message of Jesus, you cannot forget it. Nor can its effects on you be fully hidden, even deliberately

²⁹ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parable of the Lamp (Saying 33)

Jesus said, "What you hear with one ear, listen to with both, then proclaim from your rooftops. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket or in a hidden place. Rather, they put it on the stand so that everyone who comes and goes can see its light."³⁰

33. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΠΕΤΚΝΑCΩΤΜ ΕΡΟC ΖΜ ΠΕΚΜΑΑΧΕ ΖΜ
ΠΚΕΜΑΑΧΕ ΤΑΩΕ ΟΕΙΩ ΜΜΟC ΖΙΧΝ ΝΕΤΝΧΕΝΕΠΩΡ (2)
ΜΑΡΕΛΑΑΥ ΓΑΡ ΧΕΡΕ ΖΗΒC ΝCΚΑΑC ΖΑ ΜΑΑΧΕ ΟΥΔΕ ΜΑCΚΑΑC
ΖΜ ΜΑ ΕCΖΗΠ (3) ΑΛΛΑ ΕΩΑΡΕCΚΑΑC ΖΙΧΝ ΤΛΥΧΝΙΑ ΧΕΚΑΑC
ΟΥΟΝ ΝΙΜ ΕΤΒΗΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΑΥΩ ΕΤΝΝΗΥ ΕΒΟΛ ΕΥΝΑΝΑΥ
ΑΠΕCΟΥΟΕΙΝ

31

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:³²

Luke 12:2-3 For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore, whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.

Luke 8:16-17 No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covered it with a vessel, or puts it under a bed; but sets it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.

Luke 11:33-36 No man, when he hath lighted a candle, puts it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore, when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.

Matthew 5:14-16 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your

³⁰ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

³¹ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

³² <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Mark 4:21-23 He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket or under a bed? To the contrary, it is placed on a lampstand. For nothing is hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing is secret that will not be brought to light. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Scholarly Quotes:³³

Marvin Meyer quotes Clement of Alexandria in *Miscellanies* 6.15.124.5-6 for an esoteric interpretation of a similar saying: "And what you hear in the ear' - that is, in a hidden manner and in a mystery, for such things are said, figuratively, to be spoken in the ear - 'proclaim,' he says, 'upon the rooftops,' receiving nobly and delivering loftily and explaining the scriptures according to the canons of truth. For neither prophecy nor the savior himself declared the divine mysteries in a simple manner, so as to be easily comprehended by ordinary people, but rather he spoke in parables." (*The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, p. 83)

Funk and Hoover write: "This saying is probably a corruption of the saying found in Q and incorporated into Luke 12:3//Matt 10:27. The Q saying was judged to be a Christian formulation (further, consult the notes on the verses in Luke and Matthew). The saying in Thomas makes no sense as it stands." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 492)

Jack Finegan writes: "Here the completion of the saying [compared to the Greek fragment] enables us to see that the entire text combined the materials of Mt 10:27 = Lk 12:3 in the first part, with the materials of Mt 5:15 = Lk 11:33 and Lk 8:16 in the second part, with additional variations of a minor character. Not only are two separate Synoptic sayings, one about hearing and one about lighting a lamp, brought together but the respective versions of Mt and Lk are interwoven to provide a specially good example of the phenomenon which is frequent enough not only in these texts but also in the church fathers of this period, the phenomenon which has been called that of the 'compound text.' Whether this means that the materials were quoted from memory, or that there was a deliberate attempt at harmonization of the NT text, is difficult to say." (*Hidden Records of the Life of Jesus*, p. 251)

³³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

Joachim Jeremias writes: "According to the context (4.22) Mark and Thomas relate it to the Gospel, Matthew to the disciples (cf. 5.16), Luke to the inner light (cf. 11.34-36, see below, pp. 162 f.). From the exegesis a conjecture may be hazarded as to what was the original meaning. What is the meaning of, 'neither do they place the lamp under a bushel'? If a bushel-measure were placed over the small clay lamp, it would extinguish it. In the little, windowless, one-roomed peasant's' houses which have no chimney, this might well have been the customary method of putting out the lamp; since blowing it out might cause unpleasant smoke and smell, as well as the risk of fire through sparks (cf. Shab. 3.6)." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 120)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "The simile of the lamp often occurs in the New Testament: Matt. 4.21/Matt 5.15; Luke 8.16; 11.33. 'Hidden place' takes up 'hidden' from Logion 32. This is likely to have been conditioned by the Matthaean sequence, for there we have the same word from Thomas 32 in Matt. 5.14, whereas it does not occur in the verse (Matt. 5.15) which corresponds to Thomas 33.2." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 607)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "Grant and Freedman see here nothing but a combination of sayings from our Gospels and note that the Naessenses used the same combination in the reverse order. It should be observed, however, that the second part occurs definitely in the Lucan form. If Thomas drew logion 32 from Matthew, why did he switch to Luke for his version of a saying contained in the next verse? Quispel has noted parallels to the Diatessaron here and suggests that it is simpler to assume that Tatian knew either logion 33 or something like it than that he borrowed bits and pieces here and there from all three Synoptics." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, p. 75)

Other Insights:³⁴

- "Jesus said: If you truly understand my message about your true nature, you must manifest this in your life."
- "When you receive and understand the message of God go out and tell everyone."
- "Both an injunction and a reassurance for a teacher's pupils. Interpretable from the standpoint of an esoteric school teaching the perennial knowledge in each and every age to each and every community."

³⁴ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

- “Jesus is explaining that what you hear of God with your physical (outer) ear, and what you hear from God with your *inner* ear (unsung melody...*shabd*..Holy Ghost..*Logos*) leads to personal enlightenment.”
- “Truth cannot be hidden -- it is just too darn big. As a lamp is not lit to be put under a basket, so too can truth not be kept secret. Either the light of truth will burn through secrecy, or secrecy will corrupt and smother the light. Truth and secrecy cannot coexist. A truth that is truly secret cannot be important, whereas an important truth cannot be truly secret.”

The Parable of Those Who Can't See (Saying 34)

Jesus said, "If someone who's blind leads someone else who's blind, both of them fall into a pit."³⁵

34. ΠΕΧΕ Ιϸ ΧΕ ΟΥΒΛΛΕ ΕΦΩΑΝCΩΚ ΖΗΤ4 ΝΝΟΥΒΛΛΕ ΩΑΥΖΕ
ΜΠΕCΝΑΥ ΕΠΕCΗΤ ΕΥΖΙΕΙΤ

36

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:³⁷

Luke 6:39 He also told them a parable: "Can one blind man guide another who is also blind? Will both of them fall into a pit?"

Matthew 15:10-20 Then he called the people to him and said to them, "Listen and understand. It is not what goes into one's mouth that defiles a person; what comes out of the mouth is what defiles him." The disciples approached and said to him, "Do you realize that the Pharisees were greatly offended when they heard what you said?" He answered, "Every plant that my Father has not planted will be uprooted. Leave them alone. They are blind guides. And if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a pit." Peter said to him, "Explain that parable to us." Jesus replied, "Are even you still without understanding? Do you not realize that whatever goes into the mouth passes through the stomach and is discharged into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth originates in the heart, and this is what defiles a person. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, perjury, slander. These are the things that defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not make anyone unclean."

Scholarly Quotes:³⁸

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "This saying is derived from Matthew 15:14; for its substance is presented as a question in Luke 6:39. It follows Saying 34, because the mention of 'light' in that saying leads Thomas to think of sight or the lack of it." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 151)

³⁵ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

³⁶ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

³⁷ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

³⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

Funk and Hoover write: "This saying has the earmarks of a proverb. As prudential wisdom, it would be appropriate on the lips of almost any sage, and it could have entered the tradition at almost any point." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 492)

Other Insights:³⁹

- "If you do not have the correct understanding of God's word and then preach your beliefs to another you will lead them to false beliefs."
- "Only a teacher can teach a pupil. Self-teaching is impossible because the would-be aspirant lacks the lower [basic] development. Only somebody who has walked the path [tariqa, way] knows the path. And because he/she HAS walked that path he can lead the obedient aspirant."
- "Everyone who does not understand and teaches is a murderer, for you take the very everlasting life that a person could have attained. You work iniquity, and whoever you teach will follow. Both of you will taste death."
- "Sure, the blind may tag along with those who see (they're called "disciples"), but they're still blind and in no qualified position to lead other blind people around, regardless of assertions that they can see perfectly fine."

³⁹ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parable of Binding the Strong (Saying 35)

Jesus said, "No one can break into the house of the strong and take it by force without tying the hands of the strong. Then they can loot the house."⁴⁰

35. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΜN̄ ΣΟΜ Ν̄ΤΕΟΥΑ ΒΩΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΗΕΙ
ΜΠΧΩΩΡΕ Ν̄ΧΥΙΤ4 Ν̄ΧΝΑΖ ΕΙ ΜΗΤΙ Ν̄ΧΜΟΥΡ Ν̄ΝΕ4ΘΙΧ (2) ΤΟΤΕ
ΧΝΑΠΩΩΝΕ ΕΒΟΛ ΜΠΕ4ΗΕΙ

41

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁴²

Luke 11:14-23 Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute, and when the demon had gone out, the man who was mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons." ¹⁶ Others, to test him, demanded a sign from heaven. However, he knew what they were thinking, and he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a house divided against itself will collapse. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? "For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. Now, if it is by Beelzebul that I cast out demons, by whom do your own children cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. "When a strong man is fully armed and guards his palace, his possessions are safe. But when someone who is stronger than he is attacks and overpowers him, he carries off all the weapons upon which the owner relied and distributes the plunder. "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Matthew 12:22-30 Then they brought to him a man who was unable to either see or speak and who was possessed by a demon. He cured him, so that the man who was mute both spoke and saw. All the people were astonished, and they said, "Is this not the Son of David?" But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." He knew what they were thinking, and he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and every city or household divided against itself cannot survive. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom survive? If it is by

⁴⁰ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁴¹ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁴² <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

Beelzebul that I cast out demons, by whom do your own children cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. "Or again, how can anyone break into a strong man's house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then indeed he can ransack the house. "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Mark 3:23-27 Summoning them to him, he spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot survive. And if a household is divided against itself, that household will not be able to survive. If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot survive; he is doomed. "But no one can break into a strong man's house and steal his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man; then he can ransack the house.

Scholarly Quotes:⁴³

Gerd Ludemann writes: "At the level of redaction the logion recalls 21.5-8, and at the level of tradition it strongly recalls both Mark 3.27 and Matt. 12.29/Luke 11.21-22 (= Q). It has a genetic connection with these passages. However, in contrast to the parallels mentioned it does not indicate the context, which there consists in the overcoming of Satan by Jesus." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 607)

Crossan writes: "This version is extremely close to Mark 3:27, much more than to Matt. 12:29 (against Schrage: 87). With regard to *form*, the external format is assertion rather than question in Mark and *Thomas*, against Matthew; (b) the internal format has three sections: general negation ('not/'no one'), specific exception ('unless'), direct result ('then'), in Mark and *Thomas*, but only the last two in Matthew. With regard to *content* and allowing for the syntactical and translational differences between Greek and Coptic, the main differences are that *Thomas* lacks 'his goods' and 'first' but contains 'his hands,' as against Mark. The Coptic text is ambiguous on the object of the intruder's force: 'him (or: it)' in Guillaumont's (1959:23), 'it (or: him)' in Wilson (Hennecke and Schneemelcher:1.515). But the meaning seems to demand the translation 'take it by force,' as in Lambdin (122), and this is again close to Mark. In summary, then, the differences between Mark

⁴³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

and *Thomas* are performancial variations in content within a remarkably similar format." (*In Fragments*, p. 190)

Funk and Hoover write: "Thomas preserves this saying, like many others, without any context. In Mark 3:27, the saying is related to the exorcism of demons. However, that may not have been its original reference. The Fellows gave the saying a pink rating because it is not likely to have been attributed to Jesus by the Christian community inasmuch as it is an image of violence. Further, it is attested in three independent sources, Mark, Q, and here in *Thomas*." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 493)

Other Insights:⁴⁴

- "Perhaps this passage refers to the strength of faith, as in, A person cannot change your beliefs, nor take your faith, unless they bind your hands by subduing your will."
- "One cannot change a mind or a system without first knowing what is that idea's or system's or person's power. However, if you can find the locus of power and interrupt it or defuse it, then you can change minds, people, and systems."
- "I think this refers to the fact that you cannot overcome sin while you let your desires control you. You have to tie down your senses and then you will be able to overcome this material world."
- "It is impossible for someone to change your faith if it is strong. It cannot be changed unless you are weak and allow them to control you."

⁴⁴ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parables of Divided Loyalties. (Saying 47)

Jesus said, "It's not possible for anyone to mount two horses or stretch two bows, and it's not possible for a servant to follow two leaders, because they'll respect one and despise the other.

"No one drinks old wine and immediately wants to drink new wine. And new wine isn't put in old wineskins because they'd burst. Nor is old wine put in new wineskins because it'd spoil.

"A new patch of cloth isn't sewn onto an old coat, because it'd tear apart."⁴⁵

47. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΜΝ ΘΟΜ ΝΤΕ ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΤΕΛΟ ΑΖΤΟ CΝΑΥ
ΝΗΧΩΛΚ ΜΠΙΤΕ CΝΤΕ (2) ΑΥΩ ΜΝ ΘΟΜ ΝΤΕ ΟΥΖΜΖΑΛ ΩΜΩΕ
ΧΘΕΙC CΝΑΥ Η ΦΝΑΡΤΙΜΑ ΜΠΟΥΑ ΑΥΩ ΠΚΕΟΥΑ ΦΝΑΡΖΥΒΡΙΖΕ
ΜΜΟΦ (3) ΜΑΡΕ ΡΩΜΕ CΕ ΡΤΑC ΑΥΩ ΝΤΕΥΝΟΥ ΝΦΕΠΠΙΘΥΜΕΙ ΔCΩ
ΗΡΠ ΒΒΡΡΕ (4) ΑΥΩ ΜΑΥΝΟΥΧ ΗΡΠ ΒΒΡΡΕ ΕΔCΚΟC ΝΑC ΧΕΚΑΔC
ΝΝΟΥΠΩΖ ΑΥΩ ΜΑΥΝΕΧ ΗΡΠ ΝΑC ΕΔCΚΟC ΒΒΡΡΕ ΩΙΝΑ ΧΕ
ΝΕΦΤΕΚΑΦ (5) ΜΑΥΧΛΘ ΤΘΕΙC ΝΑC ΑΩΤΗΝ ΝΩΔΕΙ ΕΠΕΙ ΟΥΝ
ΟΥΠΩΖ ΝΑΩΩΠΕ

46

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁴⁷

Luke 16:10-13 "Whoever can be trusted in small matters can also be trusted in great ones, but whoever is dishonest in small matters will also be dishonest in great ones. Therefore, if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will entrust you with true riches? And if you have not shown yourself to be trustworthy with what belongs to another, who will give you anything of your own? "No servant can serve two masters. For you will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

Luke 5:33-39 Then they said to him, "John's disciples fast frequently and pray often, and the disciples of the Pharisees do likewise, but your disciples eat and drink." Jesus said to them, "How can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then, in those days, they will fast." He also told

⁴⁵ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁴⁶ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁴⁷ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

them this parable: “No one tears a piece from a new cloak and sews it on an old cloak. If he does, the new cloak will be torn, and the piece from it will not match that of the old. Nor does anyone pour new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and spill out, and the skins will be destroyed. Rather new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one who has been drinking old wine will wish for new wine, for he says, ‘The old is better.’ ”

Matthew 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. For you will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Matthew 9:14-17 Then the disciples of John came to him and asked, “Why do we and the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not do so?” Jesus answered, “How can the wedding guests mourn while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, because the patch eventually pulls away from the cloak and a worse tear results. Nor do people pour new wine into old wineskins, for if they do, the wineskins burst, the wine spills forth, and the skins are ruined. Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins. In this way both are preserved.”

Mark 2:18-22 John’s disciples and the Pharisees were observing a fast. Some people came to Jesus and asked, “Why do John’s disciples and those of the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not do so?” Jesus answered, “How can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is still with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then on that day they will fast. “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. Nor does anyone pour new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and then the wine and the skins are both lost. Rather, new wine is poured into fresh wineskins.”

