

# FINDING THE LOST



FINDING  
THE LOST  
CULTURAL KEYS  
TO LUKE 15

Kenneth E. Bailey

*To Dale K. Milligan  
with inexpressible gratitude  
for all the grace  
of all the years*



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# Foreword

*Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* offers insights at the level of theory that ultimately relate to current concerns. The assumption is that a broadened and deepened understanding of the Scriptures and of the Christian faith will clarify and enrich our analysis of issues that beset us and in so doing help us to grasp Christ's message. The intended meaning as well as the implications and applications of the parables of the prodigal son, the lost coin, and the lost sheep, the subject of this volume, have been standard fare in New Testament studies.

Concordia Publishing House encourages Christians to think theologically about all matters of life. Exploration of an issue must grow out of reliable probing and research of the Scriptures and every other related, legitimate field of study. That may not always yield theological applications which differ markedly from the past. The greater value of such study lies in the learning process and in the assurance that the issue has been properly addressed.

Kenneth E. Bailey has immersed himself for many years in studying the languages, religions, and cultures of the Middle East as he served the church professionally. His present book, as well as his previous ones, demonstrate how meaningful the biblical text becomes when a broad background of study and analysis is permitted to illuminate the text. The encumbrances of Western cultural reflection may be only grudgingly discarded. But Western readers will gain an array of new insights from this volume and will be fascinated by the author's nuances of interpretation that would be otherwise overlooked. Readers will be amazed at what has passed by them in previous probings of these parables in Luke's Gospel. They will be immensely enriched by the author's findings and colorful exposition.

A glance at the list of abbreviations provides a hint of the thoroughness of the author's scholarly exploration. These resources together with the bibliography offer a good basis for those who wish to pursue further study.

## FINDING THE LOST: CULTURAL KEYS TO LUKE 15

*Finding the Lost* does not claim to provide final interpretations, nor can any research ever be definitive for what is not empirically demonstrable or verifiable. But the author's thorough understanding and his rich conceptual treatment of the parables yield unique insights and make fascinating reading. At the same time his research satisfies our personal needs and nourishes and contributes to an inner consistency for him and for us that is intellectually honest and defensible. He exudes a genuineness of faith and of person that brings a breath of fresh air to biblical study.

*The Publisher*

# Preface

This study is an attempt to describe a “love affair.” The love affair is between the writer and the text of Luke 15 and has extended for over 30 years in Egypt, Lebanon, Jerusalem, and Cyprus. No one can adequately describe a love affair. I will do my best.

The love affair began in the late '50s in Jerusalem where I heard Bishop Kenneth Cragg lecture on the Arabic language debates that took place in the Middle East between Christians and Muslims during the Middle Ages. I knew of those debates and of their polemical character. But Bishop Cragg explained to us that the parable of the prodigal son featured prominently in the confrontations. Muslim scholars noted that the prodigal left home and then returned to it with no assistance. As traditionally interpreted, the parable has no cross, no suffering, no incarnation, and no mediator.

As a young listener to the bishop's lectures I went into shock. This parable is the most comprehensive statement from Jesus about how people are reconciled to God! Are all hints of the atonement missing from it? Was Jesus a good Muslim, and did St. Paul make a Christian out of him? As regards this parable, what could be said about the mind of Jesus on the question of the atonement? Did these questions have answers?

Bishop Craig thoughtfully noted that the “agony of rejected love” is suffered by the father all through the story. The father's willingness to endure that agony makes possible the prodigal's return home at the end of the story. Thus, noted the bishop, hints of the cross are reflected in the pain of the father's heart. This was very helpful, but I sensed that there was more.

I turned initially to the commentators of the past and present. Many of them failed even to take note of the problem. Some who saw the point admitted the difficulty, shrugged their exegetical shoulders, and pressed on. After all, they wrote, the parable is not a compendium of theology! Others observed that this parable stands in the center of the “travel narrative” (Luke 9:51–19:48). This central

section of Luke opens with the affirmation that Jesus “set his face resolutely towards Jerusalem” (NEB). Thus the cross is “in, around, and under” the entire 10 chapters. It is not specifically noted in Luke 15, the argument goes, but the long shadow of the cross is cast over the entire travel narrative. This was helpful. As a Christian it made sense to me. But the old sheikh of the medieval debates would not have been satisfied. Neither was I. Thus the love affair was launched.

