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### Jewish Customs Reflected in the Parables of Jesus as Given in St Matthew's Gospel

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JEWISH CUSTOMS REFLECTED IN THE PARABLES  
OF JESUS AS GIVEN IN ST. MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

A thesis presented to the faculty of  
Concordia Theological Seminary in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Bachelor of Divinity

by

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April 25, 1943

Approved by

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## PARABLES TREATED

- Matt. 7, 24-27 - Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.
- Matt. 9, 16. 17. No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.
- Matt. 11, 16-19 - But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, And saying, We have mourned unto you, and ye have not da nced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.
- Matt. 13, 1-9 - The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Matt. 13, 24-30 -

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field; But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the household er came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.

Matt. 13, 31. 32.

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; Which indeed is the least of all seeds; but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Matt. 13, 44. -

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.

Matt. 13, 45. 46.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

Matt. 13, 47. 48.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind; Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.

Matt. 18, 23-35 -

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence; and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me; Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Matt. 20, 1-16 -

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered

one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

Matt. 21, 28 - 32 - But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily, I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.

Matt. 21, 33-41 - Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.

Matt. 22, 1 - 14 - And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth

other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how comest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him away into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

Matt. 24, 32 - Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

Matt. 25, 1 - 13 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them; But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. After ward came also the other virgins, saying,



Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Matt. 25, 14-30 - For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed; And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even

that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**Matt. 25, 31-33 -** When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

## INTRODUCTION

"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; ....And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2, 51. 52). With this bit of information the Biblical account shuts off all research into the eventful days of Christ's youth. It is merely recorded that he, like any other normal human being, experienced the natural processes of developing into a strong, commanding, and mature individual. All attempts to bare the events of the unrevealed eighteen years, all traditional lore as to his activities during this period of obscurity—must be acknowledged and accepted as conjectural and imaginative.

The student of Bible history will not, however, go too far amiss in picturing the life of the adolescent Jesus. He grew up in Nazareth just like any other boy of Nazareth. His experiences on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, talking with the fishermen, perhaps angling a bit himself; his great joy in attending the important social functions; his little contribution in gathering the sheaves and then probably driving the cattle over the threshing-floor; his occasional jaunts through the

productive vineyards; his keen interest in the shepherds, in the marriage processions, the funeral rites, the children playing in the market - all this contributed to the education of the man Jesus, who later, in preaching his message, called to mind those years of experience and applied them in his illustrative teaching. All these experiences of youth and early manhood, indelibly impressed on his mind, he recalled to make his important preaching so much more vivid, so much easier for his people to understand. He spoke to them in parables - using Jewish life, the customs with which his hearers were most familiar, to make his discourses plain to them.

It is the writer's object to delve a bit deeper into the history behind Christ's parables in the Matthew account. He has found, in his narrowed and short experience, that there is a very close relationship between the earthly and the heavenly elements of this particular type of instruction. And in order to make these important truths, taught in the parables, more vivid, more realistic to his own understanding, he approached this subject - that he might thereby establish at least a short and concise background of the parables, to learn and appreciate the common scenes and customs of Christ's day, which that Master of teachers so delicately wove into such

beautiful exhibitions of this popular teaching method.

The writer considers the benefit obtained through this study priceless, and he feels that the time spent will be amply rewarded, when some day, by the grace of God, he will be permitted to employ this experience in feeding his flock and leading his sheep to a fuller understanding of the glorious truths of his Shepherd.

## I Agriculture

In the 13th chapter of St. Matthew the Lord Jesus Christ spoke a number of parables which were taken from one of the most common fields of Jewish activity - that of farming. Farming was the most important occupation in ancient Jewry. In fact, it was the occupation which God had planned for his people when he gave them the Promised Land as their inheritance.

The agricultural situation of that day was much different from that with which the average American is familiar. American farmers have their certain acreage and live right on this property which they cultivate. Not so with the Hebrew farmer of Jesus' day. At that time the farmers all lived in villages or towns. Here they would spend their evenings of rest, while the hours of the day found them occupied in the fields which surrounded the towns. The land around Jerusalem and the south of Palestine in general, except for the plains, was held in permanent ownership. However, in the north and in the Philistine country, each cultivator had a certain amount of land assigned to him at fixed intervals of a year or two. The amount of land was measured by a cord of a certain length and was determined by the size of a man's family and the acreage he would be able to work.

Ownership of the land was often determined by "lot." At a certain time the group of farmers would gather in the village circle. There they would draw pebbles from a bag, and on these pebbles were written the names of the fields which would be theirs for a set period of time. This was the custom of drawing lots - and finds similar expression in many Old Testament sayings, as in Ps. 16, 5: "Thou maintainest my lot," referring to this portion of land which the farmer placed into the

Lord's care for fruitfulness and blessing.

About the town lay the fields which were to be cultivated. These were unfenced. One distinction or separation of property was marked by footpaths. The owners of the fields passed from one field to another by means of such footpaths. Sometimes the paths ran straight through the fields and in so doing did not interfere with the crops, since these were not planted in any special manner, or rows, as is the custom today. Tourists returning from England tell that this is also the customary arrangement of fields there. It was a common custom throughout the Jewish eras that anyone passing through these fields could eat any of the crops which might appeal to him. No one was, however, permitted to carry any away with him or to store it on his person. The regulations permitted only the plucking of the food and eating it right there. It is interesting to note that when Jesus walked through the fields and his disciples ate of the corn, the objection of the Pharisees was not to the plucking and eating of the corn, but their accusation rested on the fact that this had been done on the Sabbath day.

Another method used to distinguish the various fields was by the old established system of landmarks. Stones were placed several feet or yards apart from each other surrounding the entire property. The farmers would in plowing even make double furrows between these heaps of stone and so properly mark off the boundaries between their fields and those of their neighbors. Should a heavy rain come and obliterate the wide furrows, these stones would still indicate the extremities of a man's property. It was a simple task to remove these landmarks and so increase one's own bit of land. This was no doubt often done, and hence the Mosaic caution - Deut. 27,17: "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbor's landmark."

The soil of the fields is usually classified as three-fold, thus excluding the pathways - on which seed occasionally fell and was trodden down (Luke 8, 5) or devoured by the fowls, usually by larks and sparrows. First, there was the shallow soil. This seemed to be very rich ground, very black and fertile. But just underground lay a stratum of virgin rock, or possibly a buried boulder, which prevented the downward passage of thirsty plant roots in their quest for water and sustenance. Hence the plantlings withered and shriveled up in short time. In describing this soil Lenski says, "So much of Palestine is rocky elevations that any tilled spaces may contain spots where the underlying rock comes close to the surface with only a thin covering of soil. These are  $\tau\lambda\ \pi\epsilon\tau\epsilon\omega\delta\alpha$  ✓, which lack enough earth, where the seed indeed sprouts quickly because of the underlying rock and the warmth it causes in the film of soil, but where the hot sun burns the seed and dries it up, before it ever has sufficient root." <sup>I</sup> Secondly, there is the thorn-infested ground. This is especially and extensively found along the Galilean coasts of today. The roots of the thorns escape the farmer as he plows the field, but after the sowing they shoot up new growth, amid which the grain is soon choked, unable to maintain itself. The third kind of soil is the good fertile land of the parable. Palestine has many such large tracts of deep, rich loam, and it is to this fertility that ancient Canaan was indebted for the title of a "land flowing with milk and honey." So rich was this ground that Christ ascribed to it returns of thirty, sixty, and an hundred-fold. Such a

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I R.C.H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 493.



return of an hundred for one is not unheard of in the East, although it is always mentioned as something extraordinary. The patriarch Isaac had the same good fortune in Gerar - Gen. 26, 12. The historian Herodotus mentions two-hundred, and three-hundred, as common returns in the plains of Babylon. <sup>2</sup>

Just as the American farmer of today, the Hebrew agriculturist employed a few methods whereby he could render his soil more fruitful. He would burn all the weeds and stubble to get their rich ash residue; the fields had to be cleared of all the stones; a fertilizing process was carried on through a manure of straw which had been cattle-trodden into dunghills. This latter custom of fertilizing was already done <sup>the</sup> in time of Isaiah, as he says: "For in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill (Is. 25, 10)." Haddad is evidently off the right track a bit, when he says, "No manure, no artificial dressing is ever employed. That deposited by the animals as they graze over the stubbly ground, the ashes of what has been burned in the fields, is all the manure the rich tillage has ever received."<sup>3</sup> In some places, where it was possible to do so, irrigation was in vogue, for Jerusalem itself was known to have quite an elaborate water system already since the days of Hezekiah. Further care of the soil is seen in the fact that the farmers allowed the fields to lie unworked and fallow every seventh year (Lev. 25, 2 ff.). In this way the ground received its proper rest, and no rotation of crops was necessary. Whatever grew on the land during this year was not alone for the

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<sup>2</sup> R.C. Trench, Notes on Parables of our Lord, p. 68, note. Niebuhr is also quoted here as reporting a return of 400 fold of some species of maize.