Scholarly Quotes:⁴⁸

F. F. Bruce writes: "The canonical saying about the impossibility of serving two masters (Matthew 6.24; Luke 16.13) is here amplified by two illustrations

⁴⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

from life and followed by sayings contrasting the old order and the new, sufficiently similar to Luke 5.36-39 (cf. Mark 2.21 f.; Matthew 9.16 f.), but with secondary deviations. The canonical counterparts do not speak of pouring old wine into new wine skins, or of patching a new garment with an old piece of cloth. These deviations are probably deliberate: the true Gnostic will not allow his new doctrine to be encumbered with relics from the past." (*Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 132)

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "An old patch is not put on a new garment; here Thomas changes the thought from that of the new patch and the old garment (Luke 5:36; Matthew 9:16; Mark 2:21), presumably because he is thinking of life in the new world (Saying 52)." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 159)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "As v. 3 *certainly* came about from the use of Luke [5.39], the same conclusion follows for vv. 4-5. Thomas has reversed the order of Luke, which he has in front of him, as he had placed v. 3 with the key word 'wine' after vv. 1-2, and now Luke 5.37 automatically presented itself as the next sentence with the same key word." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, pp. 613-614)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "Quispel argues that the first part of this saying is not dependent on Q but offers an independent translation from Aramaic. Bartsch, however, points out that the Coptic preserves a hint, obscured in the English translation, that the statement about the servant originally contained two members; *either* he will honor the one . . . (cf. Luke xvi. 13). Moreover, the words 'honor' and 'offend,' which Quispel takes as 'elegant translations' of the Aramaic underlying Matthew and Luke, could be regarded as summaries of the two words used in each case by the Synoptists. The claim that here we may have independent tradition is therefore in this case open to question." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, p. 78)

Comparing Thomas to Matthew and Luke, Koester finds that the Thomas form is more original: "Most scholars would argue that 'servant' in Luke 16:13 is a later addition, while Matthew's 'no one' is an accurate reproduction of the text of Q. However, the version of *Gospel of Thomas* 47a-b stays completely within the limits of natural expansion of a popular proverb by prefixing the analogous examples of mounting two horses or stretching two bows. Thomas's version, at the same time, shows no sign of the unnecessary

duplication 'hate the one and love the other' and of the secondary application of the proverb (serving God and mammon). Both of these appear already in Q; thus, the *Gospel of Thomas* 47b presents the form that this proverb would have had before it was incorporated into Q. Had Thomas read the final phrase in his text, he would certainly have incorporated it (cf. the rejection of worldly possessions in *Gospel of Thomas* 110)." (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 90)

Funk and Hoover write: "The order of sayings about patch and garment and wine wineskins is reversed in Thomas from the way they appear in the synoptic gospels. According to the saying in Thom 47:3-4, one does not pour young wine into old wineskins, since the old skins might burst, and one does not trust mature wine to young wineskins, since new skins tend to make the wine spoil. The synoptic version has undergone a Christian transformation, because the new has now been equated with the new Jesus movement. The version found in Mark 2:22 exhibits that transformation: 'And nobody pours young wine into old wineskins, otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and destroy both the wine and the skins. Instead, young wine is for new wineskins.' Concern for mature wine, such as we find in Luke 5:39 ('nobody wants young wine after drinking aged wine'), has disappeared; attention is riveted on the fate of the new. The old wineskins represent the Judean religion, new wine the spirit-filled headiness of the Christian movement. The Thomas version was given the highest weighted average because there is no hint of a Christian revision of the saying." (*The Five Gospels*, pp. 499-500)

J. D. Crossan writes of 47b: "From the combination of Mark and *Thomas* there arises the strong possibility that this double aphorism was originally a double-diptych or quadruple-stich aphorism with each diptych in reversed parallelism (abb'a'). This must be considered for *Gospel of Thomas* 47b(2) on wine (Turner and Montefiore: 65; and see especially Nagel), but for both *Gospel of Thomas* 47b(2 and 3) on wine and on cloth (Quispel, 1957:194-195). Thus, the double diptych involved (a) a combination of two metaphors: cloth-patching and wine-storing; (b) with a different set of categories for each; (c) in chiasmic arrangement: unshrunk/shrunk//shrunk/unshrunk and new/old//old/new. Two processes worked upon the original structure: (d) an internal process whereby the new/old categories eventually prevailed over the unshrunk/shrunk, and (e)

an external process that found it appropriate to retain the new/old aspect but not the old/new side of each diptych. Finally, (f) the internal process has changed *Thomas* even more than Mark (where 'unshrunk' is still present), but the external process, with its concern for Jesus as the new, has changed Mark and Luke much more than *Thomas* (where 'old/new' is twice present). The only vestiges of old/new still visible in Mark or Luke is its residue within that concluding and unnecessary comment about 'new win/new wineskins.' But here, of course, old/new has become new/new." (*In Fragments*, pp. 125-126)

Other Insights:⁴⁹

- “Jesus talks of knowledge. It is hard to change one's thinking after years of teaching of the wrong path. You cannot pour new knowledge into cemented thoughts. For new thoughts will be insulted while the old thoughts will be honored. You cannot follow them both. You can only follow one or the other. Growth or stagnation.”
- “Advice for would-be aspirants for enrollment in an esoteric school. For you, your teacher must be as God himself. You adopt the ways of your teacher and no other. If your teacher teaches through the medium of shoeing horses and ironwork, then you become a blacksmith! For this is the way for you and no other way. If you are not prepared to serve your teacher absolutely, forsaking all others no matter their validity, then you cannot enter into pupil hood. "Your wish is my command" is to become your motto and you are to ignore all other projections of the teaching.”
- “On logia 47, 48, & 49: You cannot honor two separate masters equally. You must therefore make the two one. If you make the two one, then you will not be double, but will be single and solitary.”
- “This saying is about the truth of a divine life and the illusions of a sensory life. We cannot live a life of duplicity and compromise and hope to gain the kingdom of heaven. We need to serve god with all our hearts, minds, and bodies every moment of every day and night.”

⁴⁹ Sample of “Visitor Comments” <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parable of the Wheat and Tares (Saying 57)

Jesus said, "My Fathers' kingdom can be compared to someone who had [good] seed. Their enemy came by night and sowed weeds among the good seed. The person didn't let anyone pull out the weeds, 'so that you don't pull out the wheat along with the weeds,' they said to them. 'On the day of the harvest, the weeds will be obvious. Then they'll be pulled out and burned.'"⁵⁰

57. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΤΜΝΤΕΡΟ ΜΠΕΙΩΤ ΕCΤΝΤΩΝ ΔΥΡΩΜΕ
ΕΥΝΤΑϸ ΜΜΑΥ ΝΝΟΥΘΡΟΘ ΕΝ(ΔΝΟ)Υϸ (2) ΔΠΕϸΧΔΧΕ ΕΙ
ΝΤΟΥΩΗ ΔϸCΙΤΕ ΝΟΥΖΙΖΑΝΙ(Ο)Ν ΕΧΝ ΠΕΘΡΟ(Θ Ε)ΤΝΔΝΟΥϸ (3)
ΜΠΕΠΡΩΜΕ ΚΟΟΥ ΕΖΩΛΕ ΜΠΖΙΖΑΝΙΟΝ ΠΕΧΔϸ ΝΔΥ ΧΕ ΜΗΠΩC
ΝΤΕΤΝΒΩΚ ΧΕ ΕΝΔΖΩΛΕ ΜΠΖΙΖΑΝΙΟΝ ΝΤΕΤΝΖΩΛΕ ΜΠCΟΥΟ
ΝΜΜΑϸ ΖΜ ΦΟΥΥ ΓΑΡ ΜΠΩΖC ΝΖΙΖΑΝΙΟΝ ΝΔΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ
CΕΖΟΛΟΥ ΝCΕΡΟΚΖΟΥ

51

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁵²

Matthew 13:24-30 He then proposed another parable to them: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. While everyone was asleep, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. When the wheat sprouted and ripened, the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and asked, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where then did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'One of my enemies has done this.' The servants then asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?' "He replied, 'No, because in gathering the weeds you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest. At harvest time, I will tell the reapers, "Collect the weeds first and tie them in bundles to be burned. Then gather the wheat into my barn."

Mark 4:26-29 He went on to say, "The kingdom of God is like this. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, while he sleeps and while he is awake, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not understand how. The ground produces fruit of its own accord—first the shoot, then the

⁵⁰ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁵¹ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁵² <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ripe, he immediately stretches out the sickle, because the time for harvest has come."

Scholarly Quotes:⁵³

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "This saying is a summary of the parable found in Matthew 13:24-30, without any significant variants - except that Thomas substitutes 'kingdom of the father' for 'kingdom of heaven.' It is odd that the tares are allowed to grow with the wheat, since the little fish are thrown away in Saying 7; but this problem is explained in the parable itself. Thomas omits the explanation of the parable which is given in Matthew 13:37-43, no doubt because he has his own." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 165)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "The Matthean parable is one of those 'so vividly told that it is natural to assume that they arise out of some actual occurrence.' In Thomas the vivid detail has been omitted, and only the main points retained. This condensation would appear to indicate a later stage of development than that represented by the canonical parable but does not decide the question whether we have here a summary made from Matthew or independent access to the same tradition at a later point. Grant and Freedman see no significant variants except the substitution of 'Father' for 'heaven,' but Quispel finds four agreements with the Diatessaron against Matthew. For Gnostic use of the parable Bauer refers to the eschatological 'harvest,' which provided the occasion for many Gnostic speculations. The passage of Heracleon's commentary to which he points had already been noted in this connection by Cerfaux." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 91-92)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "It will be seen that the ending is shorter than in Matthew, who, anticipating his allegorical interpretation, may . . . have somewhat overelaborated the separation of wheat from tares (v. 30)." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 224)

Funk and Hoover write: "Although the version in Thomas lacks the appended allegorical interpretation, there is a distant echo of the final apocalyptic judgment made explicit in Matthew. This note is alien to Thomas, so it must have been introduced into the Christian tradition at an early date, probably by the first followers of Jesus who had been disciples of John the Baptist.

⁵³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

Thomas retained the parable because it suggested, for his readers, that there were two kinds of persons in the world, those 'in the know' (members of the sect) and those dull of hearing." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 505)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "The logion has a close parallel in Matt. 13.24-30. Here Thomas 57 clearly presupposes the Matthaean version. *First*, the course of events is told more succinctly and is to be understood as an abbreviation, for *secondly*, there is no mention of the sowing of the seed (Matt. 13.24), the process of growth (Matt. 13.30a), and especially the suggestion of the servants that they should pull up the weeds immediately (Matt. 13.27), although a remnant of that has been left, namely the owner's answer (v. 3). In other words, this answer presupposes the conversation with the servants (Matt. 13.27-28). Thomas twists the parable to see non-Gnostics and Gnostics depicted in the weeds and in the good seed in order to emphasize the dualism between the two. Thomas has preserved the reference to the harvest (v. 4) in order to emphasize the lasting separation." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, pp. 618-619)

Other Insights:⁵⁴

- "The taking away of evil and pain in our life would cause the goodness to go away, meaning that we would not learn the lessons that we need to learn in life. Eventually though there will be a time when all pain and evil will be taken away."
- "Those who are Christians for the wrong reasons will renounce Christ when their error becomes apparent to them."
- "The Father's kingdom is the total personality. The weeds are learnt self-destructive attitudes which vanish when harvested by the innate parental self."

⁵⁴ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parable of the Rich Man Who Died (Saying 63)

Jesus said, "There was a rich man who had much money. He said, 'I'll use my money to sow, reap, plant, and fill my barns with fruit, so that I won't need anything.' That's what he was thinking to himself, but he died that very night. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!" ⁵⁵

63. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΝΕΥΝ ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΜΠΛΟΥCΙΟC ΕΥΝΤΑϢ ΜΜΑΥ
ΝΖΑΖ ΝΧΡΗΜΑ (2) ΠΕΧΑϢ ΧΕ †ΝΑΡΧΡΩ ΝΝΑΧΡΗΜΑ ΧΕΚΑΑC
ΕΕΙΝΑΧΟ ΝΤΑΩCΖ ΝΤΑΤΩΘΕ ΝΤΑΜΟΥΖ ΝΝΑΕΖΩΡ ΝΚΑΡΤΟC ΩΙΝΑ
ΧΕ ΝΙΡ ΘΡΩΖ ΛΛΑΑΥ (3) ΝΑΕΙ ΝΕΝΕϢΜΕΕΥΕ ΕΡΟΟΥ ΖΜ ΠΕϢΖΗΤ
ΑΥΩ ΖΝ ΤΟΥΩΗ ΕΤΜΜΑΥ ΑϢΜΟΥ ΠΕΤΕΥΜ ΜΑΧΕ ΜΜΟϢ
ΜΑΡΕϢCΩΤΜ

56

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁵⁷

Luke 12:16-21 Then he told them a parable: "There was a wealthy man whose land yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I do not have sufficient space to store my crops?' Then he said, 'This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, where I will store my grain and other produce, and I shall say to myself, "Now you have an abundance of goods stored up for many years to come. Relax, eat, drink, and be merry." '

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be required of you. And who then will get to enjoy the fruit of your labors?' That is how it will be for the one who stores up treasure for himself yet fails to become rich in the sight of God."

Scholarly Quotes:⁵⁸

R. Michael Wilson writes: "This is clearly a shorter version of Luke xii. 16-21, a passage peculiar to Luke; the preceding verses in Luke, which in that Gospel are the occasion of the saying, appear in Thomas as logion 72; those which follow, about anxiety over the things of this world, in logion 36. Formally, this should probably be considered a later development of the Lucan parable, but this does not necessarily mean that it was derived from

⁵⁵ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁵⁶ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁵⁷ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

⁵⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

Luke. Grant and Freedman suggest that the words 'this night they will require your soul of you' are omitted 'perhaps because something like them will recur in saying 88,' but the similarity is rather remote and, moreover, this would seem to presuppose a rather closer literary dependence than is justified by the gospel as a whole. In some cases, we can indeed speak of intentional or unintentional harmonization, words or phrases occurring to the mind of the author by association with what he is writing, but in others it is difficult to imagine him selecting a word here, a saying there, and keeping part of another saying for use at a later stage. Explanations which are to be valid must take account of what we can learn of the writer's methods, and free citation from memory would appear to be nearer the mark than an extensive use of scissors and paste." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 99-100)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "The closing sentence, too, of the parable of the Rich Fool: 'So (foolishly behaves the man) who heaps up treasure for himself and does not gather wealth toward God' (Luke 12.21), must be an addition; it is missing from the Gospel of Thomas (63), and gives a moralizing meaning to the parable, which blunts the sharp edge of its warning." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 106)

Helmut Koester writes: "There are two secondary features in the narrative of Luke: the conclusion and the moralizing discourse. Both are missing in Thomas's version which presents this story in the more original form of a reversal parable. On the other hand, Thomas has also transferred the parable into a different milieu. The rich man is no longer a wealthy farmer but a decurion from the city who wants to invest his money successfully. The maxim at the end of *the Gospel of Thomas* 63 is of course secondary, but it does not reveal any knowledge of Luke's conclusion." (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 98)

Funk and Hoover write: "Whether Luke's version of this parable is drawn from Luke's special material or from Q is debated by scholars, but Thomas' version is drawn from neither. It is a simpler form of the parable, containing none of Luke's moralizing tone, and has an abrupt, uninterpreted conclusion rather than Luke's pronouncement (v. 20: 'God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded back from you"') and generalizing application (v. 21 'That's the way it is with those who save up for themselves but aren't rich where God is concerned'). Thomas also lacks the sequence

of sayings on possessions that forms the context of the parable in Luke (12:13-15, 22-34)." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 508)

Funk and Hoover write: "As a single, unelaborated tale the Thomas version retains more of the characteristics of orally transmitted tradition and is probably an earlier form of the parable than Luke's. Thomas has nevertheless shifted the social location of the parable. His rich man is no longer a farmer. He is an investor who seeks such a high return that he will lack nothing. But on very day he has such thoughts he dies and thus loses everything. Thomas' version seems to turn on its incongruity between his thoughts and his end, whereas Luke's version focuses on the farmer's folly." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 508)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "This exemplary narrative is related to Luke 12.16-20. But the economic circumstances are slightly different. In Luke we have a farmer who wants to 'save', here a businessman who wants to put his money to work. The meaning of the two parables is the same. Sudden death can overtake even the shrewdest of rich men." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, pp. 621-622)

Other Insights:⁵⁹

- "A person who does not know that he needs nothing will lose everything." (Simon Magus)
- "Maybe it means that while the rich man put his life on hold to prepare for the future, he missed today. Then he died. Perhaps if he had lived each as though it were his last he would have lived it differently - or maybe he wouldn't have!"
- "Money can be mistaken for love. When one does so one is dead."
- "Be IN the world but not OF the world. If you are mesmerized by the things of the world you will indeed "die" -- to the chance of lifting yourself up [a process which also requires specialist help]"
- "The decision to keep his possessions for himself was fatal to his spirit."