For more than three decades the present writer has lectured on the New Testament in the Arabic language across the Middle East. This has been primarily from Syria to the Sudan. Traditional storytellers share a common culture with their listeners. Penetrating to the value judgments and assumptions of that culture is a critical key for interpreting stories in any age and from any culture. The same is true with regard to the stories of Jesus. As we will note below, the findings of this contextual search have been a critical key to unlock the secrets of the parables. But the recording of my findings have been piecemeal.

In 1973 I was privileged to record the first stages of my quest, thanks to Concordia Publishing House (Bailey, *Cross*). A second stage was recorded in briefer and more technical fashion in 1976 (Bailey, *Poet*, 142–206). A recent article (1990) marked a third try (Bailey, *Psalm*). What then justifies a fourth attempt to capture the meaning of this inexhaustible Biblical treasure?

Recently I have found myself to be like a person who for 30 years enjoys the beauty of a garden walled with plastered stone. Then in the fading light of a particular evening the person’s eye is suddenly caught by what appears to be a faint blue line in the plastered wall. The patron of the garden turns aside to examine the line and to his amazement finds it to be in the shape of an arch. Digging feverishly through the plaster, a sealed doorway appears. With intense excitement he breaks through the doorway to discover a long abandoned room, and in the room a chest—of gold!

Having for three decades made Luke 15 the centerpiece of my understanding of Jesus and the New Testament, and having tried to read everything of note—East and West—that has been written in the past and present on this chapter, I thought I had done my homework on all the important aspects of the three parables that the chapter contains. Then recently, by accident, the “blue line”

## PREFACE

appeared. This was the discovery of the fact that Luke 15 can be seen as an expansion of Psalm 23.

All of the above has left me with an awareness that only piecemeal sections of the material assembled on this chapter have thus far appeared in print. I am profoundly grateful to the editors of Concordia Publishing House for the opportunity to do my best to put it all together and to attempt a full presentation of what has been given to me, as I have earnestly sought, in the light of Middle Eastern culture, to understand this great chapter.

The 20th-century literature on the parables of Jesus is enormous (Kissinger, 231–415; Scott, 431–52). Recently the continued flow of that literature seems to increase rather than diminish. Across the years my debt to C. H. Dodd, J. Jeremias, T. W. Manson, and many others has been immeasurable. Yet in this study, notes and references are few. This slim volume is not intended to be a full review of current scholarly opinion in the West. Rather I have tried to add new data to the insights and knowledge already shared in the Christian world with regard to this great trilogy. For this reason alone, extensive references have been omitted.

Inexpressible thanks is due to all others, past and present, who have assisted me with my love affair. Early Christian scholars in the Arabic and Syriac Christian traditions are at the top of the list. The authors, compilers, transcribers, and translators of the Mishnah, the early Midrashim, and the two Talmuds are not far behind them. In addition to modern Western scholarship, countless numbers of students, friends and participants in seminars (East and West) have challenged and encouraged me to try again and again to search out meaning. To all of them I am deeply grateful.

All sources are fully noted in the bibliography. Following the method of the New Century Bible, references appear in the text. The notes are reserved for additional information or discussion that is secondary to the main argument and may not be of interest to all readers. With regard to the English translations cited, the Greek NT has always been open before me; yet there is heavy reliance on both the NRSV and the RSV. The centuries of Syriac and Arabic versions have significantly influenced my choice of words in critical places.

Modern post-Enlightenment historical science demands “objec-

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tivity.” With regard to this expectation and the study of the Bible, Lesslie Newbigin has written,

This “objectivity” involves the absence of prior commitment to the truth of the text, but the presence of a prior commitment to the validity of the scientific method (p. viii).

With Newbigin the present writer finds himself committed in both directions. The goal of this study is to discover as precisely as possible the original intent of Jesus of Nazareth as he created the parables recorded in Luke 15. At the same time, I am a Christian believer and am writing “from faith to faith” in the hope that readers of this brief work will find their faith strengthened and deepened by seeing Jesus as a theologian, even as my faith has been so strengthened.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Kenneth E. Bailey

Easter 1991  
Jerusalem and Cyprus

## General Abbreviations

(See also the bibliography.)

