

Mark 4: 12: More Like the Irony of Micaiah than Isaiah

There is more humor in the Bible than we sometimes recognize. I first realized this fact the day Professor Myers read interpretively in class selected passages from the story of Samson (Judg 13: 1–16: 31). It became clear to all of us that the writer of the Samson tale, if not Samson himself, had a keen sense of humor. In making a bet with the Philistines, Samson had posed one of the cleverest riddles in the Old Testament: “Out of the eater came something to eat; out of the strong came something sweet” (14: 14). And when Samson’s wife tried to coax him into telling her the answer by saying to him, “You only hate me, you do not love me; you have put a riddle to my countrymen, and you have not told me what it is” (14: 16), Samson added insult to injury by countering with, “Behold, I have not told my father and my mother, and shall I tell you?” (14: 16.) And the well-known incident in 16: 6–15, where Delilah tries to wheedle from Samson the secret of his great strength, is really a humorous battle of wits and love-play—until the end. But the playful Samson ultimately had the last laugh against the Philistine captors who had blinded him but neglected to keep his hair trimmed; for in the temple of Dagan he really brought down the house (16: 21–30).

The editor of the Samson story was not the only ancient Israelite who had a sense of humor and delighted in irony, “irony” being “humor, ridicule, or slight sarcasm that adopts a mode of speech the intended implication of which is the opposite of the literal sense of the words.”¹ Certainly the prophet Elijah did not intend to be taken literally when at Mount Carmel he said to the four hundred prophets of Baal, “Cry aloud, for he [Baal] is a god; either he is musing, or he has gone aside, or he is on a journey, or perhaps

he is asleep and must be awakened" (1 Kings 18: 27). Although Elijah's words could be described as ironic, they are better termed sarcastic; for while both ironic and sarcastic comments mean the opposite of what they literally say, the ironic remark has a lighter tone and tends to prick and reform, while sarcasm tries to wound and destroy.²

And it is as obvious to us as it was to King Ahab that Micaiah ben Imlah was being ironic³ when he said to Ahab, "Go up and triumph; the Lord will give it [Ramoth-gilead] into the hand of the king" (1 Kings 22: 15). Whether it was the twinkle in Micaiah's eye or his slightly sarcastic tone of voice or his past history of opposition to Ahab, the king recognized that Micaiah meant the exact opposite of what he said; for Ahab exclaimed, "How many times shall I adjure you that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?" (vs 16.)⁴

Irony and its stronger form, sarcasm, are not confined to the stories of Samson, Elijah, or Micaiah; the Old Testament abounds in many such examples.⁵ And in the New Testament, there are over two hundred examples of word play and related humor.⁶ Jesus himself, it seems to me, had a sense of humor, or at least he deliberately uttered some absurd (see below) and ironical statements.

It is the thesis of this paper that one of Jesus' most misunderstood sayings was deliberate irony—that is, like Elijah and Micaiah before him, Jesus on one particular occasion said the exact opposite of what he actually meant, and was probably correctly understood by his listeners, but was taken, unfortunately, at face value in the oral and written traditions of the apostolic church.

The particular passage in question, which follows immediately after the Parable of the Sower, has given rise to the so-called hardening theory in Mk 4: 10–12 (=Mt 13: 10–15=Lk 8: 9–10).

10. And when he was alone, those who were about him with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. 11. And he said to them, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; 12. *so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again and be forgiven.* (Italics added.)

Few passages in the New Testament have been characterized by such strongly negative adjectives as those used for the hardening theory of Mk 4: 11–12—that is, for the idea that Jesus deliberately used parables to prevent "outsiders" from understanding them, thereby making repentance and forgiveness impossible for them: for example, "strange" (A. T. Cadoux, M. L. Mowry); "notorious" (A. M. Hunter); "cannot be made credible"

(C. H. Dodd); "absurd" (T. W. Manson); "intolerable" (V. Taylor); "preposterous" (W. Bousset); "perverse" (F. C. Grant); "monstrous" (R. Otto).⁷

While a few modern scholars, like Rudolph Otto,⁸ T. W. Manson,⁹ Joachim Jeremias,¹⁰ and Vincent Taylor,¹¹ agree with Henry Barclay Swete¹² that Mk 4: 11–12 is a genuine saying of Jesus—albeit misunderstood, contaminated, corrupt, or dislocated—most scholars regard the hardening theory as the complete invention of either the evangelist himself or some other early Christian apologist.¹³