⁵⁹ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parable of the Dinner Party (Saying 64)

Jesus said: A man had guests; and when he had prepared the dinner, he sent his servants to invite the guests. He went to the first and said to him: My master invites you. He said: I have money with some merchants; they are coming to me this evening. I will go and give them my orders. I ask to be excused from the dinner. He went to another (and) said to him: My master invites you. He said to him: I have bought a house, and I am asked for a day. I shall not have time. He went to another (and) said to him: My master invites you. He said to him: My friend is about to be married, and I am to arrange the dinner. I shall not be able to come. I ask to be excused from dinner. He went to another, he said to him: My master invites you. He said to him: I have bought a farm; I am going to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. I ask to be excused. The servant came back (and) said to his master: Those whom you have invited to dinner have asked to be excused. The master said to his servant: Go out to the roads, bring those whom you find, that they may dine. Traders and merchants [shall] not [enter] the places of my Father.⁶⁰

64. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΝΕΥΝΤΑC ΖΝΩΜΜΟ ΑΥΩ
ΝΤΑΡΕCΟΒΤΕ ΜΠΔΙΠΝΟΝ ΑCΧΟΟΥ ΜΠΕCΖΜΖΑΛ ΩΙΝΑ
ΕCΝΑΤΩΖΜ ΝΝΩΜΜΟΕΙ (2) ΑCΒΩΚ ΜΠΩΟΡΠ ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑC ΧΕ
ΠΑΧΟΕΙC ΤΩΖΜ ΜΜΟΚ (3) ΠΕΧΑC ΧΕ ΟΥΝΤΑΕΙ ΖΝΖΟΜΤ
ΑΖΕΝΕΜΠΟΡΟC CΕΝΝΗΥ ΩΑΡΟΕΙ ΕΡΟΥΖΕ †ΝΑΒΩΚ ΝΤΑΟΥΕΖ
CΑΖΝΕ ΝΑΥ †ΡΠΑΡΑΙΤΕΙ ΜΠΔΙΠΝΟΝ (4) ΑCΒΩΚ ΩΑ ΚΕΟΥΑ
ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑC ΧΕ ΑΠΑΧΟΕΙC ΤΩΖΜ ΜΜΟΚ (5) ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑC ΧΕ
ΑΕΙΤΟΥ ΟΥΗΕΙ ΑΥΩ CΕΡΑΙΤΕΙ ΜΜΟΕΙ ΝΟΥΖΗΜΕΡΑ †ΝΑCΡΨΕ ΑΝ
(6) ΑCΕΙ ΩΑ ΚΕΟΥΑ ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑC ΧΕ ΠΑΧΟΕΙC ΤΩΖΜ ΜΜΟΚ (7)
ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑC ΧΕ ΠΑΩΒΗΡ ΝΑΡ ΨΕΛΕΕΤ ΑΥΩ ΑΝΟΚ ΕΤΝΑΡ
ΔΙΠΝΟΝ †ΝΑΩΙ ΑΝ †ΡΠΑΡΑΙΤΕΙ ΜΠΔΙΠΝΟΝ (8) ΑCΒΩΚ ΩΑ
ΚΕΟΥΑ ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑC ΧΕ ΠΑΧΟΕΙC ΤΩΖΜ ΜΜΟΚ (9) ΠΕΧΑC ΝΑC
ΧΕ ΑΕΙΤΟΥ ΝΟΥΚΩΜΗ ΕΕΙΒΗΚ ΑΧΙ ΝΩΩΜ †ΝΑΩΙ ΑΝ
†ΡΠΑΡΑΙΤΕΙ (10) ΑCΕΙ ΝCΙ ΠΖΜΖΑΛ ΑCΧΟΟC ΑΠΕCΧΟΕΙC ΧΕ
ΝΕΝΤΑΚΤΑΖΜΟΥ ΑΠΔΙΠΝΟΝ ΑΥΠΑΡΑΙΤΕΙ (11) ΠΕΧΕ ΠΧΟΕΙC
ΜΠΕCΖΜΖΑΛ ΧΕ ΒΩΚ ΕΠCΑ ΝΒΟΛ ΑΝΖΙΟΟΥΕ ΝΕΤΚΝΑΖΕ ΕΡΟΥ
ΕΝΙΟΥ ΧΕΚΑΑC ΕΥΝΑΡΔΑΙΠΝΕΙ (12) ΝΡΕCΤΟΥ ΜΝ ΝΕΩΟΤ(Ε
CΕΝΑΒ)ΩΚ ΑΝ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΝΤΟΠΟC ΜΠΑΙΩΤ

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⁶⁰ Blatz Interpretation - <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas64.html>

⁶¹ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁶²

Luke 14:15-24 On hearing this, one of the dinner guests said to him, “Blessed is the man who will dine in the kingdom of God.” Jesus said in reply, “A man gave a sumptuous banquet, to which he invited many. When the hour for the banquet drew near, he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited: ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

“But one after another they all began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have bought a parcel of land, and I must go out to inspect it. Please accept my apologies.’ Another said, ‘I have purchased five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out. Please accept my regrets.’ Still another said, ‘I have just gotten married, and therefore I am unable to come.’

“When the servant returned, he reported all this to his master. Then the owner of the house became enraged, and he said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in here the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ Shortly afterward, the servant told him, ‘Sir, your orders have been carried out, and some room is still available.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the open roads and along the hedgerows and compel people to come, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, not one of those who were invited shall taste my banquet.’ ”

Matthew 22:1-4 Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent forth his servants to summon those who had been invited to the banquet, but they refused to come. Then he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited, “Behold, my banquet has been prepared, my oxen and my fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.” ’

Scholarly Quotes:⁶³

Marvin Meyer writes: "The Palestinian Talmud recounts a similar story about the rich tax-collector Bar Ma'jan, who arranged a feast for the city officials; when they did not come, he invited the poor instead." (*The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, p. 94)

⁶² <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

⁶³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "Here Thomas rewrites the parable of the banquet in Luke 14:16-24, adding some minor details from a similar story in Matthew 22:1-10. Much of the narrative differs from the gospel parables, however. According to Luke, the first man to be invited had bought a field which he had to see; another had bought five yoke of oxen and had to test them; the third had just been married. In Matthew only two are mentioned: one goes away to his own field, the other to his own business. As it is told in Thomas, the parable develops the notion of business dealings from Matthew, and the mention of a wedding (also in Matthew, but not as an excuse), as well as the recurrent sentence, 'I excuse myself from the banquet,' from Luke. The excuses offered in the Lucan parable reflect the rural atmosphere (field, oxen); those in Thomas seem to be more urban in character, and the idea of buying a village is alien to the environment of the synoptic gospels." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 170)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "In Thomas the first guest invited must settle with merchants who owe him money, the second has bought a house, a third a village (the official translation reads 'farm', but the word is KWMH) and must go to collect the rent. The remaining excuse does mention a wedding, but here the man has to arrange a dinner for his friend who is about to be married, or possible (in Schoedel's translation) to direct the wedding banquet. Here Grant and Freedman see only a re-writing of Luke with some minor details from Matthew, but it may be questioned if this is a sufficient explanation. On the other hand, they would seem to be correct in suggesting that the excuses in the Lucan parable reflect a rural background, while those in Thomas are more urban in character. The true explanation may rather be that here we have a parable developing in the course of transmission, on its way, in fact, from a Palestinian to a Hellenistic environment." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, p. 101)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "The *parable of the Great Supper* in the Gospel of Thomas 64 ends with the sentence, 'Tradesman and merchants shall not enter the places of my Father.' Even if the reference is, in the first place, to the prosperous who decline the invitation, its generalized terms convey the idea of a sharp attack on the rich. This attitude of class-consciousness is to some extent in line with that of Luke in this parable (14.16-24) which he introduces as a sequel to the warning not to invite the richer and prosperous, but the poor, lame, halt, and blind (14.12-14). By his repetition of this list in

14.21 he indicates that the parable is intended to be a hortatory illustration of 14.12-14: one should behave like the host in the parable who symbolically invites to his table the poor, the lame, the blind, and the halt. But that is surely not the original intention of the parable: in it, as we shall see, Jesus should rather be regarded as vindicating before his critics his preaching of the good news to the poor: he is saying, in effect, 'While you are refusing salvation, God is calling the despised to share the salvation of the people of God.'" (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 44-45)

Funk and Hoover write: "In place of the three initial invitations, Thomas has four and they vary somewhat from the invitations found in Luke. The first wants to be excused because some merchants are coming to repay a debt that evening; the second has just bought a house; the third has to arrange a marriage banquet for a friend; and the fourth has just purchased an estate. Thomas appears to have exaggerated the commercial basis for rejecting the invitations, which accords with his own concluding generalization in v. 12: 'Buyers and merchants will not enter the places of my Father.' As in Luke, the slave then goes out into the streets and brings back whoever happens to be about at that hour. However, Thomas does not describe them as poor and handicapped." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 510)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "By comparison with the related parable Luke 14.15-24 (Matt. 22.1-14), Thomas offers an allegory-free version which may stand closest to the original parable. (For the secondary features in the present parable see Luke 14.15-24.) This is the case despite the fact that as in Thomas 63 an urban milieu has taken the place of the rural one. The invitation expressed in the same words (vv. 2, 4, 6, 8) is in popular narrative style." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 622)

Helmut Koester writes: "The absence of secondary apocalyptic motifs is also evident in Thomas's version of the parable of the Great Banquet (Q/Luke 14:16-23 = *the Gospel of Thomas* 64). Matt 25:2-10 has allegorized this parable. Luke also added some allegorical features when he appended the second invitation to those 'on the roads and hedges' of the countryside (Luke 14:23), apparently a reference to the Gentile mission. At the end of his parable Thomas reports only the invitation to those on the streets of the city, and there are no traces of any allegorizing in his version. This version is based unquestionably upon the original form of the parable and not on either Matthew or Luke. On the other hand, Thomas has changed the excuses of

the first invited guests so that they reflect more closely the milieu of the city. There are four invitations, instead of three, and the excuses are 'I have claims against some merchants,' 'I have bought a house,' 'My friend is to be married,' and 'I am on the way to collect rent from a farm.' At the end Thomas adds, 'Businessmen and merchants [will] not enter the places of my Father.' No doubt, this is a secondary application." (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 99)

Other Insights:⁶⁴

- “The "Master" is God Within. Those who decline the gift he offers, do not receive the gift.”
- “Teacher's advice to advanced students for when they go themselves have to go forth. The sovereign quality in aspirants is ordinariness. When the world has filled them to the extent it is able to do and not distorted their ordinary qualities, then they may well be eligible for other things.”
- “The only reasonable interpretation I can see for this passage is an exhortation to abandon the matters of the physical reality completely and totally for the pursuit of the spiritual. Like it or not, this seems to be the only means to see the kingdom of heaven.”
- “It's the little choices that we make every day that isolate us from the spirit of life. We blame God for this by making God a judge; forgetting that we were invited to dinner all along.”
- “Those who do the work of the world will not be able to do the work of God.”

⁶⁴ Sample of “Visitor Comments” <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parable of the sharecroppers (Saying 65)

He said, "A [creditor] owned a vineyard. He leased it out to some sharecroppers to work it so he could collect its fruit.

"He sent his servant so that the sharecroppers could give him the fruit of the vineyard. They seized his servant, beat him, and nearly killed him.

"The servant went back and told his master. His master said, 'Maybe he just didn't know them.' He sent another servant, but the tenants beat that one too. "Then the master sent his son, thinking, 'Maybe they'll show some respect to my son.'

"Because they knew that he was the heir of the vineyard, the sharecroppers seized and killed him. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!"⁶⁵

65. (1) ΠΕΧΑϸ ΧΕ ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΝΧΡΗ(ΣΤΟ)Σ ΝΕΥΝΤ(Αϸ) ΝΟΥΜΑ
ΝΕΛΟΟΛΕ ΑϸΤΑΑϸ ΝΖΝΟΥΟΕΙΕ ΩΙΝΑ ΕΥΝΑΡ ΖΩΒ ΕΡΟϸ ΝϸΧΙ
ΜΠΕϸΚΑΡΠΟΣ ΝΤΟΟΤΟΥ (2) ΑϸΧΟΟΥ ΜΠΕϸΖΜΖΑΛ ΧΕΚΑΑΣ
ΕΝΟΥΟΕΙΕ ΝΑ† ΝΑϸ ΜΠΚΑΡΠΟΣ ΜΠΜΑ ΝΕΛΟΟΛΕ (3) ΑΥΕΜΑΖΤΕ
ΜΠΕϸΖΜΖΑΛ ΑΥΖΙΟΥΕ ΕΡΟϸ ΝΕΚΕΚΟΥΕΙ ΠΕ ΝΣΕΜΟΟΥΤϸ
ΑΠΖΜΖΑΛ ΒΩΚ ΑϸΧΟΟΣ ΕΠΕϸΧΟΕΙΣ (4) ΠΕΧΕ ΠΕϸΧΟΕΙΣ ΧΕ
ΜΕΩΑΚ ΜΠΕϸΣΟΥΩΝΟΥ (5) ΑϸΧΟΟΥ ΝΚΕΖΜΖΑΛ ΑΝΟΥΟΕΙΕ
ΖΙΟΥΕ ΕΠΚΕΟΥΑ (6) ΤΟΤΕ ΑΠΧΟΕΙΣ ΧΟΟΥ ΜΠΕϸΩΗΡΕ ΠΕΧΑϸ
ΧΕ ΜΕΩΑΚ ΣΕΝΑΩΠΠΕ ΖΗΤϸ ΜΠΑΩΗΡΕ (7) ΑΝΟΥΟΕΙΕ ΕΤΜΜΑΥ
ΕΠΕΙ ΣΕΣΟΟΥΝ ΧΕ ΝΤΟϸ ΠΕ ΠΕΚΛΗΡΟΝΟΜΟΣ ΜΠΜΑ ΝΕΛΟΟΛΕ
ΑΥΔΟΠϸ ΑΥΜΟΟΥΤϸ (8) ΠΕΤΕΥΜ ΜΑΑΧΕ ΜΜΟϸ ΜΑΡΕϸΣΩΤΜ 66

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁶⁷

Luke 20:9-19 Then Jesus began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, leased it to tenants, and went off on a journey for a long period.

"When the time arrived, he sent a servant to the tenants to receive his share of the produce of the vineyard. But the tenants beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. Again, he sent another servant, but him they also beat

⁶⁵ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁶⁶ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁶⁷ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. Then he sent a third servant, but he too they wounded and cast out.

“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will respect him.’ But when the tenants saw him, they said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.’ And so, they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and put those tenants to death and give the vineyard to others.”

When the people heard this, they said, “God forbid!”¹⁷ But Jesus looked directly at them and said, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone’?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken into pieces, and the one on whom it falls will be crushed.”

The scribes and the chief priests realized that this parable was directed at them, and they wanted to seize him at that very hour, but they feared the people.

Matthew 21:33-46 “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, fenced it in on all sides, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went off on a journey.

“When the time for harvest approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his share of the produce. But the tenants seized his servants and beat one of them, killed another, and stoned a third. Again, he sent more servants, but they treated them in the same manner.

“Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ And so they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

“Now what do you think the owner of the vineyard will do to those tenants when he comes?” They said to him, “He will kill those evil men, and then he will lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest.”

Jesus then said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
by the Lord has this been done,
and it is wonderful in our eyes’?

Therefore, I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce fruit in abundance. [The one who falls on this stone will be broken into pieces, and the one on whom it falls will be crushed.]”

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who regarded him as a prophet.

Mark 12:1-12 Then Jesus began to speak to them in parables: “A man planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a pit for the winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went off on a journey.

“When the time arrived, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce of the vineyard. But they seized the servant, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. Again, he sent them another servant, but they beat him over the head and treated him shamefully. Then he sent another, and that one they killed. He also sent many others, some of whom they beat, and others of whom they killed.

“Finally, he had only one other to send—his beloved son. And so, he sent him to them, thinking: ‘They will respect my son.’ But those tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!’ And so, they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and put those tenants to death and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not read this Scripture:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
¹¹ by the Lord this has been done,
and it is wonderful in our eyes’?”

They wanted to arrest him because they realized that this parable was directed at them, but they were afraid of the crowd. Therefore, they left him and went away.

