

Parables play an important role in the Bible. Readers associate parables with Jesus's ministry, as indeed he taught about God's kingdom using parables and at times explained those parables to his disciples. Other books beyond the gospel books, though, also employ parables, generally shorter in length than Jesus's parables but still parables in form. Indeed, Jesus sometimes borrowed his parable's form from parables or allegory already in the Hebrew Bible. A parable is a story or similar construct meant to reveal a truth indirectly, one that the reader or hearer must draw. A very short parable, so short as to be less a truth-laden tale and more like an evocative phrase or sentence, would work more like allegory. The words describe one thing while suggesting something deeper, carrying more significance, instructing the one who is willing to learn.

Jesus intimated that he used parables to attract hearers who had the heart to learn from him. Let those who have ears hear. He also intimated that he used parables to repel those who did not have that heart. Some persons are ever hearing, never understanding. Jesus also appears to have used parables to buy his ministry time, so that hearers antagonistic to his cause had only indirect evidence to use against him. His parables permitted him to teach about his coming kingdom without suffering prompt arrest for blasphemy. Arrest and execution would come later, after Jesus had taught, trained, and prepared his disciples and other hearers, often through parables. As with symbols, a key to not reading the wrong things or too much into a parable is to first recognize the context. What was the preacher or prophet trying to communicate to what audience? Then, let persons and things within the parable represent the few persons or constituencies, whether God, religious leaders, believers, or non-believers, whom the parable modeled.