<sup>3</sup> A. C. Haddad, Palestine Speaks, p. 18.

benefit of the owner, but it was for the poor, strangers, and cattle as well. The rights of the owner were kept in abeyance for this period. In order not to depend too heavily on the crops of this seventh year, the farmer most likely stored up enough food in preceding years to meet such emergencies. Some commentators assert that this law was no longer in operation after the return from the exile, but Bissell, using Josephus as his authority, says that "Julius Caesar took account of it in levying tribute on the Jews." <sup>4</sup>

The principal crops of Palestine in Biblical days were : 1) wheat, which was so abundant that at times it was even transported to other countries (Ezek. 27, 17); 2) barley, which was used mainly for food (Ruth 3, 15) , especially by the poorer classes of people; 3) spelt, which was a kind of wheat having loose ears and triangular grains. Some say that this spelt, because of its loose ear is most similar to darnel, which in turn is closely related to wheat. Spelt was sown frequently along the field borders. It is also known as "German wheat" and is much used for food in Germany and Switzerland. 4) millet, mentioned in Ezek. 4, 9 along with beans and lentils. Gustav Dalman in his description of Nazareth touches on this point and says of the millet crop : "it grows even against its own nature taller than a man." <sup>5</sup> 5) possibly cotton; and flax (Ex. 9, 31).

The seasonal activities of this occupation fell into three main divisions. From the middle of October to the middle of April was the preparation period - in which plowing and sowing were the main items. From the middle of April to the middle of July was the time for the harvest. From the middle of July to the middle of October occurred the gathering of all the fruits from the vineyards and orchards and their accompanying duties.

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4. E. C. Bissell, Biblical Antiquities, p. 120.

5. G. Dalman, Sacred Sites and Ways, p. 71.

Actual work in the fields had to be delayed until after the coming of the early or fall rains. These usually came about the middle of October, although it often happened that they were a good two full months late. But once they were past, then the farmer entered his field to plow the ground in preparation for the sowing of the seed. The implements used in Christ's day to plow the ground were very antiquated affairs. The plow, which the peasant of the Holy Land used in the first century A. D. was no modern appliance, but the same simple, primitive thing as was used over three thousand years ago. It consisted of a large wooden pole to which the oxen were attached by the yoke. The early yokes were mostly made of wood also, usually being one large framework with two large holes for the heads of the animals. Leathern collars or hoops were probably also used for this purpose, thus enabling the beasts to draw their burden together. To the end of the pole a curve was fixed to the plowshare, while a wooden handle rose from the angle of the curved piece, which the farmer grasped with his left hand in plowing the field. Knowing this background is quite significant in understanding the Savior's remark, "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking backward is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9, 62) The farmer had to keep his eyes intent upon what was ahead of him, for while looking back his plow would be almost certain to make a crooked furrow. Plowing in those days was particularly heavy work, because the plow itself was so light that when it came to any hard clod or other trifling obstructions, the plowman had to bend forward and press his entire weight upon it in order to prevent its being thrown out of the furrow. The farmer could make little use of his plow on the rocky hillsides. Here the stones were too large and unwieldy. But an industrious peasant would also try to make use of this soil. This he would do by plowing such spots with a pickax or mattock.

Isaiah refers to this economic measure in 7, 25: "And on all hills that shall be digged with the mattock."

The plowshare itself was the only part of the entire arrangement which was made of iron. It was shaped somewhat like an anchor and it was supposed to drive into the ground as an anchor drives into sand. Unlike the plow of the Westerner which turns the land over, the Eastern plow merely broke up the land. In his right hand the farmer carried a long wooden oxgoad with a sharp iron spike at its end to punish the cattle if they kicked against it. This oxgoad was a stout staff about eight feet in length with the spike at one end and a six inch chisel-shaped blade at the other. This oxgoad was a formidable weapon in the hands of a mighty man, for, as the Bible record tells, the son of Anath, Shamgar, slew six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad (Judges 3, 31).

It was also customary for those Eastern farmers to work together in companies. This was done partly for mutual protection (Job 1, 14) and in part for the love of sociability and gossip. Several farmers would plow the same field at the same time. In this way the individual worker was spared much labor, since the task would be quite tremendous for him alone. To do a fairly good piece of work, the patient farmer, who had to work alone, had to continue going over his land until it was properly plowed, for with his light and inefficient implement he could merely scratch the surface of the ground.

After the plowing came the seed time. This was usually a scattering broadcast from a basket. It was also often the case that the farmer simply put the seed into a corner of his inner garments. Edersheim tells of another mode of sowing, namely, by means of the cattle. In such a case "a sack with holes was filled with corn and laid on the back of the animal, so that as it moved onwards, the seed was thickly scattered." <sup>6</sup>

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6. A. Edersheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, vol. 1, p. 586.

The truly careful farmer went about his task of sowing quite methodically. He would patiently place his seed in rows in the furrows (Is. 28, 25) and thus avoid the waste in having seed falling in the paths or on unfavorable ground, as was the case when it was just a plain broadcast. With the seed thus sown on plowed ground, the field was then harrowed or cross-plowed. Barley was the first article to be sown, this being done already in the latter part of October, while wheat was sown during the next month of November.

The Palestinian farmer also had his enemies to contend with. The grimmest and most constant threat to a good yield of crops were the weeds - wild mustard, thistles, tares, and thorns. Thistles are reported as growing as high as a man on horseback. This ground disease is capable of spreading very rapidly when the property is neglected but a little.

The weed to which Jesus alluded in his beautiful parable is the tare (Matt. 13, 24 - 30). This tare is also known by the name of bearded darnel. In the tare's earlier stages it cannot be distinguished from young wheat, since it seems to be identical with the expected and hoped-for crop. It is also impossible to weed it out, since the roots of the wheat and the roots of this fierce pest are usually intertwined (Matt. 13, 29). The two are, however, quite easily separated when they head out; both do this at the same time. The grain of tares is small and grows along the upper part of a perfectly erect stalk, which, before it produces the seed, bears purple-blue or red papilionaceous flowers. The taste of the grain is very bitter; and when it is eaten, even though it be diffused in ordinary bread, it causes vertigo and vomiting. For this

reason it must be removed before it is ground. The origin of this bearded darnel, how it gets among the seed sown in the field, is not definite. Some seem to think that it is wheat degenerated by marshy ground. A better explanation is that the light tare-seed is carried by birds, ants, moles, sheep, mice, and the winds blowing over the open threshing floors of the country. The sower in this parable of the tares blamed an enemy for the presence of tares in his field. Lenski claims that such dastardly acts were not very common, but that someone must have tampered with the good seed, inserting darnel with the true wheat. However, others are inclined to accept this illustration of Jesus as being a common occurrence. Such malicious acts were not unknown, for the Palestinian folk lore and tradition tell of many such cases where reeds were sown in fields by hostile enemies. Trench cites a case of a farmer tenant in Ireland, who before his ejection from the land, sowed wild oats in the field.<sup>7</sup>

The harvest season opened with the reaping of the barley. Around the vicinity of Jericho this started by the middle of April; in the coastal plains this began about ten days later; and in the upland districts it occurred as late as the middle of May. At the end of April wheat ripened in the Jordan valley; at higher altitudes this crop ripened a bit later. The various tasks of gathering in the ripened barley and wheat as a rule lasted about a month.

Reaping in the Jewish fields was done by the entire household and hired laborers. The grain was cut with a sickle about a foot under the ear and was then left behind in handfulls to be tied by the binders into sheaves. These sheaves, however, were not shocked (Job 24, 24; Gen. 37, 7).

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7. Trench, op. cit., p. 78.

The chief adjunct of the threshing process was the threshing floor. These were as a rule situated, preferably on an eminence to get the benefit of a wind, somewhere just outside the city gate, or sometimes in the midst of a field. The threshing floor was but an open, level space formed on rock or on soil which was beaten hard. A low stone wall separated one from another. At times there was but one such a floor which was used by the entire village. After the corn was gathered, it was put up in sheaves to dry. The next event in the American routine would be to haul these sheaves away and to stack them in farmyards and barns. But not so in the Orient. There they were taken straight to the threshing floor. A communal threshing floor, as Jesus knew it, was a large, circular, smooth space about forty to eighty feet in diameter surrounded by a barrier of stones.

Sheaves were brought in carts from the fields to the floors. Donkeys are also usually laden with the sheaves. Haddad describes them as "invisible under their loads save for their slender feet and pert faces, they look like ambulating haystacks."<sup>8</sup> The sheaves were spread about the threshing floor to a considerable depth. The farmer would then shoe his oxen with plates of iron and drive them over the sheave-covered floor. Four or five cattle (sometimes a donkey mixed in), driven round and round on the pile of corn, marching slowly and heavily over the heaped-up sheaves, would tread the grain out. Jewish law provided that these cattle should not be muzzled, but they were entitled to eat of the corn they were treading out (Deut. 25,4).