Scholarly Quotes:⁶⁸

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "This parable, like the preceding two, is derived from the synoptic gospels (Matthew 21:33-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16), with a few additions, as well as the significant deletion of an allusion to Isaiah 5:1-2 - 'planted a vineyard, set a wall about it, dug a ditch, built a tower.' This deletion seems to indicate the lateness of Thomas's version, for Luke (who was certainly following Mark at this point) has already left out some of the phrases derived from Isaiah. Thomas continues the process." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 172)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "As Dodd and Jeremias have observed, this parable has in its Synoptic form undergone some expansion and has been converted into an allegory in which the servants represent the prophets. The striking thing about the version in the Gospel of Thomas only appears when we compare it with Dodd's reconstruction of the original story, in which we should have 'a climactic series of three' - two slaves and then the son. This is, in fact, precisely what we find in Thomas. For Grant and Freedman, once again, this parable is derived from the Synoptic Gospels, with the 'significant' deletion of the quotation from Isaiah, which in their view indicates the lateness of this version; Thomas is merely continuing a process already begun by Luke. It would, however, be at least equally possible to argue that Thomas presents a more primitive version, and that the Old Testament allusion is a Marcan or pre-Markan addition. Thomas may tend to avoid reference to the Old Testament, or to excise Old Testament quotations, but he does preserve some, one indeed in the next saying. If Thomas is dependent on our Gospels, logion 66 is of course easily explained since it follows immediately upon the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen; but it is quite possible that we have here a genuine case of material growing together in the tradition. As Jeremias observes, the quotation introduces one of the primitive Church's favorite proof-texts; if he is right in holding that the insertion of this text is pre-Markan, this section in Thomas might be extremely

⁶⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

old, but it has none the less been subjected to some redaction." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 101-102)

John S. Kloppenborg, Marvin W. Meyer, Stephen J. Patterson, and Michael G. Steinhauser state: "When one compares this version of the Parable of the Tenants to those which occur in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, one notices immediately its distinguishing characteristic: this version is a true parabolic story, not an allegory. Former critics have long held that allegorizing of the parables was a relatively late development in the history of their interpretation. In fact, even without access to the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, the great parables scholar C. H. Dodd had offered a conjectural reconstruction of the Parable of the Tenants as it would have been read before the synoptic tradition had allegorized it. His reconstruction matched Saying 65 almost to the word." (*Q-Thomas Reader*, p. 102)

Gerd Theissen writes: "Even before the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas, Jeremias had demonstrated that the allegorizing of the parable, beginning before Mark and increasing in the Synoptics, is a sign of its secondary interpretation in terms of salvation history and Christology (*Parables of Jesus*, 1954, 55ff.). The discovery of the Gospel of Thomas confirmed this interpretation (cf. the revised version, 66-89, and Patterson, *Gospel*, 48-51). A Lindemann, 'Zur Gleichnisinterpretation im Thomas-Evangelium', *ZNW* 71, 1980, differs; he wants to explain Gospel of Thomas 65 as a de-allegorized form of the Synoptic original used for the Gnostic interpretation." (*The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, p. 39)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "With regard to *the introduction to the parable* it is to be observed that the description in Mark 12.1 and Matt. 21.33 of the careful construction of the vineyard is in close agreement with the Song of the Vineyard in Isa. 5.1-7. The hedge, the wine-press, and the tower are derived from Isa. 5.1 f. It is at once apparent from these allusions to scripture in the first sentences that the reference is not to an earthly owner of a vineyard and to his vineyard, but to God and Israel, and that we are therefore confronted with an allegory. This allusion to Isa. 5 is, however, omitted by Luke (20.9). More significant is the fact that it is absent from the Gospel of Thomas, where the beginning of the parable runs: 'A good man had a vineyard. He gave it to husbandmen so that they would work it and that he would receive its fruit from them.' Most significant is the fact that the LXX has

been used. The connection with Isa. 5 must therefore be due to secondary editorial activity." (*The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 70-71)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "This description [of the beating of the servants] does not transgress the limits of a straightforward story; there is no indication of a deeper allegorical meaning. It is especially noticeable that in the Gospel of Thomas only *one* servant at a time is sent. This feature also reappears in Mark - at least at first (12.2-5a) - although there the number of sending's is increased to three [and the third is killed]." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 71)

Joachim Jeremias notes that Christological interpretations are absent from the Gospel of Thomas. Jeremias writes: "It is interesting to observe that the Gospel of Thomas merely furnishes a starting-point to the process of interpretation described above to the extent that it allows the saying about the Cornerstone to be attached as an independent logion (66) to the completed parable (65)." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 74)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "With regard to *the final question* which occurs in all three synoptists (Mark 12.9 par.), but is missing from the Gospel of Thomas, it refers back (see pp. 70 f.) to Isa. 5.5, again not to its Hebrew text (which is not in the form of a question) but following the LXX. If the final question is secondary (the Gospel of Thomas has instead the call to hear, see p. 72), then so is the answer to the question. Neither of them is part of the original parable." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 74)

Helmut Koester writes: "In Mark 12 as well as in *the Gospel of Thomas* 65, the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen is connected with the saying about the rejection of the cornerstone (Mark 12:10-11 = *the Gospel of Thomas* 66). This is not a Markan addition to the parable; Mark's own redactional connection, leading back into the previous context that was interrupted by the insertion of the parable, appears in 12:12-13 with an explicit reference to the parable ('they understood that he said this parable about them'). Thus, the saying about the rejected cornerstone was already connected with the parable in Mark's source. However, Thomas does not reflect Mark's editorial connection of parable and saying but cites the saying as an independent unit. Mark's source may have contained more than one parable. The introduction (Mark 12:1) says: 'And he began to speak to them in parables' but only one parable follows. Whether or not this parable of Mark 12 derives from the same collection as the parables of Mark 4, it is evident that the sources of

Mark and the *Gospel of Thomas* were closely related." (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, pp. 101-102)

Funk and Hoover write: "The following allegorical elements are not found in the simpler version of Thomas: (1) The allusions to the song in Isa 5:1-7 (about someone who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a winepress, and built a tower). (2) The repeated sending of slaves and groups of slaves in the synoptic version is omitted; Thomas employs a simple, triadic structure that is a typical feature of oral storytelling. (3) No one is killed prior to the son; in Matthew some are killed in each group. (4) No mention is made of throwing the son outside the vineyard (a reference, presumably, to Jesus' death outside the walls of Jerusalem). (5) There is no concluding question addressed to the audience and therefore no punishment of the tenants. To be sure, some of these traits are missing from Mark and Luke as well. It is Matthew who carried the allegorizing to its ultimate degree. Nevertheless, it is striking that Thomas has virtually no allegorical features." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 511)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "The owner ('man') from 64.1 provides the link to this parable (v. 1). By comparison with Mark 12.1-9 parr. it does not contain any element which *must* be interpreted allegorically. However, one would hesitate to conclude from this that 65.1-7 is the basis of the Markan version. *First*, Logion 66, the content of which appears in Mark 12.10-11 directly attached to Mark 12.1-9, suggests dependence on the Synoptics. *Secondly*, v. 4, which is peculiar to Thomas, may contain a Gnostic interpretation. If we follow the text which has been handed down, the servant did not know the laborers and went to the wrong people. By contrast, v. 7 says that the laborers knew the son and killed him immediately. If the reading handed down is correct, the author is here playing on the word 'know'." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 623)

Burton Mack writes: "*The Tenants*. Most scholars agree that the story in Mark bears literary allusions to the Septuagint of Isa 5:1-5. Since that, plus the citation of Ps 118:22-23 in Mark 12:10-11, betray the signs of literary activity, several scholars have made the attempt to reconstruct an earlier, less allegorical form of the story. Crossan especially, *In Parables*, 86-96, argues strongly on the basis of the variant in GThom 93:1-18 that the story was originally not allegorical, either with respect to Israel's destiny, or with respect to Jesus' destiny, and that it was authentic, 'a deliberately shocking story of

successful murder' (p. 96). Crossan does not go on to explain the 'parabolic effect' this might have created, except to say it may have been a commentary upon the times. To follow Crossan in this attempt to retrieve the parable for Jesus, one has to imagine a situation in which listeners would not have been tempted to pick up on allusive suggestions to other stories and histories at all. The tightly constructed story, however, with its motifs of 'sending,' 'servants,' in series, to 'tenants' of a 'vineyard' for its 'produce,' to say nothing of the negative fates of the servants, that the tenants knew who the servants were, that the last one sent is different (the son), and that he was killed, is literally packed with invitations to think of Israel's epic history from a Christian point of view. Images and narrative schemes that come immediately to mind include the vineyard as a traditional metaphor for Israel (even if the literary allusion to Isaiah in Mark 12:1 is deleted), the sending of the prophets, the rejection and killing of the prophets, and perhaps wisdom's envoys (Wis 7:27). The parable betrays a reflection on Israel and the negative fate of the prophets that is greatly advanced over Q. Because the special status and destiny of the last emissary is both emphatic and climactic, the story is surely a product, not of the historical Jesus, but of a much later Christian claim. The story fits best just in Mark's milieu where Jesus' traditions, including Q, were combined with meditations upon Jesus' death as a crucial event. Mark's additions merely explicate the allegorical significance contained within the story itself." (*A Myth of Innocence*, pp. 168-169, n. 24)

John S. Kloppenborg, Marvin W. Meyer, Stephen J. Patterson, and Michael G. Steinhauser state: "But what does this ancient Christian parable mean? Its interpretation is complicated by a troublesome lacuna, or hole in the papyrus, in its very first line. The missing word is an adjective which would have modified the word 'person' in some way. The extant letters around the edges of the hole permit a reconstruction of the word 'good,' so that one could speak here of a 'good person' who rented the farm to 'evil' tenants, just as one finds in the synoptic versions of the story. But the extant letters also permit the reconstruction of the word for 'creditor' or 'usurer,' which would make this person one of the absentee landlords so much hated among the land-poor peasants of Galilee. One wonders, in the rural areas of Palestine and Syria among the dispossessed and poor - the tenant class - how this parable would have been heard. Were these evil tenants, or were they brave tenants?" (*Q-Thomas Reader*, p. 102)

John S. Kloppenborg, Marvin W. Meyer, Stephen J. Patterson, and Michael G. Steinhauser state: "we have seen how easily wisdom speculation of the sort found in Thomas could modulate into a more gnostic understanding of the sayings tradition. This may in fact have been the reason, according to James. M. Robinson, that no sayings collections seem to have survived in orthodox Christian circles, and that Q only survived as it was imbedded in the narratives of Matthew and Luke. This gnosticizing tendency, built into the wisdom sayings tradition, may well have cast a pall of suspicion over all saying's collections within orthodox circles. Embedding the sayings of Jesus into a narrative context would have 'protected' them from this sort of free-wheeling gnostic interpretation." (*Q-Thomas Reader*, p. 104)

John S. Kloppenborg, Marvin W. Meyer, Stephen J. Patterson, and Michael G. Steinhauser state: "In this instance one might well suppose that Thomas' anti-apocalyptic stance is late, the result of the failure of early Christianity's apocalyptic expectations to materialize. But this may not necessarily be the case. John Kloppenborg's recent study of Q has argued that this synoptic sayings collection may have undergone considerable editing at some point in its history. The first draft of Q would not have contained the apocalyptic and angry tones of judgment to be found in the final copy used by Matthew and Luke. This first edition, rather, was a collection of wisdom speeches, a 'wisdom gospel' not unlike the Gospel of Thomas. The addition of apocalyptic material to Q would have occurred only after the initial Q community had begun to realize how small it really was, and how few had taken their proclamation of Jesus' words seriously." (*Q-Thomas Reader*, pp. 104-105)

Other Insights:⁶⁹

- "Possible interpretation: The vineyard is the source of truth [replace 'vineyard' with a ganja tree if Rastafarian]. Humans may lease the vineyard if they pay their spiritual due. Prophets, i.e. servants, come, i.e. John the Baptist, to tend the vineyard and collect what is due. Prophets are rejected, scorned, and killed. Finally, Jesus, the Master's own son, is sent to the vineyard to harvest the spirit and is himself killed."

⁶⁹ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

- “A student of an esoteric teacher must be able to defend himself. The popular phrase is send a boy to do a man's work and they will steal his bicycle.”
- “The good man, with whom we are to identify, misjudges human nature by hiring out his property under terms that lose him his fruit, his son and apparently his property.”
- “Who are the good guys and who are the bad guys in this saying? The canonical versions are very explicit--the peasants are the bad guys. But as Kloppenburg points out, in Thomas it is ambiguous. It sounds to me like the peasants are the good guys. I get the picture of a country which badly needs land reform. The peasants killing the son (who would inherit the land) is symbolic of them taking what is theirs. Would Jesus have been killed if he just went around saying "love your enemies"? Without a doubt he was perceived as a threat to the existing political and economic powers.”
- “Our lease in the vineyard is a temporary gift. What is our rent? We are obliged to return some or most of the fruit to the lessor. Instead, we want to keep it all for ourselves. Having killed the son of the owner, how can we continue to receive His gifts? I think we are being asked to return the gifts we have been given, so that our days may be long on the land. And also, a warning: the beneficiaries of the gift soon forget to see it as such, and do not appreciate the reminder. Don't expect your pleas for charity and love to win you enthusiastic followers, once they have been conditioned to believe they need more and more to survive.”

The Parable of the Merchant and the Pearl (Saying 76)

Jesus said, "The Father's kingdom can be compared to a merchant with merchandise who found a pearl. The merchant was wise; they sold their merchandise and bought that single pearl for themselves.

"You, too, look for the treasure that doesn't perish but endures, where no moths come to eat, and no worms destroy."⁷⁰

76. (1) ΠΕΧΕ Ιϸ ΧΕ ΤΜΝΤΕΡΟ ΜΠΕΙΩΤ ΕCΤΝΤΩΝ ΑΥΡΩΜΕ
ΝΕΩΩΩΤ ΕΥΝΤΑϸ ΜΜΑΥ ΝΟΥΦΟΡΤΙΟΝ ΕΑϸΖΕ ΑΥΜΑΡΓΑΡΙΤΗΣ (2)
ΠΕΩΩΤ ΕΤΜΜΑΥ ΟΥCΑΒΕ ΠΕ Αϸ† ΠΕΦΟΡΤΙΟΝ ΕΒΟΛ ΑϸΤΟΟΥ
ΝΑϸ ΜΠΙΜΑΡΓΑΡΙΤΗΣ ΟΥΩΤ (3) ΝΤΩΤΝ ΖΩΤΤΗΥΤΝ ΩΙΝΕ ΝCΑ
ΠΕϸΕΖΟ ΕΜΑϸΩΧΝ ΕϸΜΗΝ ΕΒΟΛ ΠΜΑ ΕΜΑΡΕΧΟΟΛΕC ΤΖΝΟ
ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΜΑΥ ΕΟΥΩΜ ΟΥΔΕ ΜΑΡΕϸϸΝΤ ΤΑΚΟ

71

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁷²

Luke 12:33-34 Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Provide money bags for yourselves that do not wear out, an inexhaustible treasure in heaven that no thief can come near, and no moth can destroy. For where your treasure is, there will your heart also be.

Matthew 13:45-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went off and sold everything he had and bought it.

Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not store up treasures for yourselves on earth, where they will be destroyed by moth and rust and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ Rather, store up treasure for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves cannot break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart also be.