Much of our difficulty in interpreting this passage is rooted in the simple, incontestable fact that we cannot be sure to what question exactly Jesus was responding in vs 11–12. Some scholars, such as Otto¹⁴ and Taylor,¹⁵ go so far as to regard the question *in any form* as secondary—that is, they argue that the question was hypothesized or inferred from the presence of the allegorical explanation of the Parable of the Sower (Mk 4: 13–20) by either Mark or the tradition he drew upon. Certainly Mark's they "asked him concerning the parables" (4: 10) is vague,¹⁶ so much so that both Matthew and Luke made the question clearer but significantly different from one another: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" (Mt 13: 10); and "His disciples asked him what this parable [the Parable of the Sower] meant" (Lk 8: 9). Given this uncertainty as to the meaning of the question asked Jesus, we must frankly concede that any suggestions as to the meaning of Jesus' answer must be quite tentative. (I believe, for instance, that Matthew has correctly clarified the question rather than invented or altered it, but I cannot prove it, especially since in Luke the particular form of both the question and the answer seems quite natural and harmonious [so E. P. Gould]¹⁷.)

As noted earlier, the majority of modern scholars regard Mk 4: 11–12 as the invention of either Mark or some earlier Christian apologist. Certainly the arguments for the hardening theory being the product of apostolic teaching are impressive:

1) That Jesus deliberately taught in order to prevent people from gaining understanding, insight, and forgiveness seems so incompatible with Jesus' character¹⁸ as well as with the obvious purpose of teaching *per se*. Were Jesus' parables intelligible only to his disciples, it is puzzling to understand why "common people heard him gladly" (Mk 12: 37).

2) A priori, Jesus' aim in using parables would not have been basically different from those of his contemporaries the rabbis,¹⁹ who used them to inform, not confound, their listeners.

3) The view that the parables were allegorical mystifications could only have arisen in a non-Jewish setting, such as the pagan Roman society to which Mark addressed himself.²⁰

4) It is incontestable that the apostolic church used the hardening theory to explain Jesus' rejection and ineffectiveness among the Jews,²¹ neither fact being really evident until after his death.

5) The hardening theory would more naturally have arisen after Jesus' day, when many of his parables were either puzzling or totally unintelligible to Christians who did not know the original context or setting for many of them—that is, their *Sitz im Leben*.

6) Both linguistic²² and literary²³ analyses clearly indicate that Mk 4: 13–20 (the allegorical explanation of the Parable of the Sower) is the creation of the apostolic age. This fact makes Mk 4: 11–12 all the more suspect, since vss 11–12 are part of the *Sitz im Leben* for 4: 13–20.

7) Although the writers of Matthew and Luke were clearly dependent upon Mark, they somewhat play down his theory, in 4: 11–12, of the secretive or esoteric character of the parables, a theory which was especially appealing to Mark because it was so compatible with his theory of the secret Messiahship of Jesus.²⁴

Impressive though the above arguments are, they are not ultimately convincing, since, as will be shown later, there is too much linguistic and psychological evidence for various elements of Mk 4: 11–12 being both old and Palestinian in origin. (To be sure, the allegorical interpretation in Mk 4: 13–20 is certainly an apostolic creation.²⁵)

With any saying of Jesus, particularly a difficult one, there is always the possibility that it is genuine but corrupt—that is, was altered when translated from Aramaic into Greek or at some time during the transmission of the Greek text. For our particular passage, two quite plausible suggestions, both of which argue for a mistranslation of the Aramaic, have been seriously advanced.

First, while the Greek *ἵνα* used in Mk 4: 12 can only designate purpose—that is, “in order that,”²⁶ *d*, the Aramaic particle used by the Targum of Is 6: 9, is ambiguous, and can be interpreted either as a conjunction introducing a final clause, “in order that,” or as the relative pronoun “who.” Thus, according to Manson, Jesus probably said, “To you is given the secret of the Kingdom of God; but all things come in parable to those outside *who* [italics added] ‘See indeed but do not know And hear indeed but not understand Lest they should repent and receive forgiveness.’” Linguistically possible, Manson's suggestion has the additional theological merit of making those outside the kingdom, and not Jesus, responsible for their lack of understanding and insight. Such an interpretation is somewhat closer to the view of Mt 13: 13, “This is why I speak to them in parables, *because* [italics added] seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.”