The Jews also employed a few mechanical devices. One was a threshing sled. This consisted of thick planks nailed together, making an oblong of four by five feet, with lumps of rough basaltic rock on

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<sup>8</sup>. Haddad, op. cit., p. 42.

the under surface of the boards. Isaiah, in 41, 15 refers to this simple yet effective article of husbandry in the words: "I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth." The underneath part had sharp flintstones or pieces of iron fixed to it. These sharp points, "teeth," not only separated the corn from the ear but also cut up the straw. The threshing-sled, weighted down by stones and the driver, was pulled by one or two animals over the sheaves, and thus did a much faster piece of work than the simple manner of treading. Bissell, in commenting on this threshing device, reports that it was often used in some way or another for the purpose of torturing enemies.<sup>9</sup>

Another such mechanical device was the threshing-wagon. This was a low-built, four-cornered wagon frame, inside of which were attached two or three parallel revolving cylinders or rollers. Each of these rollers was armed with three or four sharpened iron disks. There was a seat in the cart for the driver, who was drawn over the sheaves by oxen yoked to a pole. By either of these two devices the grain was shelled and the straw, which was later used as fodder, was lacerated.

Upon this followed the process known as winnowing. The mixture of grain, chaff, and broken straw was turned about and shaken with a wooden fork. Then the fan, a sort of wooden shovel or a fork with about six prongs, was used to heave the grain up into the air that the chaff might thus be blown away by the wind (Is. 30, 24). Since both processes, the first - to separate the straw and the grain, and the second - to separate the chaff and the grain, required the use of wind, winnowing was mostly done at night, for Syrian breezes blew only from evening until the next morning. Sometimes a fan - usually another shovel - was used to assist the process with its artificial wind (Matt. 3, 12). Next, the chaff having been burned (Matt. 3, 12) or left for the wind

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9. Bissell, op. cit., p. 125.



to scatter (Psalm 1, 4), the grain was shaken through a sieve to separate it from the dirt and pebbles of the threshing floor.

This finished the entire farming procedure - until the next season. All except for the storing away of the grain into barns. First, however, the grain was washed. This was the duty of the women-folk. They cleansed the grain in clear water and then spread it on great circles of cloth to dry in the sun, before storing it away or taking it to the market to be sold. Barton reports that excavations show that many of the granaries must have been large affairs and were thus used as public store houses.<sup>10</sup> Some were connected with private houses. Most of the granaries were circular structures, varying greatly in their individual sizes. Some had special compartments for the different kinds of grain stored in them. Geikie suggests an interesting point in this connection with reference to Christ's Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12, 16-21). Geikie holds that this story indicates the covetousness on the part of some farmers to lay away much food for future periods of famine.<sup>11</sup> This may very likely have been the case.

10. G. A. Barton, Archseology and the Bible, p. 134.

11. C. Geikie, Life and Words of Christ, vol. I, p. 282.

## II Viticulture

Closely related to the subject of farming is tree-culture. Christ in his parable-preaching also made several allusions to this important Palestinian occupation. The first one to be mentioned is the well-known Biblical fig-tree (Matt. 24, 32).

The fig-tree is native in western Asia. In the case of a young tree, cultivation is essential to fruitbearing, and old trees quickly degenerate into barrenness, when they are uncared for. So they are planted in the vineyards that the dresser of the vineyard might also care for them (Luke 13, 7). This amounted to no extra labor on the part of the dresser of the vineyard, for the fig-tree was not the principal crop. Consequently it was as a rule relegated to the corners and odd spots of the vineyard, so as not to interfere with the productiveness of other plants and trees. The little care given to this tree was but a little digging of the surrounding ground and the manuring of its roots (Luke 13, 8). In most places the first fruit was ripe already in June. In some places, as in the regions of Galilee, fruits could be gathered for a continuous period of some ten months.

The technical or generic term for this tree is figus carica. It generally reaches a height of some twenty to thirty feet. The leaves sprouting from its light-gray branches are heart-shaped, from eight to ten inches in size, and appear late in spring and are again shed at the approach of winter. The relative appearance of fruit and the appearance of the tree's leaves provide a keener insight into the Biblical account of Christ's cursing this plant. This shows that the Lord had every right and reason to expect fruit on the tree at that particular time. Next to the grape, the fig holds the most prominent place among the fruits cultivated by the Israelites. Like the grape, it was eaten

both fresh and in a dried state. When dried, it was sometimes pressed into the form of round cakes. The fig was also thought to have curative qualities; at least in one instance recorded in Scripture it was made the medium of a cure, when the prophet Isaiah healed the king Hezekiah from his illness ( 2 Kings 20, 7).

The mustard tree (Matt. 13, 31. 32.) is really not a tree, but an herb which reaches the proportions of a tree. Its seed is very minute, and so the Jews often used this as a proverbial expression for smallness. The common mustard of Palestine was the Sinapis nigra - the black mustard; this grew to a height of twelve feet. It was sown either in gardens (Luke 13, 19) or in fields (Matt. 13, 31). The seed was mainly used in the Jewish menu as a condiment, or also as food for pigeons. Birds in general were readily attracted to the lodgement which the wide-spreading branches of this plant afforded.

A vineyard called for harder and more regular labor than any other industry the farmer undertook. The best position was usually the fair and gentle slopes at the foot of a hillside where the vines could get plenty of sun and air above, and ground below in which to sink their long and spreading roots. The vintage time itself was preceded by pruning time, and unless the vine dresser used his knife in seeming cruelty to cut back any of the shoots and clusters, the bunches that remained could never grow to rich and full maturity.

The greatest excitement, however, came during the vintage, the time for gathering the grapes and carrying out the initial steps in making of the wine. This was a time for great social gatherings. Other occasions for such gatherings were the sheep-shearings, grain harvests, family festivals - such as the circumcision of children, wedding seasons, and the ordinary arrival of guests. This vintage period generally occurred in September,

though the first few grapes had ripened already in July, and continued into October. The grapes were ordinarily red, although there was also a variety of the white grape, especially at Bethlehem and at Hebron. Fresh grapes were eaten in great quantities during that season, but still greater amounts were dried for winter storage. In a warm, open spot in the vineyard a smooth floor was prepared, and here bunches of grapes were spread out to dry. In order to keep the skins moist, the bunches were frequently turned around and sprinkled with olive oil. This conversion into raisins was also often done by dipping the clusters into a strong lye solution and then allowing them to dry. When the drying-out process was finished, the women then stored them away in their earthenwares or bins. These raisins formed a valuable part of the food supply for the entire year. One specific Mosaic law sheds a bit of light on the abundance of the grape crop. In Deut. 23, 24 the Holy Writer says, "When thou comest unto thy neighbor's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel." This passage illustrates the liberality which one could readily expect with such abundance. Visitors or passers-by through vineyards were permitted to eat of the fruit, but were cautioned not to carry any away with them. The juice of the grape was drunk either fresh or as wine.

Vines required constant and special attention. The Israelites really fell heir to this precious heritage when they marched into the Land of Canaan, for originally this culture had been successfully carried on by the inhabitants before Israel took over. The laborers in the vineyards had to do much digging and pruning away several times a year of all the dead or unfruitful vines, that the fruitbearing branches might receive full strength from the main vine and bear better fruit. The cuttings were mostly burned (John 15, 6). The ground itself needed much care; it had to be kept entirely free from all weeds. Most of the

vines in the Holy Land were allowed to trail along the ground. The peasant believed that the grapes would ripen slower under the shadow of their own leaves, whereas if they were propped up on sticks the fruit might then, exposed to the direct rays of the sun, ripen before it had fully grown.

A well-equipped vineyard was always characterized in three ways - Matt. 21, 33. Every vineyard was surrounded by a hedge, a fence. The Greek term *περαγῶς* indicates a stone wall overgrown with thorns to protect the vineyards from thieves, but especially from wild boars and foxes (Ps. 80, 13; Cant. 2, 15; Neh. 4, 3). The second notable characteristic was the winepress. This was a device used to squeeze out the juice. The winepress of Jesus' time usually consisted of two parts - an upper vat and a lower vat. The upper vat - *ἀνωτός* - was a tub or trough-shaped receptacle, roughly two feet by four feet. The grapes were placed into this vat and then trodden by human bare feet (Judges 9, 27; Neh. 13, 15). That this entire period of vintage was one of joy and festivities is further substantiated by the jubilant tone of those who pressed the juice from the fruit. The treaders shouted as they kept time in doing their work (Is. 16, 10). Through a small, closely-grated opening near the bottom of this upper vat the juice ran down into the *ὑπολήνιον*, the lower vat. This bottom receptacle was hollowed either out of the earth, being then lined with masonry, or it was hewn out of the same huge rock as the upper vat. The juice was then stored in new goat-skin bottles, the hairy side of which was turned inside. No old skin bottles were employed for they were weakened by continual usage, and their walls could not stand the pressure of the fermenting contents (Matt. 9, 17).