Scholarly Quotes:⁷³

Marvin Meyer writes: "Perhaps read *p{ef}eho*, 'the treasure.' Antoine Guillaumont's and the other editors of *The Gospel According to Thomas*, p. 42, note that the scribe initially wrote *pefho*, 'his face,' then added a

⁷⁰ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁷¹ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁷² <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

⁷³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

supralinear e, but neglected to delete ef." (*The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, p. 98)

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "This saying is a revised version of the parable of the pearl in Matthew 13:45-48. Since in Matthew the parable is preceded by the parable of the hidden treasure, Thomas adds a statement about treasure, derived from Matthew 6:20 (Luke 12:33). Matthew mentions moth and *brosis*, which means 'rust'; Thomas takes *brosis* very literally to mean 'eating,' and therefore adds a word about worms. The treasure is the inner man; what worms eat is the body." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 177)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "The situation, however, is not quite so simple [as Grant and Freedman suggest], since the words are not an exact parallel to Matthew vi. 19 f., but, as Cerfaux pointed out, introduce an element derived from John (vi. 27), while the 'worm' seems to come from Mark (ix. 48). Doresse suggests that we may have the beginnings of a synthesis already in Luke (xii. 33 f.). The most obvious explanation here is free quotation by an author familiar with all four Gospels, but as already noted this does not seem to account for the phenomena presented by the gospel as a whole. It may be that we must reckon with the possibility that the several sayings are of diverse origin: some perhaps from genuine early tradition, others based on our Gospels directly, others again the result of free quotation and harmonization, and still others merely tendentious inventions. It is, however, interesting to note that Jeremias brings Matthew vi. 19 ff. and Luke xii. 33 f. into his discussion of these two parables. For Gnostic use of the concept, we need only recall the famous 'Hymn of the Pearl' in the Acts of Thomas." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 92-93)

J. D. Crossan writes: "Luke 12:33 and *the Gospel of Thomas* 76b. Both Luke and *Thomas* are totally positive and lack Matthew's antithetical parallelism. . . . I prefer to consider Luke as the Q version, a tradition reflected more brokenly by *Thomas*." (*In Fragments*, p. 130)

Funk and Hoover write: "This parable appears also in Matt 13:45-46, where it takes the form: 'Heaven's imperial rule is like some trader looking for beautiful pearls. When that merchant finds one priceless pearl, he sells everything he owns and buys it.' Thomas has edited the parable slightly to accommodate his disapproval of mercantilism. So, the merchant sells the

merchandise and buys the one pearl he has found. The small differences in the two versions do not affect the basic point: God's imperial rule is worth a priceless pearl, which one will do well to acquire no matter what the cost. The Fellows thought that Jesus probably told a parable of this type." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 515)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "This verse [3] contains an interpretation of the parable in vv. 1-2. It is similar to Matt. 6.19f./Luke 12.33 (=Q) and calls on the reader to preserve the inner treasure which in the context of the Gospel of Thomas can mean only the self (= Jesus as light; cf. 50.1). In this Gnostic interpretation I presuppose that v. 3 is dependent on the Synoptic parallels mentioned (for 'treasure' cf. further Matt. 13.44)." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 628)

Ron Cameron writes: "This imperative [seek the treasure] is virtually identical with that which prefaces the application of the Ear of Grain (ApJas 12.27-28). However, whereas the similarities of language and style in the secondary frames which conclude each parable in the Apocryphon of James suggests that those frames have been composed by the same circle, one which is closely related to the final stages of editing the entire text, the application in GThom 76.2 constitutes a traditional piece of aphoristic wisdom, 'appended interpretatively' [Crossan] to The Pearl, that has no vestige of a distinctive language or style attributable to the author of this gospel. Instead, the aphorism about the treasure which Thomas has preserved as the application (76.2) of The Pearl (76.1) is a version of an independent unit of tradition. A similar thematic - but not formal - juxtaposition is attested in the Gospel of Matthew, whose author seems to have assembled The Treasure (13:44//GThom 109) and The Pearl (13:45-46) from two separate sources. Although that arrangement may be attributed to the editorial activity of Matthew himself, the secondary collocation of 'pearl' and 'treasure' in GThom 76 betrays no earmarks of the author's own redaction. Since this marks the only instance in the Gospel of Thomas in which such a saying is used to interpret the parable, the addition of this application is to be regarded as the product not of the author himself but of an earlier stage of the tradition." ("Parable and Interpretation in the Gospel of Thomas," *Forum* 2.2 [1986])

Other Insights:⁷⁴

- “The merchandise is the repressed self; the pearl the innate child self within this. Seek the pearl!”
- “Be not OF the world [though you are indeed IN it] but instead seek the one indestructible thing that will gain you salvation. Knowledge!”
- “No way, the pearl is knowledge! Seek knowledge, which no moth or worm can destroy.”
- “Seek the knowledge that is beyond intellectual knowledge.”
- “Seek the rewards of the spirit, that nothing can change or take away from you.”

⁷⁴ Sample of “Visitor Comments” <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parable of the Woman Baking Bread (Saying 96)

Jesus [said], "The Father's kingdom can be compared to a woman who took a little yeast and [hid] it in flour. She made it into large loaves of bread. Anyone who has ears to hear should hear!" ⁷⁵

96. (1) Π(ΕΥ)Ε ΙC ΧΕ ΤΜΝΤΕΡΟ ΜΠΕΙΩΤ ΕCΤΝΤΩ(Ν ΑΥ)CΖΙΜΕ
(2) ΔCΧΙ ΝΟΥΚΟΥΕΙ ΝCΑΕΙΡ Δ(CΖ)ΟΠC ΖΝ ΟΥΩΩΤΕ ΔCΑΑC
ΝΖΝΝΟ(C Ν)ΝΟΕΙΚ (3) ΠΕΤΕΥΜ ΜΑΔΧΕ ΜΜΟC ΜΑ(ΡΕ)CΩΤΜ

76

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁷⁷

Luke 13:20-21 Again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of flour until it was completely leavened."

Matthew 13:35 This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

"I will open my mouth to speak in parables;

I will proclaim what has been hidden since the foundation of the world."

Scholarly Quotes:⁷⁸

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "This parable about the kingdom of the Father, like the one which follows it (Saying 94), compares the kingdom with a woman. The original version, in Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21, compared the kingdom of heaven or of God with the leaven which she used. Thomas's emphasis, as usual, is on the action of the Gnostic, not on the work of God." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 187)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "Here the kingdom is likened not to the leaven, as in the Synoptics, but to the woman. Grant and Freedman see here a change of emphasis, from the work of God to the action of the Gnostic, but it may be no more than a transmission-variant. More important is the pointing of the contrast between the little leaven and the large loaves; here it is possible that, as Cerfaux suggests, we have an echo of the Synoptic twin parable of the Mustard Seed, but this presupposes that Thomas made use of our Gospels." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 96-97)

⁷⁵ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁷⁶ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁷⁷ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

⁷⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

Joachim Jeremias writes: "Again we are shown a tiny morsel of leaven (cf. 1 Cor. 5.6; Gal. 5.9), absurdly small in comparison with the great mass of more than a bushel of meal. The housewife mixes it, covers it with a cloth, and leaves the mass to stand overnight, and when she returns to it in the morning the whole mass of dough is leavened." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 148)

Funk and Hoover write: "This is a one-sentence parable in its Q version (Matt 13:33//Luke 13:20-21): 'God's imperial rule is like leaven which a woman took and concealed in fifty pounds of flour until it was all leavened.' Matthew and Luke agree word-for-word in taking the parable over from Q. Thomas, on the other hand, seems to have edited it slightly: the explicit contrast between a little leaven and large loaves has been introduced into the parable. This contrast, found also in Thomas' version of the parable of the lost sheep (107:1-3) and the parable of the fishnet (8:1-3), is alien to the genuine parables of Jesus." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 523)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "These verses have a parallel in Matt. 13.33/Luke 13.20-21 (=Q). Their dependence on the Q parable emerges from the abnormal expression that the woman hid (one would have expected the verb 'knead') the leaven in the flour. Moreover, in the parable in Thomas the woman and her activity are at the center, and she is meant to be the model for the readers. Finally, at the end the size of the loaves is emphasized (cf. 8.1-3; 107.1-3)." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 636)

Other Insights:⁷⁹

- "The kingdom of God promotes growth."
- "God has planted seeds in all of us. With time and free will "grow" and be able to transcend into heavenly beings."
- "As usual, the "who has ears" is a coded reference for school inmates. A very small amount of the teaching, from a true teacher, fertilizes a great mass."
- "It's not entirely about the intellect. The leaven is the faith walk, a leap of faith that must be taken in the real world before the kingdom of heaven opens its doors...before the loaf will rise. Thief, you don't need to have an enlightened sage to point this out...the bread is available to anyone who reads this gospel and puts it into practice. No one has a monopoly on the dharma, the wisest sages are the ones who admit to

⁷⁹ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

selling water by the edge of the river...Yet, If that's what it takes, the risk of redundancy is better than no guide.”

- “Also implies about the nature of Truth; just the smallest taste or glimpse alters one forever, and the passion to find out is relentless; it grows from the smallest "bit of yeast" and rises to tremendous potentials, transforming the person forever.”

The Parable of the Jar of Flour (Saying 97)

Jesus said, "The Father's kingdom can be compared to a woman carrying a jar of flour. While she was walking down [a] long road, the jar's handle broke and the flour spilled out behind her on the road. She didn't know it and didn't realize there was a problem until she got home, put down the jar, and found it empty."⁸⁰

97. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΤΜΝΤΕΡΟ ΜΠΕ(ΙΩΤ Ε)CΤΝΤΩΝ ΔΥCΖΙΜΕ
ΕCΧΙ ΖΑ ΟΥΘΛ(ΜΕΕΙ) ΕCΜΕΖ ΝΝΟΕΙΤ (2) ΕCΜΟΟΥΕ Ζ(Ι ΟΥ)ΖΙΗ
ΕCΟΥΗΟΥ ΑΠΜΑΔΧΕ ΜΠΘΛΜ(Ε)ΕΙ ΟΥΩΘΠ ΑΠΝΟΕΙΤ ΨΟΥΟ ΝCΩC
(2)Ι ΤΕΖΙΗ (3) ΝΕCCOΟΥΝ ΔΝ ΠΕ ΝΕΜΠΕCΕΙΜΕ ΕΖΙCΕ (4)
ΝΤΑΡΕCΠΩΖ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΕΠΕCΧΕΙ ΔCΚΑ ΠΘΛΜΕΕΙ ΑΠΕCΗΤ ΔCΖΕ
ΕΡΟC ΕCΨΟΥΕΙΤ

81

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:

None – Unique to The Gospel of Thomas

Scholarly Quotes:⁸²

Marvin Meyer writes: "This parable is known only here in early Christian literature, although 'Macarius' of Syria tells a somewhat similar story of a bag full of sand that is leaking out through a tiny hole in the bag." (*The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, p. 103)

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "This parable also compares the kingdom with a woman; it is not found in the gospels. Perhaps its meaning is given in the parable of the secretly growing seed in Mark 4:26-29. Doresse (page 198) cannot decide whether it refers to the imperceptible loss of the kingdom or to the contrast between its coming and the woman's failure to notice her loss; neither can we." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 187)

F. F. Bruce writes: "Here is a parable of the kingdom which has no canonical parallel. The point seems to be a warning against self-confidence, against thinking that one possesses the saving knowledge when in fact it has trickled away." (*Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 148)

⁸⁰ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁸¹ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁸² <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

Gerd Ludemann writes: "The parable is preserved only here in the early Christian tradition. But its images do not match. Why should all the flour pour out of a jar if only a handle breaks? How is it that the woman did not observe this? So, the parable must be interpreted in the light of these contradictions. In that case Thomas wants to say that knowledge (v. 3) is important at any point in time. The reader should always be on guard. . . . The parable is inauthentic, as it is an admonition to the individual Gnostic." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 637)

Jack Finegan writes: "This is a relatively simple, direct parable, introduced much as are parables in the Synoptic tradition, e.g., Mt 13:31, 'The kingdom of heaven is like . . .' The peril of inattention and unnoticed loss is stressed, a teaching well enough in harmony with the teaching of Jesus otherwise in the Synoptic Gospels about the value and the possible loss of the kingdom." (*Hidden Records of the Life of Jesus*, p. 260)

Funk and Hoover write: "The structure of this parable, recorded only by Thomas, is similar to that of the parable of the leaven (Thom 96:1-2//Matt 13:33//Luke 13:20-21). It has a surprising and provocative ending: the woman comes home with an empty, rather than a full, jar. A full jar would be the expected metaphor for God's imperial rule, so this ending is startling. The symbolism may fit with Jesus' tendency to portray the kingdom as having to do with the unnoticed or unexpected or modest (this is true also of the parable of the mustard seed, Thom 20:2//Mark 4:31-32//Matt 13:31-32//Luke 13:19)." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 524)

Christan Amundsen writes: "Like people who are unaware that they are leaking the stuff of their being, they walk along a road mindless until they find themselves empty. . . . Our lives, Jesus is saying, are lived by accident. We become 'broken jars,' with nothing inside. Finding ourselves empty is a devastating affair. . . . This story, like any good parable, leads us up to a question. What does the woman do when she finds her jar broken and empty? It is like seeing that one's life is meaningless and without true substance. What now? This is where the true drama unfolds, and so we are left to fill in the blank. The meal that was contained in the jar is the important thing. Perhaps the spirit cannot escape its bondage until the jar is broken, until all our avenues of material reality are discovered to be simply a 'broken jar.' Many responses and interpretations are possible and necessary." (*Insights from the Secret Teachings of Jesus*, pp. 274-275)

Other Insights:⁸³

- “This parable shows that the whole gospel can best be understood from the spiritual traditions. The kingdom of heaven is that state of felt awareness of the presence of God within us--enlightenment. In meditation we seek the void, the emptiness where that state of grace can be felt. Vs.3, "the kingdom is inside you..." Christians may be puzzled by this verse (perhaps the whole book), but a Buddhist would say, "aha!"
- “The Kingdom of God or enlightenment or whatever you wish to call it is always with you wherever you go and sometimes you can lose it without knowing it. Don't just carry your load in life, stop and look at it sometimes to make sure it's still there.”
- “The Kingdom of God is not meant to be hoarded by one, but dispersed, poured out, upon the ground to nourish and sustain the lowest of creatures (sinners). The spilling of the Kingdom of God may have seemed like a "misfortune" to the woman, but not to God.”
- “I think that Amundsen must be right: At the end of your journey, you are left with nothing material, a paradoxical journey for in a sense you have made no progress. You are only left with yourself, and yourself must be in good condition. You are a passer-by whether you like it or not or even whether you know it or not.”
- “She was unaware. Was however God? Like the Story of the Indian Water Carrier, intended to be instrumental, this is intended to have a particular effect on a particular person at a particular time. It is not dedicated to a general usage”
- “When puberty is reached no one notices that they have been emotionally bankrupted during childhood.”
- “Maybe the point is that we should end up where we started (like being a naked baby again), completely emptying ourselves of everything that weighs us down.”
- “The woman holds her kingdom in her hands if she would have paid more attention she wouldn't have let it go to waste.”
- “It is wrong to expect a meal (entering the kingdom) at the end of the road when we reach home (when we die). Rather the kingdom is

⁸³ Sample of “Visitor Comments” <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

already here, and we should try to enter it now, before the possibility to do so pours away.”

- “The jar of flour on the long road might be our thoughts of who we are and what life is all about. But we are so involved with our role that we do not realize that as we go along life empties out our idea of who we are. And when we get to the end and look back we see the jar, our role, is empty. But we, our real selves, are there to witness the empty jar. That this is actually a good thing is why it is likened to the kingdom of heaven. I love the surprise ending.”
- “Clearly this lesson is parallel with the parable of the lilies. Do not worry about your own good. What you most care about, you shall lose. In emptiness is only God. What you save will be only for others. Jesus says that over and over again. This is what spiritual economics is all about. Giving and receiving is one. Also, it shows us that carrying the burden of trying to care for ourselves is not rewarding. Also, this is a lesson in learning not to plan for our good in the future. God is here and now. Carrying the burden of wellness or fulfillment in the future is futile.”
- “The kingdom of God is not visible. It is not of the earth or the material but of the unseen and spiritual. On the path "home" we lose that which is material; we must lose all earthly and material attachments.”
- “Personally, I believe that "handle" is mis-translated. The proper translation may be "that which holds" referring to a lid or door. In any event. The parable may mean something subtle like: A person is born with all that is required to enter the Kingdom whole. However, on taking a road to "enlightenment" the individual neglects that which he had all along, namely his spirit. "She had not understood how to toil." She did not know how to engage her own spirituality and wound up empty-handed. By going down a "distant road" may refer to going down a spiritual path far from oneself.”

Dan Harper | Sermons⁸⁴

Back in 1945 in Egypt, Mohammed Ali Samman and his brother by pure chance happened to uncover an earthenware vase. Inside that vase were ancient handwritten manuscripts, containing many previously unknown

⁸⁴ danielharper.org

books, what we now call the Nag Hammadi library. The most famous of the books is what we now know as the Gospel of Thomas, a collection of sayings of Jesus that was written down somewhere around one thousand nine hundred years ago.

I find the Gospel of Thomas to be a particularly interesting book. Although many of the sayings of Jesus recorded in it are similar to the sayings of Jesus we already knew from the gospels recognized by the Christian churches, the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; yet other sayings in the Gospel of Thomas are recorded nowhere else.

Now we know what we're supposed to think the sayings of Jesus mean, because for the past two thousand years the Christian churches have been telling us what they mean. But the Gospel of Thomas is not an official Christian book. Therefore, those sayings of Jesus that appear in the Gospel of Thomas, and nowhere else are of particular interest to me. The Christian churches have not been telling us what they mean, so we can look at them with fresh eyes, listen to them with openness.

When I first read the Gospel of Thomas all the way through a few years ago, I was particularly struck by chapter 97, which we heard in the first reading this morning. I re-read that short little parable several times over, asking myself: What was Jesus trying to tell us? Part of the reason it's so hard to understand is that it's so short; perhaps all that got written down was the merest outline of a longer parable. So, as I thought about this parable, I began to imagine it more fully. I filled it out, and this is how I imagined it went:

Jesus and his followers were traveling from village to village in Judea so that Jesus could teach his message of love to whomever would hear it. They had spent the day in a village where some people wanted to hear what Jesus had to say, and many others didn't seem to care. That evening, they stayed on the outskirts of the village, and as they were eating dinner, one of the followers asked, "Master, what will it be like when the kingdom of heaven is finally established?"

"Let me tell you a story that will explain," said Jesus, and he told this story....