The other plausible suggestion for a mistranslation of the Aramaic underlying the Greek of Mk 4: 12 has been offered by J. Jeremias.²⁷ The Aramaic word underlying the Greek *μήποτε* (“lest”) in Mt 13: 15, and hence also in Mk 4: 12, is *dylm'*, as can be seen from the fact that the Aramaic Targum uses *dylm'* in translating the Hebrew *pn* (“lest”) of Is 6: 10, “lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” *dylm'*, however, is ambiguous, and can mean “in order that not,” “lest perhaps,” or “unless.” The last meaning was, in fact, the one that later rabbinic exegesis actually chose in interpreting Is 6: 10,²⁸ thereby transforming Yahweh's words from a sentence of doom to a promise of hope and possible forgiveness. It was with this understanding of Is 6: 10 that Jesus originally used it. What Jesus originally meant was “to you has God given the secret of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are without everything is obscure²⁹ in order that they (as it is written) may ‘see and yet not see, may hear and yet not understand, unless they turn and God will forgive them.’”³⁰

It is also possible that Mk 4: 11–12 was a genuine saying of Jesus but had been separated from its original context. As Jeremias has shown,³¹ proof³² that vs 11 is a genuine saying of Jesus, albeit misplaced, is based upon some rather solid linguistic evidence—namely, the presence of antithetical parallelisms (11a and 11b), the redundant demonstrative (*ἐκεῖνοις* versus *τοῖς ἕξω*), and two circumlocutions for God's activity (*δέδοται* and *γίνεται*). For vs 12, the evidence that the saying is genuine—that is, is old and Palestinian—is even stronger—namely, the greater agreement of vs 12 with the Aramaic translation of Is 6: 10 than with either the MT or the LXX. The most striking form of this agreement is that Mk 4: 12 agrees with the Aramaic of Is 6: 10 in having “it shall *be forgiven* them” [italics added], instead of either “I shall heal them” (LXX) or “it shall be healed to him” (MT).³³ According to both Jeremias and Taylor, the genuine saying behind Mk 4: 11–12 originally referred to *the whole* of Jesus' preaching, not just the parables; but the author of Mark, not realizing that in this separate logion (vs 11) *ἐν παραβολαῖς* meant “in riddles” rather than “in parables,” inserted it in its present place.

Persuasive though the above arguments are for the mistranslation, corruption, or dislocation of a genuine logion of Jesus, the most probable explanation is possibly also the simplest. With the exception of *καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς* all of vs 11 is a genuine but intrusive saying in Mk 4: 1–12—that is, all of what is now vs 12 originally followed vs 10 and *καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτοῖς*. Mark's inherited tradition may have run something like this: “And when he was alone, those who were about him³⁴ asked him concerning the parables [that is, why he used them when they were not always understood by all].”

And he said to them, 'That they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand; lest they should turn again and be forgiven!'" To the Christians of Mark's day, such an answer was probably cryptic if not absurd. Thus, Mark, in perfectly good faith, attempted to "explain" Jesus' absurd statement by taking another independent but genuine logion, to the effect that "for those outside the kingdom everything"—all Jesus' teachings—"is in *παραβολαῖς*," and inserting it before what is now 4: 12. Mark did not realize of course that *ἐν παραβολαῖς* in the separate logion meant "in riddles" rather than "in parables."³⁵

To concede that Jesus' answer (vs 12) to the question (vs 10) is absurd does not rule out its being both genuine and in its original context. In fact, "the very unexpectedness of the saying proclaims it is original."³⁶ After all, Jesus uttered several hyperboles so absurd that they would hardly have been attributed to him unless he had actually uttered them:

It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. (Mk 10: 25=Mt 19: 24=Lk 18: 25)

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (Mt 7: 3=Lk 6: 41)

For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move hence to yonder place," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. (Mt 17: 20). [Cf Lk 17: 6, where essentially the same point is said about moving a sycamine tree into the sea.]