The third characteristic feature of a well-organized vineyard was the tower. The tower or booth of Matt. 21, 33 was undoubtedly different

from the one mentioned in Isaiah 1, 8. This cottage of the vineyard, as Isaiah calls it, probably sufficed as a shelter for the watchman, who kept a constant lookout for would-be marauders. It was but a simple structure, built of four poles stuck in the ground in the form of a square and about four feet apart. At nearly the same distance from the ground cross-sticks were fastened to these supports, and upon them boards were laid. Here was spread the simple couch of the watchman, and here, for the most part, was his home during the summer. A second platform, covered with boughs of trees, was made a few feet higher up when a wider range of vision was desired. The insecure character of this cottage of the vineyard is well illustrated in another passage of this prophet where he says of the earth that under the judgments of God it shall "stagger like a drunken man" and "be moved to and fro like a hut." (Is. 24, 10)

However, the tower mentioned in the parable was of a more substantial structure, possibly of stone, for the same word used to designate tower here - *πύργος* - is used also of the defensive fortifications of walled cities. The purpose of towers often branched into a three-fold category. They were mainly used for protection of the food, for the storage of tools and garden implements, and then, possibly in the wealthier vineyards, for pleasure. Rich owners often resorted to their towers as summer retreats, for there in their roomy, well-ventilated apartments they could easily relax in the cooling breezes of that high altitude. Such towers of wealthier Jews were circular and averaged an area of thirty square feet, attaining heights close to sixty feet.

This subject would be quite incomplete if due consideration were not given to those responsible for the work done in the vineyards, namely, the laborers.

The employers mentioned in the parables are usually men of an exemplary and generous character (Matt. 20, 1 - 16; 21, 33 - 41). The laborers fell into two classes - some good and some bad. Matthew 20, 11. 12 gives a slight indication that those laborers did not work as zealously as they might have. This same passage also describes the difficulty of their tasks. They had to bear the "burden and heat of the day." Consequently theirs was no easy life, working in the hot sun with such primitive implements. This *καύσων*, heat, might also imply that dry, burning wind which came from the eastern desert and plains and which was so fatal to vegetable life. The prophet Hosea refers to this wind in 13, 15: "Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the Lord shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up; he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels."

When an owner of a vineyard needed help for his vintage, he could procure this help in the village market-place. This market-place, a primitive but effective employment-bureau, was the common rendezvous of the poorer classes, who gathered there each morning with spade in hand, waiting to be hired. Ancient Jewry was also familiar with a class of "harvest hands" who traveled from one location to another in search of work - very similar to the American "harvest hands" who travel from state to state to assist the farmers in their busy seasons. Here at this market-place groups were formed and hired, and then as the day gradually passed, new groups of waiting hands were again to be found.

When the owner engaged a number of workmen from this "bureau," the labor contract was customarily a verbal one. The lord promised his workers so much for a day's work, and they then received that amount regardless of the number of hours they labored. A standard working day

was twelve hours; and this according to the Jewish method of reckoning time would then be the hours between six a.m. and six p.m. - the first and the twelfth hours respectively (John 11, 9). The wages at the time of Christ, according to his parable (Matt. 20), were a penny, a Roman denarius, which in today's coin would amount to seventeen cents.

The Palestinian viticulturist had also another system in employing laborers for his vineyard. This was the method of renting the vineyard to workers (Matt. 21, 33f). The owner would let his property out to husbandmen, who would work the vineyard, and in return would pay the owner a certain amount of money or its equivalent in produce. The latter was the more usual as well as the more natural. It was also often the case that the renters received fruit and free seed to hire workers under them again. Such contracts or leases, as Edersheim says, were given by the year, by life, or were even hereditary.<sup>1</sup> French imparts this bit of information that this system of rentals is still carried on in parts of France and Italy. In Persia similar arrangements are made and "that there, too, as in the case of the Wicked Husbandmen frauds and violence sometimes occur as a result."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Edersheim, op. cit., vol. II, p. 423.

2. French, op. cit., p. 168.



### III Animal Husbandry

Two parables are to be found in the account of St. Matthew which refer to the interesting occupation of sheep-raising. These two parables are the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Matt. 18, 12, 13) and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Matt. 25, 31 - 33).

The picture of a flock of sheep with their shepherd is a very familiar one in Jewish history. The keeping of flocks was prevalent almost everywhere. The highlands of Gilead and Bashan are usually designated as the chief regions, although considerable flocks were tended also in the hill countries of Ephraim and Judah. It seems that the shepherd was more prominent in southern sections of Palestine than in the northern. Most topographers usually classify three great sheep-raising districts - that of Gilead and Bashan, that of the highlands just west of the Jordan river, and that of the territories of Moab, Edom, and the land of Simeon.

These districts were commonly called "wildernesses," although they were not that in the modern sense of the term. Such a designation was given them only because they were uninhabited, whereas in reality they were wide, grassy plains, steppes, or savannas; some were a bit sandy or rocky in parts, but again almost jungly with luxuriant growths of aromatic shrubbery.

The shepherd had not such a difficult task. True, sheep often went astray and he would have to seek them out in neighboring ravines or mountains, but in general his job was quite a pleasant one. The sheep, which required day and night watching, were well acquainted with their

keeper's voice. He had no need to drive them, as is the custom in western sheep-folds, but he merely called them (John 10, 4). Moreover, the shepherd was often enabled to give individual care and attention to his sheep; it was also frequently the case for each animal to have its own name, and when hearing its master's voice, it would nimbly and quickly leap to his side or into his arms.

Job 30, 1 - "But now they that are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to have set with the dogs of my flock." This passage carries a reference to the keeper's entrusting the care of his sheep to dogs. Dogs of Palestine were not esteemed as the faithful friends of mankind, but they were mostly mean and lazy and only good for barking warnings when danger threatened. Otherwise the shepherd left his flock in the charge of another man. But any such substitution immediately reduced the efficiency of the pastoral care. To a stranger the sheep would not willingly hearken - a fact which Christ aptly employs in his parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10).

The sheep-fold was a large square inclosure, surrounded by stone walls. These walls were crowned with thornbranches to keep out thieves and predatory animals. Some of these permanent folds also had towers, similar to the structures found in vineyards. At night, when the weather was favorable, sheep and shepherd slept under the open sky. In bad weather the sheep were kept under low, flat-roofed quarters to shelter them from the rains. Sometimes several flocks shared one such a fold, and on the following morning each shepherd would lead his individual flock out of the fold into the pasture. When the flock was far from home, temporary folds of thorns and briars were erected. The many Palestinian caves were also frequently resorted to for this purpose.

Wild animals, chiefly wolves, were the main threats to the safety of the flock. To ward off their many and repeated raids, the shepherd was equipped with such weapons as a sling and a staff ( 1 Sam. 17, 40). The staff was a long rod crooked at the top. Besides its use as a protective measure against the enemies, the shepherd also employed it to lead the flock and to chasten its disobedient members. The sling was the same as that used by the young shepherd-boy - the later king David. It was a narrow strip of leather with a sort of pocket or "hand" in the center, into which a stone was placed. The shepherd would take both ends of these thongs tight in his grip, swing the sling around his head, and finally leave one end go, directing the stone before the sheep so as to make them alter their course. This sling, incidentally, is said to be the origin of the later developments in war artillery, as the huge machine used in Roman days to sling large stones at walls of cities. Ross tells of another way to make a sling. He says, "The boys make their own slings; from the back of the family sheep they cut a little wool, and by patiently rolling it over and over on a smooth pebble, spin it into yarn, and then make the yarn into a sling."<sup>1</sup> The shepherd also carried a "scrip," made of an entire skin of a lamb - the wool having been removed - and it was carried by straps passing over the shoulders. This pouch was probably used for the shepherd's food for a day. Besides this he was burdened with very little equipment to transport from place to place. In cold weather he would probably carry an extra garment to meet this need.

The sheep of the Holy Land were of different colors and breeds. The general colors were white, brown, black, and piebald - like the ones in Jacob's flock as he served his uncle Laban. In the north there roamed a short-wooled variety; of this breed both the rams and the ewes were horned. Another breed, which was more general, was the broad-tailed

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1. E. J. Ross, Living Where Jesus Lived, p. 32.

species. The tails of these sheep were quite enormous, often eight inches wide and fifteen inches long, and scaled an average of ten to fifteen pounds. These tails were sold as food. They are described as being superior to tallow though not equal to butter. The Arabs are reported to consider such a dish a rare delicacy, as they feast on this food, frying it in slices. It is also said that this variety of sheep is especially good for that country, for if the pastures fail, these sheep can go for days without food, living on the fat that is stored up in their tails.

The uses of the sheep were manifold. Since the Jews considered it a clean animal, it was used for food (1 Sam. 14, 32; 25, 18). The ewes supplied a rich milk which was a favorite with the Hebrews (Deut. 32, 14; 1 Cor. 9, 7). The skin of the animal served as rude clothing (Heb. 11, 37; Matt. 7, 15), and sometimes it was converted into leather (Ex. 26, 14; Mark 1, 7). The trappings of horses, camels, and asses, the saddle-bag, and the water bottle were all by-products of this sheep-skin. From the wool sheared from the sheep cloth was woven (Lev. 13, 47. 48). For a few days subsequent to their shearing the sheep were driven regularly into water for cleansing, and possibly to harden<sup>them</sup> to the changes of the atmosphere (Cant. 4, 2). This wool was considered very valuable and was frequently rendered as a tribute. 2 Kings 3, 4 presents an example of this as it tells of Mesha, the king of Moab, paying King Ahab of Israel "an hundred thousand lambs, and an hundred thousand rams, with the wool." The horns of the male sheep were used as flasks (1 Sam. 16, 1) and also as trumpets. These were the trumpets used by the priests as they circled the city of Jericho before its fall (Josh. 6, 4). One of the main purposes for which this species of animals was employed was for the Passover feast. Beginning with the great exodus of Israel under Moses from the land of Egypt, and

thereafter at every Passover festival, a male lamb or goat of a year old, without blemish, was offered unto the Lord.