"Once upon a time, there was a woman, just an ordinary woman who happened to live in a very small village that had no marketplace of its own. At the harvest season, the crops having been gathered in, the woman

decided to walk to a larger village, just two or three miles away, where there was a market.

“She started off early in the morning. She brought along some things her family had grown to sell in the market, and she brought along a large pottery jar with two big handles. Since she was an ordinary villager, or course she did not have fancy bronze jars, she just had an ordinary earthenware jar that had been made in her village. The potter who lived in her village was not very good at what he did, so her jars were without decoration, and not very well made.

“She arrived at the marketplace and sold everything she had brought. Then she purchased a large amount of meal, that is, coarsely-ground flour. She filled her jar with the meal, tied the handle with a strap of cloth, and slung the jar over her back.

“The path home was steep and rough, and by now the day was hot. She walked along, putting one foot in front of the other, and she did not notice anything besides the heat and the rough path.

“But one of the handles to the jar broke off, and the jar slowly tipped to one side. Bit by bit, the coarsely-ground flour spilled out on the path behind her. Bit by bit, the jar tipped even further. Before she reached home, all the flour in that jar had spilled out.

“At last, the woman reached home. She put the jar down and discovered that it was empty. That is what the Kingdom of Heaven will be like.”

That’s how I imagined the Parable of the Empty Jar might have been told in a fuller version. That helped me visualize the parable. Next I thought about how I could better understand the parable, and I began with three assumptions:

First, I assumed that traditional Christian theology was not going to be able to adequately explain this parable; I made this assumption because I noticed that orthodox Christians tend to ignore the Gospel of Thomas in general, and this parable in particular. (Indeed, I decided that this parable was especially interesting because I couldn’t see how traditional Christians could possibly incorporate it into their theology.) Thus, I assumed that I should go beyond the boundaries of conventional Christian theology.

Second, I assumed that “Thomas” or whoever wrote this parable down was a theologian, and so he (or she) had some kind of theological bias. It appears that whoever wrote this parable down was a Gnostic, that is, a member of that branch of early Christianity which taught that there are secret and hidden teachings of Jesus. The Gnostics seem to have believed that Jesus left secret teachings that were never written down, but which they passed on by word of mouth to those who were initiated into their religious communities. So perhaps we are meant to be confused by this parable, and this is part of the theological bias of this parable. At the same time, as a Unitarian Universalist, I’m used to understanding and working around other people’s theological biases, so I assumed that alien as it might be, I could still make some sense out of it.

Third, I assumed that even though the Gospel of Thomas is not a part of the standard Christian Bible, it’s still an interesting and useful book. I assumed that any book about Jesus that was written within two or three generations after the death of Jesus is worth reading; such ancient books are likely to have some interesting or useful insight into the world of Jesus, or at least into the world of the early followers of Jesus.

Those were my three assumptions. If we start with those assumptions, we don’t have to try to make the Parable of the Empty Jar fit into conventional Christian theology, and we don’t have to reject it simply because it’s not in the official Bible. Furthermore, we know that it has been retold by someone with a Gnostic Christian bias, but we don’t have to let that affect us. Finally, we know that it’s worth trying to understand this parable insofar as it might give us some additional insight into the thought of Jesus of Nazareth. Starting with these three assumptions, let’s see what the Parable of the Empty Jar has to say to us.

The first thing I notice is the that Parable of the Empty Jar tells us that emptiness somehow is the same as the Kingdom of Heaven. This is not traditional Christian theology, where the Kingdom of Heaven means a place you go after you die — emptiness is not a place, emptiness is just empty. Not only is this not traditional Christian theology, it seems to have a passing resemblance to another great religious tradition, the tradition of Taoism. In the Tao te Ching, the central book of Taoism, we find that passage which we heard in the second reading this morning:

We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want.

Is this just coincidence? Does the idea of emptiness occur anywhere else in the Christian tradition?

Once we start looking, we find that images of emptiness and nothingness do appear elsewhere in the Christian scriptures. I think of the story of the rich young man who comes to Jesus, says he has observed all the commandments, upon hearing which Jesus tells him: “Go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” (Bible geeks note this is from Mk. 10.21 [also Mt. 19.21; Lk. 18.22] RSV.) An empty bank account is equated with the kingdom of heaven. I think also of that passage in Jesus’s most famous sermon, the so-called Sermon on the Mount, where he says that we shouldn’t worry so much about material things; we shouldn’t even worry about clothing, he says: “And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.” (Mt. 6.28-29) An empty clothes closet is equated with the kingdom of heaven. Jesus even empties out his family, as in the story where his mother and brothers and sisters have come to see him, to which he replies: “Who are my mothers and my brothers [and my sisters]?... Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.” (Mk. 3.33, 35)

Obviously, the Jesus tradition has a way of talking about emptiness that is quite different from the Taoist tradition; I’m not trying to tell you that they’re the same thing. The teachings of Jesus are more likely to advise us to pay less attention to material things, and instead pay greater attention to matters of the spirit; whereas the Taoist tradition, at least in my limited understanding of it, is more likely to instruct us in how to empty our minds as a form of spiritual discipline. Yet in both traditions, we do seem to find the idea that in order for us to be connected with that which is most important in life, we have to empty our lives of non-essential things; we even have to empty our lives of things we thought were essential, but which we are assured are in fact inessential.

While there are distinct differences, I think that both Taoism and the Jesus tradition are telling us that if we want to truly understand the world, we can’t rely on ordinary ways of thinking and being. Lao-tse, who allegedly wrote the

Tao te Ching, invites us to empty our minds so that we may better know what he terms the Tao, the Way; Jesus invites us to empty our lives so that we may better know what he calls the Kingdom of Heaven — which he sometimes also calls the Way. Both traditions are inviting us to step out of the ordinary way of thinking and being, and step into a new way of thinking and being.

I believe it's very important that both Jesus and Lao-tse talk about the "Way." They don't talk about "the place we're going to get to eventually"; they talk about the way, the path, the journey. We can see this in the Parable of the Empty Jar. Jesus says that the empty jar is like the kingdom of heaven, but he also tells us about the process by which the jar becomes empty: first the handle of the jar breaks, then the jar empties out over time (and we know that it must happen slowly, or otherwise the woman would immediately become aware that the jar was suddenly empty), and then the woman gets home and realizes that the jar is empty. We also know that the process will continue after that moment when the woman discovers that the jar is empty: she will be shocked, she will wonder how it happened; and then she will have to figure out what to do next — will she borrow flour from someone else? will she be forced to rely on her extended family and the community for help? In other words, will the emptiness of the jar force her to use her network of relationships? And perhaps this is this the kingdom of heaven:— not the emptiness of the jar itself, but the inescapable network of mutuality that binds each of us to the rest of humanity, to the rest of the ecosystem, to what we might call the Web of Life.

We have come a long way from the original parable; nothing that I have said can be found in that very short parable. None of this can be found there, but in the process of thinking about that parable, perhaps this is the direction we must come. We have not come down the well-trodden path of traditional Christianity, which tends to reject the Gospel of Thomas, or tends to interpret the Parable of the Empty Jar as a conventional parable telling us to accept Christian orthodoxy. Instead, by looking into the empty jar, by looking into emptiness, perhaps we have come face to face with reality — face to face with a reality that doesn't have firm and final answers, a reality that is always changing, reality that is a process.

Not that I think that I have just uncovered the one final, correct interpretation of the Parable of the Empty Jar. This is a process, a path, a way — it is not

a final definition that can be pinned down like a dead butterfly in a display case. And to make that point, let me tell you the rest of the story of the Parable of the Empty jar, as I imagined it happening:

You remember that as I imagined it happening, one of his followers asked him what the Kingdom of Heaven would be like, and in response Jesus told the Parable of the Empty Jar. He concluded the parable by saying, “At last the woman reached home. She put the jar down and discovered that it was empty. That is what the Kingdom of Heaven will be like.”

As I imagine it, when Jesus stopped talking, his followers respectfully waited a little while longer, because they did not think that could be the end of the parable. But Jesus had nothing more to say. They all sat in silence for a while, and one of the followers finally said, “Master, I’m not sure I understand.”

But Jesus did not explain further, and eventually he went off by himself to sleep. The followers sat up for a while talking about the story.

“It is like the story when the prophet Elijah goes to the widow of Zarephath,” said one of the followers. “God told Elijah to go there, and she would feed him, but the widow did not even have enough flour for herself and her son. Elijah tells her to bake three loaves anyway, and she finds that she does have enough flour after all, for God has provided for her. Indeed, the jar of flour is still just as full as it was before Elijah had arrived. Jesus is telling us that in the Kingdom of God, we will not have to worry where our food comes from.”

“You mean like when Jesus said, the lilies in the fields don’t go to work and yet they have enough to eat,” said one of the other followers. “Perhaps you are right, but I think Jesus is telling us that we will find the Kingdom of God in the most unexpected places. He also taught us that the Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, a seed so small you can hardly see it, but one that grows into a huge plant.”

“Perhaps you are right,” said a third follower, “but a mustard seed can grow, and an empty jar of flour cannot grow into anything but hunger. I think Jesus is talking about the poor, who will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Like the woman in the story, those who have nothing, who are poor and hungry and have no flour at all. She will be one of the ones who inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.”

No one else had anything to say, and they sat in silence for a while. At last, another one of Jesus's followers stood up.

"I don't think any of us really understand that story," she said, "but Jesus got us to think hard about what the Kingdom of God is like. We have thought about it, and we have talked about it, and now it's time to sleep, because just like the woman in the story, we have a long walk ahead of us tomorrow."

That's what I think about the Parable of the Empty Jar: I don't think any of us knows exactly what it means. I don't know exactly what the Parable of the Empty Jar means, but it makes me reflect on life from a new perspective; and maybe that is the real point of any parable. And I suspect that the real point of this parable, the real point of any parable told by Jesus, is not to give us a final answer about something, but to make us think in new ways. The best teachers, the greatest teachers, are not the ones who give us all the answers. The greatest teachers are the ones who make us think for ourselves, who move us into new ways of being in the world, who turn us towards a way of being in the world that makes the world a better place while it allows us to be more human, which we might call the Kingdom of Heaven. And perhaps the first step is to empty ourselves of the old ways of being, so that we can move into the ways of being.

The Parable of the Assassin (Saying 98)

Jesus said, "The Father's kingdom can be compared to a man who wanted to kill someone powerful. He drew his sword in his house and drove it into the wall to figure out whether his hand was strong enough. Then he killed the powerful one."⁸⁵

98. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΤΜΝΤΕΡΟ ΜΠΕΙΩΤ ΕCΤΝΤΩΝ ΕΥΡΩΜΕ ΕΦΟΥΩΩ
ΕΜΟΥΤ ΟΥΡΩΜΕ ΜΜΕΓΙCΤΑΝΟC (2) ΑΦΩΩΛΜ ΝΤCΗΦΕ ΖΜ ΠΕΦΗΕΙ
ΑΦΧΟΤC ΝΤΧΟ ΧΕΚΑΑC ΕΦΝΑΕΙΜΕ ΧΕ ΤΕΦΘΙΧ ΝΑΤΩΚ ΕΖΟΥΝ
(3) ΤΟΤΕ ΑΦΖΩΤΒ ΜΠΜΕΓΙCΤΑΝΟC

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Synoptic Gospel Parallels:

None – Unique to The Gospel of Thomas

Parable of the Assassin⁸⁷

Introduction: The [Wise] Assassin's Parable (also known as the Murderer's Parable) is a parable attributed to Jesus. However, it does not appear in the canonical Gospels of the New Testament, only in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas. According to Thomas 98, Jesus said: His father's kingdom is like a man who tried to kill the powerful. In his own house he drew his sword and thrust it into the wall to see if his hand would pass. Then he killed the man in power.

Authenticity: Scholars at The Jesus Seminar gave this parable of the assassin a "pink" rating, indicating that it is, in their view, probably, but not with certainty, the true words of Jesus. They were influenced by the similarities to the parable of the Tower Builder and War King found in Luke's Gospel (see Cost Calculation) and the "scandalous nature of the image". According to Funk (1997), "[Taking up the parable of Jesus, unproven in the canonical Gospels and known only a few years earlier, was an act of courage that required careful deliberation. This decision by the seminar has been criticized as inconsistent because the Parable of the King of War as recorded in Luke was not given a pink rating. The authenticity of this parable is attacked because Jesus would not use a parable that glorifies murder. And

⁸⁵ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁸⁶ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁸⁷ academic-accelerator.com

all because of the use of the word "Father's Kingdom," which is not found in the canonical gospels.

Meaning: Like Luca's parable of the King of War and the Tower, this parable seems to be concerned with "estimating the cost of an action or the ability to carry it out successfully." In the Book of Mark, Jesus explains the idea of a rehearsal before evil happens: , blasphemy, pride, stupidity: all these evil things come from within and defile a person. According to a fellow at the Jesus seminar, "This parable storyline originally had to do with the reversal of David, and Goliath: By Taking Precautions A Wise Man Takes Before Encountering A Village Bully." , the little man wins the big man." A similar message can be found in the parable of the strong man.

Scholarly Quotes:⁸⁸

Joachim Jeremias writes: "Just as this political assassin first makes a trial of his strength before he embarks on his dangerous venture, so should you test yourselves to see whether you have strength to carry the adventure through." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 197)

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "It is better to compare the kingdom of the Father with a man (as here) than with a woman (as in the two sayings preceding this one); see Saying 112 [114]. The parable vaguely reminds us of Saul's throwing his spear at David, in the Old Testament, but Thomas is not interested in Old Testament allusions. It is more like the parable of the king going into battle who first makes an estimate concerning his prospects (Luke 14:31). He who would find the kingdom must first count the cost. If he is strong enough, he can slay the 'great man' (probably the world; see Saying 78)." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 188)

F. F. Bruce writes: "This parable, also unparalleled in the canonical tradition, may have come from a period when Zealot activity gave it contemporary relevance. The point seems to be that anyone who embarks on a costly or dangerous enterprise must first make sure that he has the necessary resources to carry it out. There may be a link with the strong man whose house is ransacked in Saying 35." (*Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 148)

⁸⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

Gerd Ludemann writes: "The parable appears only at this point in the early Christian Jesus tradition. It has a high degree of offensiveness, since as in Luke 16.1-7; Matt. 13.44; Matt. 24.43-44/Luke 12.39 Jesus uses an immoral hero to make a statement about the kingdom of God. Cf. in addition the original version of the saying about 'men of violence' in Matt. 11.12/Luke 16.16 (= Q) as a further example of Jesus being deliberately offensive in what he says. . . . The parable is authentic. Because of its offensiveness it probably fell victim to moral censorship at an early stage and therefore does not appear in any other text." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 637)

Funk and Hoover write: "It appeared to some of the Fellows that the story line of the parable originally had to do with reversal: the little guy beats the big guy by taking the precautions a prudent person would take before encountering the village bully. This, together with the scandalous nature of the image, prompted a majority of the Seminar to vote red or pink on the third ballot." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 525)

Other Insights:⁸⁹

- "This statement by Jesus means that one should put forth more than "just enough" effort to try to become qualified for heaven. Many times, "just enough" becomes "not enough" because one does not truly know what he or she is facing. Putting that extra effort in will many times ensure that the goal will be accomplished!"
- "If you want to kill the Great Deceiver, try to do so while at home. Try as hard as you can to do so. When you try harder than you can, then you will do so."
- "If the metaphor here is about preparation for some great event, then the kingdom of heaven is only a dress rehearsal for something greater to come. What? The kingdom is only the means to that end."
- "The powerful person is the father who uses power without authority. The symbolic rape of the father figure empowers the child and destroys the figure's illusion of authority."
- "First desire, then fear, then realization. But just as the murderer is a danger to the community, so is the sage. The sage can see what is in front of his face, has experienced the divine. And all the consensus of the community and its boundaries and taboos and superstitions have

⁸⁹ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

been transcended. This is truly dangerous and it's your birth right. As the prophet Bob Marley said, "It's not all that glitters is gold, half the story has never been told and now you see the light, stand up for your rights."

- "It seems to me that you have to know yourself (become acquainted with your strength) first. *Then* you can and will overcome your obstacles."
- "Practice overcoming your weaknesses in private...perhaps meditate in seclusion. When the temptation comes in the real world, you will be able to resist."

The Parable of the Assassin⁹⁰

The historical Jesus no doubt told the parables of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the lost sheep, and the mustard seed, according to a panel of New Testament scholars, but the group also says he may have told a chilling story about an assassin's preparations.

Of 27 parables found in the Bible, 21 were favored by the majority of scholars voting in a recent session of the Jesus Seminar, an unprecedented project assessing the authenticity of about 500 sayings attributed to Jesus.

The parable of the assassin is not in the Bible; it's in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas.