Mark was quite justified in retaining Jesus' admittedly absurd answer; he erred, however, in failing to understand it as irony. The great danger in using irony is of course that "the ironist depends on his listener or reader for recognition, and therefore risks misunderstanding."³⁷ But where the total context for a saying is clear, there is little chance of the words being taken literally. When, for example, a young boy sees his father entering the house with his clothes soaking, dripping wet, with the lightning flashing outside and the thunder crashing overhead, and hears his father exclaim, "Beautiful day for a walk," there is little likelihood of the boy's taking those words literally. The details of the total situation—that is, the obvious signs of inclement weather, the father's wet clothes, his facial expression and body posture, his tone of voice, the particular emphasis the father gives the various words—all enable the boy to understand that his father does not really mean what he literally says, but the exact opposite. If, however, we ourselves had not witnessed the actual scene and had only read about it, then the fewer details we knew, the greater the likelihood of our taking the father's observation as literally true, especially if we read only, "The boy went to the door, and his father exclaimed, 'Beautiful day for a walk!'"

It is my contention that in dealing with Mk 4: 12 we are in a roughly analogous situation: the details of the original setting are totally lost to us, the readers. We have only the disciples' question, imperfectly preserved in the Synoptics, and Jesus' answer. The evangelists give us no clue as to the expression in Jesus' eyes or on his mouth, no clue concerning his tone of voice or the particular emphasis given the various words. We have only Jesus' bald answer, and that answer is clearly absurd.

Jesus recognized its absurdity: that is precisely why he said it. After all, the answer to the question was so self-evident. Like the rabbis of his day, Jesus taught in parables simply because the people *could understand* and remember them. Common folk did learn from them; they did see and hear new truths, sometimes at the time the parable was told or when it was pondered later. One of the greatest appeals of Jesus' parables was that one *could see* the religious truths as they were incarnate in everyday objects and people. His parables, in contrast to abstract theological pronouncements, were so graphic and filled with moving images.³⁸ They never featured the unusual, the esoteric activity, or unbelievable people. His parables concerned commonplace objects and everyday activities and persons—birds and plants, eating and farming, beggars and tax collectors, fathers and sons. Thanks to his mastery of dialogue in his longer parables, one *could hear* the religious truths embodied in the conversations of ordinary people and their experiences.³⁹

Thus, when asked why he spoke in parables, Jesus spoke ironically and said, in effect, something like this: "Why do I teach in parables? Why I tell them so that people won't see. I tell them so they won't hear. After all, I wouldn't want to instruct the people or save them." The *Sitz im Leben*—that is, his facial expression, tone of voice, and body posture, the witness of his entire ministry would, it was hoped, have indicated to his listeners that he meant the exact opposite.

But whether or not his disciples understood the saying preserved in vs 12 as irony, the writer of Mark clearly did not. So he took another saying of Jesus, a logion to the effect that for those outside the kingdom everything was a riddle (vs 11), and in perfectly good faith used this independent saying as a prelude to the cryptic saying now in vs 12.

If the above interpretation of Mk 4: 10–12 is essentially correct, then several other considerations or implications are in order. First, and contrary to common consensus, Jesus may not have been alluding to Is 6: 6–10 *at all*. While the Greek of Mk 4: 12 indisputably echoes the Greek of Is 6: 9,⁴⁰ this fact may be the result of *Mark's thinking* of Is 6: 9 rather than of Jesus' actually alluding to it. After all, in speaking about unseeing eyes and unhearing ears, Jesus could just as easily have been influenced by

Pss 115: 5–7 (LXX 113: 13–15): “They [the idols] have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell,” and 135: 16–17 (LXX 134: 16–17), where idols are spoken of again. Thus, the undoubted allusions to Is 6: 9 in Mk 4: 12 may be more the creation of Mark or some other early Christian apologist than the accurate preservation of Jesus’ own words. Second, if Jesus had really intended to advocate the hardening theory, then he should have included the most specific and damning part of Is 6: 10—namely, “Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes.” Third, the writer of Matthew, recognizing that the hardening theory in Mark was not really credible and yet failing to recognize the saying behind Mk 4: 12 as irony, did the next best thing: he had Jesus say, “This is why I speak to them in parables, because [ὄτι, instead of Mark and Luke’s ἵνα] seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (13: 13), thereby making those outside the kingdom themselves responsible for their plight. Luke further “improved” on the difficult saying by totally omitting the most offensive part of Mk 4: 12—namely, “lest they should turn again and be forgiven.”