At the beginning of this discussion mention was then already made of the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Sheep and goats were kept in the same pasture; the goats were tended with the sheep by the same shepherd (Gen. 27, 9; 30, 32). At night, however, they were divided into separate folds - which is the important fact in the meaning of the parable. There was a close affinity between the goats and the sheep. One of the few differences lay in the construction of their respective horns; the goats' horns are curved backward. Then, too, there is a difference in their habits. Sheep eat herbage and grass, while the goats browse twigs and leaves. Similar to the uses of the sheep, the goats' hair is also woven into cloth - cloth used for tents usually of this substance - the milk is drunk and is preferred to that of any other animal, and the flesh is eaten. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, 11, 37, refers to the destitute and afflicted, who wore clothes made of the hairy skin of this animal. This skin, turned inside, was also used as a container for liquids.

#### IV Fishing

A parable of Christ which presents another picture of Palestinian life is that of Matt. 13, 47, 48. This parable suggests the occupational mode of fishing. This was not so much the sport, as many Americans consider fishing today, but it was one of the main industries of Jewish life. Whole families engaged in it (Mark 1, 20); it was a wholesale business.

This fishing was confined to inland waters, mainly that in the region of the Sea of Galilee. According to the tradition of the Rabbis, Joshua, on his distribution of the country, had made the fishing in the Lake of Galilee free to all. Nowadays, the fishing is a monopoly of the Turkish government, and is virtually extinct.<sup>1</sup> There is very little evidence that the Israelites ever took part in any fishing along the Mediterranean coast, but Neh. 13, 16 provides this bit of information, that men from the region of Tyre brought huge amounts of their catch to Jerusalem and there disposed of them, selling their fish to the Jews on the sabbath, for which Nehemiah rebuked his people. Bissell infers that there was a regular fish market in Jerusalem, since there was a gate known as the "fish gate" on its northeast side.<sup>2</sup>

The equipment used to carry on this occupation was quite simple but effective. Every fisherman was an expert in the use of the hook and line and nets. The mention of fishhooks is found already in the days of Amos the prophet - Amos 4, 2. Isaiah also shows some familiarity with this industry as he employs such fishing terms as "they that cast," and

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1. Geikie, Life and Words of Christ, vol II, p. 609.

2. E. C. Bissell, op. cit., p. 71.

"they that spread nets" (Isaiah 19, 8). Job 41, 1 and 7 also seem to indicate that at that early date spears and tridents were already in use.

The nets are worthy of special mention. There were two types of nets used at these times - 1) the bag-net and 2) the drag-net. The first of these was employed out in deep waters. The fisherman let his net down and then drew it up again into the boat. Several good catches often endangered the lives of the men, when the weight of the fish caused the boats to begin sinking, as in the case of the miraculous draught of fishes which Jesus produced. This bag-net is also referred to as the hand-net. In shape it is like the top of a tent with a long cord fastened to the apex. This cord is attached to the fisherman's arm, and the net is so folded that when it is thrown, it expands to its utmost circumference around which are strung beads of lead to make the net drop to the bottom. When the fish are enmeshed within the strings of the net, the fisherman leisurely draws the net to him with the long cord tied to his arm. Since shoals of fish could be distinguished much better from a higher level than from the angle of an active fisherman near the shore, it was quite the custom to station several men on cliffs, who would then signal the fisherman where to cast the net.

The other type of net was the drag-net. It was leaded below and corked above so that it formed a sort of partition when placed into the water. The length of such nets at times averages several hundred feet. Ocean nets of that time are quoted to have been long enough to compass an entire bay. The ends of the drag-net were taken out into the lake and brought back by boats. These boats were usually large, clumsy affairs, manned by at least four fishermen, who took turns rowing

with oars as thick as cart shafts. At the bottom of the boat there usually lay a sail, which was readily put to use in the event of a lake breeze. The next move was to drag the net back on to the shore, while other hands stood beating the waters about the net and throwing stones to prevent the escape of the fish. This is that net which, as Jesus described it, "gathered of every kind." When the net, enclosed with fish, was drawn fully upon the sandy shore, the fishermen immediately sat down and began to collect the salable and edible fish into vessels, but the bad they cast away. The day's work was finished with the washing of the nets (Luke 5, 2) and spreading them on the ground, between poles, to dry. The fisherman himself wore few, if any, clothes, as he engaged in his occupation. That this nudity was not considered so dishonourably is probably due to the thorough infiltration of Greek customs. It was the way of the Greeks for the participants in their popular games to appear naked. So this condition in Palestine was less regarded, doubtless through the universal presence of more or less Greek feeling.

Some have estimated the still, blue waters of Galilee to contain thirty-seven species of fish. Many fish die, when and if they pass down the Jordan into the Dead Sea. No fish are mentioned by name in the Bible. "Dag" and "Nun" are generic terms which cover all species. The fish are found in large numbers and in shoals, and they appeared to be the choice dish or delicacy to the Hebrews. Those most abundant are quite small, only five or six inches in length, and they are eaten with the bones. There are, however, also quite a number which range to considerable sizes. Fish twelve to eighteen inches long are not an uncommon sight at the Galilean markets.

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## V Marriage

In illustrating the truths of the Kingdom of Heaven the Lord very often referred to customs which dealt with marriage and its various appended ceremonies. Much information is accessible on this subject and, therefore, this brief treatise is intended to hit merely the high spots of this interesting sphere of Jewish life.

In comparison with the customs prevalent in other sections of the East, the young men and young women of Palestine enjoyed a very unrestricted intercourse among themselves. The young man was permitted to make the personal choice of his bride. The bride, on the other hand, also had her say-so in the matter. She had to give her own free and expressed consent to make a union or betrothal valid.

Betrothal in the case of minors was subject to certain regulations. Girls up to twelve years and a day might be betrothed or given away by their father. However, such a contract was not binding upon the young girl; if she so chose, she had every right to a divorce afterwards. The young Hebrew, who sought a help-mate for himself, entertained several exact ideas regarding his future wife's qualifications. He would look for a girl with such redeeming qualities as meekness, modesty, and shamefacedness. These were high aesthetic values; indeed, the opposite - brawling, gossiping in the streets, and immodest behavior in public - were regarded as sufficient grounds for divorce. An interesting observation in this connection concerns a Rabbinical interpretation or

exegesis of the creation of woman from man's side. Ed ersheim quotes, "God had not formed woman out of the head, lest she should become proud; nor out of the eye, lest she should lust; nor out of the ear, lest she should be curious; nor out of the mouth, lest she should be talkative; nor out of the heart, lest she should be jealous; nor out of the hand, lest she should be covetous; nor out of the foot, lest she be a busyBody; but out of the rib, which was always covered." <sup>1</sup> This excerpt certainly proves the high admiration of the Jews for modesty as the prime quality in a woman.

Since marriage was always connected with the great anticipation of the coming Messiah, the Jews considered this ceremony as somewhat of a religious obligation. Maimonides records that a young man, as a rule, was expected to be married at the age of sixteen or seventeen; twenty was possibly the limit, and this concession was made only to those who might have no time for marriage, being so absorbed in a study of some kind. Yet marriage was looked upon as even more preferable and more sacred than any study.

The Jews drew a line of distinction between betrothal and marriage. St. Matthew portrays this distinction in his Christmas narrative, as he describes Joseph as espoused to the Virgin Mary. A Jewish betrothal was marked by the bridal present (or Mahar - Ex. 22, 17; 1 Sam; 18, 25), the obligation for which at times fell upon the bride's father, and then again, at times upon the young Hebrew suitor. It was expected that the young lady's father provide a dowry for her, and one which was conformable to her station in life. This dowry might be in the form of money, property, or jewelry - and it was entered into the marriage contract. The wife, however, really remained the possessor of this dowry, and her

new husband was required to add one-half of that to the sum if it be money, and four-fifths its value if it be in the form of jewelry. Occasionally a bride received no dowry at all; and in such a case it was the duty of her bridegroom to supply her with the necessary requirements. Orphan brides received a certain stipend from the parochial authorities, 50 Zuzes, a Zuz, in the Talmud, equaling a sixth part of a demarius. The Old Testament has a number of examples of large and generous dowries. Caleb gave his daughter a field with several springs - Joshua 15, 19; the king of Egypt gave an entire city to his daughter, the wife of Solomon - 1 Kings 9, 16. All these considerations were settled at the time of betrothal; a cup was sometimes broken as a sign that a covenant was made, and then the entire routine, at least in Judea, seems to have culminated in a great feast celebration.

Betrothal was regarded very highly. In fact, a betrothed person was considered as already wedded, with certain limitations, of course. No dissolution of an engagement was permitted except through a legal divorce. Further proof of this close relationship between betrothal and marriage is gathered from various legal proceedings. If a young woman died before her marriage, her bridegroom became the natural heir to all his betrothed's possessions.