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Ar.          | Arabic  |
| Arc. Gr.-Ar. | archaic Greek-to-Arabic version   |
| BAGD         | W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> |
| b.           | <i>ben</i> (son of)   |
| BT           | Babylonian Talmud   |
| Cop.         | Coptic  |
| IDB          | <i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>  |
| JT           | Jerusalem (Palestinian) Talmud  |
| M            | Mishnah   |
| NTS          | <i>New Testament Studies</i>  |
| R.           | Rabbi   |
| Si. Gr.-Ar.  | Mt. Sinai Greek-to-Arabic version   |
| Sir.         | Sirach  |
| TDNT         | <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>  |
| Vat.         | Vatican   |
| ZNW          | <i>Zeitschrift für die neu testamentliche Wissenschaft</i>  |

## Tractates Quoted

(Mishnah, Babylonian Talmud, Jerusalem Talmud)

|       |                       |        |             |
|-------|-----------------------|--------|-------------|
| Ab.   | 'Aboth (Pirke 'Aboth) | Meg.   | Megilla     |
| B.B.  | Baba Bathra           | M.Kat. | Mo'ed Katan |
| B.K.  | Baba Kamma            | Pe'a   | Pe'a        |
| B.M.  | Baba Metsi'a          | Pes.   | Pesahim     |
| Bek.  | Bekoroth              | Sanh.  | Sanhedrin   |
| Ber.  | Berakoth              | Shab.  | Shabbath    |
| Dem.  | Demai                 | Sof.   | Soferim     |
| Erub. | 'Erubin               | Sot.   | Sota        |
| Hag.  | Hagiga                | Sukk.  | Sukka       |
| Kel.  | Kelim                 | Taan.  | Ta'anith    |
| Ket.  | Ketuboth              | Toh.   | Toharoth    |
| Kidd. | Kiddushin             |        |             |

# Introduction

Every student of the New Testament gradually develops a series of lenses through which he/she examines the text. For the serious student these lenses are conscious and reflected. Thus it seems appropriate to expose the reader to the answers to some of the major methodological questions that I have hammered out across decades of study of the NT in a Middle Eastern context. The reader will then be fully informed regarding the various lenses brought into focus for this study. If the reader prefers a different set of lenses, it will then, hopefully, be easier to sift the insights here set forward in that the vantage point of the author is exposed.

## 1. Jesus as Metaphorical Theologian

Our first lens views Jesus as a theologian and not merely as an ethical example for the Christian life. At least since the fifth century B.C., and the great days of classical Greece, the Western mind has done its serious thinking in concepts. In most forms of discourse, we from the West begin with an idea and then occasionally *illustrate* that idea with a simile, metaphor, or parable. The conceptual language is primary and the metaphor or parable is secondary. The first is critical, the second is optional. If the listener/reader is intelligent enough, the speaker/writer may dispense with illustrations. For indeed, the story is presented only to clarify the meaning of the concept. If people are able to catch that meaning without using up time with illustrations, so much the better. The illustration is useful for simplification, the Western mind thinks. It aids memory. It assists in adding emotional coloration and in catching and holding attention. But through all of this, the pictorial remains a secondary form of speech. The concept continues as the primary form of theological language. A theological discourse is created by attaching one concept to another by means of logic. Philosophy then provides an overall structure for the material. This has been the primary Greco-

Roman form of theological discourse and thereby the dominant Western form. It has been in use for centuries.

In the early years of the Christian era, Platonism was the dominant philosophy. Theology was then done in Platonic terms. Aristotelian philosophy dominated the Middle Ages, and St. Thomas did his theologizing in an Aristotelian, philosophical framework. The same patterns prevailed through scholasticism, rationalism, Hegelianism, and existentialism, and now process philosophy has given birth to process theology. We can but offer gratitude and pay tribute to the diligent men and women who have struggled with the dominant philosophical systems of the day and who have across the centuries used the structures of those systems as pathways of the mind along which the Gospel might travel. But there is another way to "do theology."

Middle Eastern creators of meaning do not offer a concept and then illustrate (or choose not to illustrate) with a metaphor or parable. For them the equation is reversed. Rather than

*concept + illustration*  
the Middle Easterner offers  
*parable + conceptual interpretation.*

The Middle Eastern mind creates meaning by the use of simile, metaphor, proverb, parable, and dramatic action. The person involved is not *illustrating* a concept but is rather creating meaning by reference to something concrete. The primary language is that of the metaphor/parable and the secondary language is the conceptual interpretation of the metaphor that in Biblical literature is often given with it. To assure the reader that the present writer still remembers his Western roots, having set forth the *concept*, an *illustration* is now perhaps appropriate.