But scholars felt by a narrow margin, 16 to 13, that it has the marks of Jesus' illustrations from ordinary life:

"Jesus said: 'The Kingdom of the Father is like a certain man who wanted to kill a powerful man. In his own house he drew his sword and stuck it into the wall in order to find out whether his hand could carry through. Then he slew the powerful man.' "

Catholic scholar John Dominic Crossan said he believed that most of the panel favored the "assassin" because it is very similar to two well-regarded parables in Luke (14:28-32) about preparations for building a tower and going to war. "If we had no parallels, we might have thought it was too violent an image for Jesus to use," Crossan said.

⁹⁰ Los Angeles Times 3/15/1986 by John Dart, Times Religious Writer

Describes Immoral Act

The “assassin” parable does not seem to have any moral, and, if anything, describes an immoral act. But Crossan said the “unjust steward” (Luke 16:1-8a) is another case of immoral behavior, and some parables describe moral or amoral acts. Many parables have moralizing endings but those were added by gospel writers or the early church, mainstream scholars say.

Despite the popular impression that the parables are moral lessons, many scholars say they are succinct stories often illustrating the joy, surprise, or shattered expectations that the kingdom, or “reign,” of God would bring. Stevan Davies in “The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Wisdom” suggested that the Kingdom parables make sense if the word “wisdom” is substituted for kingdom--a suggestion which some scholars say makes the “assassin” more palatable.

The late Norman Perrin of the University of Chicago wrote of “the extreme unlikelihood of anyone but Jesus” using an assassin as an example, but Perrin was one of the few New Testament scholars in the 1960s and 1970s who supported the authenticity of several “new” parables in the Gospel of Thomas.

The vote taken last weekend at the University of Redlands was indicative of the growth in scholarly esteem for the Gospel of Thomas, a collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus. The first complete copy of the Gospel of Thomas was discovered in Egypt in 1945 and it was available in translations by 1960.

Routine Comparisons

Conservative scholars tend to regard the text as tainted by heretical passages and, at any rate, lacking any spiritual authority since it was not included in the New Testament. On the other hand, so-called mainstream scholars, who feel that religious doctrine should not limit research directions or conclusions, now almost routinely compare Thomas versions of Jesus sayings with biblical renditions for historical purposes.

“I think it’s exciting,” said seminar participant Ron Cameron, a Wesleyan University professor currently on a research leave funded by the National Endowment of the Humanities to write a major commentary on the Gospel of Thomas.

“We seemed to have turned a corner--that a gospel text not in the New Testament can be taken as seriously as any of those which are,” said Cameron, who is writing his commentary at Claremont Graduate School.

In fact, of 10 parables that exist in both Thomas and one of the biblical Gospels, the Jesus Seminar deemed the Thomas version closest to the original story in three cases (the “mustard seed,” the “fishnet” and the “feast”) and equal in two (the Gospel of Luke’s “rich farmer” and the “sower” whose seed fell in good soil, in Matthew, Mark and Luke).

On the other hand, two other Thomas parables not found in the New Testament were judged not authentic by most seminar members as were three parables from the “Apocryphon (Secret Book) of James.”

Thomas was said to be one of the 12 disciples, although mainstream scholars do not think Thomas wrote this text any more than they think the disciples Matthew or John wrote the New Testament Gospels attributed to them. The practice of attaching the names of deceased religious authorities to religious writings was common both in Old and New Testament days, scholars say.

Share Works With Public

The Jesus Seminar began the six-to-10-year project last year to spur scholars to share the results of their work with the general public, partly in an effort to counteract the literalistic approaches to the Bible by evangelical and fundamentalist television and publications. One evangelical scholar involved in the controversial project was told to quit the seminar by the president of Point Loma Nazarene College in San Diego last January, but the 15-year faculty member, John Lown, resigned his teaching position rather than quit the seminar.

The skepticism that the Jesus Seminar scholars bring to the texts is often surprising to the religious public. After the Jesus Seminar decided last fall that less than half of the Sermon on the Mount actually goes back to Jesus, a United Methodist weekly newspaper asked why biblical scholars should be trusted any more than television evangelists, and, even if so, whether dissecting the Scriptures amounts to a pointless, possibly harmful debate.

At the University of Redlands, seminar organizer Robert Funk of Bonner, Mont., said that the ordinary believer does not distinguish between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history.

'Bewildering Variety'

"While in the popular mind the data about Jesus in the earliest texts constitute an undifferentiated mass, like mashed potatoes or Jello pudding, for us, these data present a bewildering variety that we must sort out," Funk said. Funk is author of "Parables and Presence" and the two-volume "New Gospel Parallels," among other books.

Jesus is represented differently in the Gospel of John than he is in the other New Testament Gospels, and still differently in Paul's letters and as "the bloodthirsty redeemer" in the Book of Revelation, Funk said.

"New Testament scholars have established, beyond any reasonable doubt, that the Jesus of early Christian documents is to some extent a fiction of the Christian imagination," Funk asserted.

Scholars generally agree that the bulk of Jesus' parables were not originally told as allegories. When they do appear in that form, mainstream scholars usually suspect the creative hand of a Gospel writer, or the early church was responsible. In allegorical parables, characters sometimes represent opponents of the early church, or the story betrays theological reflections about Jesus developed after his lifetime, the scholars say.

Thus, at Redlands, seminar members voted against at least three parables in which they saw allegories: "an enemy sowing bad seed among the good seed," tenant farmers who killed the owner's "son" and "heir" to the vineyard and another about 10 maidens who await "the bridegroom" (thought to be a later title for Jesus).

Breakfast Favorite

Likewise, the parable of the talents--a story about investing money wisely and a favorite Scripture reading at businessmen's prayer breakfasts--received an evenly divided vote because some felt it had allegorical elements and was not typical of Jesus' other parables.

The Pharisee and the tax collector, as well as another story in Luke, the rich man and Lazarus, also had supporters in seminar discussions but the negative votes prevailed.

Many scholars believe that Jesus stories involving the Pharisees are anachronistic--that the Jewish rabbinic movement did not exist under that name prior to Jesus' crucifixion in the early 30s of the 1st Century.

As for the Lazarus story (not the raising of Lazarus in the Gospel of John), seminar member Bernard B. Scott of St. Meinrad Catholic Seminary in Indiana said, "The group thought it was written by Luke. It reflected his own theme--the poor." Funk said the story, about the rich man in hell and poor Lazarus in heaven, also had elements uncharacteristic of Jesus' parables--the use of specific names and a vindictive flavor.

Membership in the Jesus Seminar has grown from about 70 last fall to more than 100, but Funk and Crossan indicated that the discussion-informed votes by the 30 scholars present at the first two meetings would carry more weight in the project than a scattering of mailed ballots from non-participants.

Half Thought Authentic

Karen King of Occidental College also said that if a two-thirds approval is required to say a Jesus saying has a "consensus"--an early suggestion in the project--then only half of the parables considered last weekend were thought authentic. In later discussion, seminar members seemed to favor later reconsideration of sayings in which votes were close.

Paper ballots were used for most of the voting. But Funk retained the use of colored beads and ballot boxes for selected votes on difficult sayings--red for authentic, pink for probably, gray for probably not and black for inauthentic. The combination of red and pink votes was used to determine a positive vote. The highest number of red votes, 18, went to the succinct story about the woman who put leaven into bread (Matthew 13:33).

The Parable of a landowner and bandits (Saying 103)

Jesus said, "Blessed is the one who knows where the bandits are going to enter. [They can] get up to assemble their defenses and be prepared to defend themselves before they arrive."⁹¹

103. ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΟΥΜΑ(ΚΑ)ΡΙΟC ΠΕ ΠΡΩΜΕ ΠΑΕΙ ΕΤCΟΟΥΝ ΧΕ
Ζ(Ν ΛΩ) ΜΜΕΡΟC ΕΝΛΗCΤΗC ΝΗΥ ΕΖΟΥΝ ΩΙΝΑ (ΕΦ)ΝΑΤΩΟΥΝ
ΝΨCΩΟΥΖ ΝΤΕΨΜΝΤΕ(ΡΟ) ΛΥΩ ΝΨΜΟΥΡ ΜΜΟΨ ΕΧΝ ΤΕΨΠΕ Ζ(Λ)
ΤΕΖΗ ΕΜΠΑΤΟΥΕΙ ΕΖΟΥΝ

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Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁹³

Luke 12:39-40 "But keep this in mind: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. So, you must also be prepared, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Matthew 24:37-44 For as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, up to the day that Noah entered the ark. They knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and swept them all away.

"That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be out in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and the other will be left.

Scholarly Quotes:⁹⁴

Gerd Ludemann writes: "The beatitude picks up the woe from the previous logion. The logion is a free version of 21.5-7; Matt. 24.43-44/Luke 12.39-40 (=Q). It puts a new emphasis on the Q parallel by indicating the place (and not the time) of the attack. Perhaps Thomas could interpret this logion in a Gnostic way, starting from 'know'." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, pp. 639-640)

J. D. Crossan writes: "There are five major differences between this version [103] and the preceding one [21]. (a) The form of 21c was metaphor

⁹¹ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁹² Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁹³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

⁹⁴ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

succeeded by application, that of 103 is beatitude, beginning with the Greek loan-word *Makarios*. (b) In 21c the protagonist is a *householder*, but in 103 he is simply a *man*, and there is no mention at all of a house. (c) In 21c the metaphor mentions a singular *thief*, but the application mentions the plural *brigands* or *robbers*. In 103 there is only mention of brigands or robbers, using the same Greek loan-word as earlier in 21c. (d) In 21c it is a question of knowing the *time* of attack, but in 103 it is the *place* of attack that is in question. There is, however, a textual problem here. The Coptic reads literally: 'Blessed is the man who knows in what part the robbers are coming' (Wilson, 1973:521). The problem is whether 'part,' using the Greek loan-word *meros*, is to be taken as 'part (of the property),' that is, 'where' (so Lambdin: 129), or 'part (of the night),' that is, 'when' (so Guillaumont's, 1959:52-53). I am accepting the Lambdin interpretation because there are enough *other* differences between *Thomas* and Q on this saying to render intrusions from Q into *Thomas* on this point at least doubtful. (e) This is also an important point, but it depends on an even greater textual problem, one of restoration rather than interpretation. In 21c the phrase 'his house of his domain' (*tefmentero*) appears, as was seen earlier. In 103 the protagonist sets out to 'muster his *menet* [. . .].' That is, the object of that action is uncertain because of a bad tear in the manuscripts outside top corner. Most translators attempt no reconstruction after 'his.' They simply leave a gap. But Lambdin proposes reading 'muster his domain,' presuming *menter* (domain, kingdom) as the missing word. If that reconstruction is correct, it is an important connection between 21c and 103, and it would indicate that 103 has infiltrated the application not only by the plural 'robbers' or 'brigands,' but also by the term 'domain' or 'kingdom.' I find this reconstruction very appealing, *but* there is a major problem in that the manuscript's photographic copy evidences a fourth letter after that opening triad (*mnt*), a fourth letter that is mostly lost in the lacuna, but which could not be e or r. Accordingly, although I accept Lambdin's 'muster his domain,' I do so with some doubts." (*In Fragments*, pp. 62-63)

J. D. Crossan continues: "But even apart from that reconstruction, it is now clear that there are important content differences between *the Gospel of Thomas* 21c and 103. (a) That latter text concerns a *man knowing the place where brigands will invade his property*. Place, not time, is what is important. The former text concerns a *householder knowing that a thief is going to attack his house*. One could presume here that time (when) rather than place

(where) is the significant point. But I would emphasize that time is not explicitly mentioned within the metaphor itself and that place would seem even more indicated in the application ('find a way to come to you'). (b) That application in 21c links even more closely with the distant image in 103 than with the proximate and preceding one in 21c itself. One sees, in other words, a slight movement from explicit place in 103 to implicit time in 21c's metaphor, but with 21c's application still capable of moving in either direction." (*In Fragments*, p. 63)

Other Insights:⁹⁵

- “The brigands are the learnt self-destructive attitudes. When one is aware of them one can arm oneself with one's learnt constructive attitudes.”
- “I think the key word in understanding this saying is "arise". According to Marvin Meyer's interpretation of Saying 17 in the Q Thomas Reader, the last part of this saying is "what has not arisen in the human heart". As someone notes there (re saying 17), but modified to be consistent with the Meyer translation, Jesus is promising to arise in our hearts when we understand the Gospel of Thomas well enough. So, I read Saying 103 here as follows: "Servants and dupes of Satan (the 'Great Deceiver') will soon try to break your faith. The assault will be formidable. Understand the Gospel of Thomas well and their lies will be met with truth." It sounds scary. But the big point seems to be that Christians had better well start understanding the Gospel of Thomas if they are going to save their faith.”
- “Know Yourself! For there are brigands within.”

⁹⁵ Sample of “Visitor Comments” <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Saying 107)

Jesus said, "The kingdom can be compared to a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. The largest one strayed. He left the ninety-nine and looked for that one until he found it. Having gone through the trouble, he said to the sheep: 'I love you more than the ninety-nine.'"⁹⁶

107. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΤΜΝΤΕΡΟ ΕCΤΝΤΩΝ ΕΥΡΩΜΕ ΝΩΩC
ΕΥΝΤΑC ΜΜΑΥ ΝΩΕ ΝΕCΟΟΥ (2) ΛΟΥΑ ΝΖΗΤΟΥ CΩΡΜ ΕΠΝΟC
ΠΕ ΛCΚΩ ΜΠCΤΕΨΙΤ ΛCΩΙΝΕ ΝCΑ ΠΙΟΥΑ ΩΑΝΤΕCΖΕ ΕΡΟC (3)
ΝΤΑΡΕCΖΙCΕ ΠΕΧΑC ΜΠΕCΟΟΥ ΧΕ ΤΟΥΟΥΚ ΠΑΡΑ ΠCΤΕΨΙΤ 97

Synoptic Gospel Parallels:⁹⁸

Luke 15:3-7 Therefore, he told them this parable: "Which one of you, if you have a hundred sheep and lose one of them, will not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he does find it, he lays it on his shoulders joyfully. Then, when he returns home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.' In the same way, I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.

Matthew 18:12-14 "Tell me your opinion. If a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the other ninety-nine on the hillside and go off in search of the one who went astray? And if he finds it, amen, I say to you, he is more filled with joy over it than over the ninety-nine who did not wander off. In the same way, it is not the will of your Father in heaven that a single one of these little ones should be lost.

Scholarly Quotes:⁹⁹

Marvin Meyer writes: "In the Babylonian Talmud, a contrast is made between ninety-nine people who urge one thing and one person who is more on the side of the law; and in the Midrash Rabbah of Genesis, a person is described

⁹⁶ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

⁹⁷ Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

⁹⁸ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

⁹⁹ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

leaving eleven cows to find the one that wandered away." (*The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, p. 106)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "Accustomed as we are to the familiar story in the Synoptic Gospels, this version must come as something of a surprise, the more particularly since in the Synoptics it is not a parable of the kingdom at all. As Cerfaux observes, however, the parable was a favorite with the Gnostics, who adapted it for their own purposes. He finds an explanation in the Gospel of Truth (32.18-25), which links the lost sheep of this parable with that of Matthew xii. 11 f., the sheep fell into the well. This, with some other features, would provide clear evidence of Gnostic redaction. For Bartsch the addition of 'the largest' is merely an explanatory expansion to explain the shepherd's search, but if the analogy of the fish and the pearl is borne in mind it may, perhaps, be suggested that the point is somewhat more significant: the sheep would seem to be either the Gnostic, for whose sake Christ the shepherd labors, or the kingdom (identified as elsewhere with *gnosis*) for which the Gnostic must strive. Bauer draws attention to the Valentinian interpretation recorded by Irenaeus and, like Doresse before him, to the speculations on the number ninety-nine in the Gospel of Truth, but Grant and Freedman see no reason to suppose that Thomas had such calculations in mind; of this it can only be said that all the available evidence must be collected for examination, even if some of it may eventually prove irrelevant. Finally, there is the variant in the closing words: 'I love thee more . . .' for Matthew's 'he rejoiced.' Guillaumont's suggestion that these are different versions of the underlying Aramaic is certainly attractive, but this must be left to the specialists in that field. As it is, there has been some development of this parable in the Synoptic tradition itself, as comparison of the Matthean and Lucan versions will suffice to show." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 95-96)

Funk and Hoover write: "Thomas' version of the lost sheep has moved away from the original: the lost sheep here is the largest of the flock - a motif repeated elsewhere in Thomas (in the parable of the leaven, Thom 96:1-2, and in the parable of the fishnet, 8:1-3). The shepherd loves the large sheep more than the ninety-nine, according to Thomas. In the version of Matthew (18:12-13), the shepherd loves the single sheep simply because it is lost. The themes and interests that have prompted Thomas to revise the story are

alien to the authentic parables and aphorisms of Jesus." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 529)

F. F. Bruce writes: "In the canonical versions of the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15.3-7; cf. Matthew 18.12 f.), the owner puts himself to exceptional trouble over the hundredth sheep just because it is lost. This is unacceptable to our present editor, who rationalizes the situation by explaining that the lost sheep was the biggest (and presumably the most valuable) in the flock. Either the shepherd is Jesus and the hundredth sheep the true Gnostic, or the shepherd is the Gnostic and the sheep the true knowledge (like the big fish in Saying 8 and the pearl in Saying 76)." (*Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 151)

Gerd Ludemann writes: "The parable has a parallel in Matt. 18.12-13/Luke 15.4-6 (=Q) and represents a further development of the Q parable. For the lost sheep has now become the largest (v. 2). This is a motif which corresponds to 8.1-3 and 96.1-2. Two interpretations of the parable in Gnostic terms are possible: (a) the shepherd stands for the Savior, who in the large sheep seeks and finds the Gnostic self which has gone astray in the world. (b) The shepherd represents the Gnostic himself, who seeks and finds himself." (*Jesus After 2000 Years*, p. 641)

Helmut Koester writes: "*the Gospel of Thomas* 107 lacks the secondary applications found in Matt 18:14 ('So it is not the will of my father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish') and Luke 16:7 ('There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance')." (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 99)

Other Insights:¹⁰⁰

- "Of all people, those who journey for truth and knowledge of God are regarded by God as more important."
- "A lost sheep is an integral part of the whole. So, a repressed fragment of the innate child self is cherished as its re-integration is necessary for the expression of that whole. Seeker of truth: the divine is immanent in each of us, so how can one be more important than another?"

¹⁰⁰ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

- “The one sheep rejects groupthink and herd mentality, and thus is favored over those who blindly follow.”
- “Is it possible for God to love something (sing.) more, in his whole creation, than something else? I feel not. Could it be the lost sheep represents man and his free will. Where the other 99 represent other creations (physical and spiritual) without free will. Which leads to some beliefs of why 'the fallen angel' who detests man...as God 'favored' man over the fallen angel....not loved man more.”
- “Assurance. Jesus is assuring pupils in his esoteric school that all are equal. Not even the one who went so sadly astray, not even if that one is the largest/best, will that straying one be deemed to be less than the others. It is NOT about superiority. It is instead a counter to inferiority, emphasized by the techniques available to authors of poetic and dramatic effect. All are equal.”
- “For me, the 99 sheep are people who have accepted and never questioned their inherited religion. The lost sheep is trying to rediscover spiritual truth for him or herself, from direct experience and the mystical way. This doubter or agnostic is actually greater in spirit than the unquestioning believers.”

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Saying 109)

Jesus said, "The kingdom can be compared to someone who had a treasure [hidden] in their field. [They] didn't know about it. After they died, they left it to their son. The son didn't know it either. He took the field and sold it.

"The buyer plowed the field, [found] the treasure, and began to loan money at interest to whomever they wanted."¹⁰¹

109. (1) ΠΕΧΕ ΙC ΧΕ ΤΜΝΤΕΡΟ ΕCΤΝΤΩΝ ΕΥΡΩΜΕ ΕΥΝΤΑϸ
ΜΜΑΥ ΖΝ ΤΕϸΩΩΕ ΝΝΟΥΕΖΟ ΕϸΖΗ(Π Ε)ϸΟ ΝΑΤCΟΟΥΝ ΕΡΟϸ
(2) ΑΥΩ Μ(ΜΝΝCΑ Τ)ΡΕϸΜΟΥ ΑϸΚΑΑϸ ΜΠΕϸ(ΩΗΡΕ ΝΕ)ΠΩΗΡΕ
CΟΟΥΝ ΔΝ ΑϸϸΙ ΤCΩΩΕ ΕΤΜΜΑΥ ΑϸΤΑΑC (ΕΒΟ)Λ (3) ΑΥΩ
ΠΕ(Ν)ΤΑΖΤΟΟΥC ΑϸΕΙ ΕϸCΚΑΕΙ Α(ϸΖ)Ε ΑΠΕΖΟ ΑϸΑΡΧΕΙ Ν†
ΖΟΜΤ ΕΤΜΗCΕ Ν(ΝΕ)ΤϸΟΥΟΥΟΥ

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Synoptic Gospel Parallels:¹⁰³

Matthew 13:44 The kingdom of heaven is like treasure buried in a field, which a man found and buried again. Then in his joy he went off and sold everything he had and bought that field.

Scholarly Quotes:¹⁰⁴

Marvin Meyer quotes Aesop's Fable 42 as a parallel: "A farmer who was about to die and who wished to familiarize his sons with farming summoned them and said, 'Sons, in one of my vineyards a treasure is hidden.' After his death they took plows and mattocks and dug up all of their farmed land. They did not find the treasure, but the vineyard repaid them with a harvest many times greater. The story shows that what is gotten from toil is a treasure for people." (*The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus*, p. 107)

Joachim Jeremias quotes a parallel in *Midr. Cant.* 4.12: "It (i.e. the quotation from Cant. 4.12) is like a man who inherited a place full of rubbish. The inheritor was lazy and sold it for a ridiculously small sum. The purchaser dug therein industriously and found in it a treasure. He built there with a great palace and passed through the bazaar with a train of slaves whom he had

¹⁰¹ The Gospel of Thomas," by Mark M. Mattison, based on the Coptic text of Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2.

¹⁰² Nag Hammadi Coptic Text

¹⁰³ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas9.html#>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

bought with the treasure. When the seller saw it he could have choked himself (with vexation)." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 32)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "Whereas in Matthew the parable of the Treasure in the Field describes the overwhelming joy of the finder . . . in the Gospel of Thomas, under the influence of the rabbinic story, the point is entirely lost: the parable now describes the rage of a man who has failed to seize a unique opportunity." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 33)

Robert M. Grant and David Noel Freedman write: "It might mean that the kingdom which the Jews, or people in general, could have known was given to others [cf. Mt 8:11-12, Lk 13:29] . . . The 'lending at interest' at the end of the story would then be spiritual, for taking interest is rejected in Saying 92. On the other hand, it might mean that unless you look for the treasure within your own field it will pass to others who will profit from it. The second interpretation seems more probable." (*The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, p. 194)

R. Michael Wilson writes: "As Cerfaux noted, this version departs radically from that of Matthew and finds a closer parallel in a Rabbinic story of the second century. Grant and Freedman find it difficult to see what the story meant to Thomas, but a Gnostic interpretation is not hard to discover. If the kingdom be identified with *gnosis*, the knowledge that is latent in every man, but which only the Gnostic can truly be said to possess, we have a treasure hidden from the original owner and his son (the psychic or the hylic?), awaiting the coming of the Gnostic who was able to receive it. An alternative is offered by Bauer, who with Doresse refers to the Naassene use of the parable. Like the mustard seed and also the leaven(logion 96), the treasure is the kingdom, understood in a Gnostic sense. The purchaser is Christ, who bought the field in His Incarnation, labored in it in His Passion, and by casting off the body of flesh in His return to heaven has found the treasure. The taking of interest is forbidden in logion 95 (cf. Matt. v. 42, Luke vi. 34) but is plausibly explained by Bauer as the imparting of *gnosis* by Christ to his followers. Of this parable Bartsch observes that it has undergone a transformation and shows no relation either in form or in content to the synoptic version." (*Studies in the Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 93-94)

F. F. Bruce writes: "This version of the parable of the hidden treasure (cf. Matthew 13.44) has a novel ending. The treasure, like the pearl in Saying 76, is the true knowledge; if those who have this within their grasp do not

avail themselves of it, it will pass to others who will profit by it." (*Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 152)

Funk and Hoover write: "In Matthew, by covering up the treasure and buying the field, the man deceives the original owner. But he sells all his possessions in order to acquire the field with the hidden treasure. In Thomas' version, the ultimate purchaser of the field launches a despicable occupation: moneylender. Thomas 92 specifically prohibits moneylending as an acceptable practice. In both versions of the parable, the treasure comes into the possession of someone with dubious moral credentials. This is comparable to the behavior of the shrewd manager in another of Jesus' parables (Luke 16:1-8a), who swindles his master in order to provide for his own future. Surprising moves such as this, in which Jesus employs a dubious moral example, appear to be characteristic of Jesus' parable technique." (*The Five Gospels*, p. 530)

Charles W. Hedrick writes: "The Treasure in the Gospel of Thomas is easily understandable in the cultural context of first-century Judaism (or early Jewish Christianity) and has parallels to be found in other parables of Jesus that emphasize transversion, or reversal, of values. Thomas's parable stresses the sudden finding of the treasure and seems to commend the resourceful response of the individual who found the treasure, i.e., the loaning at usury, by making it the climax of the parable. The loaning of money for interest would certainly conflict with Torah where one is not permitted to loan at interest to a fellow Israelite. In that sense the motif becomes a shocking element in the parable, assuming that it was addressed to Jewish audiences, and such language is attributed to Jesus elsewhere. The point of Thomas's version of The Treasure in a Jewish context would seem to have been the impact of suddenly, unexpectedly finding a fabulous treasure (=the kingdom of God). I suppose it would correspond to winning a lottery with a large purse. Such an event completely reverses values. It turns the world upside down. It challenges and changes the old customs and former values, religious and otherwise. Farmers (peasants) become bankers, heirs are abruptly disenfranchised and cherished religious beliefs are discarded. Other parables of Jesus that reflect a similar twist are The Good Samaritan, Pharisee and Publican, The Vineyard Laborers, The Palm Shoot, and Grain of Wheat." ("The Treasure Parable," *Forum* 2.2 [1986], pp. 52-53)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "Both parables [109 and 76] make use of a favorite theme in oriental story-telling. The audience expected that the story of the treasure in the field would be about a splendid palace which the finder built, or a train of slaves with whom he promenades through the bazaar (see p. 32), or about the decision of a wise judge that the son of the finder should marry the daughter of the owner of the field. In the story of the pearl, it would expect to hear that its discovery was the reward of special piety, or that the pearl would save the life of a merchant who had fallen into the hands of robbers. Jesus, as always, surprises his audience by treating the well-known stories (pp. 178 ff., 183, 188) in such a way as to emphasize an aspect quite unexpected by his hearers. The question is, what aspect?" (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 200)

Joachim Jeremias writes: "The decisive thing in the twin parable is not what the two men give up, but the reason for their doing so; the overwhelming experience of the splendor of their discovery. Thus, it is with the Kingdom of God. The effect of the joyful news is overpowering; it fills the heart with gladness; it makes life's whole aim the consummation of the divine community and produces the most whole-hearted self-sacrifice." (*The Parables of Jesus*, p. 201)

Helmut Koester writes: "The original parable of the Hidden Treasure, however, is not actually quoted by Thomas. If one considers *the Gospel of Thomas* 109 as a quotation of that parable, one arrives at a judgment like Jeremias's, who called it 'utterly confused.' But Jeremias already recognized that *the Gospel of Thomas*. 109 is actually a reproduction of a rabbinic parable where the story describes how angry one can get if one misses such an opportunity. The story, otherwise widespread in folklore and in the complex legal Talmudic discussion about ownership of treasures found, has been deliberately changed by the *Gospel of Thomas*. It says nothing about the angry reaction of the first owner of the field (who is actually dead when the treasure is discovered!) but emphasizes that the two original owners of the field 'did not know about the treasure.' The contrast in the parable is, therefore, between not knowing and finding, that is, 'knowing.' Since 'treasure' has at this point in the story clearly become a metaphor, the following 'lending money at interest to whomever he wished' must be understood metaphorically as the communication of knowledge." (*Ancient Christian Gospels*, p. 105)

Charles W. Hedrick writes: "Matthew and Thomas have in common all the parables in Matthew 13, and when one compares the structures of the parables in Matthew 13 to their parallels in Thomas one discovers that it is only The Treasure whose structure in Thomas differs radically from that version of the parable to be found in Matthew's tradition. In the light of the identity between The Pearl in Matthew and Thomas and the striking, even verbatim, agreement between Matthew's versions of The Treasure and The Pearl, it would appear that Matthew has assimilated The Treasure to The Pearl, and it is Thomas that preserves the traditional parable. . . . If Thomas has modified an original parable of Jesus along the lines of the rabbinic tradition so as to create the structural order of 'receiving, selling, buying and finding,' why did he not make a comparable adjustment in The Pearl and The Fishnet, which seem according to Crossan, to reflect a different sequence of motifs (i.e., finding, selling, buying)? On the other hand, no such questions arise if one assumes that it is Matthew who has adapted a parable with rabbinic features to fit his versions of The Pearl and The Fishnet." ("The Treasure Parable," *Forum* 2.2 [1986], pp. 46-47, 52)

Other Insights:¹⁰⁵

- "Plow this field until you find the treasure."
- "Parents unknowingly bequeath to their children the innate self. At puberty the conscious self "buys" the innate self. When the former becomes aware of the latter it is enabled to love and be loved with interest."
- "We all have "treasures" we don't see. And giving those to others helps everyone. If you can find them."
- "The listener intends to question the validity of the parable & especially the comment about usury. Do you then, dear reader, please question it. But I am not to do your work for you!"
- "The Kingdom IS like the man who unknowingly had a hidden treasure in his field and passed it on, inconspicuously. The Kingdom is NOT like the son who, valuing a sum of money (temporal) over a plot of land (eternal), sold the field and unwittingly lost the treasure. Likewise, the Kingdom is NOT like the man who discovered the treasure and willingly

¹⁰⁵ Sample of "Visitor Comments" <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/thomas/gospelthomas8.html#>

destroyed it (by exploiting it -- turning it from a treasure into a "cash cow").

- “Those who do not work their fields cannot possibly find the treasure within.”
- “Whether or not we have found the treasure is not important, but the desire to find the treasure and share it with others is more important than who owns it or where it came from.”
- “The treasure is our gift to connect with God and know his will without going through an intercessor (i.e. a rabbi, priest, or TV preacher). If we don't see this gift, we will remain wanting, and will look outside our property for riches. We have squandered our father's gift and now must pay a tithe to buy what we had all along.”

About the Author

Rev. Dr. Jack R. Miller served in the United States Marine Corps including a 13-month deployment in Vietnam (1965-66). After leaving the Marines, he earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and a Certificate in Leadership Management. He retired in 2008 after a 36-year career in the Real Estate Valuation Industry; the last 10 years in corporate management. Prior to retiring, Rev. Jack earned a Master of Art's Degree (MA) in Pastoral Ministry and a Doctorate (D.Min.) in Applied Ministries. After his ordination in November of 2010, Rev. Jack earned a Master of Divinity Degree (M.Div.).

Rev. Jack and his wife, Rev. Liz Miller, were married in 2011 and serve as *"Equals in Ministry - Equals in Life."* Although retired from active ministry, both remain in good standing with the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), Pacific Northwest Diocese, and the First Christian Church - Disciples of Christ (DOC), Northern Lights Region.

Our Story: After years of service in the Independent Catholic Church, we found ourselves in a rather unique position in the final years of our ministry. While being Pastors of Saint Clare Pastoral Center, an independent Catholic community, we also served for three years in a pastoral role for the Mount Vernon First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). During that period and prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, our two communities shared an ecumenical worship service each Sunday on Zoom. It was a remarkable relationship that benefited both faith traditions and created a distinct ecumenical identity that aligned with the Mission Statement and Constitutional Preamble of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion (ECC), and the vision of unity found in both the Disciples of Christ, Council on Christian Unity, and the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis wrote of such relationships stating, "It is important to know each other better but also to recognize what the Spirit has shown in the other as a gift for us ... We must walk united with our differences. There is no other way to become one. This is the way of Jesus."

The relationship between Saint Clare Pastoral Center and the First Christian Church of Mount Vernon developed into a welcoming and inclusive experience that led to a better understanding of what unites us as the People of God and served as a living, breathing example of the work begun by the Catholics and Disciples of Christ Commission for Dialogue. In this lies our calling of working toward the "visible unity of the one church of God," which was the original goal of the commission when it began work in 1977.

Although First Christian Church sold its building and ended its visible ministry at the end of 2021, Saint Clare Pastoral Center continued to provide a transitional and ecumenical worship service each Sunday on Zoom through August 2022. This provided a safe haven for FCC members while they transitioned into other faith communities. Since everyone was welcome at our gatherings, the work towards Christian unity and walking together in our differences continued. In November 2022, Rev. Liz and I retired from active ministry, the Pastoral Center closed, and our Safe Haven website (www.stclarepastoralcenter.com) was born. Our ministry continues.

Blessings, Rev. Jack