According to Rabbinical law certain formalities had to be carried through to make a betrothal legally valid. The bridegroom customarily handed the woman a piece of money, or else a letter, before witnesses, accompanied with the words "Be thou consecrated (wedded) to me."<sup>2</sup> In the Middle Ages this developed into the popular custom of an engagement ring. Sometimes this bridal token was sent by the young man with messengers. Such a formality indicated to the young woman that

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2. E. C. Bissell, op. cit., p. 44.

the young man wanted to become engaged to her. The Mishnah tells of regular Shitre Erusin, writings of betrothal, which were drawn up by the authorities at the expense of the groom. In such documents the various mutual obligations - the dowry and other points - were stipulated.

The real marriage contract was the Chethubah, without which a marriage was regarded as mere legalized concubinage. This Chethubah provided a settlement of 200 denars for a maiden, half of that amount for a widow, while the priestly council at Jerusalem fixed four hundred denars for a priest's daughter. This was just the legal minimum; prices often ranged far above this. The present form of the Jews is probably substantially the same as that used in the days of Christ. The bridegroom married his bride according to the law of Moses and of Israel; he promised to please, to honor, to nourish, and to care for her, as was the manner of the men of Israel. To this vow of devotion and marital consecration the woman's consent was then added. The signature of two witnesses made the contract final.

The interval of time between betrothal and marriage was not limited to any certain period. The wedding of a maiden took place on a Wednesday afternoon. Such an arrangement allowed her the first three days of the week for preparation. On Thursday, the day after the wedding, the groom had the privilege to charge his wife with previous unchastity before the local Sanhedrin, which convened that day of every week. Marriage with a widow usually took place on Thursday. No such celebrations were permitted on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, lest by such festivities the Sabbath rest might be endangered. Also no weddings were held on the three great festivals, for the Jews were not supposed to celebrate more than one joyous occasion at a time.

The wedding itself was purely a domestic affair without any religious services. The presence of a rabbi was not required until the Fourth Century A. D.; if a rabbi was present, he performed no religious rituals,

but merely attended the festivities and perhaps contributed a bit to the entertainment.

On the day of the wedding the bride had a set routine of acts to perform. First of all she bathed (Judith 10, 3); thereafter she put on white robes which were often richly embroidered (Ps. 45, 13. 14), decked herself with jewels, fastened the indispensable bridal girdle about her waist, covered herself with a veil (Gen 24, 65), and placed a garland over her head. The bridal girdle was a belt or band of cord, cloth, leather, and sometimes even linen, six inches in breadth, with a buckle to loosen or tighten the band. Moreover, this girdle had a certain significance; a romantic angle was therewith connected. It was the groom's personal gift to his bride, one which she treasured above all else and with which she would under no circumstances part. The bridegroom also wore a handsome headdress and a garland (Song of Solomon 3, 11). The bride always wore a veil; sometimes both bride and groom were so covered, but after the destruction of Jerusalem this custom was interdicted by the rabbis for some time.

The marriage ceremony itself was quite simple. It consisted merely of a bridal procession from the home of the bride to her new home - that of her husband. The groom was obliged to call for her, and this homebringing was connected with no ceremony at all; the husband merely took his wife unto himself. As the couple marched to their new home they were accompanied by large crowds of well-wishers. It was a religious duty for all to give pleasure to the newly-married couple. Palm and myrtle branches were borne before the couple, grain or money was thrown in their path and around them (very similar and probably the origin of the modern rice throwing custom), and loud and joyful music, songs, and dancing preceded the entire procession.

The Parable of the Ten Virgins reveals the fact that lamps were carried in front of the wedding procession. These lamps, according to Rabbinic authority, were carried on the top of staves. Incidentally, it was no great expense for the Hebrews to have lamps burning all night, for the country was very rich in oil. Even the poorest families would deny themselves food rather than do without a light in the home.

"Putting out of the light" denoted ruin and destruction of a family and the desertion of a house (Job 18, 5.6; 21, 17; 29, 3). The ordinary lamp was probably made of earthenware or of some kind of metal, and it held but little oil. In form it was like a small shallow saucer with the edge projecting on one side and turned up to make a place for the wick and a little oil. Olive oil was burned. These *λαμπάδες* were really somewhat like a torch. Excavations in Palestine have uncovered many tiny little clay lamps, which would not hold more than two ounces of oil. If these were the "virgin lamps", it is easy to see why an extra measure of oil was necessary while waiting for the bridegroom. The virgins usually awaited the coming of the bride and the groom in some niche near the bride's home, and then with lighted lamps they preceded the couple to the marriage feast. "The number ten is not accidental, but symbolical, denoting completeness, just as there are Ten Commandments, ten talents (Matt. 25, 28), ten pieces of silver (Luke 15, 8), ten servants, ten pounds, ten cities (Luke 19, 13 - 17), instruments of ten strings (Ps. 33, 2), at least ten families per synagogue, and ten persons for a funeral procession."<sup>3</sup> The feast took place in the groom's house (Matt. 22, 1 - 10), but if he lived at too great a distance from the bride's home, the celebration took place at her house (Matt. 25, 1). In the parable of the King's son (Matt. 22) there is a reference to the royal

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3. Lenski, op. cit., p. 941.

dinner ( v. 4 ). The term אֶרְבֵּעֵי עֶשְׂרִים is here used which really designates "breakfast," the first meal which was taken at nine o'clock. "Common Jewish weddings lasted seven days, some even longer, with feasts all the time. This royal wedding would go far beyond that. The proportions of the feast are indicated by the information that the steers have been slaughtered - so many guests were to be fed." <sup>4</sup> That this wedding celebration was a time of unmixed festivities is proved by Edersheim, as he says, "Even on the day of Atonement a bride was allowed to relax one of the ordinances of that strictest fast. During the marriage-week all mourning was to be suspended - even the obligation of the prescribed daily prayers ceased." <sup>5</sup>

The merriment at these occasions often became riotous. People outdid themselves to demonstrate their share in the couple's newly-found happiness. For this reason strict rabbis are reported to have introduced a more sober note into the festivities. One is said to have broken a ~~£~~ twenty-five vase; another smashed a costly glass; and still another, instead of joyfully singing, proclaimed, "Woe to us, for we must all die!" <sup>6</sup> The entire marital proceedings generally lasted a week, but the bridal days extended over a full month. In fact, a wife was still called a bride after a year of married life. This may have been based on Deut. 24, 5 : "When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken."

One very relevant feature of a Jewish wedding was the presence of the groomsmen - or friends of the bridegroom. This was known only in Judea, not in Galilee. These groomsmen are not to be conflicted with the "children of the bridechamber," to whom Christ refers in Matt. 9, 15, for

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4. Lenski, op. cit., p. 827.

5. Edersheim, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 663.

6. Edersheim, Jewish Social Life, p. 152.

these latter ones were simply the guests invited to the wedding reception. In Judea it was customary to have two groomsmen, one for the bride and one for the groom. These persons acted as intermediaries before marriage, carrying notes and gifts between the espoused man and woman. At the wedding these attendants offered gifts, served the couple, and escorted them to the bridal chamber. They were also considered the guarantors of the bride's virgin chastity. After marriage these "friends of the bridegroom" were obliged to maintain proper terms between the newlyweds, and if the young bride suffered any imputation against her good name, they had the responsibility to defend her..

If a marriage occurred in higher circles of society, as in the case of the King's son (Matt. 22, 1 - 14), it was the custom at the reception for the host to provide his guests with royal vestments. These magnificent robes were hung in a chamber through which the invited guests passed, and each one robed himself in honor of the occasion ere he entered the banquet hall. This was the "wedding garment" to which the Savior referred. At very wealthy wedding feasts the guests were given several such robes throughout the course of the celebration. On this score Lenski relates, "The evidence that in the Orient and even among the Greeks garments were provided for honored guests, not one but several to be worn in turn, relieving the guests of undue expenditure on their part, adding to the magnificence of the grand host, is quite sufficient, and we may point even to Gen. 45, 22; Judges 14, 12 and 19; 2 Kings 5, 22; Esther 6, 8; and Rev. 19, 8.9."<sup>7</sup> The judgment inflicted on the guest without the wedding garment is a picture of the oriental figure even today. Any guest who

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7. Lenski, op. cit., p. 834.



fails to acknowledge his host's gracious hospitality receives the treatment of a criminal, being bound hand and foot and cast out.

A side remark may be made at this point in reference to this same parable. The phrase "and they would not come" casts its light upon all the preliminary and advance invitations the guests had received. Evidently the Jews were quite punctual and profuse in extending their invitations well in advance of such an important occasion. First the guests were invited and then afterwards they were summoned by special messenger (Luke 14, 17).

## VI Financial Transactions

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18, 23 - 35) and that of the Talents (Matt. 25, 14 - 30) suggest several Jewish customs which were in vogue at the time when the Lord Jesus Christ traversed the territories of Judea and Galilee. In the first account there is a reference to a king and one of the king's subjects, who owed him a large amount of money. Lenski does not interpret the  $\delta\acute{o}\upsilon\lambda\omicron\iota$  in this text to mean ordinary slaves. He explains, "the idea that slaves were often entrusted with large sums of money, with which to do business for their master, seems entirely too weak here, where the sum involved is so immense."<sup>1</sup> This exegete then continues and cites similar customs in other lands with which Christ and his fellow-Jews were familiar. It seems that the  $\delta\acute{o}\upsilon\lambda\omicron\iota$  of the parable were the king's satraps, appointed by him to rule great parts of his domain and to turn into his treasuries the grand revenues of their provinces. Though these satraps were great lords, yet they were subject to their king's absolute authority, and in reality were nothing but the king's  $\delta\acute{o}\upsilon\lambda\omicron\iota$ .

The debt mentioned in the text extended to ten thousand talents. A talent is an ancient weight of silver or of gold coin. These weights varied in different nations and also at different eras. The Attic talent was \$1, 200; the great Roman \$500, and the small \$375; while the Hebrew, Assyrian, and Babylonian ran from \$1,550 to \$2,000. Many are inclined to apply the Attic talent here, thus making the debt \$12,000,000; others

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1. Lenski, op. cit., p. 690.

take the Hebrew which totals an enormous figure of \$15, 500,000 to \$20,000,000. The second debt related in the parable was a sum of one hundred denarii. A denarius, which was a laborer's daily wages (Matt. 20, 2 - Parable of the Vineyard) was but seventeen cents. This denarius was the most common silver coin, and it is rendered in the Authorized Version as a "penny." It was so named because it was originally equivalent to ten asses or small copper coins. The as is mentioned in Matt. 10, 29 where the Authorized Version translated it as "farthing." Barton claims that down to the seventh century before Christ money was not coined at all.<sup>2</sup> The coins in use at the time of Christ had Greek inscriptions. This shows the rapid advance of foreign elements. Herod Agrippa I is usually credited with the introduction of the un-Jewish practise of images on coins. The coin mentioned in Matt. 22, 20 with an image and superscription must have been struck at Rome, or else it was one of the tetrarch Philip, who was the first to introduce the image of Caesar on strictly Jewish coins.

There were two ways of settling debts, both mentioned in this first parable (Matt. 18, 23 - 35). The first method was to sell a man together with his family into slavery. The selling of the family with the head thereof rested on the theory that a man's wife and children were a part of his property. This was not instituted by the law of Moses, yet it was permitted "but only after it had been hedged about with precaution for the impoverished Jew's comfort and welfare."<sup>3</sup> A debtor became a slave in the single respect that he must do voluntary and unrewarded labor. When the first year of Jubilee arrived after his enslavement, it marked the regaining of his lost liberty. The laws regarding the Jubilee year permitted him to return, but not empty handed, to his native place (Lev. 25, 35 - 41). In every other respect a Jew, who became a temporary

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2. Barton, op. cit., p. 162.

3. R. A. Jesse, The Social and Economic Background of the Parables of our Lord, p. 56.

slave, enjoyed the status of one who served for wages and by choice.

Slavery was brought about in the Holy Land in various ways. But nowhere does the Bible speak of slave-markets for the free selling of slaves. Slaves were acquired by 1) capture - Num. 31, 9; 2 Kings 5, 2; 2) by purchase - Gen. 17, 27; Joel 3, 6. 8; the price of slaves varied according to circumstances. In Hebrew judicial cases the expense involved was fixed at thirty shekels ( a shekel being about sixty-five cents). Joseph was sold at the age of seventeen for twenty shekels. 3) through birth of slaves owned - Gen. 17, 12; 4) in payment of debt; a thief unable to make restitution was sold into slavery - Ex. 22, 3; 5) and by the voluntary sale of oneself or daughter because of poverty - Ex. 21, 2. 7.

The legal status of Jewish slaves was on a much higher and humane plane than that of heathen nations. In fact, "all the miseries of negro slavery were a drop to the ocean, compared to those of the slaves of antiquity."<sup>4</sup> Because of these humane laws Canaan has often been called an asylum for slaves. A Hebrew slave enjoyed the right of manumission, liberation, after six years of service, if he so chose. Also different from the slaves of Gentile peoples, slaves in Palestine were accorded very little harsh treatment. When all slaves were released at the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25, 40), they were not sent empty away. This liberation was effected by a concomitant regulation regarding this Jubilee year, whereby everyone was obligated to return to his original inheritance. McGarvey says that the operation of this law was suspended by the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, but that after the exile it was probably restored.<sup>5</sup> Gentile slaves in Palestine also enjoyed certain rights and privileges. They might be whipped or beaten, but not maimed or killed (Ex. 21, 2-21. 26. 27). When a captive slave girl was taken

4. Mommsen, Geschichte, II, 79, quoted by Geikie, op. cit., II, p. 623.

5. J. W. McGarvey, Lands of the Bible, pp. 99. 100.

As a wife she acquired new rights (Deut. 21, 10-14). Intercourse between a slave and his master was usually very cordial. Abraham and his servant, sent out to fetch a wife for Isaac, are noble exponents of such virtuous conduct - Gen. 24. That slaves were entitled to justice is hinted at in Job 31, 13, "If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me...." Sometimes the slave even inherited the property of his master; occasionally one was admitted into the family as a daughter-in-law or as a son-in-law (1 Chron. 2, 34. 35). A favorite Scriptural term for slave is steward. A steward was usually a senior slave, who, in default of children, became the heir of his master.

A second method of settling debts is also alluded to in this Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. This servant cast his debtor into prison "till he should pay the debt" in return for which the "certain king" delivered him "to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due him." Students of Jewish customs agree that this practise of imprisonment and torture was originally foreign to Hebrew practise, that they must have borrowed it from a neighboring country. It seems that this method was often employed in cases of doubt regarding the debtor's bankruptcy. The jailers kept the imprisoned safe and made their life miserable with heavy chains, stocks (Acts 16, 24), and other means of distress and torture until the debts were paid. Acts 22, 24 - the scourging of Paul at Jerusalem - apparently indicates that this mode of torture was at times used to extort confessions. Among the tortures anciently applied also to imprisoned debtors were dragging about heavy chains, near-starving, excessive labor, or bodily tortures proper. Jail sentences were most likely inflicted in accordance with the Roman law,

for from the earliest times of Hebrew civilization, their laws knew nothing of imprisonment as a punishment for a crime. Bissel definitely states in this connection: "It is not until after the Babylonian exile that we find imprisonment resorted to as a punishment for crime real or supposed. Authority for this purpose was given to Ezra by the Persian monarch (Ezra 7, 26). At the beginning of the Christian era we find the Sanhedrin, by Roman custom and authority, making use of the same means in their treatment of Christians (Acts 4,3; 9, 2). The case of imprisonment for debt mentioned in Matthew is to be explained in the same way." <sup>6</sup>

It is remarkable how the Israelites throughout their history, surrounded by many barbarous tribes and peoples, could maintain such a sane attitude in regard to such customs. The monuments of Egypt and Assyrians sometimes collected the heads of all those slain in battle, and had them counted or put together, to estimate the extent of the victory. The Egyptians, in a similar way, cut off and numbered the hands of their slaughtered foes. They were impaled, skinned alive, their tongues torn away, and their eyes gouged out. No pain or inhumanity was too great to be inflicted on a captive taken in war. Those whose lives were spared, including women and children, were bound together like so many cattle, and driven off, scantily clothed, bareheaded and bare-footed, to be held or sold as slaves. That the Israelites could refrain from such heathen practises was wholly due to the restraints which the spirit and the letter of the Mosaic regulations imposed upon them (Kings (2) 6, 22).

"Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury (Matt. 25, 27)." In this scathing rebuke which the lord of the parable dealt to his wicked and slothful servant lies a reference to a feature of the banking customs of that day. Money-changing for a commission had become a branch of banking. It is said that the old Phoenicians

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6. Bissell, op. cit., p. 226.

had introduced this practise into the world of the Jews through the Romans. Originally it was strictly forbidden to take interest from a fellow-Jew, but in Christ's day it had become a general custom. At first the Rabbis were so punctilious in avoiding the appearance of usury, that a woman who borrowed a loaf of bread from her neighbor was told to fix its value at that time, lest a sudden rise in flour should make the loaf returned worth more than that borrowed.

If a man wished to borrow some money, he was obliged to follow a set routine. Such advances were legally secured by regular documents, drawn at the expense of the debtor and attested by witnesses. According to Jewish law certain provisions were made regarding those who bore witness at such a financial transaction. Quoting from Rosh Hashanah ( 1, 8 ) Edersheim says, "the following are unfit of witness-bearing: he who plays with dice (a gambler); they who train doves (either for betting purposes or as decoys); they who trade in Seventh Year's products, and slaves."<sup>7</sup> No person was ever taken as security. At times it was lawful to give household materials as security for the loan.

The busy season for the money changers was the time of the great festivals. Since only Jewish coin was acceptable tribute to be paid in the temple, Jews who came from distant parts of the then known world had to convert their currency into native coinage. As these feasts approached, the money-changers were admitted into the precincts of the temple, to the Court of the Gentiles. In the arcades, formed by the quadruple rows of Corinthian columns surrounding the temple, they sat publicly and unrebuked with their money-laden tables before them.

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7. Edersheim, Jewish Social Life, p. 205.

The charge for converting a pilgrim's money into the acceptable Jewish coinage was according to the Talmud a kollubos for half a shekel. This amounted to twelve grains of silver - three cents in American money. From this premium the money-changer was called kollubistes (Matt. 21, 12) and from the table at which he sat trapizites (Matt. 25, 27). Too often the dishonesty and avarice on the part of these money-changers were incompatible with the sanctity of the temple, as was the case when Christ drove them out (Matt. 21, 12-13), rightly accusing them of perverting the temple, making it into a den of thieves.

The lord in the parable expected the least of this slothful servant. The least which he could have done was to have invested his talent with the bankers and so accumulated some interest. So this type of banking seems to have been an established institution. At that time people could easily expect four per cent interest, for the bankers in the early days of the Empire regularly received as high as eight per cent for their investments. Rome and Greece had regular State banks. Not infrequently was the two-fold business of money-changing and banking combined. "Such 'bankers' undertook to make payments, to collect moneys and accounts, to place out money at interest - in short, all the ordinary business of this kind." <sup>8</sup>

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8. Ederheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, vol. 2, p. 464.



## VII Miscellaneous

Before concluding this study of Jewish customs reflected in the parables of Christ as given in the account of St. Matthew, there still remain a few short parables or parabolic sayings which refer to phases of Palestinian life not yet fully treated in this thesis. The first is the Parable of the House on the Rock (Matt. 7, 24 - 27). A quotation from Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament illustrates the rocky condition of Palestinian soil quite well; "At this very day the mode of building in Christ's own town of Nazareth suggests the source of this image. Dr. Robinson was entertained in the house of a Greek Arab. The house had just been built, and was not yet finished. In order to lay the foundations he had dug down to the solid rock, as is usual throughout the country here, to the depth of thirty feet, and then built up arches." <sup>1</sup> In a limestone country like Galilee, it is necessary to dig only some distance, and one is apt to find a stratum of rock upon which to build the foundations. A house built on sand is a very unstable structure, for lacking a sturdy foundation, it might fall victim to the first outburst of the elements. The sand mentioned in the text might refer to the loose surface of the ground, or perhaps to the sand accumulated in some part of a mountain ravine, which looks smooth and firm, but which is liable to be swept away by the next flood or hurricane. Many of the houses themselves, built of mud or sun-dried bricks, were rather unsafe when the rain descended or a <sup>storm</sup> swept over them.

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1. M. A. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, p. 51.

Another short parable of Jesus is the one of the New Cloth and the Old Garment, (Matt. 9, 16). The new cloth is designated in the Greek text as <sup>ἄκρος ἄγρῶνος</sup> which means a piece of goods fresh from the loom. A part of the process of preparing woolen cloth for use consisted in shrinking it, and a patch of "unfulled" cloth, not duly shrunk, would contract the first time it would become wet; and as the older and weaker cloth all around then gave way, the result would be a worse rent. Jewish garments of that day were usually all wool, and if unfulled, would shrink like the present day flannel.

After teaching the important lesson of the New Cloth, Jesus followed with another short parable to emphasize that truth. The second parable in this discourse of Christ is that of the New Wine and the Old Bottles (Matt. 9, 17). Wine-skins were as a rule made from goat-skins. The head and feet of the animal were removed and the skin then stripped off whole. The openings at the feet and the tail were bound up, leaving the neck as the mouth. New skin stretched to a considerable degree, but when it was old, it became stiff and split under any pressure. These goat-skins were sometimes tanned to prevent a disagreeable taste. Larger vessels were often prepared from the hides of oxen or camels.

In Matt. 11, 16, 17, Jesus took an illustration from one of his favorite subjects - children. Using the children at play as an example, he painted a meaningful picture to his hearers. Children of all nations and people are known to play; this is one characteristic common to all children everywhere. The large, open market-places were convenient playgrounds for the children of Jewish neighborhoods of Jesus' day. They held their sports and games at this center of activity, especially when the market was not in progress. These market-places were in the

real sense of the term assembly places; the business and bartering sense was really secondary. In Oriental cities these market places were really usually just inside the gate, and here all the citizens assembled, judges sat, business was transacted, loafers lounged (Matt. 20, 6. 7), and children played. When not used for threshing, the hard, smooth ground of the threshing-floor was another favorite playground for the children of the village.

When ancient cities are excavated, many curious articles are exhumed from their ruins. Toys are frequently found among the number of these curiosities; dolls and other playthings form a noticeable part. On this Bissell says, "those of the ancient Egyptian youth as found laid away beside them in their tombs are constructed with a skill that would do credit to modern times."<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, one can easily visualize the Hebrew tots with their little dolls and other toys. When Job says, "Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens?" (Job 41, 5) he seems to hint at another form of amusement, that of making birds captive and attaching strings to them.. Isaiah, 22, 18, may refer to some form of ball-playing. It is known that this sport was carried on in Egypt at a very early date, the Egyptians using balls made of leather or dried mud. In his conversation with David, Jonathan spoke of shooting three arrows, "as though I shot at a mark." This may have been a pastime for royal youth. In the days of the Maccabees the attempt was made to introduce the gymnasium and the sports connected with it into Jerusalem, but this met with general disapproval, for the Jews regarded it as the height of profanation.

The group to which Jesus referred in his parable was engaged in a common Jewish juvenile amusement. At first the children insisted on

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2. Bissell, op. cit., p. 39. 40.

playing wedding. So they copied what they had seen in older people; they piped or fluted, imitating the flutes used for wedding processions. This imitation fluting they accomplished either by blowing little whistles or merely by whistling with their lips. The second imitation was a mock funeral procession. Here they again copied the loud wailing they had heard from the professional mourners of that day. And such a demonstration they mimicked to a point of remarkable accuracy, even beating themselves on the head and breasts in the way in which the hired mourners, usually women, always performed at real funerals.

The women in the Parable of the Leaven (Matt. 13, 33) took "three measures of meal." The term used in the original is seah which is a dry measure amounting to approximately one and one-half pecks. Dough was kept until it had grown sour; this in Eastern countries was the leaven, the ferment for fresh dough, or "Sauerteig" as the Germans designate it. This leaven she mixed with the "meal," or flour, together with a little water. The "meal" in the case of the rich was mostly wheat, whereas the poorer people used barley. The seemingly large amount is explained in that the Hebrew housewife did her baking for several days, as is the custom today also. The dough was made into flat cakes and then baked, by being laid inside a jar which had been heated. Some times loaves were placed into a hole in the ground, which had previously held a fire, to remain there over night to bake. It was also customary at times to take all the dough to the village baker, who would do the baking and who would charge a loaf or two as his fee.

The disuse of leaven on certain occasions was an important part of Jewish rituals (Ex. 12, 15, 19). This custom originated at the time of the exodus from the land of Egypt. At that time the children of Israel left in such great haste that they had no time to prepare leavened

bread . This disuse of leaven was, therefore, a symbol of their hasty departure from the Egyptian bondage.

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure (Matt. 13, 44) has always caused considerable comment. This custom of hiding valuables, as gold, money, or jewelry, was brought about by the heavy traffic of robbers. Palestine was always exposed to the thievery of individuals or of plundering tribes, so it became the general usage to bury valuables. If this treasure was discovered and the owner did not appear to claim it, then this treasure reverted to the owner of the land upon which it was found - the reason why the man in the parable rushed off to purchase the land. Broadus speaks on this point, "We are told that in the East men of wealth have been known to divide their estate into three parts, one invested in trade, a second part in jewels easily kept about the person, and the remainder buried <sup>in</sup> earth." <sup>3</sup> The author also quotes a case of a South Carolina shoemaker, who, in the War of Secession, buried five hundred dollars in gold. Since the shoemaker died before he could tell anyone of the place of burial, it still lies hidden away in the earth. That this was very prevalent in the East is further shown by examples taken from Geikie - "In India, during the mutiny, treasures were hidden in the strangest places. At Lucknow, a tank was dug and a vault constructed below it, into which the treasures were put, and the water was then let in over it. A box of magnificent jewels was hidden in a hole at the top of a palm tree. Immense hoards were built into walls, or buried in fields and sown over with thick crops." <sup>4</sup> In view of this custom of burying riches, it consequently became quite popular also to organize searching parties to find such treasure (Job 3, 21; Prov. 2, 4). Especially in recent times many are known to have invested much capital

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3. Broadus, Commentary on Gospel of Matthew, p. 304, 304.

4. Geikie, op. cit., p. 628, vol. I.

in such treasure-hunting expeditions.

Although the Parable of the Goodly Pearls (Matt. 13, 45) might be classified with the discussion of fishing, the writer thought it preferable to discuss this matter here because of the close affinity of this parable to the preceding one, that of the hidden treasure. Pearls, as the Gospel narrative indicates, were considered a very costly and precious article of commerce. The merchantman was probably a dealer in pearls, a pearl specialist - very similar to the diamond gaugers of today. At that time a pearl was regarded as highly as a diamond today. Then, too, they were also used by women as ornaments. Cleopatra possessed two famous pearls which were valued at about four hundred thousand dollars, and at that time the purchasing power of money was at least ten times as great as now.

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