The above can be illustrated by noting Johannine literature which affirms that the believer is "born of God" (1 John 4:7; 5:1; John 3:5). Thus female imagery is used to enrich the reader's understanding of God. God gives birth to the believer. The author creates meaning by use of a powerful metaphor. Particularly in 1 John 4:7 the metaphor is then surrounded with conceptual language that sets the direction of any interpretation. Starting with the interpretation in the text, exegetes for centuries have struggled to

## INTRODUCTION

adequately conceptualize the meaning created by the metaphor. Quickly two realities become evident.

First, conceptualization/interpretation of the metaphor is not a strange aberration imposed on the Biblical metaphor by a non-Middle Eastern mind. Existentialists have decried *any* form of conceptualization of metaphor (Via, 2–107). But Biblical authors themselves often encase their metaphors in conceptualizations which focus the reader’s interpretive reflection. Dozens of cases of this phenomenon are on display in Isaiah alone. One example is Is. 55:8–9, which is structured as follows:

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| For my <i>thoughts</i> are not your <i>thoughts</i> ,    | THOUGHTS |
| nor are your <i>ways</i> my <i>ways</i> , says the LORD. | WAYS     |
| For as the heavens are higher than the earth,            | parable  |
| so are my <i>ways</i> higher than your <i>ways</i>       | WAYS     |
| and my <i>thoughts</i> than your <i>thoughts</i> .       | THOUGHTS |

This deceptively simple stanza of prophetic speech has metaphorical language at its center. Around that center there are two semantic envelopes. The inner envelope has to do with contrasting the *ways* of God to those of his people. The outer concentrates similarly on their *thoughts*. The reader is not left with a metaphor which is like a floating balloon that drifts freely with the wind of the interpreter. Rather a specific conceptual framework encases the metaphor. A second example of this same structure is in the well-known text of Is. 53:7–8a:

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| He was <i>oppressed</i> , and he was <i>afflicted</i> ,            | INJUSTICE |
| yet he did <i>not open</i> his <i>mouth</i> ;                      | SILENCE   |
| like a <i>lamb</i> that is led to the <i>slaughter</i> ,           | parable   |
| and like a <i>sheep</i> that before its <i>shearers</i> is silent, | parable   |
| so he did <i>not open</i> his <i>mouth</i> .                       | SILENCE   |
| By a <i>perversion</i> of <i>justice</i> he was taken away.        | INJUSTICE |

Again, the parable appears in the center and is *encased* with concepts that direct any reflection on the parable’s meaning. The meaning is created by *metaphor*. At the same time the metaphor, as it were, “cries out” for conceptual interpretation which appears in the text as a frame set around the metaphor. Thus concepts appear *with* the parable in Biblical literature and are not strangers to it (cf. also Is. 5:1–7).

Chapter 1

# The Good Shepherd and the Lost Sheep

## Luke 15:1–7

Before turning to the text, the setting in Luke 15 needs examination.

In its simplest form the gospel of Luke can be understood to fall into three sections. These are as follows:

1. The prolog, infancy narratives, and Galilean ministry (1:1–9:50)
2. The “travel narrative” (9:51–19:48)
3. The passion and resurrection (20:1–24:53)

Luke 15:1–32 is near the center of the so-called “travel narrative.” Thus this special section of Luke’s gospel must be briefly examined.

The 10-chapter collection at the center of Luke’s gospel concentrates on the teachings of Jesus. Its opening verse reads, “As the time approached when he was to be taken up to heaven, he set his face resolutely towards Jerusalem” (9:51 NEB). Thus already in 9:51 Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and the long shadow of the cross falls over the entire narrative, for at its end the passion begins.

As indicated, the synoptic problem is beyond the scope of this study. However, these 10 chapters can be seen as a special section regardless of what solution to the synoptic problem is adopted. The material itself is “special” in that it does not appear in Mark. Any diagram of synoptic relationships quickly shows that Mark and Luke have nearly the same outline except that almost all of Luke 9:51–19:48 is missing from Mark (cf. Barr). More than 20 parables of Jesus appear in this section. Many of them, (like Luke 15:1–32) appear *only* in this travel narrative. Thereby a brief glance at the way this material is composed is appropriate.