Jesus was evidently a very serious man. But this does not mean that he was devoid of a sense of humor or afraid to resort to the use of irony. Down through the ages prophets, rabbis,⁴¹ and preachers have made themselves more appealing and their views more memorable by the effective use of many kinds of humor, including irony. Sometimes misunderstood by their listeners, they were more often misunderstood by their readers. In this matter, Jesus was no exception.

NOTES

¹ Webster's *Third New International Dictionary*, unabr. (1961), p. 1195. But not all irony is humorous; it can be quite tragic, as when Jesus said to Judas as the latter betrayed him with a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Friend, why are you here?” (Mt 26: 50.)

² So Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (1951), pp. 26–27.

³ Ironic rather than sarcastic, since Micaiah, in contrast to Elijah at Mount Carmel, wanted to dissuade rather than destroy.

⁴ The phrase “how many times” implies that, much to the king’s annoyance, Micaiah had also employed irony in his past dealings with Ahab.

⁵ For humor in general, see I. M. Cassanowicz, “Paronomasia in the Old Testament” (1894), a Johns Hopkins University dissertation; for irony in particular, see E. M. Good, *op. cit.* The author of Esther especially delighted in irony; for details see my *Esther* in AB, 7A (1971), p. lvi.

⁶ E. Russell, “Paronomasia and Kindred Phenomena in the New Testament” (1920), a University of Chicago dissertation.

⁷ Arthur T. Cadoux, *The Parables of Jesus* (1931), p. 16; M. Lucetta Mowry, “Parable” in *IDB*, 3 (1962), p. 652; Archibald M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* (1961), p. 13;

C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1936), p. 15; T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* 2d ed (1951), p. 76; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* 2d ed (1966), p. 257; W. Bousset is so quoted by I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, 1st ser., reprinted with new material (1967), p. 106; Frederick C. Grant, “Exegesis of Mark” in *IB*, 7, (1951), p. 700; and Rudolph Otto, *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man* rev. ed (1951), p. 91.

⁸ According to Otto (*op. cit.*), vs 11a is “an ancient saying original to Christ himself . . . but now likewise misinterpreted in the sense of this theory” (p. 91). Otto thinks Jesus probably said something like this: “To you (i.e., to those who bring seeing eyes) is given the mystery of the kingdom of heaven, but to the others (i.e., to those of dull mind and dim eyes) everything (that I say about the kingdom of heaven) remains a riddle, something not understood or comprehended. Therefore ‘he that hath ears to hear, let him hear.’” (*Ibid.*, p. 92.)

⁹ *The Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 74–80; see also A. M. Hunter, *op. cit.*, pp. 110–12.

¹⁰ *The Parables of Jesus* 6th ed (1963), pp. 13–18; *Rediscovering the Parables* (1966), pp. 10–14.

¹¹ “Mark has given an unauthentic version of a genuine saying,” *op. cit.*, p. 257.

¹² *The Parables of the Kingdom* (1920), p. 4.

¹³ So most scholars since Adolf Jülicher’s *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (1899), pp. 146–47.

¹⁴ “This [i.e., the disciples’ question in Mt 13: 10, which equals Mk 4: 10] is plainly a mere editorial device, for it is artificial to ask why a popular speaker addresses the ‘am ha’arez’ in parables. He speaks thus, of course, in order and to the extent that simple folk can and should understand him. Everyone knows that; the disciples knew it. Mk iv 33 says it plainly enough.” Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 140 f.

¹⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 255.

¹⁶ For a detailed and well-balanced commentary on the various components of vs 10–12, including those portions not immediately relevant to our present study, see V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 255–58.

¹⁷ *The Gospel According to St. Mark* in ICC (1907), pp. 73–74.

¹⁸ So W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Gospel Parables in the Light of Their Jewish Background* (1936), p. 54. One might even argue that the hardening theory is incompatible with the spirit of a loving God; in any case, as Oesterley has pointed out on p. 52, the LXX softened considerably Is 6: 10 of the Hebrew text by having “For the heart of this people has become gross,” instead of “Make fat the heart of this people.” While rejecting the hardening theory, G. A. Buttrick correctly observes that in the parables “the hostile received, despite themselves, a story that might germinate in secret, but which did not confirm hostility and deepen guilt, as plainer statement might have done, by provoking enmity to wrath.” *The Parables of Jesus* (1930), p. xxi; So also Cadoux: “a parable often hides the truth until it is too late for the hearer to guard himself against it . . . But this is for the sake of getting the truth home to the hearer,” *op. cit.*, pp. 16–17.