Many recent scholars have found this narrative without any order (cf. Fitzmyer, *Luke*, I, 825; Bailey, *Poet*, 79, n. 1). Yet the idea that

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND THE LOST SHEEP

Luke has composed/edited the material around the “journey theme” persists. This I find problematic. Jesus starts *resolutely* for Jerusalem in 9:51. By 10:38–39 he has arrived in Bethany at the edge of Jerusalem and the goal of his journey (?) is reached. But then strangely, in 13:22 he is still on his way (?) and there are towns and villages yet to traverse before he reaches the Holy City. More complications appear in 13:31 where he is warned about Herod’s plot to kill him; thus presumably he is back in Herod’s territory in Galilee or Perea. In 17:11 he is “between Samaria and Galilee.” Finally, as it were, he “comes out of the woods” in 19:1 in Jericho and for the second time proceeds to Jerusalem. Fitzmyer reaffirms the traditional “travel motif” point of view but holds that “Luke’s knowledge of Palestinian geography is not what it should be” (*Luke*, I, 824). This is hardly adequate for an intelligent man (Luke) who has visited the Holy Land. Where Bethany is and where Samaria and Galilee are in relation to Jerusalem is rather basic! Luke claims contact with eyewitnesses. Any one of them or any other Palestinian Jewish Christian or apostle (including Paul) could have given him this information in 30 seconds. Ellis comments succinctly on Conzelmann’s defense of the “travel motif” and notes, “Conzelmann . . . must assume Luke’s ignorance of the very geographical elements that the Evangelist supposedly is concerned to stress” (p. 147).

Luke *is* an intelligent man. This *is* a special section of his gospel. Luke must have had *some* reason for the order which presents itself to us in this section. As noted above, the material does not follow a geographical progression across the countryside from Galilee to Jerusalem. What then might that order be?

It is my conviction that the entire section has a precise outline that is fashioned after models unfamiliar to us. My suggestion, published some years ago in an imprecise form (*Poet*, 79–85), is that the material is organized around nine topics that start with reference to “saving events in Jerusalem” and end with that same subject. This makes a total of 10 sections. The list then repeats, only it does so backwards and thus ends with the same topic of “saving events in Jerusalem.” The 19 sections thus exhibit inverted parallelism (chiasm).

Some of the parallels are unmistakable. There are two sections on prayer (11:1–13 and 18:1–14). Why are these not assembled in one place in the text? Two people ask the question, “What must I

## Chapter 4

# **The Good Father and His Two Lost Sons**

## **Part 2: The Older Son**

### **Luke 15:25–32**

The participation theater discussed in the previous chapter now comes to its climax. The audience heard their views on sin and salvation authentically presented in the speech and actions of the prodigal in the far country. They observed him return confident that after considerable negotiation he would manage to get the backing of his father to become a craftsman and earn his way. Then suddenly and dramatically the father breaks into the story to offer costly love to the undeserving son. As he accepts that costly love the prodigal is reconciled. He abandons the plan to become a craftsman. The banquet is ordered and all eagerly expect a grand occasion.

Now the participating audience is given a voice. In the person of the older son their response to Jesus' welcome of sinners is expressed in words. Again the parable authentically represents the views of the audience as the parable rushes on to its climax. The text is found in figure 14 (my translation).

The overall structure of the material is nearly identical to the first half of the parable. There is one significant change. This second drama is incomplete. It has seven stanzas. There should be eight. The last is missing because the audience, now on the stage, must finish the unfinished play. The cultural details of this critical second half of the story will need to be examined with care.

Yet a word in passing on the structure may be meaningful. In stanza 1 the older son stands aloof rather than enter the banquet with joy. The hoped-for missing final scene I have tried to recon-