¹⁹ So Richard C. Trench, *Notes on the Parables of Our Lord*, rev. ed (1880), p. 12.

²⁰ So C. H. Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 14–15.

²¹ Cf Rom 9: 6–33; 10: 16–21; and 11: 1–11, 25.

²² J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 77–79; R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (1965), pp. 187, 199.

²³ Virtually all modern scholars agree that the allegorical explanation of the Parable of the Sower is invented.

²⁴ First developed by Wrede in *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (1901).

²⁵ Since the epochal work of A. Jülicher, *op. cit.*, scholars have tended to regard not

only Mk 4: 13–20 but also the allegorical interpretations in Mt 13: 37–43; 49–50; and Jn 10: 7–18 as creations of the apostolic age. For a fascinating survey of the history of the allegorization of parables, see Jülicher, pp. 203–322.

²⁶ So Manson, *op. cit.*, p. 78. But some scholars disagree, arguing that the *iva* of Koine Greek has lost the idea of purpose in many places, including this one. Thus C. C. Torrey argues that *iva* can be used to translate the Aramaic *d*, which means, among other things, “who” (*The Four Gospels* [1933], pp. 75–76). Far less convincing is the assertion that *iva* here should be understood as virtually equivalent to *ἔτι* (so W. C. Allen, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* [1915], p. 80), or to *ᾧστε*, where, by means of the Hebrew *lm'n* “the result is ironically described as a purpose.” (Alan H. M'Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* [1965], p. 192.) (This well-known phenomenon in the Bible of confusing result with purpose is, I think, better explained on psychological, not linguistic, grounds.)

²⁷ *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 17–18.

²⁸ See Jeremias, *op. cit.*, p. 17, n. 26.

²⁹ Jeremias' use of the word “obscure” in the sense of having the character of a riddle is certainly defensible here, since *παραβολή* is the stock Greek translation for the Hebrew, *māšāl* [Aramaic *mētal*], the word meaning riddle as well as parable, e.g., Ps 49: 4 (Heb 5), 78: 2; Ezek 17: 2 f; and Prov 1: 6, where *māšāl* is parallel with *hiddāh*, the regular Hebrew word for riddle. See also J. W. Hunkin, *JTS* 16 (1915), 372–91, who suggests “Everything comes to a riddle.”

³⁰ *The Parables of Jesus*, p. 17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³² Establishing that a saying is old and Palestinian as well as “compatible” with the character and teachings of Jesus as a whole is about the closest one can come to “proving” that Jesus uttered a particular logion.

³³ For details, see Manson, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

³⁴ Many scholars regard *σὺν τοῖς δώδεκα* as secondary. See V. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 255.

³⁵ See n. 29.

³⁶ H. B. Swete, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³⁷ E. M. Good, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

³⁸ E.g., from the point of view of vividness and clarity of meaning, cf the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 29–37) with the rather abstract declaration it illustrates in Mk 12: 31: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

³⁹ E.g., the parables of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15: 11–32); the Great Supper (Mt 22: 1–14); and the Last Judgment (Mt 25; 31–46).

⁴⁰ Cf *ἀκούοντες ἀκούωσιν* and *βλέποντες βλέπωσιν* of Mk 4: 12 with *ἀκοῆ ἀκούετε* and *βλέποντες βλέπετε* of Is 6: 9 (*šm'w špw'c* and *w'r'w r'w*), where to express emphasis a Greek finite verb is used for rendering the Heb infinitive absolute. Such Greek constructions are hebraisms found only in the Greek of the Septuagint. (That Mt 13: 14–15, Jn 12: 40, and Acts 28: 26–27 are clearly quotes of Is 6: 9–10 may be further evidence that where Is 6: 9–10 is intended, it is clearly quoted rather than alluded to.)

⁴¹ Among his talmudic scholars, Rabbah (third century A.D.), for example, had a reputation for great seriousness; yet even he “used to say something humorous” to cheer his students before he lectured to them (so *Sabbath* 30b in B.T.).