**Figure 14**

**Two Sons Have I Not—Part 2 (Luke 15:25–32)**

Now the elder son was in the field,

- |    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 1. | and when he came and approached the house,<br>he heard music and dancing.<br>And he called one of the boys<br>and asked what this meant.   | HE STANDS ALOOF                          |
| 2. | And he said to him,<br>“Your brother has come,<br>and your father has killed the fatted calf<br>because he recovered him with peace.”<br>Then he became angry and refused to go in.  | YOUR BROTHER—PEACE<br>(a feast)<br>ANGER |
| 3. | So his father came out<br>and began to plead with him.   | COSTLY LOVE                              |
| 4. | But he answered his father,<br>“Listen, for all these years,<br>I have been working like a slave for you,<br>and I never disobeyed your commandments,<br>yet you never gave me even a young goat<br>so that I might celebrate with my friends. | MY ACTIONS<br>MY PAY                     |
| 5. | But when this son of yours came back,<br>who has devoured your living<br>with prostitutes,<br>you killed the fatted calf for him!”   | HIS ACTIONS<br>HIS PAY                   |
| 6. | And the father said to him, “Beloved son,<br>you are always with me,<br>and all that is mine is yours.   | COSTLY LOVE                              |
| 7. | And to celebrate and rejoice was necessary,<br>for this your brother was dead<br>and has come to life,<br>he was lost and has been found.”   | YOUR BROTHER—SAFE<br>(a feast)<br>JOY!   |
| 8. | [ And the older son embraced his father<br>and entered the house<br>and was reconciled to his brother<br>and to his father.<br>And the father celebrated together with his <i>two</i> sons.]   | ?????????????<br>?????????????           |

(Bailey, *Poet*, 191)

struct at the end in the above figure (stanza 8). This is the ending the father longs for. Stanza 2 is a report of the return of the prodigal,

## Chapter 5

# Luke 15 and Psalm 23

## A Vision Expanded

The shepherd psalm has been a favorite among many for centuries. This prominence is evidenced in tractate Pesahim of the Babylonian Talmud. In a discussion of the liturgy of the Passover celebration the following appears:

Our Rabbis taught: At the fourth [cup] he concludes the *Hallel* and recites the great *Hallel*: this is the view of R. Tarfon. Others say, *'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.'* What comprises the great *Hallel*? Rab Judah said: From *'O give thanks'* until *'the rivers of Babylon'* [i.e., Psalms 105–36]. While R. Johanan said: From *'A song of ascents'* until *'the rivers of Babylon'* [i.e., Psalms 120–36]. R. Aha b. Jacob said: From *'for the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself'* until *'the rivers of Babylon'* [i.e., Ps. 135:4–136:26] (BT Pes., 118a.).

Rabbi Tarphon was of the second generation of Tannaim (ca. A.D. 90–130, cf. Strack, *Introd.*, p. 105). Thus the discussion reflected in this text is early. Mark records that the last supper concluded with the singing of a hymn (Mark 14:26; Matt. 26:30). This hymn is commonly understood to be the second half of the *Hallel* (i.e., Psalms 105–136; cf. Taylor, 548; Cranfield, 428). The above Talmudic text would indicate that if Jesus and the apostles sang a part of the *Hallel*, it may have been considerably less than all of Psalms 105–36. But the striking part of this rabbinic discussion is the fact that for some rabbis the psalm sung on that sacred occasion was the shepherd psalm! Thus Psalm 23 could have been the hymn sung at the conclusion of the Last Supper (Mark 14:26).

In any case this Talmudic reference is clear evidence of the importance Psalm 23 had for the Jewish community in the early centuries. If it was an option for the conclusion of the Passover meal, it was already a much loved and honored psalm in those times.

## LUKE 15 AND PSALM 23

At various points in the previous chapters we have noted some comparisons between Psalm 23 and Luke 15. My intention here is to present all the parallels we have observed between these two great texts and to reflect briefly on the theological significance of such parallels for a clearer understanding of Luke 15. Some repetition and summary has proved necessary in order to bring scattered ideas together and thus to allow this topic its own integrity. Initially, figure 9, shown in chapter 1, needs reexamining. It is as follows:

---

### Figure 9

| <b>Psalm 23</b>                              | <b>Luke 15</b>                                |
|--|---|
| The good shepherd and a lost sheep (vv. 1–4) | The good shepherd and a lost sheep (vv. 4–7)  |
|  | The good woman and a lost coin (vv. 8–10)     |
| A noble host and a costly banquet (vv. 5–6)  | A noble host and a costly banquet (vv. 11–32) |

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Each text opens with a story about a good shepherd. Each ends with a noble host and a costly banquet. In Ps. 23:5a God prepares a banquet. Thus, in the psalm, God does the work of a woman, for women in the Middle East have traditionally prepared the meals. This theme is present yet muted in the psalm. Luke 15 records a full parable which positions the “good woman” in parallel with the “good shepherd” and the “good father.”

Keeping this overall structure in mind, 13 points of comparison between the two texts can be noted. Summarized these are as follows: