



# **Evaluation of Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 in the light of Reformed hermeneutics**

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Dissertation accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Arts in New Testament* at the North West University

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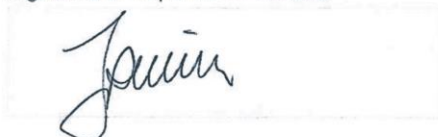
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am full of praise to God Almighty, whose Spirit I depended on from the point of conceptualising this study till its completion. I learnt, and gratefully so, that the Holy Spirit can be so real, so close and so involved in the life of God's child on an academic expedition. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Prof. Dr. Francois P. Viljoen, my Supervisor, was such a patient and concerned father. Although he and I were yet to meet physically, he made the relationship such a relaxed one, allowing for confidence on my part to approach him with sometimes childlike questions. His willingness and promptness to respond, his generous commendations, his kind corrections, and calm assurances are some of the things I will always cherish in him. Thank you, Prof.

Mrs. Annelize Liebenberg helped a great deal at the level of the Faculty. Other staff were on hand to assist every time I called out. I am grateful.

A large chunk of the finances that I needed for this programme came from the postgraduate and merit bursary awards I received from the North-West University. It still baffles me that the institution was that kind. I was overwhelmed by further interventions that I enjoyed from Elder Enamidem Umoh, Deacon Hope Amos and wife, Love, Deaconess Eno Ifiok Akpabot, and Deaconess Aniebiet Udoh. Deacon Hope's office eventually became a safe haven for my work. I hereby register my appreciation to each one of you.

Rev. Fr. Etido Jerome and Elder Uko Akpatang inconvenienced themselves a great deal to ensure overseas purchase and delivery of most of the textbooks that I depended on for the study. At some point in the study, Miss Imo Akpabot helped me with her laptop computer and seemed to have forgotten that she owned one. Yet a bigger one came when my friend, Mrs. Helen Ante, invited me over to her house in Uyo for a gift of a brand new laptop, unbeknownst to her that I was having a borrowed one at the time.

These are acts of kindness I will not forget. My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Elder Akamanwam Itang was ever willing to help with some administrative issues whenever they arose. Miss Blessing Esau, Miss Aniefon Michael, Miss Favour Felix, Miss Medlene Emmanuel, Miss Mercy Ime and Miss Ekeno Unwong helped in different aspects of preparing the document, mostly free of charge. Your sacrifices were such a relief to me. God bless and establish you and all others who in various ways helped me come through this study.

I specially acknowledge the support and encouragement I enjoyed from my wife, Emediong. Her patience was elastic, her understanding immeasurable, and her intercession priceless. She covered up for what should have been Daddy's inadequacies, while I bent over my reading table. God will continue to bless and keep you, *My Endless Love (M.E.L.)*. So also our children cooperated in no small measure. I sometimes had to respond late to their request for assistance with their homework. In all, they were patient with me – and I am happy that they themselves are getting along well academically. Prince Andikan, Princess Uyama-Abasi and Bishop Iberedem, this is your salutation!

*Gracias!*

## ABSTRACT

This study seeks to evaluate Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 in the light of Reformed hermeneutics. This research interest is informed by a combination of two main assumptions, namely: (1) That in interpreting Scriptures, most Pentecostals seek for the immediate meaning(s) of the text, and do so in such a way that it fits their experience and serves their pragmatic agendas. This is counterbalanced with Reformed approach to Scripture, which in recent times is said to combine a number of diachronic and synchronic approaches to generate meaning of biblical passages and therefore believes that although its interpretation is not infallible, it is nonetheless as close as possible to the communicative intent of the text and is therefore reliable. (2) That in the history of interpretation of the Gospel parables in general, they are understood differently; that Matthew 25:14-30 in particular is interpreted variously, mostly without recourse to its literary or cultural context; and that the concepts in the parable are interpreted anachronistically. The study therefore proceeds with the central theoretical argument that when viewed in the light of Reformed hermeneutics, some Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 are unacceptable and therefore implausible.

Chapter 2 shows that parables constitute a distinct genre in the Synoptic Gospels and are central in Jesus' teaching. "Parable" in the New Testament traces its roots to **משל** (transliterated "mashal") in the Hebrew Bible and **παραβολή** (transliterated "parabolē") in the Septuagint. Parables are extended figures of speech whose narrative claim(s) is (are) fictional but verisimilar in the narrated world, and whose truth-significance is realistic in the referenced world. They elucidate, metaphorically transfer meaning from one domain of understanding (usually the natural world) to another domain (usually the religious world), prophetically call God's people to change their ways and return to God, and sometimes function as weapons of conflict. They presuppose the kingdom of God, seek to explain different motifs of the kingdom, and in fact make sense only against the backdrop of the message of the kingdom.

Chapter 3 treats the theory of "biblical hermeneutics" in general and of "Pentecostal hermeneutics" in particular. On the assumption that the Bible lends itself to human interpretation but also demands correct interpretation, it understands biblical

hermeneutics as the discipline that harnesses all necessary tools to validly and effectively interpret biblical texts. On the other hand, it sees Pentecostal hermeneutics as an experience-oriented, narrative-oriented, and praxis-oriented practice of biblical interpretation that emphasises the active role of the Holy Spirit in generating meaning from the canonical texts, and in such a way that promotes the identity and meets the needs of the Pentecostal community. Pentecostal hermeneutics emphasises the immanence of God, the narrativity of the Scriptures, the role of the charismatic community, and the role of the Holy Spirit. In addition to the authority of Scripture, Pentecostals have regard for personal experience. A major hermeneutical approach among Pentecostals is “Bible Reading Method”, an inductive reading that partly involves a synchronic strategy and partly involves a modified proof-text approach.

Chapter 4 examines forty (40) sample Pentecostal interpretations (SPIs) of Matthew 25:14-30 randomly picked from various sample source types (STs). In consideration of the context of interpretation (Col) and the actual interpretation of each of them, the SPIs are found to diverge widely, with 17 samples (42.5%) apparently focusing on finance/success/wealth, 6 samples (15.0%) on Christ’s second coming, and the rest on a variety of other interests.

Chapter 5 attempts a Reformed interpretation (RI) of Matthew 25:14-30, comprehensively and critically combining both synchronic and diachronic tools. Among other factors, the text and its context are primarily determinative of meaning. Being a parable, such Reformed principles as its theological significance, its meaning in historical and literary contexts, as well as its meaning in relation to its frames and other neighbouring parables, are explored for generating its meaning. The conclusion reached is that Matthew 25:14-30 is a parable about the *parousia* of Christ and of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν [= “the kingdom of heaven”], and that it seeks to call the disciples of Christ to be vigilant/watchful/ready for the *parousia*, in view of the fact that the exact time of its advent is not known by any man. It also concludes that these disciples need to serve Christ faithfully and profitably while waiting for this event.

In the light of the conclusion of Chapter 5, Chapter 6 seeks to know if the SPIs focused on the motif of vigilance for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. This is done by comparing and contrasting the conclusions of the SPIs with the conclusion of the RI. In the end, it is found that none of the 40 SPIs addresses the motif of the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, but rather focus on a variety of other subjects that neither the text nor its context suggests. The investigation also makes clear that the methods used by these Pentecostals are anachronistic, allegorical, as well as a good deal of eisegesis. Chapter 6 therefore reaches a conclusion that confirms the central theoretical argument of this research, namely, that some Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30, when examined in the light of Reformed hermeneutics, produce questionable results and are therefore implausible.

Finally, Chapter 7 summarises the arguments that lead up to the conclusion that the SPIs of Matthew 25:14-30 investigated in this study are unacceptable, insofar as they do not focus on the eschatological βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. It therefore recommends that while it is needful to do further Reformed study on Matthew 25:14-30, as well as to investigate more Pentecostal interpretations of the passage, the available evidence simply indicates that Pentecostals need to stop and re-assess their hermeneutical methods. They need to learn from the insights of Reformed principles for interpreting parables in particular, as well as from general Reformed hermeneutical procedures that Chapter 5 of this study clearly highlights. These recommendations are motivated by, *inter alia*, the warning of Paul to Timothy to do everything within his power to “correctly [handle] the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 KEYWORDS

Evaluation, Pentecostal, Interpretation, Matthew 25:14-30, Parable, Talent, Reformed, Hermeneutics.

### 1.2 BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

#### 1.2.1 BACKGROUND

Jesus' use of parables as a teaching tool was phenomenal. The Synoptic Gospels especially record several of these parables. In fact, Matthew observes: "Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable" (Matthew 13:34). Mark makes a similar remark: "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable..." (Mark 4:34). However, Jesus' parables have been subjected to various interpretations, some of which border on error.

According to Fee and Stuart (2003:149), "for all their charm and simplicity, the parables have suffered a fate of misinterpretation in the Church second only to the Revelation". Neal (2012:1) agrees, observing that parables as a major genre in Jesus' teachings have been subjected to numerous interpretations. It is against the background of these observations that this study seeks to evaluate, in the light of Reformed hermeneutics, how some selected Pentecostal exegetes interpret the parable of the talents.

#### 1.2.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Hey (2001:1), "Pentecostals emphasise immediacy of the text and multiple dimensions of meaning. This allows interpretations to develop that are suited to the particular interests and needs of different groups." Fee (1991:86), himself a Pentecostal, observes that in place of scientific hermeneutics, some Pentecostals "have developed a kind of pragmatic hermeneutics – obey what should be taken literally; spiritualise, allegorise, or devotionalise the rest". In addition to this, Pentecostals tend to approach

the text within the framework of their personal experience. Again, Fee (1991:86) says, “In a sense, the Pentecostal tends to exegete his or her experience.”

These observations play out in the interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30. An example of this is the apparent use of a proof-text method to identify the parable as “[o]ne of Jesus’ most significant parables regarding work ... set in the context of investments” (TOW Project, s.a.). Besides investment of money, it also sees this parable as addressing a wide variety of gifts which God gives to individuals to use in his service. Such talents (gifts) include skills, abilities, family connections, social positions, education, experiences, etc. To that extent, “[t]he volunteer who teaches Sunday school is fulfilling this parable. So are the entrepreneur who starts a new business and gives jobs to others, the health service administrator who initiates an AIDS-awareness campaign, and the machine operator who develops a process innovation”.

Another questionable example is the interpretation offered by Israel (2014). According to him, the meaning of “talents” from the passage range from natural to spiritual gifts of God. The natural talent is the breath of life that the Creator God gives to every human being (cf. Acts 17:28; Is. 42:5; Job 12:10). The spiritual talents, which Jesus gives to his Church, are at least two. These are a promise to all believers that they have eternal life of God and at least one supernatural gift to work spiritually for him (cf. Jn. 6:47; Eph. 4:11; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10-11; Rom. 12:3-8). Israel decries the failure of “the man given the one talent of life to know God and make it a minimum of two talents with eternal salvation”. Indeed, “God wants all men on earth to use his talents and multiply on earth what he has given them to enjoy” (Israel, 2014).

On its part, Reformed hermeneutics until recently laid emphasis on the grammatico-historical context of the text and sought to discover the “one meaning” of the text as the author intended it and as the original audience understood it (Bahnsen, 1993). This was in fact a very solid position until recently when many alternative approaches have evolved to challenge the age-old grammatico-historical approach. Reformed exegetes themselves have come to realise that these other approaches have valid inputs for the interpretive enterprise, and have in various ways espoused, demonstrated or defended them. This is already very clear in the preface to the book, *Focusing on the message:*

*New Testament hermeneutics, exegesis and methods*, whose editor and contributors are all Reformed scholars (Du Toit, 2009a:ix). Then in the first chapter of the same volume, Lategan (2009a:26) speaks of “the multi-vocal and multidimensional nature of the text” as a reality in postmodern theories of interpretation. One of the approaches he highlights as forming part of the current trend is a text-immanent approach, which primarily views language as a “synchronic system operating according to a finite set of rules, unaffected by any external factors” (Lategan, 2009a:45, 46).

In view of these new developments, this study seeks to ***evaluate how the Pentecostals interpret Matthew 25:14-30 in the light of Reformed hermeneutics.***

Questions arising from this problem are:

1. What is the meaning of parables in biblical usage, how do they function in Jesus’ teachings, and how have they been interpreted through history?
2. What is the nature of Pentecostal hermeneutics?
3. In what ways have Pentecostal exegetes interpreted Matthew 25:14-30?
4. What is the nature of Reformed hermeneutics and what is the result of Reformed exegesis of Matthew 25:14-30?
5. What are the disparities or differences between Pentecostal and Reformed interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30?

### **1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

#### **1.3.1 AIM**

The main aim of this study is *to evaluate Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 in the light of Reformed hermeneutics.*

#### **1.3.2 OBJECTIVES**

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- ❖ study the meaning of parables in biblical usage, how they function in Jesus’ teachings, and how they have been interpreted through history
- ❖ study the nature of Pentecostal hermeneutics
- ❖ examine how Pentecostal exegetes have interpreted Matthew 25:14-30

- ❖ study the nature of Reformed hermeneutics and the result of Reformed exegesis of Matthew 25:14-30
- ❖ evaluate the disparities or differences between Pentecostal and Reformed interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30.

#### **1.4 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT**

The central theoretical argument of this research is that some Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30, when examined in the light of Reformed hermeneutics, are unacceptable and therefore not plausible.

#### **1.5 METHODOLOGY**

This study is done within the framework of Reformed tradition. The Reformed tradition is a branch of Protestantism that follows the theological convictions of John Calvin, among others. It distinctively lays emphases on the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, the need for disciplined holiness in personal Christian life, and Christianity as a religion of the Kingdom (CRCNA, s.a.).

The following methods are used to answer the various research questions:

- ❖ In order to study the meaning of parables in biblical usage, how they function in Jesus' teachings, and how they have been interpreted through history, a literary study of textbooks, Bible commentaries and journal articles is done.
- ❖ In order to study the nature of Pentecostal hermeneutics, a literature analysis of Pentecostal hermeneutics textbooks, Bible commentaries and journal articles is done.
- ❖ In order to examine how Pentecostal exegetes have interpreted Matthew 25:14-30, content analysis is conducted on teachings presented by Pentecostal preachers on the parable of the talents. A random search for teachings on the parable is conducted from mostly Internet-based sources. These include web articles, YouTube, Internet magazines, blog posts, etc. Of the tons of results turned up, the sources are validated to be of Pentecostal origin by checking for a belief in the

interpreter/organisation's belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues.

- ❖ In order to study the nature of Reformed hermeneutics and the result of Reformed exegesis of Matthew 25:14-30, a literature analysis is conducted on Reformed-based textbooks, Bible commentaries, journal articles, etc. In order to interpret Matthew 25:14-30, a Reformed exegesis is made of it. Particular attention is also given to Reformed hermeneutical rules for interpreting parables.
- ❖ In order to evaluate the disparities or differences between Pentecostal and Reformed interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30, the collected data are selected and categorised through analysis, interpretation and synthesis on the basis of Reformed hermeneutic principles.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE PARABLES OF JESUS

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This Chapter focuses on literature on the parables of Jesus. As is evident in the New Testament (NT), particularly the Synoptic Gospels, the genre **παραβολή** (transliterated “parabolē”) was used extensively by Jesus of Nazareth. However, the Old Testament (OT) also indicates that other Jewish communicators and particularly prophets<sup>1</sup> used parables and other related literary forms.<sup>2</sup> Over the centuries, biblical parables have been understood and used in varying ways.<sup>3</sup> These realities therefore justify effort to know what parables meant to biblical authors in general and to Jesus in particular, how Jesus used them, and how the history of parable interpretation has unfolded.

To achieve this, this unit of the research studies what parables generally mean in the Bible, how they generally function in the Bible, how they function in particular in Jesus’ teachings, and how they have been interpreted through the history of Bible interpretation. These four objectives constitute the three major sections of this chapter, with the first two objectives combined in the first section.

#### 2.2 MEANING AND FUNCTION OF PARABLES IN BIBLICAL USAGE

##### 2.2.1 MEANING OF PARABLE

**2.2.1.1 Introduction.** Parable research is one typical field of biblical studies that lends itself to an endless spiral of scholarly disagreements. As this literature review will reveal, divergence of thoughts and conclusions is endemic with parable study, whether one considers what may be identified as a parable, or what it means to say that a text is a parable, or how many of such texts may be counted in the Bible, or how any parable text may be interpreted or applied. Against this background of divergence, this section seeks to expose the general idea of “parable” that is replete in the Bible.

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1 E.g. Nathan’s parable of a poor man’s only ewe lamb to David (2 Sam. 12:1-4).

2 Snodgrass (2008:39) and Zimmermann (2009:164) supply a number of examples of related forms in Section 2.2.1.2.1 below.

3 See Section 2.4 of this study for an overview of the history of interpretation of parables.

**2.2.1.2 Meaning of parable.** According to Snodgrass (2008:2), the biblical idea of parable differs from the English idea. He says that whereas the terms for it in biblical Hebrew and Greek “are much broader and cover a variety of forms”, the English word “parable” usually refers to “a short narrative with two levels of meaning”. Realising the difference between biblical and contemporary meanings of “parable”, for instance, Ellisen (2001:40-41) prefers to speak about “parable” in its Semitic usage in the Gospels, rather than “parable” in its broad literary class. He cites Boucher (1981:13) as having said that:

In the ancient sources the term [parable] and the literary compositions do not neatly and exactly coincide....The word “parable”... had a wide range of meaning in both the Bible and classical literature. Today, however, we do not employ the word in all those ways.

**2.2.1.2.1 Biblical-etymological roots of “parable.”** The two biblical terms commonly adopted as the roots of the word “parable” are **משל**<sup>4</sup> and **παραβολή**, used respectively by the Hebrew Bible (HB) and the Septuagint (LXX). These are commonly transliterated as “mashal” and “parabolē” respectively. Zimmermann (2009:164) asserts that the NT parables depended on Jewish traditions. According to him, **משל**<sup>5</sup> encompasses a wide variety of texts in the HB, including proverb, teaching saying, teaching speech, and oracle speech. He cites some wisdom and prophetic texts as examples: 1 Sam. 10:12; Ps. 49:5; Prov. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; Eze. 12:22f.; 18:2f.; as well as the Bileam narrative (Num. 23:7, 18; 24:3, 15, 20f., 23).

Snodgrass (2008:39) extends the scope of the *mashal* term to cover a “taunt” or “by word” (Is. 14:4), a “lament” (Mic. 2:4), and the extended discourse of Job (Job 27:1; 29:1). He notices further that in Ezekiel 14:8, God’s punishment of idolaters makes them a *mashal* and “sign”, and that in Psalms 49:4; 78:2 and Ezekiel 17:2, it appears in a parallelism with “riddle”. He also points out that whereas *mashal* (noun) is for instance

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4 Hebrew words and sentences are written and read from right to left, as in this word **ל ← ש ← מ**.

5 Zimmermann transliterates the term as “maschal,” as against the more commonly transliterated form “mashal.” This study will in all cases make use of the common transliteration, “mashal.”

not used to designate Nathan's parable to David,<sup>6</sup> Ezekiel freely uses it of the allegory of "The Eagle and the Vine" (Eze. 17:2-10), the prophecy of the "Devouring Fire" (Eze. 20:44-49 [21:1-5]), and the extended comparison of "The Cauldron" (Eze. 24:3-5). He believes that even when one ignores some of the nuances of the term, *mashal* still covers a wide semantic range as seen above.

According to Snodgrass (2008:38-39), the verb form occurs seventeen times in the HB, and comes in two categories. The first category involves a comparison: "to be like" (e.g. Ps. 28:1) and the second refers to speaking parables or proverbs (e.g. Num. 21:27; Job 17:6; Eze. 16:44). For the noun form, he says that the most common usage refers to a proverb (e.g. 1 Sam. 10:12), even though according to him meanings proliferate. In that light, perhaps the strongest evidence of its usage for proverb is the usage of *mashal*'s plural construct as the title of the book of Proverbs (*mishle Shelomoh*).

Snodgrass (2008:39) cannot resolve the reason for the wide variety of the usage of *mashal*, but however submits that the dominant idea in all its usages is comparison: "...In the end, we have to conclude that a *mashal* is any saying meant to stimulate thought and provide insight." Zimmermann (2009:164-165) agrees in no ambiguous terms when he opines that *mashal* could safely be translated as "equal word/comparison word", and that it is common in a process of comparison, which "can initially occur either in an analogy relationship or in a contrast relationship of two semantic units".

He asserts that the definitive use of *mashal* and *parabolē* respectively in the HB and the LXX points unequivocally to the fact that the OT authors were conscious of those texts belonging together as a genre. He observes a similar genre consciousness in the NT documents, whose authors, according to him, unify a variety of literary types under the term *parabolē*. He however submits that despite the correspondence of functional definition between the OT terminology and its NT counterpart, there is hardly a close and simple continuity from the Hebrew root to the NT parables. In saying this he explains that "continuity" suggests the idea of a diachronic study, which for him is

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<sup>6</sup> According to Snodgrass (2008:39), Nathan's parable to David (2 Sam. 12:1-4) is by all standards similar to Jesus' parables.

doomed to failure in parable research. More preferable and indeed more helpful for him would be a synchronic consideration of such literary parallels as genre, motif, subject and style between the rabbinical parables and those of Jesus.

If the relationship between the LXX and the NT is one of discontinuity with respect to “parable”, the relationship between the HB and the LXX is one of exclusivity. Not only did the LXX adopt the word *parabolē* in translating all the nuances of *mashal* in the HB; throughout the LXX also, *parabolē* is used in translating no other Hebrew word than *mashal* (Snodgrass, 2008:39). Snodgrass is however very surprised that *parabolē* is so wide as to cover the entire *mashal*-range, whereas in primary Greek usage it only meant “comparison”. Another reason for his surprise is that *parabolē* was not particularly in common usage before the end of the first century A.D., presumably so that it could have developed so wide a range of meanings by that time. In the end, his only conclusion is that:

By choosing *parabolē* the translators of the Septuagint brought into prominence a word the Evangelists would catapult to notoriety.... The broad range of *mashal* in the OT is mirrored by *parabolē* in the NT.

(Snodgrass, 2008:39)

In conclusion, it is obvious that the biblical term “parable” has its etymological roots in the Hebrew **משל** (*mashal*) and Greek **παραβολή** (*parabolē*), used respectively for comparison in the HB and LXX. It is also clear that just as both terms are used in a variety of ways in their respective biblical literary environments, “parable” in the NT similarly reflects a variety of nuances.

**2.2.1.2.2 Scholarly definitions of the term “parable”.** Now to the question: What is a parable? Some definitions offered by scholars will now be studied.

#### 2.2.1.2.2.1 C. H. Dodd

The parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought.

(Dodd, 1961:5)

In contrast to allegories Dodd sees parable as “the natural expression of a mind that sees truth in concrete pictures rather than conceives it in abstractions”. He means by this that parables attempt to present truth in ways that our natural senses can easily relate with, instead of leaving the mind to imagine its import. This, he says, is characteristic of Jesus’ way of communicating truth. In other words, he contends, Jesus’ use of parables replaced the so-called “dead metaphors” of language with “living metaphors”. To illustrate the contrast between concrete and abstract thoughts, he compares Mark 12:33 with Matthew 5:23-24. According to him, the former represents an abstract (or dead-metaphor) way of communicating and the latter “a concrete, pictorial mode of expression” (or in this researcher’s words, a living-metaphor way of communicating truth). The table below presents the similarities and differences between the two pericopes:

<b>Text</b>	<b>Mark 12:33</b>	<b>Matthew 5:23-24</b>
	To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices	Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.
<b>Similarities</b>	discusses love for neighbour in comparative importance with offerings/sacrifices	discusses love for neighbour in comparative importance with a gift for sacrifice
<b>Differences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the value of love over an offering/sacrifice presented in theoretical terms</li> <li>b) requires no drastic action</li> <li>c) is abstract and therefore a “dead-metaphor” presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the value of love over an offering/sacrifice presented in practical terms</li> <li>b) requires drastic action: suspend the offering and go first and reconcile with the offended brother/sister</li> <li>c) is concrete and therefore a “living-metaphor” presentation</li> </ul>

*Table 2.1: Similarities and differences between Mark 12:33 and Matthew 5:23-24, according to C. H. Dodd*

The kind of concreteness that Matthew presents here is what Dodd (1961:5) anticipates in Jesus' parable. His first class of parables under the name "figurative sayings" is constituted by these so-called *living metaphors*, e.g. "Where the carcass is the vultures will gather" (Matt. 24:28), "A town set on a mountain cannot be hidden" (Matt. 5:14), etc. He further indicates that such a metaphor could be extended into a picture by adding detail. He identifies this second kind of linguistic phenomenon as a "similitude" (German: "*Gleichnis*"), e.g. "the Son asking for Bread" (Matt. 7:9), "the Sons of the Bride Chamber" (Matt. 9:14-15), "the Eye the Light of the Body" (Matt. 6:22), etc. Further, where the metaphor (or simile) is elaborated into a story, so that a situation is developed, what results is "the parable proper" (German: "*Parabel*"). He indicates that *Parabel* ranges from very short stories, to relatively longer ones, to full-length stories ("*Novellen*").

2.2.1.2.2.2 K. Snodgrass. Snodgrass (2008:8-9) believes that the *immediate* aim of a parable is to be "compellingly interesting" and with that edge to divert attention and disarm; whereas its *ultimate* aim is to "awaken insight, stimulate the conscience, and move to action". Building on this stimulating impact and in compliance with the way ancient Greeks used the term, he then defines a parable as "an expanded analogy used to convince and persuade", arguing further that this definition is wide enough to cover the majority of the ways the Evangelists use the word.

It is however obvious that Snodgrass bases his definition on Greek rhetorical system. It is similarly obvious that he does not here give account of how the OT authors applied the term.

2.2.1.2.2.3 A. J. Hultgren. Hultgren (2000:2-3) also assumes that "parable" has its root in the Greek word *parabolē*. For him, not only is it derived from this root; also, "like its Greek antecedent its basic and primary meaning is comparison". Accordingly, this motivated Jesus and others before and after him "to carry on instruction by making comparisons between eternal, transcendental realities and that which was familiar to the common human experience of his day".

Sequel to this background, Hultgren presents “a working definition” of parable as “a figure of speech in which a comparison is made between God’s kingdom, actions, expectations and something in this world, real or imagined”. He goes on to identify two types of parables: 1) narrative parables, in which the comparisons that are made include narration in the form of “once upon a time...”; and 2) similitudes, in which analogies are made between their subjects and general and timeless observations using such constructs as “is like” or “is as if”.

It is obvious that the premise of Hultgren’s definition of “parable” leans heavily on Greek thought, as well as that his definition is more or less tentative (he presents it as “a working definition”), which leaves one waiting endlessly for a final resolution. He is generous in the scope of parable as “a figure of speech”, in which case any figurative speech can fit in. Conversely, the applicability of parable according to his definition is rather very limiting. He has a view of parable only in the field of religion. This is not faithful to even his Greek foundations, for *parabolē* in Greek rhetoric was not necessarily a tool of religion. Even among Jewish scholars, it was not only in religious discourse that it came into use. However, the prominence of the idea of comparison in the definition should be commended.

2.2.1.2.2.4 B. B. Scott. Scott (1989:8) defines a parable as “a *mashal* that employs a short narrative fiction to reference a symbol”. This terse definition is pregnant with crucial claims, and is reviewed below:

1. On parable as “a *mashal*”, Scott (1989:9) observes that the Hebrew root *m-sh-l* means “to be like”, and that the prevailing *mashal*-form in the HB is proverb (of which 1 Samuel 10:12 is his earliest observed example). This idea of prevalence, combined with such qualities as popularity, concreteness, openness to interpretation, and representativeness, makes Scott identify proverb as “the archetype for *mashal*”. In this light, the view of “parable” as a *mashal* implies that “parable” is generically related to proverb-*mashal* in the HB and that “parable”, in so far as it is a *mashal*, is couched in connotative language. It is against this backdrop that it is believed that OT usage of *mashal* provides a background against which to understand the usage of “parable” in the NT (Scott, 1989:10-11).

2. On parable as a *mashal* that employs “a short narrative fiction”, Scott (1989:35) rightly concedes that “short” as a definitive description of the *mashal* type called “parable” is an imprecise term. He however classifies parables as being “among the smallest complete narrative units of oral tradition”. According to him, “short” in fact “hints at the primarily oral character of parables”, and the parables of Jesus indeed display the characteristic of orality. Shortness has the merit of the hearer being able to hold the parable in the ear. However, a complement of shortness is the memorable thoughts that parables employ.
3. Parables are not only short; they are also *narrative fictions*. By narrative fiction Scott (1989:41) refers to “the narrative of a succession of fictional events”. According to him, these “fictional events” are mostly verisimilar in nature, which is why parables are sometimes thought to be based on reality. Furthermore, this verisimilitude is drawn from everyday life, but everydayness is fictionalised by being taken up into story.

To emphasise parable’s narrativity and fictionality, he cites Via (1967:70-71) as describing parables as “aesthetic objects”. Consequently, they like all narratives are independent of their context. Accordingly, the search for the *Sitz im Leben* (the life-situation) of a parable a “misdirected” effort, “for a parable can have more than one *Sitz im Leben*”. This finds support in rabbinical parables being made to illustrate more than one Scripture verse, and the Evangelists’ situating the same parable in different contexts or even in no context (Scott, 1989: 41).

The implication of this alleged plurality of contexts is that Jesus could have used any given parable in more than one context (Scott, 1989: 41-42). Realising, however, that the relationship of parable to its context needs to be put in perspective, Scott (1989:42) rightly says,

The independence of parable from an immediate contextualisation does not make the parable ahistorical, because the cultural context of the parable is first-century Judaism. Furthermore, that cultural context is critical for the parables’ interpretation. What I reject is that a specific situation in the ministry of Jesus accounts for a

parable. It seems especially untrue that the situation is Jesus' controversy with the Pharisees.

(Scott, 1989:42)

Another crucial corollary of Scott's (1989:42) view of parables as narrative fictions has to do with approach to interpretation. He suggests that because they are narrative fictions, a useful approach to analysing them would be literary criticism, which he says emphasises interaction between text, narrative and hearer/reader, and allows for flexibility of meaning in different situations. This suggestion of Scott's is perhaps instructive.

4. On *referencing*, Scott (1989:42) asserts that "referencing" is a key characteristic of parable "because the laying-beside of narrative and referent creates the parabolic process". However, according to him, it also raises the "daunting" question whether parables are allegories or metaphors. Following an elaborate study, he answers that "the parable as a genre is neither by necessity allegorical nor by necessity metaphorical" (Scott, 1989:44). That is, one cannot categorically identify the parable genre as of nature allegorical or metaphorical; indeed, it can be either, or mixed. According to him,

The importance of this conclusion needs to be insisted upon: Jülicher's categorical rejection of the possibility of allegory in Jesus' parables is unwarranted. The genre parable can be allegorical, metaphorical, or mixed.

(Scott, 1989:44)

Exactly how does a parable *reference* its symbol? To answer this all important question, Scott (1989:49) relies on the common notion underlying both *mashal* and *parabolē*: in literal terms, "a parable is something laid beside, 'parallel', so that the narrative is laid beside its referent". Accordingly, it does not explicitly specify to the hearer/reader how to relate narrative to referent; the interpreter has to figure that out. In doing this the interpreter however needs the guidance of some implicit rules or instructions: rudimentary among them are *genre*, *narrative structure*, and *the direction of transference*.

This researcher has observed that, like Scott has just said, biblical parables generally do not specify their correspondence to their symbols. That is, whereas a biblical teacher lays a parable besides its referent to bring home his message, he does not do a one-to-one mapping between the parable and its symbol. The onus now placed on the hearer/reader makes the hearer/reader tend to draw lines of correspondence that might not be faithful to the parable's communicative intent, and might well be the explanation for some of the surplus details of meaning (including allegorisation) accrued to parables.

5. On the *symbol* that parable references, Scott (1989:51) says that religious parables specifically reference religious symbols, which in biblical studies are Torah, Gospel and kingdom. He points out that while rabbinical parables have *the exegesis of the Torah* as their context, Jesus' parables have *the gospel narrative* as their context. Further, he observes that a number of the Gospel (and Thomas) parables have *the kingdom of God* as their explicit, immediate referent. His opinion of the meaning of Mark 4:3-8, 11 supports this conclusion:

The parable for Mark is a secret bearer of the kingdom, and his Gospel's narrative is a hermeneutical context of the parables. Marks' Gospel not only proclaims the kingdom of God but is also like parable a bearer of the kingdom. The narrative context functions as a fictional redescription of the kingdom. By setting the parable within the narrative context of his Gospel, Mark makes the kingdom the hermeneutical horizon of parable.

Scott (1989:55)

According to him, this is not the case with Matthew, Luke or Thomas. Matthew's focus is the motif of Jesus as Lord of the kingdom, and therefore he places the parable in the context of judgment (e.g. Matt. 25). Luke diverts from emphasis on the kingdom and rather presents Jesus as the preacher of the kingdom, "so that many of the parables become example stories of the kingdom ethics". For Thomas, the parables are placed in "a context in which the kingdom is the wisdom to be found in parable" (Scott, 1989:55).

Whatever the differences in emphasis, Scott has been able to demonstrate that biblical parables reference the kingdom of God as symbol. This researcher doubts that there can be any sustainable argument to the contrary.

2.2.1.2.2.5 R. Zimmermann. Zimmermann (2009:157-176) acknowledges that his work on parable takes a completely new and novel approach than all that have taken the centre stage since Jülicher. According to him, this new route traverses a four-step programme, namely, historical, traditio-historical, literary, and hermeneutic perspectives, while also reckoning with the expanded theoretical basis of parable research occasioned by newer approaches. Only the literary and hermeneutic perspectives will be reviewed here.

This study adopts a position for comprehensive parable-genre consciousness, instead of following classification schemes that are either artificial or fluid. Similarly, Zimmermann's (2009:167) literary perspective suspends all internal differentiation of so-called parable "forms" in favour of generic comprehensiveness. For him, it should be "parable – and nothing more". This stems from his observation that there is a unitary genre consciousness (German: *Gattungsbewusstsein*) in the way the Evangelists use the term **παραβολή**, much the same as the Hebrew *mashal* is broadly used. Therefore, the argument continues, if they do not differentiate sub-genres (whether in terms of being long or short, or in terms of so-called everydayness or extraordinariness), then any scholarly attempt at such differentiations is fundamentally untenable (Zimmermann, 2009:168-169; contra. Bultmann, 1995:181-184; Jülicher, 1910:58-80, 92-111, 112-115).

Following this literary evidence, Zimmermann's hermeneutic perspective affirms the possibility of a plurality of interpretations that is established by the texts themselves and that validates such interpretations in different reading situations. Similarly, this study is open to the possibility of a parable having more than one meaning in different literary or reading contexts. More will be said on this later in Section 5.4.2.2.

On the basis of the forgoing, Zimmermann defines "parable" as follows:

A parable is a short narrative (1) fictional (2) text that is related in the narrative world to known reality (3) but, by way of implicit or explicit transfer signals, makes it understood that the meaning of the narration must be differentiated from the literal words of the text (4). In its appeal structure (5) it challenges the reader to carry out a metaphoric transfer of meaning that is steered by co-text and context information (6).

(Zimmermann, 2009:170)

Key ideas in this definition need to be briefly explicated:

1. On *narrativity*, Zimmermann (2009:171) explains that parables are *short narratives* in which at least one action sequence or change of status is reported or imagined. According to him, parables concentrate on essential meaning for the sake of brevity, and in extreme cases are made up only of a verb or a subject of action. Thus they are different from longer narrative genres like epos, novel, short story, etc. He also observes that because of the presence of action sequence or change of status, they are also different from figurative stylistic forms or tropes (word metaphors, symbols, metonymy), as well as from comparison.
2. On *fictionality*, Zimmermann (2009:171) explains that a parable is a fictional or invented or composed narrative, in contrast to a factual narrative that is based on a historical event that has happened or that is believed to have happened. In other words, a parable does not lay claim to a historical reference. However, a parable demonstrates a close relationship to reality in the sense that although it is invented, it is an “invented truth”. In other words, the fictional event narrated could actually have happened in that way. He rightly observes that this feature distinguishes parable from fantastic narratives, apocalyptic visions, fables and myths.
3. His comment on *metaphoricity* is that in a parable, “a semantic transfer of meaning takes place between two different domains of meaning”. Put differently, a parable simply points to a statement that lies outside the primary level of meaning; or still simpler, it has “a ‘transferred’ or literally ‘metaphoric’ [*μετα-*

*φέρειν* = *transfer*] meaning”. However, he warns that metaphoricity here has to do with the function of a parable text as a whole, and not with any *word-metaphor* that may be found within the parable text (Zimmermann, 2009:172).

4. On *appellativeness*, Zimmermann (2009:173) is positive that a parable appeals; that is, it wants to be interpreted. In other words, it is active in interpretation, because it expects the reader to construct meaning.
5. For a parable’s *co-text* and *context* relatedness, he opines that the literary (or narrative) context of a parable is constitutive of its meaning. Accordingly, although the transfer signals may sometimes lie outside the parable itself, yet they most certainly influence its meaning. He includes in the parable’s *co-text* the speaking and reading situation, the world of communication situation, etc.

2.2.1.2.2.6 S. A. Ellisen. Ellisen (2001:39, 43) offers two complementary definitions of the term “parable”. From a purely literary perspective, he defines “parable” as “an extended figure of speech presented as a story”, and in turn defines a “figure” (Latin: *figura*; Greek: *tropos*, “a turning”) as “a word, phrase, narrative used in different sense than normal”. In other words, a figure turns a word or group of words from its ordinary or literal meaning to a “tropical” (or figurative) meaning. The “trait of familiarity” makes a figure excel, because it portrays something familiar to build a bridge to the unfamiliar. Ellisen contends that the feature of familiarity is so essential to the nature of a figure that without it a figure would be meaningless. As such, “a figure is not mysterious in the sense of being unintelligible; it is, in fact, a friendly escort between two realms of truth”. In this light, then, a parable is an extended figure of speech in which truth in an unfamiliar realm is made easily accessible through the use of familiar issues.

From an etymological perspective, he views “parable” as a transliteration of the Greek *parabolē*, itself a compound word formed from two other Greek words, namely, *para* (alongside) and *ballo* (to cast). In that case, *parabolē* means “to cast alongside of”. Building on this, he defines biblical parable as “a fictitious but true to life story, designed to teach some specific lesson in the spiritual realm, usually concerning the kingdom” (Ellisen, 2001:43). One quick comment on this definition will suffice at this point: it does

appear that Ellisen subscribes to the single-point theory: “some specific lesson” (singular) seems to suggest this. This strict, single-point grid does not however hold sway anymore in parable study; it rather shows that Ellisen is yet to shake himself free from the influence of Jülicher.

2.2.1.2.2.7 Summary on scholarly definitions of “parable.” To conclude on the above-reviewed scholarly definitions of the term “parable”, it is important to observe that “parable” belongs to a literary family that the Hebrew call **משל** (*mashal*) and the Greeks **παραβολή** (*parabolē*). In the Bible, parables are figures of speech used for elucidation. They teem with “life” and give a punch to the message or teaching being delivered with as much power as can possibly be. Common with them is also a metaphoric transfer of meaning from one domain of understanding to another. This clearly means that parables are not self-constitutive; that is, they do not direct attention to themselves, and therefore their meaning is always not literal. Whereas their literal meaning would make sense if it were to be the case, parables address themselves to issues outside of themselves and their immediate domain of meaning.

## 2.2.2 AN OWN DEFINITION OF PARABLE

Having just sampled a number of scholarly definitions of “parable” – with blessed insights – this researcher now wants to attempt an own definition of “parable” that takes cognisance of the salient insights garnered above and that is yet simple enough to understand. Below is the definition:

*A parable is an extended figure of speech whose narrative claim(s) is (are) fictional but verisimilar in the narrated world, and whose truth-significance is realistic in the referenced world.*

This definition has the following implications:

- 1) A parable is *a figure of speech*. The most common ones used in the Bible are similes and metaphors.
- 2) This parabolic figure of speech is an *extended* one; that is to say, it is not a one-sentence comparison like “Mike Tyson is like a bull” or “Mike Tyson is a bull”.

Rather, it is a comparative construct in which the core idea (or ideas) is (or are) extended into a story (or at least an action sequence), with all the details of the story not necessarily contributing to the meaning of the message.

- 3) The story may have one or more *narrative claims*; that is, it can be a one-point or multi-point story. Provided meaning is not read into the parable, it should be allowed to express itself on as many points as it wishes to.
- 4) A parable is *fictional* in the narrated world. In other words, the story that makes up a parable is not factual or historical – it cannot be accounted for as having happened at any time in human history. It is a created story in the narrated world.
- 5) A parable is also *verisimilar* in the narrated world; that is, the fictional event narrated in the parable is proximate to reality and could have happened that way.
- 6) *Narrated* versus *referenced* worlds indicate that there has to be transference of meaning of the parable from the world of its telling to the world of its signification. While a parable has sensible meaning in its narrated world, it is not told for the sake of its narrative meaning; but rather for a meaning in *another* world, namely, the referenced world. In that case, there has to be *a transfer of meaning* from the narrated world to the referenced world.
- 7) *Truth-significance* is the interpreted message (or communicative intent) of the parable in the signified world. A parable is told to communicate something, and that “something” is what is here called “truth-significance”. This truth-significance is realistic in the referenced world.

### 2.2.3 FUNCTION OF PARABLE IN THE BIBLE

**2.2.3.1 Introduction.** Biblical parables function as extended figures of speech; that is, whether a simile or a metaphor or anything else, the figure is extended into a picture or a fictitious story that usually sounds real rather than outlandish (Dodd, 1961:6). A parable is a literary device of illustration and persuasion. However, there are many such devices that are either obviously or subtly different from parables. The first burden here, then, is to isolate parables from three of such non-parabolic tools of persuasion.

### **2.2.3.2 What parables are not**

**2.3.2.1 Parables are not myths.** A myth is a “traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon” (Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary, 2002:768). The historical event so referred to cannot be proven to have happened, although tradition claims it happened; but nonetheless serves the cultural interests of the people.

According to Zimmermann (2009:172), whereas myths “extend beyond the general world of experience”, parables portray the real world, and their narrative “could have taken place in that way”. Moreover, in contrast to myths, parables are never set in supernatural contexts, but rather relate with the natural world. They also do not make historical claims or purport to have a historical setting like myths do; they are understood to be perfectly fictitious. Nor do they hold religious or spiritual significance in their narrative world; their meaning is necessarily “transported” to another (religious/ethical/spiritual) domain of meaning.

**2.2.3.2.2 Parables are not fables.** A fable is a fictitious narrative in which animals, plants or inanimate things speak and act anthropomorphically (Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary, 2002:414; Zimmermann, 2009:172). Zimmermann (2009:166) lists biblical examples to include Judges 9:7-15, 2 Kings 12:1-15, and Ezekiel 17:3-10; while classical examples are the fables of Aesop and Stesichorous. He proposes a close proximity between parable and fable since Jülicher. Scott (1989:19-20) supports this proposal. According to him, Greek rhetorician Aristotle identifies two types of general means of persuasion, namely, “*paradeigma* (example) and *enthymemē* (a ‘rhetorical syllogism and drawn from probable premise’)”. Furthermore, “examples” are of two types, namely, those formulated from historical or actual incidents and those invented by the speaker. In turn, the invented or created facts subdivide into two types – parable and fable.

But whereas both parable and fable are fictitious narratives, unlike fables, biblical parables do not assume anthropomorphism. Rather, human beings function as human beings and animals, plants and inanimate things function in their natural orders.

**2.2.3.2.3 Parables are generally not allegories.** According to Hultgren (2000:12), the Greek word ἀλληγορία is a compound word built from “ἄλλος (‘other’) and ἀγορία (‘speaking’)”. On this premise he defines “allegory” as “speaking otherwise than one seems to speak”. Characteristic of an allegory is the fact that every detail of the story tends to have significance, and interpretation would not be complete unless all such details were accounted for. Biblical examples of an allegory include “The Song of the Vineyard” (Isa. 5) and the Contrast between the Freewoman and the Bondwoman (Gal. 4:22-31). Conversely, details in a parable are not all equally significant. In other words, not all details in a parable are meaningful for faithful interpretation; therefore any attempt to assign meaning to all details ends up *allegorising* the parable.

According to Zimmermann (2009:166), however, there is some proximity between parable and allegory that needs to be rehabilitated. Contributing to the argument, Hultgren (2000:13) submits that parable and allegory were not clearly distinguished in Jesus’ day, and that both were covered by the generic term *mashal*. Beyond just generic affinity, he in fact also observes that there are specific terms in the parables of Jesus that have metaphoric meanings and should be understood as such, e.g. “father”, “servant”, “king”, etc. He contends that as soon as these terms are noticed, one cannot but admit to the presence of some allegorical elements in such parables. He says, for instance, that the figure of a king in a parable of Jesus most likely represents God, as is evident in both the Hebrew Scripture and many rabbinical parables (cf. Exo. 15:18; 1 Chron. 16:31; Ps. 93:1; Is. 24:23).

Hultgren (2000:14) goes further to demonstrate that some of the parables of Jesus are in fact thoroughly allegorical in nature: e.g. “the Wicked Tenants” (Mark 12:1-12), “the Wedding Feast” (Matt. 22:1-14), and “the Great Banquet” (Luke 14:16-24). Still others have recognisable allegorical elements embedded in them, such as the city that is destroyed in the parable of “the Marriage Feast” (Matt. 22:1-14) and the shepherd in the parable of “the Final Judgment” (Matt. 25:31-46). Others, he continues, carry allegorical interpretations appended to them, e.g. the interpretations of the parable of “the Sower” (Mark 4:13-20) and “the Dragnet” (Matt. 13:49-50). He insightfully observes that while nobody can say with certainty whether or not these allegorical appendages were the

creation of Jesus, “they illustrate how fluid the dynamics were between parable and allegory in the first century”. In that wise, he rightly advises that the interpreter of a parable should recognise and respect allegorical elements wherever they exist, but also be wary of arbitrarily assigning allegorical meanings to symbols or figures within the text.

### **2.2.3.3 How then do parables function in the Bible?**

Scott (1989:50) believes that metaphor is a suggestive model for a parable’s functioning. He in turn depends on a statement which he credits to Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. Scott further says that this statement “underscores the parallel, laid-beside notion so prominent in parable”. Since a parable is introduced into a discourse to aid understanding, and puts the hearer/reader in a position of understanding one thing in terms of another, this study takes a stand for metaphor as a model for the functioning of biblical parables.

**2.2.3.3.1 Parable as metaphor.** Earlier in this study, Scott (1989:44) was cited as saying that “the parable as a genre” can be either allegorical or metaphorical, or even both. Having already discussed the relationship of parable to allegory, the study now examines parable as metaphor, and the implications of this connection to its function in the Bible. Scott (1989:45) begins his discussion on the metaphoricity of parables with credit to Dodd (1961:5) as the scholar who introduced the idea of metaphor into parable study. But, he continues, whereas Dodd called the parable a metaphor or simile, another scholar, Funk (1966:136-137), distinguished between the two. According to Scott, Funk’s reason for this distinction was that, for him, simile was simply illustrative while metaphor was “creative of meaning”.

This distinction has a telling implication. One notices in these descriptions that parable as simile does no more than *illustrate* a point (or points) perhaps already established, while parable as metaphor opens up a whole new world by *creating* a new meaning (or new meanings) perhaps not before thought of.

To say *A is B* is a metaphor, which, because of the juxtaposition of two discrete and not entirely comparable entities, produces an impact on the imagination and induces a vision of that which cannot be conveyed by prosaic or discursive speech [Funk, 1966:136].

It is not too much to say that true metaphor reveals a mystery: the mystery of Kaleidos-copic reality directly apprehended [Funk, 1966:140].

Thus parables are not simple didactic stories illustrating a single point, whether moral or eschatological reality [Scott, 1989:46].

(Scott, 1989:46)

Scott (1989:47) therefore wishes to see parable (much like metaphor) “as an additive, not substitutive, an instrument of knowledge”. Following this up, one sees that this description of parable-metaphor by Scott agrees with his earlier description (citing Funk) of metaphor as “creative of meaning”.

On the issue of direction of transference, Scott (1989:47) notes that as a *mashal*, “parable is connotative”; that is, “its literal level is supposed to lead to non-literal interpretation, a metaphoric interpretation”. Borrowing, as he claims, the idea of re-description of narrative at a second-level reference from Ricoeur (1977:244-245), he further says that “as fictional redescriptions, parables demand that the direction of transference be from parable to referent, because the redescription exposes something new, not simply copying the already known”. He says that even with rabbinical parables this is also true and one cannot at all contemplate a reversal of transference for the Jesus-parables.

Agreed, they lack a direct reference to Scripture and in many cases a referent is left unspecified; yet it is assumed that at a second level of reference they are about the kingdom of God, or as he cites Ricoeur (1977:244-245), they are a fictional re-description of the kingdom. Whereas the king-symbol is all but once absent from the Jesus tradition, “the anonymous man, the standard character in Jesus’ parables” is usually a metaphoric referent to God as king (Scott, 1989:48-49).

Parable as metaphor also blocks the idea of *tertium comparationis*, that is, the single point of comparison espoused by older schools. Scott (1989:49-50) pushes Lakoff and Johnson's (1980:5) position further and against Aristotelian position regarding metaphor: according to him, whereas Aristotle saw metaphor as relating a single aspect of *A* to a similar aspect of *B*, that is, the relationship of *A* and *B* involves a *tertium comparationis*; Lakoff and Johnson's argument is that "A is understood in terms of B, and B is not a single word or term but a network or structure of possibilities". In his words:

A metaphorical network undergirds a systematic understanding of the other thing. Even more than just understanding (a cognitive activity), the metaphorical network affects experience and behaviour.... The metaphorical network structures the experience, behaviour, and understanding of that other reality it stands for.

(Scott, 1989:50)

From ordinary "laying beside" and "parallel to", to *affecting* and *structuring* experience and behaviour and understanding.... This tells one that while metaphor does not make any explicit statement about the relationship of *A* to *B*, by its implicit rules it however determines not just the nature of the relationship but also the way the relationship is to be understood, and thereby how *B* is to be understood and experienced. If one reduces this to parables and their generally assumed re-descriptions of the kingdom, it means that the parables (*A*) are not passive illustrations idly "laid beside" or "parallel to" the kingdom (*B*), but that the parables (*A*) structure the hearer/reader's understanding and perception (experience) of the kingdom (*B*). In other words, they do not re-describe the kingdom for nothing; rather, they add something new to a previous understanding and experience of the kingdom, and therefore one can hardly go away with the impression that parables are harmless. No, they are not idle illustrations so long as they are not necessarily tools of single-point comparison.

Nor does Scott (1989:51) wish his reader to think that a metaphorical network only *reveals* (or highlights) aspects of the referent. He posits that it simultaneously "*hides* other aspects," and that this shows that the structuring power of a metaphorical network is not exhaustive but partial. According to him, this leaves no room for *B* to tyrannise *A*

for which it stands. In terms of parable and kingdom, it is easy to deduce from this that any given parable does not (indeed cannot) say everything about the kingdom. This balance is very important to note, so that while parable (as metaphor) is known (or is expected) to be free to do a re-descriptive work, one might be well guided in terms of the fact that no one parable reveals everything about the kingdom.

In their preface to the book *Metaphor, narrative, and parables in Q*, Roth *et al.* (2014) assert that “the parables provide fertile ground for considerations of narrativity and metaphor”. This is probably one of the strongest statements that connect parables to metaphor in recent times. In the introductory article to the same title, Zimmermann (2014:7) offers a definition of metaphor that this study finds useful. He says that a metaphor is “the transport of meaning from one domain of meaning to another”. He draws this definition from the etymological root of “metaphor, namely, μετα-φέρειν (transliterated *meta-pherein*). This Greek construct means “to transfer”, or more concretely, “to transport”.

In parables, meaning is transported from one domain to another. In this sense, therefore, it is understandable why parables should be viewed as functioning metaphorically. According to Zimmermann (2014:10), the “image receiving” domain (*bildempfangender Bereich*) of biblical parables refers to the religious or ethical sphere, while the “image providing” domain (*bildspendender Bereich*) is taken from different fields of daily experience, especially the field of daily life.

Van der Watt (2009:325-326) lends an affirmative voice to the view that parables function as metaphors in the Bible. They are, according to him, “open metaphorical texts” as well as [in his citation of Arens (1982:339-340)] “fictional metaphorical texts”. His discussion on metaphors is generally insightful. To start with, he identifies metaphor under figurative language, which he says makes up a large proportion of the NT language. According to him, in literal language the case is understood “as it stands” – no subtle reference to something else is intended – while figurative language refers to “something different from the literal meaning of the uttered words”. Particularly for metaphor, he says that:

A metaphor is created when the literal meaning of a word or phrase (lexical item) in a sentence does not make literal sense (they are incongruent) since semantic or linguistic conventions are broken..., but the sentence nevertheless has a useful content from which meaning may be derived....

(Van der Watt, 2009:307)

To conclude on this, it is all very clear that parables suspend the literal meaning of their narrative, while providing sensible meaning in their referenced world. It is justifiable, therefore, to see parable's functioning in the Bible as being metaphoric.

## **2.3 THE PLACE AND FUNCTION OF PARABLES IN JESUS' TEACHING**

### **2.3.1 THE PLACE OF PARABLES IN JESUS' TEACHING**

**2.3.1.1 Introduction.** It is generally accepted that parables occupy a central place in the teaching of Jesus. This section will investigate that claim. Discussion will proceed in terms of parable's distribution and their centrality.

**2.3.1.2 Distribution of the parables.** Stiller (2005:9) quotes one-third of Jesus' teaching in the Synoptics as parables. Snodgrass (2008:22) agrees with this estimate, accounting for thirty-five per cent parabolic material in the Synoptic documents. This is a significant volume and shows how important the parabolic mode of teaching was to Jesus.

**2.3.1.3 Centrality of the parabolic material.** Parables are said to have been central in the teaching of Jesus. Commenting on this, Wenham (1989:13) says:

What made Jesus' teaching different from much other teaching then and now was the centrality for him of parabolic speech.... Jesus, especially when speaking to crowds, spoke almost entirely pictorially, explaining his ideas in and through stories, and not just using stories as an aid to illustrate his points.

From internal NT witness, there can hardly be an argument against the claim to the centrality of parables in the Jesus tradition. Matthew and Mark bear witness to this:

<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Mark</b>
<b>13:3</b> Then he told them many things in <b>parables</b> (παραβολαίς) ...	<b>4:2</b> He taught them many things by <b>parables</b> (παραβολαίς) ...
<b>13:34</b> Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in <b>parables</b> (παραβολαίς); he did not say anything to them without using a <b>parable</b> (παραβολή).	<b>4:33-34</b> With many similar <b>parables</b> (παραβολαίς) Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a <b>parable</b> (παραβολή). But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

*Table 2.2: Matthew and Mark's witness to the centrality of parables in Jesus' teaching*

Both Evangelists are basically saying the same things: One, Jesus taught *many* things in parables; two, he did not say anything to his disciples without using a parable. No witness can be stronger than these passages. They show how central parables were in the teaching of Jesus.

Furthermore, Matthew indicates that the parable phenomenon in Jesus' teaching was a fulfilment of prophecy about the Messiah:

*So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in **parables** (παραβολαίς), I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."*

Matt. 13:35<sup>7</sup> (emphasis not original)

One might deduce from this prophetic perspective that Jesus' much use of parables as a teaching tool was no ordinary coincidence but an aspect of the divine plan for his earthly ministry. Employing so many parables as the NT bears witness to can be seen to be only true to the nature of a teacher/parable-narrator whom Zimmermann (2009:7) calls "the parable of God". Besides, since the parabolic tool was part of Jewish traditional wisdom, it might well be that Jesus' much use of parables demonstrated his one-ness (the concept of immanence) with the people to whom he was primarily sent.

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7 cf. Ps. 78:2

## 2.3.2 THE FUNCTION OF PARABLE IN JESUS' TEACHING

Besides the centrality of parables in Jesus' teaching just surveyed, one also finds useful the function of parables in his teaching. This has to do with the way he used parables and how they fit into his teaching ministry. This section turns attention on the issue of function of the parables of Jesus.

**2.3.2.1 Parables as prophetic tools.** Snodgrass (2008:8) unequivocally refers to parables as prophetic tools, which he says justifies his calling them "stories with intent". According to him, biblical parables came into use by those who had a message from God – "those who [were] trying to get God's people to stop, reconsider their ways, and change their behaviours". He says that these prophetic tools reveal the character and disposition of God, as well as the true situation of and demands on humanity; and that rather than being mere packages of information, they came into service for Jesus to arouse thinking and stimulate response toward God. As such, they draw humanity out of their "stultifying passivity" and drive them to take action – "radical cross-bearing, God-imitating response worthy of the name 'conversion'".

As a way of demonstrating the prophetic nature of biblical parables, Scott points out the rarity of parables in OT legal texts and historical narratives and their abundance in prophetic literature, psalms and proverbs. He says,

The majority of comparisons and parables occur in contexts of judgment and indictment. The saying identified as parables in the various lists appear primarily in the mouth and writings of prophets.

Parabolic language is a tool of prophets in the conflict they have with Israel and her leaders. They are mirrors of the nation, its king, and the fate that awaits it. Prophets used parables to confront the nation, warn of judgment, and bring about change.

(Snodgrass, 2008:40-41)

He is sure, too, that the NT is aware of the connection between the Jesus' parabolic enterprise and his prophetic stance. According to him, this is demonstrated by at least Matthew's understanding of Jesus' use of parabolic speeches as fulfilment of the prophetic prediction in Psalm 78:2. Matthew 13:35 cites this psalm as follows:

*So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in **parables** (παραβολαῖς), I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world." (emphasis not original)*

In light of the above, there is every reason to believe that Jesus used parables prophetically. He began his earthly ministry inviting his hearers to repent for the sake of the imminence of the kingdom of God (cf. Matt. 4:17), and throughout the Synoptic Gospels portrayed the kingdom with parables (cf. Matt. 13:1-52; 18:10-14, 21-35; Mark 4:1-34; Luke 8:1-15; 10:25-37; 13:18-21). Like the OT prophets (cf. Isa. 28:23-29; Jer. 13:12-14), he sometimes used parables to confront the obstinate Jewish population and particularly religious leaders with the evil and consequences of their unbelief (cf. Matt. 21:28-32, 33-46; Luke 15:11-32). These facts, plus his self-understanding as fulfilling a prophetic ministry (cf. Matt. 13:57; 23:31-32), leave a very strong impression that Jesus used parables in a prophetic sense. They were indeed "stories with (prophetic) intent".

**2.3.2.2 Parables and the kingdom of God.** Snodgrass (2008:2, 579) presents as a functional point of departure the assertion that the parables of Jesus presuppose the kingdom they seek to disclose. Indeed for him, it is against the backdrop of the message of the kingdom that the message of the parables makes sense. He also states that parables were the most frequently used means that Jesus employed in explaining the kingdom of God and in showing the character of God and his expectations for humans.

He identifies theocentricity as one of the characteristics of the Gospel parables. Here he posits that parables seek to change behaviour and create disciples by telling about God and his kingdom. He observes that whereas a few parables are overtly Christological, most refer to God, his kingdom, and his expectations for humans. To justify this claim, he notices the monarchic figures allegedly embedded in most parables, and concludes that these father-, master-, and king-figures point to God in true OT and Jewish contexts (cf. Matt. 18:21-35; 21:33-44; 22:1-14; Lk. 14:15-24; 15:11-32; 16:1-15). To such an extent, he fears that any failure to acknowledge these elements would render the parables lame and ineffective (Snodgrass, 2008:20).

Hultgren (2000:11) captures the relationship between parables and kingdom in his discussion of “the universal and the particular in the parables of Jesus”. He notices that whereas the parables of Jesus are in terms of their metaphoricity related to the OT’s literary framework (universal), they are *particularly* related to Jesus’ distinctive proclamation of the kingdom of God. He means here that just when the reader wants to identify the *universal* characteristics of the parables of Jesus, he/she meets with a *particular* theological issue (here, the kingdom); so much that the meaning and the significance of the parables are secondary to those theological claims. Put differently, claims about the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus determine the correct meaning of the message of his parables. In this way, Hultgren (2000 :11) has not only stated that the parables are subverted by and subservient to the kingdom, but has agreed with Snodgrass (2008:2, 579) above that it is only in understanding the message of the kingdom that one can truly understand the message of the parables.

Wenham (1989:20) agrees that the parables of Jesus are about the kingdom of God, but limits the scope of the message that a parable carries with respect to the kingdom. This motif of the kingdom, he says, was central in Jesus’ preaching and in fact in his ministry as a whole, and the parables simply describe “some aspect of the kingdom”.

Agreeably, the various parables describe particular aspects of the kingdom. Thus, it becomes clear that any given parable is limited in its description of the kingdom. Conversely, it is also clear that the message of the kingdom is a larger theme than the message of any given parable. Thus, one may agree with Snodgrass (2008:2, 579) and Hultgren (2000:11) above that the kingdom thematic in Jesus’ ministry provides context and meaning for parables in his preaching. Truly, Jesus used parables to explain aspects of the kingdom that he came to proclaim, to call for massive response to that kingdom, and to warn about the consequence of paying deaf ears to its message.

**2.3.2.3 Function of parables in terms of their communicative intent.** Snodgrass (2008:3) identifies parables as “*stories with intent*, the communicative intent of Jesus”, and warns that this intent should be made the goal of our study of parables. He further cautions that anything other than this “communicative intent of Jesus” is a rewriting of

the parables. For our purposes, he identifies the communicative intent as the function of parables. His justification for this equation follows from *speech act theory*, in which, according to him, “communication is not about abstract meaning” but “acts and seeks to change things”. In light of this he recommends that the question be asked how Jesus sought to change attitude and behaviour with each parable. He drives home his point by stating that:

The attempt to answer this question does not suggest hermeneutical naïveté or make one guilty of the “intentional fallacy,” a simplistic understanding of intentionality that assumes it can get into the other’s head. Rather, it seeks the communicative intent of discourse and assumes that the discourse indeed had a purpose.

(Snodgrass, 2008:580)

It is worthy of note that by “communicative intent” Snodgrass is not talking about *authorial intent*, but that Jesus definitely meant his parables to communicate *something* to his hearers in their circumstance. Jesus had a definite purpose for telling the parables, even though we can hardly apprehend such specific purposes – and in fact need not begin such a search. However, we may conclude that such purposes were generally to affect his hearers and move them to change and do something – chiefly to repent and turn to God. This is the idea of communicative intent as a function of parables.

**2.3.2.4 Parables and conflicts.** Ellisen (2001:22) asserts that parables were not born out of predictable circumstances, but “often came as Jesus’ response to opposition and unreceptivity”. He also claims that “animosity usually lurked in their background”, adding that Jesus began to use “full-blown parables” (presumably narrative parables) only after his miracles began to be blasphemed by Israel’s leaders. This allegation of animosity clearly explains the title of Ellisen’s work, *Parables in the eye of the storm: Christ’s response in the face of conflict*.

On his part, Barclay (1999:14) explains that Jesus did not create his parables in a careful and well-thought-out way, but “on the spur of the moment”. He says, “They were produced instantaneously, in the cut and thrust of debate”. In this way he concurs

Cadoux (1931:11-12), whom he cites as having said that “a parable is art harnessed for service and conflict”, and that “in its most characteristic use the parable is a weapon of controversy ... improvised in conflict to meet the unpremeditated situation.” In that wise, Barclay (1999:15) believes that it took “the sheer genius of the mind of Jesus” to produce these “sudden, lovely improvisations in the dust and heat of conflict”.

Snodgrass (2008:2) agrees that Jesus’ parables are “both works of art and weapons in conflict with opponents”, but also adds that they are more. His justification for this position is that “from the day they were first told right to the present, they have brought delight and instruction to countless people and offence to others”. He even asserts that the case is similar in the OT: “When parabolic material does appear, *it often mirrors* the prophetic and *confrontational* stance of the OT parables” (Snodgrass, 2008:42, emphases mine).

An older voice in parable research thinks in like manner: Jeremias (1972:21) submits that the parables of Jesus are primarily not literary works, nor do they seek to espouse general maxims, but were rather spoken in actual situations of the life of Jesus, at particular and often unforeseen points, mostly conflict situations (e.g. justification, defense, attack, challenge, etc.). He adds that most times they functioned as weapons of controversy calling for an answer on the spot.

From the above review, it is clear that the idea of Jesus using parables as weapons of conflict is a long-standing and popular one – and this should be taken seriously. However, there is no sufficient evidence to believe that he spoke parables only in conflict situations. Whereas he actually used *some* parables in response to controversies as occasion demanded (e.g. the Two Sons, *Matt. 21:28-32*; the Wicked Vinedressers, *Matt. 21:33-46*), there is also evidence that he used *other* parables in no-tension situations (e.g. the Mustard Seed, *Matt. 13:31-32*; the Leaven, *Matt.13:33*). Therefore, it is safer to reason that Jesus employed parables for a variety of purposes and that one of such purposes was to shut the mouths of his foes, rather than to consign all parables to conflict situations.

On the whole, one wishes to draw the conclusion that parables constitute a significant portion of Jesus' teaching material and is indeed pivotal to his teaching. They function prophetically, presuppose the kingdom of God, have definite communicative intent, and were sometimes used in conflict situations. Jesus knew when to use it for what purpose.

## **2.4 OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF PARABLE INTERPRETATION**

Parable interpretation has a long history and different interpretive models have been created at various times by biblical scholars. These different models have as well produced different meanings which succeeding generations of parable scholars have either supported and elaborated, or rejected and replaced. This section takes a brief overview of the different epochs in parable interpretation, relying on Van der Watt (2009:323-326) as follows:

2.4.1 **The patristic era**, during which allegorical method was used and deeper spiritual meaning was sought in the parables; and parables were predominantly interpreted as reflection of church dogma and tradition.

An important interpretive event of this era is Augustine's allegorical interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), according to which every detail was given theological significance (Snodgrass, 2008:4).

2.4.2 **The Reformation**, during which Luther and Calvin at best only criticised the allegorical approach.

2.4.3 **The 20th century**, during which Jülicher proceeded on the basis of the Aristotelian distinction between metaphor and comparison to categorise parables as comparisons. He modeled his popular one-point solution in consideration of the *tertium comparationis* between the *Bild* (image) and *Sache*, as well as claimed that a parable usually had a moral lesson that should be discovered.

2.4.4 **The period of new questions due to awareness of the historical context of parables**, during which Jülicher's approach was rejected and preference now leaned towards ancient Jewish cultural and historical setting.

Whereas the Jewish *mashal* immediately presented itself as a way of understanding parables, it was felt, within the context of the Gospels, that their major focus was the kingdom of God. As such, the interpretation of parables was placed within an eschatological framework and their messages were seen as describing the crisis of the coming eschatological kingdom of God in and through Jesus, rather than just providing simple moral lessons.

2.4.5 **The period of influence of historical-critical exegesis**, during which the original sources and forms of parable texts were reconstructed and the development and divergent uses of the parables in different situations were plotted. "Refined classifications" were achieved. Such characteristics as economy of words and information, repetition of important facts in some cases, and the contextual nature of parables were keenly observed.

2.4.6 **The era of the New Hermeneutic movement**, during which the communicative-persuasive nature of parables was taken cognisance of.

Insights from the philosophy of Heidegger and Gadamer led up to parables being seen as hermeneutical tools that were functional and should affect people. To such an extent it was expected that parables should go beyond being understood to being experienced. Moreover, the German term *Einverständnis* was coined and used to indicate that the horizons of understanding of the present-day reader and those of the original author should merge in order to come to a proper understanding of the parable text.

2.4.7 **The era of multidimensional approaches under literary studies**, during which literary methods, developed in the field of literary studies, were now systematically applied to parables, e.g. narrative analysis, speech act theory, reader response theory, feminist readings, ideological approaches, etc.

These methods were used either individually or in combined forms. Van der Watt (2009:325) however observes that these and other literary methods of the era are a far cry from the historical emphasis of Dodd and Jeremias, and in many ways the opposite of Jülicher's one-point proposition. He explains that whereas Jülicher thought of parables as comparisons with a resultant one-point meaning, the literary methods now present parables as "open metaphorical texts with multiple possibilities for interpretation".

According to him, this methodological explosion led, as should be expected, to the development of a more comprehensive approach that combined various individual methods and took account of the elements of truth and specific highlights of the individual methods. He notes for instance that it was in pursuit of this broader understanding of parables that Arens (1982:339-340) coined the German phrase *pragmatische Gleichnistheorie* ("pragmatic theory of parable interpretation") on the basis of a communication model, including the relevant aspects of proper communication. For him, parables are "fictional metaphoric texts with dramatic qualities".

Even for ideological agenda, multidimensional approaches are also used, including allegory. In the end, as Van der Watt (2009:326) observes, "The presuppositions of the exegete as to what a parable is and how it communicates, determines the way it is interpreted."

The above thoughts of Van der Watt are only stating the obvious. Current scholarship pays considerable attention to the literary dimensions of biblical texts. It is within such an analytical framework that this study is done. Chapter 5 of this study will highlight some of the issues on the front burner of current literary approaches to biblical studies.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter of the research set out to discuss issues bordering on the meaning of the term "parable", the way parables generally function in the Bible, the way they function in Jesus' teaching in particular, and the major paradigms of parable interpretation over the

centuries of biblical studies. These objectives were achieved, and the results are summarised below.

The biblical term “parable” has a meaning that is rooted both in the Hebrew literary tradition **משל** (transliterated “mashal”) and in the Greek literary tradition **παραβολή** (transliterated “parabolē”), as used respectively by the HB and LXX. A parable is an extended figure of speech of illustration, persuasion, or comparison. It shares some features with other literary tools in the two literary traditions above, but also has distinctive features that make it a genre in its own right.

Biblical parables function in situations of comparison, where analogy is drawn between two dissimilar domains of understanding. They are verisimilar, fictitious stories created, told, or re-told to illustrate or explain reality in a different meaning-context. They have metaphorical powers; that is, they transfer meaning from the domain of everyday life to a religious, ethical or spiritual domain. Therefore, the meaning of biblical parables should never be sought literally, since they are not told for their own sake but to convey a meaning other than its literal sense.

The Gospel parables generally have communicative intent; that is, they were told to communicate *something*. This communicative intent is however different from the idea of authorial intent. Jesus used parables as prophetic tools – tools with which he creatively declared the message of God and challenged the people to repent and turn fully to God. They highlight aspects of the kingdom of God, which is a chief motif in the teaching of Christ.

It was also indicated that parable research began with an allegorical agenda during the patristic era, when theological significance was assigned to virtually every detail of the parable. Then in early 20th century Jülicher adopted a single-point approach and thus overturned the patristic heritage. This turned out to be another extreme approach. However, many alternative approaches have been formulated since Jülicher. The latest of these approaches is a multidimensional, literary approach, which it is hoped will be useful later in this study.

The overarching goal of this study is to assess, in the light of Reformed hermeneutics, how some Pentecostals interpret the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). To build up to that, this chapter has exposed the general biblical idea of a parable as distinct from other figurative constructs in the Bible or even outside the Bible. This knowledge and the limits so set will help navigate the whole process of evaluation, for they will help this researcher exegete the passage with some degree of confidence and credibility, as well as determine useful parameters for evaluating the Pentecostal interpretations under investigation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### 3.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

This chapter of the study pursues an understanding of the nature of Pentecostal hermeneutics. This theoretical background is necessary for acquainting with the common mind-set of Pentecostals and the dynamics involved in their interpretation of the Bible. The justification for this is that this study is about evaluation of *Pentecostal interpretations* of Matthew 25:14-30. However, before investing effort in understanding the origin, meaning and nature of Pentecostal hermeneutics, attention will first be given to general biblical hermeneutics, its meaning, and the motivation for it. Also, a cursory look at Pentecostalism will be done before settling down to examine Pentecostal hermeneutics, because the former is the tradition within which Pentecostal interpretation is practiced. All these will hopefully help set the stage for recognising and analysing Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 in Chapter 4, as well as set up possible theoretical contrasts between Pentecostal hermeneutics (in Chapter 3) and Reformed hermeneutics (in Chapter 5). These, it is believed, will in turn be useful while the results of the analysis of sample Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 in Chapter 4 will be tested in Chapter 6.

##### 3.1.1 MOTIVATION FOR BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

“This is a lament and *is to be used* as a lament.” (Eze.19:14c, emphasis not original)

This instruction by Prophet Ezekiel is an overtly hermeneutical one, perhaps one of the most explicit hermeneutical instructions in the Bible, and one that demonstrates that proper understanding and application are obligatory when dealing with biblical texts. Conversely, it alerts the Bible student to the fact that biblical texts *can* be *misunderstood* and *misapplied*, in which case the message (or the communicative intent) would be missed by the interpreter. Herein lies the burden of hermeneutics, and the need for it.

Furthermore, the fear of *misunderstanding* and *misapplying* Scripture is one with an absolutely theological consequence, because what is understood from the Bible, as well

as what is believed on the basis of such understanding, is crucial to faith. In the words of Klein *et al.* (2004:19),

It becomes exceedingly critical to understand as well as we possibly can what God means by what he says in the Bible. We must understand correctly so we can believe and act correctly.... Because proper hermeneutics helps us understand God's will, it is crucial to faithful application.... Since we desire to obey God's will, we need to understand how to interpret Scriptures, which reveal his will, correctly.

In his preface to the title, *New horizons in hermeneutics: the theory and practice of transforming biblical reading*, Thiselton (1992:xv-xvi) joins in bemoaning the problem of misunderstanding. With "transformation" as a key concept in the book, he fears that readers of biblical texts can (in fact, do) sometimes transform the texts in ways that God does not intend them to be transformed. He highlights ignorance, blindness and misunderstanding as reasons for such questionable approaches. This problem is particularly critical against the backdrop of his point of departure, namely, that the Bible is not given primarily for informing people on sundry subjects, but as "a source of transformation, to shape readers according to God's purpose for them". For this reason, then, the central thing in reading the Bible is to actualise and perform what is sometimes only potential in its texts; that is, to apprehend what God intends the reader to receive in order to be transformed according to his (God's) purposes, which otherwise can be missed in the midst of so much.

Still, Thiselton (1992:xvi) accurately observes that this search for the "voice" of God in the pages of the Bible also constitutes a pitfall, apparently in terms of sometimes overstretching the text and reading meanings into it. His counsel, then, is apt, that readers of the Bible need a combination of prayer, listening and hermeneutics, if they are ever going to be delivered from self-preoccupation, self-centeredness, or any attempt to "tame" the Bible to accord with their own prior wishes, concerns or explanations, or if they are ever going to open themselves to the voice of God. It is also sufficient caution to a careful reader when Thiselton warns that otherwise, "the process of reader-transformation becomes reversed into text transformation", and "the vision of God is instead replaced by treating the Bible as a mirror of the self".

Coming from the slant of logical dialectic, Klein *et al.* (2004:3) also motivate two problems that create a need for biblical hermeneutics. For them, “correctly understanding Scripture is an arduous and often puzzling task”, due mainly to the divine-human dialectic involved in interacting with Scripture, as well as the tension generated by the ideal of objectivity and the actual situation of (at least moderate) subjectivity. Against the backdrop of these perplexities, the authors assert that readers can only have hope of correctly understanding Scripture by using “a well-thought-out approach to interpreting the Bible”, and that hermeneutics fits precisely into this need. According to them,

Hermeneutics provides the means for acquiring an understanding of the Scriptures. To avoid interpretation that is arbitrary, erroneous, or that simply suits personal whim, the reader needs methods and principles for guidance. A deliberate attempt to interpret based on sensible and agreed upon principles becomes the best guarantee that an interpretation will be correct.

(Klein *et al.*, 2004:5)

Slightly different from Klein *et al.* above, Silva (2007a:17-19) on his part explains that hermeneutics is necessary for correctly understanding the Bible, not because of the divine part of biblical language, but because of the human part of it<sup>8</sup>. He contends that whereas God speaks in “an absolutely unambiguous fashion” and “[makes] himself understood with irresistible efficacy”, human language on its part “is largely equivocal, that is, capable of being understood in more than one way”, and therefore almost always presents “the *potential* for misinterpretation”. Put differently, Silva’s contention here is that, whereas the message of God through the biblical author to his people was without doubt precise, the author, being human, struggled with language to adequately express that message and naturally failed to deliver it spot-on. He suggests that one thing could also have been understood by the author’s audience (also human) to mean something (or even many things) else. So for Silva, hermeneutics comes in to bail the reader out in his quest to understand that which God had spoken “in accents clear and

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<sup>8</sup> By this statement, Silva (2007a:17) concedes that the Bible has both a divine part and a human part. This is correct reasoning, because “God spoke ... through the prophets ...” (Heb. 1:1), and “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21).

still” (Bode, RCH 508, Stanza 3, Line 2), but was blighted by the natural ambiguity of human language (Silva, 2007a:17) or even “the storms of passion” and “the murmurs of self-will” (Bode, RCH 508, Stanza 3, Lines 3 and 4).

Lategan (2009b:66) makes a very penetrating observation when he says: “Interpretation is a universal phenomenon and hermeneutics is a generic discipline.” This statement indicates in part that interpretation happens everywhere and in all situations. For instance, a sigh has a very deep meaning for somebody who was talking to the person sighing; a wink means something between mother and child; and, when somebody says, “I understand what he is saying”, there is no guarantee that what they *understand* is what the speaker is saying, but all the same, they understand *something*. The other part of Lategan’s statement only adds that (presumably in a technical sense) we approach (or should approach) the practice of hermeneutics with a consciousness of the genre we are dealing with – whether prose, poetry, prophecy, etc.

He however warns that a written text “represents an enormous concentration of energy”, and as such needs to be approached cautiously and respectfully when seeking to “unleash its communicative potential”; because otherwise “it is ready to release this energy in a surplus of meaning in an ongoing process of sense-making” (Lategan, 2009b:66). That is, if interpretation is not deliberately controlled, it can produce meanings that may not all be true to the communicative intent of the text. It is in view of this potentiality that he proposes a “map” which he hopes would inform interpreters on where they are with the text (“orientation”) and where they are going (or are supposed to be going) with it (“direction”). For him, this is important because the NT texts were written for a certain purpose that should be respected. In that light, whereas the NT texts can be read in many ways, the mapping exercise aims at readings that aid the discovery of the main (communicative) thrust of the text and the continuation of that thrust in new and different situations (Lategan, 2009b:66-67).

It is crucial to note Lategan’s (2009b:66) warning above against following the surplus flow of energy of the text in reproducing meaning. From everyday communicative processes, it is obvious that unwarranted meanings are often drawn by one from another person’s statement or action. This happens sometimes for malicious reasons,

and at other times plainly because of ignorance or lack of attention. A similar scenario also occurs with the biblical text. Selfishness, malice, or sheer ignorance can so colour one's understanding of the biblical text that the result of an interpretation is way off the matrix of acceptable meaning(s). But whatever the reason for misinterpretation, no hermeneutical approach that leads to damaging or misleading interpretation of biblical texts is excusable. Misinterpretation and misunderstanding of biblical texts should be avoided as far as it is possible, because as seen in Klein *et al.* (2004:19) above, the way we interpret and understand Scripture has serious theological implications for our faith.

In view of the allegation of multiplicity of meaning with respect to human language and the undeniable possibility of surplus of meaning in any communication situation, an immediate question that arises is: Is there anything wrong if one statement presents more than one possible meaning? Depending on one's answer to this question, another would be: Is the multiplicity of possible meanings of human language a blessing or a problem? This study has a good part of these questions to grapple with, and will attend to it while investigating Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30.

### 3.1.2 SOME SCHOLARLY DEFINITIONS OF HERMENEUTICS AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

It is obvious from the foregoing that Bible students, theologians and all other persons who use the Bible as a tool for their work need hermeneutical equipment in order to succeed in their endeavour. However, the question remains as to what hermeneutics means. Attention will now be turned to the general meaning of hermeneutics, and the particular meaning of biblical hermeneutics. The following three scholars are considered here:

**3.1.2.1 M. Silva.** Silva (2007a:17) simply defines *hermeneutics* as "the discipline that deals with principles of interpretation". He wishes that his readers realise that they have been taught hermeneutics, and have been practicing it, all their lives, so long as they are daily involved in reading things, hearing stories, and analysing events. The only difference when it comes to biblical hermeneutics is that it involves a book that is partly

divine and partly human. In his view, although the idea of hermeneutics sounds very technical (and according to him, is, given the complexity of prior learning), biblical hermeneutics simply involves “learning to transpose our customary interpretive routines to our reading of the Bible”, rather than “learning difficult techniques” (Silva, 2007a:19). However, whether the transposition proposed here is as easy as has been said or not, will be revealed in the course of this study.

**3.1.2.2 W. W. Klein, C. L. Blomberg, and R. L. Hubbard.** Klein *et al.* (2004:4) take an etymological route in investigating the meaning of the term *hermeneutics*. According to them, it has its roots in the Greek verb ἐρμηνεύω (transliterated as *hermēneuó*, meaning “to explain, interpret or to translate”, cf. Luke 24:27), and the Greek noun ἐρμηνεία (transliterated as *hermēneia*, meaning “interpretation” or “translation”, cf. 1 Cor. 12:10). Accordingly, *hermeneutics* involves interpreting or explaining. The authors say that in general terms “hermeneutics describes the principles people use to understand what something means, to comprehend what a message – written, oral, or visual – is endeavouring to communicate”. More narrowly, if one focuses on fields like biblical studies or literature, they say, *hermeneutics* refers to “the task of explaining the meaning of a piece of writing”. Particularly then, biblical hermeneutics describes the burden and task of explaining the meaning of Scriptures.

On the nature<sup>9</sup> of hermeneutics, Klein *et al.* (2004:5) agree with Silva (2007a:17) that interpretation is “both a science and an art”. As such, whereas communication uses “codes” of some sort, the interpreter needs to use some rules, principles, methods, and tactics to “decode” them (= “science”). However, the “art” of interpretation is also necessary because, according to them, there are subtle implications and nuances in some communication situations that must be carefully observed to get at the meaning of the message – these subtleties being themselves not necessarily or easily amenable to scientific rules.

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9 This researcher prefers to talk about the “nature” of hermeneutics at this point, whereas Klein *et al.* (2004:5) refer to the material as the precise definition of hermeneutics.

In the understanding of this researcher, the transition between the “science” and the “art” of interpretation as indicated above means that for any interpretive activity, there is always tension between objective interpretation (“science”) and subjective interpretation (“art”), which Klein *et al.* earlier asserted. Their “both ... and ...” phrase above shows for that matter that they hold as relatively valid *both* the objective *and* the subjective dimensions of biblical interpretation. It remains, perhaps, to show the precise point at which objective or subjective interpretation is applicable.

Of equal interest is their assertion that interpreters seek ways to bridge the linguistic, historical, social and cultural gaps that exist between the ancient world and the modern world in order to understand the meaning of (ancient) texts<sup>10</sup>. Not every detail of the characters, actions or situations is given. The reader needs to fill the gaps by supplying what the text omits or leaves unsaid. The reader looks for connections and links between the gaps to create a coherent interpretation. Gaps can be filled by the reader’s memory, expectations, the building up of associations which serve as contexts in reading through the text. It would have been easier for the first readers to fill these gaps, as they shared many of the social and cultural experiences, and knew many of the events that are told.

The above call by Klein *et al.* (2004:5) to fill gaps comes down to the issue of intentionality. On the assumption that the goal of communication is understanding – this including Scriptures – they affirm that “hermeneutics provides a strategy that will enable us to understand what an author or speaker *intended* to communicate” (emphasis not original). The mention of intentionality here, as the authors themselves concede, allows for perhaps no more than one meaning of a text or utterance, and also tasks the interpreter to understand *that* single meaning in the mind of the author of the text (Klein *et al.*, 2004:6).

According to them, the issue of intentionality raises the question whether a text has only one correct meaning, or several meanings, or even infinitely many possible meanings. A corollary question to this one is about the actual location of meaning: that is, whether

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10 The Bible is an ancient literature compiled over a long period of time.

meaning resides with the original author, or with the reader, or in the text itself, or in the interaction between reader and text. They avoid direct answers to these questions though, but make a remarkable assertion that, in the view of this researcher, has critical implication for hermeneutics. The assertion is that any definition of the task of hermeneutics dovetails one's bias with respect to the "location" of meaning. That is, whether one believes that meaning resides in the text, or in the mind of the reader, or in some combination of the two, will influence one's way of understanding what hermeneutics seeks to achieve (Klein *et al.*, 2004:6). This study will in due course attend to these and other related issues.

**3.1.2.3 B. Lategan.** Lategan (2009a:13-20) enters the discussion on the meaning of hermeneutics with very inspiring thoughts. According to him,

Understanding is both an art and a science. It is both a gift and a result of hard work, involving all the skills and intellectual powers we can muster. It requires precision, control and accountability, but also innovation, imagination and creative talent<sup>11</sup>. The interpretation of biblical texts is more than an aesthetic or intellectual exercise – it is in essence sense-making with existential consequences.

(Lategan, 2009a:13)

The statement above does not only agree with the earlier cited thoughts of Klein *et al.* (2004:5) about the scientific and artistic dimensions of interpretation, but also beautifully elucidates the complementarities of the "art" and "science" of interpretation. Perhaps more important is that it relates interpretation to concrete situations in life when it says that interpretation "is in essence sense-making with existential consequences". Klein *et al.* (2004:19) themselves also agree with this idea of "existential consequences" while making a case for the goal of hermeneutics. They say that "true interpretation of the Bible combines both an exercise in ancient history and a grappling with its impact on our lives. Indeed, to truly understand what a text meant to its original recipients requires that we apprehend something of that original impact ourselves."

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11 By incorporating "innovation, imagination and creative talent" among needed skills for valid interpretation, Lategan is apparently influenced by more recent hermeneutical theories that allow for the contribution of the reader to the meaning of the biblical text, rather than the unrealistic vision of a dispassionate, "scientifically" objective reader.

Lategan (2009a:14) defines hermeneutics as “the discipline that concerns itself with the nature, the conditions and the process of understanding”. In a more general sense, he describes it as “the *art of understanding*”, here referring to a combination of “the conditions that make understanding possible” and “the phenomenon of understanding itself”. Conversely, he describes it in a narrower sense as “the method and techniques employed to interpret written texts”. He notes that more particularly in theology, hermeneutics contrasts with exegesis as “the *theory* of interpretation”, while the latter is “the *practice* of interpretation” (emphases not original).

It is obvious from the above thoughts that Lategan has a broad vision of hermeneutics. For him, it is not only an activity but also a combination of activity and conditions that light up the process of understanding. Mention of “the nature, the conditions and the process of understanding” above indicates that apart from the actual apprehension of the meaning of a text or utterance, there are philosophical, cognitive, and other concerns with hermeneutics, as he himself demonstrates when he mentions names like Aristotle, Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, etc. (Lategan, 2009a:15-18) as being part of the history of development of hermeneutics.

Lategan (2009a:14-15) acknowledges that hermeneutics (or better, hermeneutical intervention) would not be necessary unless the process of understanding was interrupted or came under threat, as when misunderstanding occurred or conflict erupted. He submits that miscommunication was more likely to occur where the “distance”<sup>12</sup> between sender and receiver was wider. According to him, this is the situation with biblical texts, and therefore makes “hermeneutical support” (or hermeneutical intervention) an absolute necessity. For biblical texts in particular, Lategan (2009a:20) affirms that the practice of hermeneutics is not an imposed task, but that the texts themselves, as part of a dynamic process of communication aimed at discerning the will of God and its existential implications, call for a conscious effort at understanding. Further justification, according to him, lies in the facts that the will of

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12 “Distance” here is considered in terms of history, culture, geography, etc., not space.

God is not immediately clear in some instances as well as that there are various forms of ambiguity here and there.

### 3.1.3 AN OWN DEFINITION OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Above is a rich harvest of insights into the meaning of both general hermeneutics and biblical hermeneutics. What follows is this researcher's attempt at defining biblical hermeneutics, taking into consideration the inputs of the scholarly works reviewed above:

*Biblical hermeneutics is the discipline that mobilises all the needed spiritual, intellectual, technical and creative tools to gain valid understanding of the communicative intent of a text of the Bible in a way (or ways) that makes (or make) sense to the reader in his/her existential situation.*

The following points need to be noted from the definition:

- 1) The hermeneut needs more than one tool to succeed in correctly interpreting the Bible. These include:
  - (i) The spiritual tool of prayer. The hermeneut's mind has been blighted by the effect of the Fall (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9-11; 2 Cor. 3:14-16); so they cannot think the thoughts of God. Even if they would, the thoughts of God are higher than their thoughts (cf. Isa. 55:9). The hermeneut who wishes to receive a message from God through a passage of Scripture for life transformation and not merely for intellectual purposes, will therefore need to bow in prayer to God for illumination by the Holy Spirit (cf. Ps. 147:19-20; 1 Cor. 2:11b). Above, Thiselton (1992:xvi) recommends a combination of obedient prayer, listening and hermeneutics to succeed in biblical interpretation. This should be taken seriously.
  - (ii) Intellectual equipment has its place. Ordinarily, without prior knowledge of the language in use, the reader cannot participate in the communication process involved in reading the Bible. To use Paul's language in 1

Corinthians 14:11, he/she would be a “foreigner” to the text and the text a “foreigner” to him/her.

Acquired language is one form of intellectual development, and more so if one goes further to acquire some skills in the original languages in which the Bible was written. Training in various cultures, worldviews, ideologies, etc., or even Christian traditions (Reformed, Pentecostal, Liberal, etc.) is also a form of intellectual development – and to be sure, these influence the way the reader understands concepts, even biblical doctrines. Beyond these, some persons are formally trained in the skill of interpretation. All these categories of persons, when faced with the need to interpret biblical texts, consciously or unconsciously deploy their earlier cognitive acquisitions in the process of sense making with the text. Still further, one’s professional training can as well affect one’s understanding of the Bible. Think, for instance, how a geologist understands the Genesis creation story: he will most likely be more critical with the text than, say, an accountant.

The truth remains that every interpreter comes with a repository of knowledge that he consciously or unconsciously deploys in the process of sense making with the text. Therefore, one cannot honestly discount the role of intellectual capacity in biblical interpretation.

- (iii) Technical tools are also necessary for interpretation. Technical equipment simply means the ability to interpret a problem and to proffer a solution to it or at least know where to go for solution. One cannot agree more that reading the Bible poses a problem to many. Like the Ethiopian eunuch whom Philip asked whether he understood what he was reading from Isaiah’s prophecy on the Suffering Servant (cf. Acts 8:26-39; Isa. 53:7-8), many persons understand virtually nothing or even something else from passages of Scripture that otherwise have specific communicative intents.

It should be remembered that when Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:30b), he retorted, “How can I, unless someone explains it to me?” (v. 31a). The man’s problem was not with Greek semantics or perhaps syntax, for he was actually reading the text at the time that Philip met him. Something technical was lacking, namely, not the literary meaning of the words that form the text but the referential meaning of the prophetic text taken as a whole. So he did not ask Philip to tell him *what* the prophet meant (in a literary sense), but *whom* the prophet was referring to – was it to himself or to someone else? (v. 34). This episode was a purely hermeneutical encounter out there in the field, but aptly represents a challenge that upsets both the pulpit and the pew of the church today.

In that light, reading the texts of Scripture with understanding requires that one know what one is dealing with, as well as what one should make of the issue that confronts one from the Scripture. Taking the present canonical form of the biblical texts for example, the interpreter needs to know whether he/she is dealing with a narrative, a poem, a prophecy, or an apocalypse. This knowledge will help him/her approach the text in its own right and with due respect to its genre. This is perhaps why Lategan (2009b:66) says above that “[i]nterpretation is a universal phenomenon and *hermeneutics is a generic discipline*” (emphasis not original). In other words, people do general interpretation everywhere and every time, but when they are trying to approach interpretation technically (that is, hermeneutics), they need to pay attention to the literary type of the text or utterance.

Viljoen (2017:25-36) suggests a multifaceted process while trying to interpret biblical texts. He calls the process a “problem-oriented approach”, and says it is a combination of both diachronic methods (historical approaches) and synchronic methods (text-immanent approaches) respectively applied according to the requirements of the text

and the concerns brought to it. While elaboration on this will be suspended till Chapter 5, it is obvious as he says that such an engagement with methods needs some degree of specialisation (Viljoen, 2017:26). This is another way of talking about technical endowment.

- (iv) The need for creativity can also not be down-played. For this researcher, this is the point at which the hermeneut exercises ability to differentiate between the “science” and the “art” of interpretation. In terms of the “art”, here they are able to discern the nuances of the language and to make sense of their contributions (or otherwise) to the interpretive process.
- 2) The issue of validity of meaning is taken seriously by the definition. Whatever meaning the hermeneut discerns in the text has to be tested<sup>13</sup> by means of agreed-upon parameters. There are certain general hermeneutical parameters and there are others that are unique to certain traditions. In any case, the understanding of the hermeneut/exegete has to be true to the biblical text in particular and to the overarching message of the Bible in general. Interpreters are not at loose liberties to impose meanings on biblical pericopes (a practice that is commonly called *eisegesis*).
  - 3) The definition allows for the possibility of multiple interpretation of the biblical text. The communicative intent is not necessarily one; it can be more than one. A passage can convey one message to one culture or situation and another message to another. It can convey the same message in different, nuanced ways. The hermeneut should be armed with tools for validating meaning, but should also be open to more than one valid possibility.
  - 4) The existential factor is also very crucial for interpretation. The Bible was not written/compiled in a vacuum, was not transmitted in a vacuum, and has never been read, understood or applied in a vacuum. It is not read just for the sake of reading or simply to gather scientific facts. The Bible is read for effect, for impact,

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13 This study is actually about testing the validity of meanings derived from Matthew 25:14-30 by some Pentecostal interpreters.

or like Thiselton (1992:xv) puts it, for transformation. When members of the Body of Christ read the Bible, they have an expectation: God would speak to their situation, God would address their crisis, God would rebuke or correct them in the error of their ways, God would show them the way to go, and so on. Similarly, ideologically-driven Bible readers, like feminists, the politically disadvantaged class, human rights activists, charity organisations, etc., want their plights or the plights of their beneficiaries addressed, even though in some cases very extremely.

The truth is that every reader of the Bible or hearer of the words of the Lord read, taught or preached, has at least one existential expectation. In Mark 10:17-31//Luke 18:18-30, for instance, the rich man (Luke: *rich ruler*) apparently filtered the demands of the kingdom that Jesus placed on him through existential fears. How could he survive if he sold everything he had and turned the proceeds over to the poor? What would become of him? So he responded with sadness and disappointment – his entire heart possessed by wealth! – and walked away with no such excitement as he had when he was coming. In response to Jesus' further explanation of the demands of the kingdom of God after the man had left, Peter, presumably speaking on behalf of the other disciples, raised another existential concern: "We have left everything to follow you!" (v. 28). Interestingly, Jesus did not rebuke him for this existential concern, but lovingly assured him that they would have in return in this life a hundredfold of every mundane thing they had abandoned for the sake of the kingdom, plus persecution, and then eternal life in the age to come (vv. 29-30).

The existential expectation of an encounter with God's goodwill on the pages of the Bible has many implications. Two immediate ones are that it boosts the confidence of the reader in approaching the God who ever speaks through Scriptures, and indeed animates the whole Bible reading process.

## **3.2 ORIGIN AND MEANING OF PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS**

### **3.2.1 ORIGIN AND MEANING OF PENTECOSTALISM**

Before reviewing the origin of Pentecostal hermeneutics, it is necessary to understand the origin and meaning of Pentecostalism, being the Christian tradition in which Pentecostal hermeneutics is practiced. The following briefly summarises the origin and meaning of Pentecostalism:

**3.2.1.1 Origin of Pentecostalism.** According to Melton (2018), Pentecostals trace their origin to the apostles, although modern-day Pentecostalism has its actual roots in the late 19th century, a time that he says witnessed “mounting indifference to traditional religion”. In reaction to the prevalent formalism and somewhat class consciousness in the Protestant denominations of the day, those who were socially deprived yearned for a “heart religion” that would meet their spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical needs. Like its precedent, the Holiness Movement, Pentecostalism would fulfil these needs for both the church and the un-church.

Although there were some charismatic manifestations in some 19th-century Protestant churches, the break-in point of contemporary Pentecostalism was in the early 20th century at Bethel Bible College, Topeka, Kansas. According to Melton, college director Charles Fox Parham had been influenced by the 19th-century Holiness Movement and was thus dissatisfied with the complacency and formalism of the church. For him, the solution was a revival occasioned by another outpouring of the Holy Spirit (like at Pentecost). Equipped with this conviction, he instructed his students to pray, fast, study the Scriptures, and like the apostles await the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Eventually on January 1, 1901, Agnes Oznam became the first of Parham’s students to speak in an unknown tongue, soon followed by others. These manifestations were for Parham and his students a prophetic phenomenon; they were signs of the End-time and called for urgent response by way of evangelical mission.

Faith healing followed in 1903, with a resultant attraction by 1905 of about 25,000 new converts in Texas alone. Melton (2018) asserts on the whole that Texas, Alabama, Florida, Kansas and Missouri were all “hotbeds for Pentecostalism”. But beyond the

American South and Southwest, wider national and international expansion resulted from the Azusa Street revival that began in 1906 at the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission at #312 Azusa Street, Los Angeles. The Azusa Street leader was William Seymour, a Holiness church pastor and one of the many whom Parham's teachings had influenced in Houston, Texas. Under Seymour's guidance, Azusa Street became a great spiritual centre for all classes of people, while scores of men and women from Azusa and other Pentecostal churches began to extol the reality of speaking in tongues, having purportedly been spiritually energised and charismatically endowed. However, following the very stiff opposition, and sometimes excommunication, meted by the established Protestant churches on charismatically-oriented clergy and laity, many Pentecostals withdrew from their churches and began to form new ones, frustrated that they could not transform the former. In that way, "Pentecostal" branded churches came into existence.

**3.2.1.2 Meaning of Pentecostalism.** The term "Pentecostalism" is difficult to define, because it is "a diverse phenomenon consisting of different types of groups". In other words, although the underlying theological ethos is the same, the movement lacks homogeneity owing to the different factions established within different traditions<sup>14</sup> (Wambua, 2014). However, pivotal to all strands of the Pentecostal movement is the centrality of the Holy Spirit in virtually every aspect and activity of life and worship.

Against the backdrop of this diversity, Archer (2009:13-14) describes Pentecostalism as

A diffuse group of restorationist revivalistic movements, held together by a common doctrinal commitment to the "Full Gospel" message and a passionate emphasis on the ecstatic religious experiences associated with Spirit baptism.

This description calls for some explication: "restorationist" indicates that Pentecostals have a view of themselves as "both an authentic continuation of New Testament Christianity and ... a faithful representation of New Testament Christianity in the present societies in which they exist" (Archer, 2009:133). "Revivalistic" indicates Pentecostal

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<sup>14</sup> This diversity has geo-cultural and theological dimensions. One, some traditions favour Charles Fox Parham as the founder, and Topeka, Kansas as the birth place of the movement. Others favour William Seymour as the founder, and the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, California as the birth place. Two, early Pentecostalism contains Trinitarian and Oneness groups, as well as Wesleyan Holiness and Finished Work groups (Archer, 2009:11-13).

emphasis on “the necessity of a personal conscious conversion experience” as the means of transforming the individual, implanting the principle of private action and personal responsibility, and thus changing society (Archer, 2009:16). The “Full Gospel” refers to the five-fold understanding of the on-going work of Jesus as Saviour, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and soon coming King (Archer, 2009:13, 269). “Spirit baptism”, a third distinct blessing of the Holy Spirit after conversion and sanctification, is “an enduement of power for proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel ... initially evidenced by speaking in unlearned tongues” (Archer, 2009:20).

These distinctives make Pentecostals different from other Evangelicals. At the same time, they constitute the golden thread that runs through the various versions of Pentecostalism. Of particular note among the points of emphasis is the uniqueness of Pentecostalism in its belief “that all Christians should seek a post-conversion religious experience called baptism with the Holy Spirit”<sup>15</sup>. The basis point of departure for this argument is the ecstatic experience of the disciples when the Holy Spirit came on them on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2-4). This baptism is according to Pentecostals necessarily accompanied by speaking in tongues as initial evidence, and may be either *glossolalia* (speech in an unknown language) or *xenoglossy* (speech in a language known to others but not the speaker) (Melton, 2018).

Little wonder, then, that individual devotion or corporate worship among Pentecostals witnesses volumes of tongue-speaking, whether in prayer, worship, or ministering. Sometimes one cannot but wonder whether it was appropriate at the point in time and in the manner that it was deployed. Howbeit, the common Pentecostal justification of these ecstatic expressions is that tongues edify the speaker (cf. 1 Cor. 14:4) (Melton, 2018).

One other thing about Pentecostalism that needs to be mentioned is that whereas early Pentecostals were located down the rung of America’s socio-economic ladder, and as such easily won the appeal of “[r]evivalist restoration preaching and practice”, what

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15 Some people call it “baptism *with* the Holy Spirit; others “baptism *of* the Holy Spirit”; still others “baptism *in* the Holy Spirit”; or simply “Spirit baptism.” They all refer to the same experience.

fuelled their passion for the kingdom of God was not their social deprivation but “their reading’ of the biblical meta-narrative” (Archer, 2009:28). He says:

Their social cultural milieu contributed to “how” they read Scripture as well as to “what” themes they heard in Scripture. Thus, their social situation enabled the Pentecostal pioneers to “hear” and “long for” themes in Scripture which were being ignored or were viewed as unacceptable by both the fundamentalists and the liberals of that era.

In this way, Archer (2009:28) debunks all sociological theories propounded by scholars to explain the origin and meaning of Pentecostalism.

Archer (2009:29) further motivates early Pentecostalism’s most universal characteristic as “their passionate desire for an unmediated experience with the Holy Spirit”. He continues:

They sought to establish a deep and personal relationship with Jesus Christ through Spirit baptism. Their religious passion was shaped and facilitated by their restorationist reading of the New Testament narrative.

In summary, Pentecostalism is a multidimensional Christian movement that resulted from the early 20th-century outpouring of the Holy Spirit, whose chief concern is the continuation of the work of Jesus as Saviour, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptiser, Healer and soon coming King, and which can be actualised only by those who themselves have been baptised in the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues. Preachers and adherents alike want to see charismatic experiences spread across the faith community, and want to hear testimonies of miracles. Gradually, what started and has remained as a largely diffuse movement has begun articulating its character and formulating its strategies. Among these, there is an ongoing discussion on what its hermeneutics should be, of course amidst divergent arguments whether a unique Pentecostal hermeneutics is possible, necessary or even reliable, or not (Archer, 2009:178; Nel, 2017:97-98). However, in the section that follows, this study will focus on the question of origin and meaning of Pentecostal hermeneutics.

## 3.2.2 ORIGIN OF PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS

### 3.2.2.1 The Period before the Pentecostal Movement

**3.2.2.1.1 Interpretation in the Period before the 19th Century.** Bible interpretation has a long and interesting history that spans from the very beginning of the compilation, studying, editing, and use of Jewish religious writings in the period before Christ up until the 19th century. This long period can be clearly divided into distinct epochs that either evolved or perfected certain unique approaches to Bible interpretation.<sup>16</sup> Attention will now turn to the 19th century to summarise the hermeneutical events of the period immediately before the birth of Pentecostalism.

**3.2.2.1.2 Interpretation in the 19th Century.** According to Klein *et al.*, (2004:52-53), the 19th century is remembered for the birth of the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation. This development came about due to the upward surge of intellectualism during the period. Some crucial philosophical presuppositions of the historical-critical method were that:

1. The use of human reason, unencumbered by theological limitations, was the best tool of Bible study. This in turn led to a treatment of the Bible like any other literature, rather than God's special revelation to humanity;
2. The Bible's ideas are time-bound truths rather than being timeless; and
3. The moral and ethical values of the Bible deserve more attention than its theological and historical claims.

These presuppositions brought about a major paradigm shift in biblical interpretation. Interpretation now focused on the sources behind a text (source criticism) rather than on the meaning of a text. On another hand, some scholars abandoned the idea of the Bible as divine revelation and sought for the details of the historical development behind it (Klein *et al.*, 1994:52-53).

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<sup>16</sup> Klein *et al.* (2004:24-51) traces in reasonable details the different epochs, namely, Jewish interpretation (before Christ), apostolic interpretation (ca. A.D. 30-100), patristic interpretation (ca. A.D. 100-590), Medieval interpretation (ca. A.D. 590-1500), Reformation interpretation (ca. A.D. 1500-1650), and post-Reformation interpretation (ca. A.D. 1650-1800). Above is only a cursory look at 19th-century interpretation as one directly preceding Pentecostal interpretation.

This earlier paradigm shift of the 19th century was to lead to another paradigm shift, namely, a hermeneutical approach that would take the stage along with the rise of Pentecostalism. To that unique Pentecostal hermeneutical approach the study now turns.

**3.2.2.2 Emergence of Pentecostal hermeneutics.** To apprehend the origin of Pentecostal hermeneutics, this study will follow Archer's (2009:27) suggestion that Pentecostal hermeneutical development be traced historically, viz:

**3.2.2.2.1 Reaction to Common Sense Realism.** Archer (2009:50-52) traces the origin of Pentecostal hermeneutics to a reaction to 19th-century Common Sense Realism (CSR). According to him, CSR was "the dominant hermeneutical context of the early 19th century". Truth was seen as being static, stable, unchangeable, and not culturally derivable. As such, it "could be known objectively by careful observers in any age or culture". CSR was closely related to Frances Bacon's inductive scientific method, which required that general laws be discovered on their own terms rather than by superimposing hypotheses or theories on the evidence (Archer, 2009:50). Touted as being objective and empirical, the Baconian method is reported by Archer (2009:51) to have been deeply entrenched among conservatives, because it was seen to be "both scientific and supportive of evangelical faith". But how did this affect biblical hermeneutics? Archer (2009:51) answers as follows:

For conservative Protestants, the Bible, like nature, was a book of "hard facts"; thus the Baconian method served to discover objectively the plain (literal) meaning of Scripture.

For the various Protestant seminaries, truth of Scripture was in this spirit both immutable and perspicuous. Archer (2009:52) notes the implication of this as follows:

For Protestants, Common Sense philosophy wed to Baconian scientific method produced a confidence that one could discover the facts of Scripture as clearly as one could discover the facts of science.

The provisions of CSR and Baconian philosophy surveyed above did not however sit well with particularly American Protestantism, and this led to a threefold reaction,

namely: 1) Modernists/liberals pushed for “personal experience”, rather than “objective revelation, as a basis for authenticating the Christian faith”; 2) Conservative intellectuals insisted on the *status quo* of the “factuality” and “authority” of Scripture, even arguing that the Bible was a scientific document in the sense of accurate factual reportage, and therefore built their theological understanding on a scriptural foundation, as well as upheld the doctrine of divine inspiration of Scripture; and 3) The Wesleyan Holiness movement and the Pentecostals “affirmed both the objective nature of Scripture and the importance of personal experience as a means to reaffirm the supernatural inspiration of Scripture” (Archer, 2009:53-54).

For the purpose of this study, only the reaction by the Wesleyan and Pentecostal movements will be reviewed. They projected the importance of personal experience to roughly the same degree as their belief in the objective nature of Scripture. For them, the inspirational work of the Holy Spirit could be found in “both the past written document (Scripture) and in their present experience with Scripture”. In Archer’s (2009:54) words,

Inspiration was not limited to the Scripture in the sense that it was a past document containing no errors, but it also included the present ability of the Scripture to speak to the community. The community experienced the Spirit through reading and living according to the Scripture.

However, things did not end with this near-equation of the authority of Scripture and that of experience, or their concern to “live faithfully and responsibly with God” even if at the expense of a well-formulated “cognitive intellectual understanding of God”. Later in the century, particularly Pentecostals abandoned the above theoretical position and followed the demands of Evangelicalism (officially born in the 1940’s) to subscribe to verbal inspiration and inerrancy (Archer, 2009:86-87). This brought them back close to conservative emphasis on divine inspiration as such.

In all, the Pentecostal concerns for the objectivity of Scriptures and the importance of personal experience traced above was not yet formal. Klein *et al.* (2004:62) trace the origin of a formal Pentecostal hermeneutics to as late as 1979, when the Society for

Pentecostal Studies launched a major journal, *Pneuma*, as a forum for international scholarly discussion of Pentecostal and charismatic issues. Then in 1992, Sheffield Academy Press began the *Journal of Pentecostal theology (JPT)* as a platform for promoting constructive theological discussion across many faith traditions. Klein *et al.* observe that although the *JPT* was not fully developed at the time of their writing, it sought to address a number of relevant issues relating to Pentecostal hermeneutics. Two major issues among these were:

1. How does the experienced work of the Holy Spirit relate to biblical interpretation?
2. Is the central authority of the Christian community the Bible or Christ addressing the community through the Spirit?

These questions, to the mind of this researcher, capture the heart of a hermeneutic that could be said to be Pentecostal in the first instance. This is because both questions revolve around the idea of the subjective work of the Holy Spirit during interpretation. Pentecostals tell testimonies of how they “heard the Lord” (through the Spirit) as they were studying the Bible. For them, such an “experienced” (or “inspired”) understanding of Scripture is authoritative; whatever they heard was what the Lord had said. This phenomenon leads naturally to the second concern, namely, whether the authority of the community lies in the Bible or in subjective encounters of the Spirit. Of course, Pentecostals hold the authority of the Bible in high esteem; but that does not in any way reduce their regard for “the things that come from the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:14). Perhaps it should be said that they hold both authorities in relative importance.

**3.2.2.2 Early Pentecostal hermeneutical method.** In the midst of the above-noted struggle for self-assertion, a distinctive and novel reading approach could still be detected among early Pentecostals. According to Archer (2009:55, 89, 101), early Pentecostals used the “Bible Reading Method” (BRM), which he says was pre-modern, popularistic, an adaptation of the inductive approach, as well as a modified form of proof-texting. He describes the BRM as follows:

The Bible Reading Method was a commonsensical method that relied upon inductive and deductive interpretive reasoning skills. Once the data was analysed, it was then synthesised into a biblical doctrine. Harmonisation was the acceptable and necessary way to synthesis (sic) all the biblical data on a particular subject.

(Archer, 2009:101)

Reference to “commonsensical method” and “inductive and deductive reasoning skills” in the citation above indicates that the BRM was not as such averse to the Common Sense Baconian model earlier discussed. In fact, it was practically not possible for the latter’s influence to just have waned within the short period between the close of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century when Pentecostals began to interpret Scriptures with a specific agenda. Moreover, while Pentecostal exegetes and their Holiness counterparts might have rejected a static and propositional view of truth, they might have at the same time found useful (or at least been thoroughly influenced by) the reasoning skills of the CSR-Baconian-oriented scholars, and therefore adopted their reasoning skills in carrying on their own unique hermeneutic enterprise. Whatever the case, they adopted a method that met their needs and aspirations at the time.

On how BRM actually worked, Archer (2009: 102, 125) explains that it was a synchronic interpretive strategy that would extrapolate a verse from its larger context and then would string together all the verses that relate to the investigated word, theme or topic, and from there would form a doctrinal understanding of the issue. As a modified form of proof-texting, it involved the interpreter looking up a specific word in any English Bible concordance, making a list of all its occurrences, and drawing out “truth” on the basis of the reading of the texts. According to Archer (2009:102), this is for instance how the early Pentecostals arrived at their emphatic and innovative doctrine of speaking in tongues as the first physical evidence of Spirit baptism.

What this means is that early Pentecostals did not wait to formulate doctrine based on the so-called “chair passages” or “seats of doctrine”<sup>17</sup> of the Bible. Particularly on the issue of speaking in tongues, whereas it is listed among other charismatic gifts in 1 Corinthians 14:1-25, there is no one passage that explicitly demands speaking with unknown tongues as a way of demonstrating the fullness of the Spirit. But for Pentecostals the sum of all the various narrative passages becomes an imperative and therefore a matter of doctrine. Pentecostals are till today so convinced of this imperative that it is common to hear a worship or prayer leader in a Pentecostal gathering issue the instruction for congregants to “go ahead and speak in unknown tongues”. This much conviction is a good example of what Archer (2009:182) wishes to capture when he cites Dayton’s (1974:23) statement that Pentecostals read the Scriptures “through Lukan eyes, especially with the lenses provided by the book of Acts”. Sifting the entire NT through the book of Acts has inevitably led them to the belief in a post-regeneration Spirit baptism for the endowment of power for evangelistic and missional purposes, and speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of this empowerment experience.

### 3.2.3 MEANING OF PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS

Nel (2015:6) has said that the heart of classical Pentecostalism is the belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. This, according to him, affirms that the Bible is a reliable revelation of God and thus states the exact truths that the Holy Spirit wants conveyed. He also states that the point of departure and foundation for Pentecostal faith and praxis is the biblical text – and that this makes hermeneutics the crux of Pentecostalism. It is against this backdrop that he composes a three-element description of Pentecostal hermeneutics as follows:

The three main elements of a Pentecostal Hermeneutics can be described as: The interrelationship between the *Holy Spirit* as the One animating *Scriptures* and empowering the *believing community* with the purpose that members be equipped for ministry and witness in culturally appropriate ways.

(Nel, 2015:6)

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17 Kaiser (2007:250) defines “chair passages” or “seats of doctrine” as those passages that “contain the largest amount of material in one place on the respective doctrines”. They are didactic in nature and form the basis for doctrinal formulations.

The above indicates, if not any other thing, that Pentecostals have a way of understanding and practicing hermeneutics that makes it distinctive to their context. This is the thought in this study; that is, that there is a distinctive way that Pentecostals interpret the Bible. However, some scholars do not think that distinctiveness is possible, let alone necessary. For instance, while Anderson (2010) believes that “there is an identifiable, unique, and legitimate Pentecostal hermeneutic”, he cites Israel *et al.* (1990:8-9) as saying that calls for a Pentecostal hermeneutic are misguided and ideological. On his part, Nel (2017:97-98) argues that distinctiveness is neither possible nor desirable. His contention is that contrary to the impression created by Pentecostals that “an openness to the Spirit that informs the model of Bible reading” is a distinguishing characteristic, this is not the case; but that this and other emphases may at best serve “a Pentecostal ideology, while in reality they differ in several hermeneutical aspects from each other”. (That is, Pentecostals themselves vary in their emphases and therefore cannot claim to have a distinctive hermeneutic.) He says,

What is important is that its pneumatology informs its Bible interpretation. However, this is not unique to Pentecostal hermeneutics. Ecumenical discussions with the Roman Catholic Church and several Protestant groups show that Pentecostal hermeneutics drinks from many different streams.

(Nel, 2017:98)

He therefore rather wishes that Pentecostals “contribute to a conciliar reading of the Bible that strengthens ecumenical commitment to the Bible and reveals its meaning for postmodern humankind” (Nel, 2017:98), than to seek an *impossible* distinctive hermeneutic.

Another matter of interest in Nel’s (2015:6) definition of Pentecostal hermeneutics above are the three hermeneutical elements that he names and their interrelationships, namely, the Holy Spirit, Scripture, and the believing community. This is what Archer (2009:225) calls “a tridactic negotiation for meaning”. It is such that the Holy Spirit plays an active role in the interpretive activity, rather than the typical Evangelical (and sometimes Pentecostal) assumption of his illumination of Scripture in the task of exegesis following a historical-critical route (Fogarty, 2012). Fogarty also believes that

at present the Holy Spirit does speak beyond the Scripture, although not in a contradictory way. This kind of claim accords with Pentecostal worldview: Turnage (2003:9) says, “Central to Pentecostal worldview is the confession that God speaks and acts today as he did as recorded in the Bible....” To that extent, Ellington (1996:24) places the authority of the Spirit above the authority of Scripture:

The Spirit was over the church. The Spirit was prior to Scripture. So, the order of authority was Spirit, Scripture, church. Without the Spirit, there would have been no Word, incarnate or written; without the Word, no church.

Such a high view of the Holy Spirit cannot but certainly influence the role that Pentecostals accord him in the process of interpretation. This element features heavily in any discussion of Pentecostal interpretation of the Bible, as will still be seen in the nature and approaches to Pentecostal hermeneutics below.

### **3.3 THE NATURE OF PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS, AND APPROACHES TO IT**

#### **3.3.1 THE NATURE OF PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS**

Whereas Nel (2007:525-526) concedes to the difficulty in defining a Pentecostal hermeneutic due to the doctrinal and structural heterogeneity that characterises classical Pentecostalism, he observes that there is something common to all Pentecostals, namely, that “their hermeneutic is informed by a pneumatic epistemology leading to the awareness that the Bible is the product of an experience with the Spirit which the Biblical writers described in phenomenological language”. To that extent, Pentecostals tend to use the Bible to propagate the same spiritual experiences that biblical figures had, and are more concerned with practice than with belief and doctrine. In short, theology comes after experience. On the whole, Nel (2007:529-536) identifies four elements that constitute the nature of Pentecostal hermeneutics, namely:

**3.3.1.1      Emphasis on the immanence of God.** Pentecostals read the Bible in terms of their perception of God among them. For them, God is working today as he is pictured to have worked in the Bible, and as such the Bible is not a source-book for doctrine but a blueprint for living. In effect, Pentecostals read the Bible with the

expectation that what happened to or through biblical characters would be duplicated in their lives. They seek to “live in the world of the Bible”, desiring some continuity between the ways God revealed and is revealing himself. They read the Bible pneumatologically, i.e., “in terms of the modern believer’s experience of the fullness of the power of God” (Nel, 2007:529-531).

**3.3.1.2 The role of biblical narratives.** For Pentecostals, “the Bible is to be implemented, demonstrated and realised rather than understood”. In other words, they emphasise what is practical in terms of the divine reality that the Bible testifies of. Preaching is done with the aim of changing lives in similar ways as the Spirit changed biblical personages. According to Nel (2007:532), “the Bible is used to demonstrate and actually bring about the change that God intends for people through the Spirit’s anointing on them.... While Protestants emphasise orthodoxy, Pentecostals stress orthopraxy”. The goal of preaching is not that the listener would be changed by the text, but that he would be changed by the direct encounter with the God to whom the text testifies. Biblical stories show how God works, not what God did in human lives, and those acts are “repeatable and relivable”. According to Ellington (1996:29), “The biblical narratives are testimonies of how people experienced God with the invitation to expect the same experience today.”

**3.3.1.3 The role of the charismatic community.** Their high view of the Bible notwithstanding, Pentecostals expect to hear directly from God, whether through a sermon or through private devotion. However, whatever contemporary revelation they receive should in all cases be distinguished from and in fact subjected to biblical revelation (Nel, 2007:533). In this connection, the charismatic community has the duty of evaluating prophetic utterance, for it functions as the place where the Spirit acts. Here, believers testify to God’s work, and the community assesses and accepts/rejects it. Not only in this way does the charismatic community function; it is also believed to be primarily an extension of an original, biblical charismatic community:

Pentecostals claim that much of the Bible is the product of the charismatic community in Biblical times, and the ongoing charismatic experiences of modern believers is a logical extension of that history, where God is still acting and leading his people

through his Word. The Bible testifies to the presence of God in a charismatic way in the ancient and modern charismatic community.

(Nel, 2007:534)

**3.3.1.4 The role of the Spirit.** For Pentecostals the Reformers' understanding of the illumination of the Spirit as a cognitive phenomenon is a limited one; it rather also includes "a pneumatic epistemology that takes place in a lived experience where believers 'hear the Lord' while reading the Bible and a preacher's sermon is based on the presupposition that he/she 'has heard from the Lord'". The Spirit mediates God's ongoing history with his people, and the believer is guaranteed fruitful participation when he/she is baptised in the Spirit, so that "the biblical drama becomes the believer's own story" (Nel, 2007:535). On his part, Cartledge (1996:123) says, "In the process of interpreting the Bible, Pentecostals read the content but also respond to fresh, new things the Spirit does." Indeed, "[m]ore than reason is needed to comprehend the message of the Bible; the light of the Spirit is also needed.... The Bible is a dead letter until God speaks through it" (Nel, 2007:535-536).

### 3.3.2 APPROACHES TO PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS

As it should be expected, there are diverse approaches to Pentecostal interpretation of the Scripture. Anderson (2010) in fact concedes that there are Pentecostal interpretations that do not agree with what is taught at Pentecostal institutions; and warns that using the methods or results of such approaches to assess Pentecostal hermeneutics would lead to inaccurate conclusions. According to him, such interpretations are "fanciful", are illegitimate, and include allegory and multiple-meaning approaches. On the other hand, by implication, "trained" and "careful" Pentecostals practice acceptable and conscientious interpretation. What method might that be? He answers:

Careful Pentecostal interpreters agree with other mainline evangelicals that the best way to interpret the Bible is to work to uncover the intended meaning of the text through the use of historical-grammatical methods.

(Anderson, 2010)

For the purpose of this study, the above statement talks about “careful Pentecostal interpreters” and by that implies that there are “careless” Pentecostal interpreters. Then it relates the careful interpreters to historical-grammatical methods, while the rest (apparently the “careless” interpreters) do unacceptable, “fanciful” interpretation. While this kind of phenomenon is not unique to Pentecostals, it indicates that there are at least perceived problems of interpretation within the Pentecostal circle. The allegation here, especially made by one who speaks in favour of a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutics, is one that will be taken seriously by this work, especially in evaluating Pentecostal approaches to Matthew 25:14-30 later in Chapter 6. However, at the moment this study will refrain from any evaluative or defensive statement based on Anderson’s claims above, nor will it follow his judgments. It will suffice only to notice that there are both critical and non-critical methods of doing Pentecostal hermeneutics. To these the study now turns attention, starting with what it identifies as non-critical approaches.

**3.3.2.1 Non-critical approaches to Pentecostal interpretation.** Non-critical approaches as understood here are approaches that focus on the text synchronically, without asking any question that borders on its historical background. This study wishes to discuss these approaches under three subheadings, namely, Bible Reading Method, pneumatic-experiential approach, and narrative-didactic-pragmatic approach.

**3.3.2.1.1 Bible Reading Method.** Detailed discussion of the Bible Reading Method (BRM) of early Pentecostal interpretive practice was done in Section 3.2.2.2 above, and will not be repeated here. What needs to be added is that the practice of BRM is still popular today. For instance, the health and wealth teaching that is characteristic of Pentecostal preachers is derived from the Bible by means of BRM. Popular references are:

- ❖ Deuteronomy 8:18, where God gives power to his people to make wealth, and that power must be exercised with evidence of material prosperity;
- ❖ Joshua 1:8, where habitual meditation on the word of God makes one prosperous and successful;

- ❖ 2 Corinthians 8:9, where Christ surrenders his riches and becomes poor, so that through his poverty believers are made rich (in material sense);
- ❖ Philippians 4:19, where God meets all the needs of his people according to his riches in glory, and therefore a true believer cannot be poor; and
- ❖ 3 John 2, where it is derived that God wants his children to be healthy and wealthy along with their spiritual prosperity.

The problem with this kind of approach is that the pericopes are mostly taken out of context, and while the conclusions may sound good they are in the most part not faithful to the text's communicative intent.

**3.3.2.1.2 Pneumatic-experiential approach.** Nel (2007:526) asserts that Pentecostal hermeneutics “is informed by a pneumatic epistemology leading to the awareness that the Bible is the product of an experience with the Spirit which Biblical writers described in phenomenological language”. In other words, Bible reading *is* an experience in the Spirit just as its writing *was* an experience in the Spirit. It is only natural, then, for the Pentecostal reader to seek an experience with God through his Spirit. Three scholars capture this conviction, even with a sense of pride. What follows is a brief review of each:

3.3.2.1.2.1 J. W. McKay. McKay (2013:57-58) eulogises Pentecostal hermeneutics as “spiritual”, “charismatic”, or “prophetic” hermeneutics. His motivation is that “it draws us to God and gives life”, as against its counterpart, the “objective and analytic” approach, which he describes as being “interesting in itself, but imparting little or nothing of the life of God to the student”. From this researcher’s interaction with Pentecostals so far, a frequently quoted Scripture to support this kind of view and other similarly disdainful ones is 2 Corinthians 3:6, where Paul says: “He has made us competent as ministers of the new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Pentecostals see themselves – almost exclusively only themselves – as “ministers of the new covenant”, who preach the “rhema” of the word of God (that is, what the Spirit “reveals” from a passage or verse or phrase or word in the Bible during the reading encounter, or during meditation), and not the “logos” (that is, the written

“letter”). Their aversion for the “logos” and preference for the “rhema” is hinged on Paul’s submission above that “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6).

There is no surprise, then, that McKay (2013:66) calls the charismatic approach “a theology of biblical experience – or, perhaps better, ‘shared experience’”. This, for him, indicates that the charismatic Bible student is aware of the similarity between his own experience and that of the prophets, apostles and even Jesus, as well as the fact that they are fulfilling similar roles as the biblical personages. In fact, for McKay (2013:64) charismatics are “prophets” or are at least prophetically sympathetic and therefore read the Bible with the eye and intellect of prophetic persons.

3.3.2.1.2.2 C. H. Pinnock. On his part, Pinnock makes yet a stronger case for Pentecostal hermeneutics, which he prefers to call “Spirit-hermeneutics” and finds biblical examples in Jesus, his disciples and Paul (Pinnock, 2013:237-238; cf. 1 John 2:20; Eph. 1:17). According to him, “Spirit-hermeneutics is a strategy of reading Scripture in such a way that the Spirit has the liberty to speak.” His point of departure is still not far from the purported contrast between the “dead letter” and the “revelatory text” (Pinnock, 2013:239-240; cf. 2 Cor. 3:6). Here is how he puts it:

The Spirit can ensure that interpretations are effective. A “dead letter” is not what is needed. We need a revelatory text which can be a power in our lives. Exegesis is important, even indispensable, for working on the text-horizon but grasping the text’s significance is another matter.

(Pinnock, 2013:240)

The need then to grasp the significance of the text makes “Spirit-hermeneutics” indispensable; for while exegesis has its place, it is the former that insures “a revelatory text” and its power for the reader/believer. He puts this straight in these words:

The Spirit takes the things of Christ and make (sic) them known to us. He plays the pivotal role in making the text God’s revelatory word. The Spirit makes the knowledge of God a possibility in and through an “I-Thou” encounter.

(Pinnock, 2013:240)

It is clear from the statements above that there is, according to Pinnock, a clear distinction between a “dead letter” and a “revelatory word”, much as there is a difference of significance between the findings of exegesis and “the things of Christ” made known by the Spirit. Then also is the issue of encounter – the “I-Thou’ encounter”. This encounter is obviously a subjective experience between a reader and God through his Spirit. It is sought for every time a Pentecostal opens the Bible to read.

Pinnock also makes some other claims that have critical implications for hermeneutics in general and for Pentecostal hermeneutics in particular, especially in terms of them highlighting the background to his so-called “Spirit-hermeneutics”. One, he regrets that some believers stick to a rational-propositional model of Scripture, which more or less fixes the meaning of a text, based on its subscription to the doctrine of inspiration (cf. 2 Tim. 3:15-16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; John 10:35; Matt. 5:17). He opines that this same doctrine of inspiration is in fact based on proof-texting and therefore cannot stand up to the challenge.<sup>18</sup> For him, too, sticking to the rational-propositional model is an unaccountable denial of the plurality of meaning conveyed by language, and as such a forfeiture of the enriching dynamism of “Spirit-hermeneutics” (Pinnock, 2013:234-235).

The above charge of the doctrine of inspiration not having a foundation more solid than a set of proof-texts is one issue; the other issue is the alleged failure of the rational-propositional model to make room for multiplicity of meaning. For this reason, Pinnock (2013:239) invites the Bible student to recognise as key “the richness of language which makes it such an excellent instrument for God to use when communicating with humans”. He continues: “Language has qualities which make it an ideal instrument at the Spirit’s disposal. Texts have a way of opening up and they invite playful interaction”. Pinnock is here speaking for the biblical text as “the revelatory text” whose message is brought to bear by the Spirit at the centre of hermeneutics. His disposition towards the written text as seen here roughly affirms current text- and reader-oriented strategies of

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18 On inspiration and interpretation, he has this to say: “Certainly the scriptures are inspired but not in the sense of their being a static deposit of revealed propositions that we can systematise and make into an idol. Scripture is not something that we can control. It has a dynamic authority and is a living guide” (Pinnock, 2013:236). This attitude makes clear the loose kind of liberty that Pinnock’s Spirit-hermeneutics envisages.

text interpretation,<sup>19</sup> which accords high value to the literary properties of the text and to the contributions of the reader to the generation of meaning.

Two, for Pinnock (2013:241) the Scriptures are amenable to dynamic interpretation, because the Bible is a record of a developing historical revelation. According to him, this justifies and validates the diversity of readings as well as its surplus of meaning. In his words,

There is a dynamic in the text which promotes endless reflection. Texts of the Bible do have definite meanings in the historical situation and that meaning is the anchor of our interpretation. But the “total” meaning cannot be restricted to that.

(Pinnock, 2013:241)

Three, still speaking in linguistic terms, Pinnock (2013:242) believes that a text can transcend itself and generate more meaning than was originally intended by the author. In that case, it would have achieved the fuller sense and the deeper meaning intended by God but poorly expressed by its human author. As such, as he continues, there is no “right” meaning of the text, since there is “no one and only possible meaning”. One should therefore only talk about a “genuine” meaning and not the “right” meaning. Owing to this fluidity of the nature of texts, multiple interpretations are according to him not just possible but inevitable (Pinnock, 2013:244).

This denial of “right” meaning in favour of “genuine” meaning of the biblical text sounds like Pinnock’s “Spirit-hermeneutics” has gone too far towards looseness in interpretation. Logically, it is not possible not to have a right meaning (or right meanings) of any given text; otherwise, any meaning appended to any text would stand valid. Similarly, while the inevitability of multiple interpretations cannot be denied, all such interpretations are not necessarily correct or acceptable.

Perhaps anticipating this protest, Pinnock (2013:241) proposes the principle of “controlled liberty” in interpreting Scriptures as a way of checking excesses. According to him, this is a liberty that is anchored in the canon of Scripture; that honours both the

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19 An overview of some of these theories will be presented in the Chapter 5.

original meaning and the text that needs to be opened up; and thus, that allows the Spirit to fuse the past and present horizons. Secondly, he proposes the “criterion of fruitfulness”, and by “fruitful interpretation” implies an interpretation that allows the text to speak, and that lights up the faith community. Finally, he subscribes to the authority of the charismatic community, and demands of interpreters to be accountable to “the common life”, that is, the consensus belief and teaching of the community guided and guarded by apostolic and prophetic authorities (Pinnock, 2013:244). It is soothing at least that he considers the need to control interpretation; but how exactly the three criteria outlined here work or whether they are at all efficient is an entirely different matter.

3.3.2.1.2.3 A. Davies. For Davies (2013:251), Pentecostal hermeneutics is purely a hermeneutics of encounter – personal, unmediated encounter with the divine, and both Pentecostal interpretation and preaching fulfil this reality. According to him, Pentecostals read the Bible “to meet God in the text, and to provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to speak to [their] spirits”. He goes further to differentiate between *encounter* and *exegesis*, thus:

Our common heritage ... has taught us the miracle and the mystery of personal experience of God’s presence, experienced and mediated through the biblical text among other ways, and therefore, the value of knowing by perception over knowing by proof. As a result we prefer to interpret Scripture by encounter more than by exegesis.

(Davies, 2013:254)

Further, he identifies the role of Pentecostals in the reading process as “dialogue partners” with the Bible and with the inspiring Spirit. These “dialogue partners” bring their own questions, circumstances and needs to the text and through it to God, and thus allow God to reveal his agenda as he speaks to them. As such, they, as “spiritualising readers”, pay little or no attention to historical facts or the original intention of the author; but seek the “anagogic power” of the text, that is, “its capacity to edify and inspire” (Davies, 2013:254).

**3.3.2.1.3 Narrative-didactic-pragmatic approach.** According to Anderson (2010), Pentecostals use historical narratives as didactic material, and form doctrine on the basis of them. In other words, they use descriptive portions of the Bible as prescriptive material. For instance, on speaking in tongues as first evidence of baptism of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostals arrive at this teaching because all the accounts of people being filled with the Holy Spirit punctuates with the beneficiaries speaking in tongues. Therefore, for Pentecostals, this should be the case for everyone who claims to be filled with the Spirit. Such a person must be able to exercise the capacity of speaking in tongues at will as further evidence that he has the Spirit of God. That is why, from observation, they switch back and forth between human language and this “heavenly” language.

Another aspect of narrative consciousness is that Pentecostals generally believe that the stories of the Bible should be re-lived by them in similar ways as they happened in Bible days. Speaking on this disposition, Nel (2007:532) says:

The Bible is to be implemented, demonstrated and realised rather than understood. The emphasis is on the practice, the experience of the modern believer, of the divine reality that the Bible witnesses to.... The Bible is used to demonstrate and actually bring about the change that God intends for people through the Spirit’s anointing on them.

In other words, knowledge is not a primary consideration in Pentecostal reading, but a personal experience of the kind that the reader reads about. An expectation of knowledge in a primary sense would make the text function in “a static manner”. Conversely, an expectation of personal experience seeks for the text to function “dynamically”, thus “making necessary an intensive engagement with it in order to discover its truths in ways that go beyond the cognitive” (Nel, 2007:533). In fact for Nel,

The play starting in the Bible is still running and the biblical testimonies are carried on in modern testimonies of the encounter with God, and the Bible receives its authority from this experience of its relevance for modern people.

(Nel, 2007:533)

Thus, for instance, reading a passage where a miracle happened does not fascinate a Pentecostal merely on its merit; what they are looking for is a repeat of those same or similar miracles in their own time and community. To a typical Pentecostal, biblical stories are “so what?” stories unless and until those or similar supernatural events can be replicated here and now. So they read and meditate on biblical stories to be healed, to be delivered, to receive a miracle, and so on. In short, to read the Bible is to extend the story of the Bible.

Closely connected to this narrative phenomenon is the pragmatic expectation that Pentecostals come to the Bible with: “The emphasis is on the practice...” (Nel, 2007:533). Davies (2013:256) identifies Pentecostal reading of the Bible as “agendad<sup>20</sup> reading with an intended result and a goal in mind”. He does not care about the charge of subjectivity, experientialism or self-centredness that has been raised about this kind of approach, because as much as he knows there is no non-subjectivist reading approach anywhere. Besides, the goal of preaching from the Day of Pentecost has according to him been to set agendas for action (Davies, 2013:254, 262). While his work has failed to justify this last claim about post-Pentecost preaching as an agenda-setting exercise, he seeks to boost Pentecostal confidence in “agendad reading” when he says:

Truly Pentecostal interpretation always requires reading with an end in mind. There is no abstract exegesis; what treasures that, together, we uncover are there to be shaped into agendas for action.... For us the application is vital in that it connects the text to “real world” issues and affords us the opportunity to read and appropriate it for transformative ends.

(Davies, 2013:262)

### **3.3.2.2 Critical approaches to Pentecostal interpretation**

**3.3.2.2.1 Evangelical methods.** Evangelical methods of interpretation are critical in nature. By this is meant that evangelical approaches have to do with exegetical methods that raise questions about the historical, cultural, redactional, formal, and other

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20 Davies uses the word “agendad” here as an adjective to the noun “reading”. That means a reading with an agenda.

background issues about a text of Scripture, in an attempt to apprehend the original context and meaning of the pericope under investigation. Oliverio (2012:133-134) observes that from the mid-twentieth century and into the twenty-first, there has been a tendency towards historical-critical methods and other types of biblical criticism by a collection of mostly seminary Pentecostal theologians that he describes as “Evangelical-Pentecostal”. He says that they find these methods to be useful for interpreting biblical texts with respect to their (the texts’) original composition and contexts. He says further that they “explicitly employ author-centred hermeneutic theory”, with a theological method whose essence is “exegesis of biblical texts and the formation of biblical theologies followed by a thematic arrangement of these in a systematic theology”.

According to him, some advocates of this approach stand for “a unidirectional movement from Scripture to experience” with marginal respect for experiential presuppositions, while others weigh heavily in on the role of experience and experiential presuppositions in biblical interpretation. This latter set, he says, tend to concentrate more on the formation of doctrines that distinguish Pentecostals from other orthodox Christians, particularly Evangelicals. Interpretation is “first and foremost on the basis of an Evangelical affirmation of the role and authority of Scripture”. The thrust of such an interpretation is “to carefully discover what the Bible says in its original context in order to properly understand reality in light of Scripture before contemporary application”.

It is obvious from this last statement that Oliverio’s so-called Evangelical-Pentecostal hermeneutics does not deny the need for contemporary meaningfulness of Scripture to the reader; all he is saying is that such present meaningfulness has to be anchored on what the text originally meant. There is a place for experience and practice, but neither is a prior hermeneutical element; they should naturally be informed and guided by the meaning of the text in its original context. Hence, while the historical methods step backwards with historical questions, they do so to come back to the present situation with useful information from the past.

In an effort to justify the historical-critical approaches, Longenecker (2004:45, 47) explains that whereas the Christian faith is a religion of revelation, it is also a historical religion in the sense that God’s redemption of his people, his leading of his church to

understand that redemption through Jesus Christ, and how the gospel of this redemption was proclaimed by the early church, were all events in history. Accordingly, a search for the cultural contexts, specific situations, particular concerns, and distinctive exegetical conventions of the day is a justifiable one, for they would help the reader to understand the author's message.

Similarly, Menzies (1992) claims evangelical, historical-critical methods for the generality of Pentecostals when he says:

Our Pentecostal feet are firmly planted in mainstream evangelicalism; our theology is essentially the same [as it was in early Pentecostalism]; but our approach to Scripture – the hermeneutic which supports our theology – has been significantly altered. The hermeneutic of evangelicalism has become our hermeneutic.

One would on the basis of this statement infer that the marriage of evangelical and Pentecostal hermeneutics espoused here by Menzies is a Pentecostal consensus. However, there are reactions that betray the fact that he represents only a section of Pentecostal interpreters. For instance, Fogarty (2012), while acknowledging Pentecostal commonality with Evangelicalism in terms of the inspiration, authoritativeness, reliability and historicity of the Bible, points out two areas of differences between Pentecostals and many Evangelicals. These are: (1) Pentecostal emphasis on an immediate and experiential meaning of Scripture, which may or may not generate the same result as a historical-critical analysis does; and (2) Pentecostal belief that the Spirit can say more than Scripture, although not in contradiction to Scripture. Fogarty challenges historical-critical approaches in the sense that, according to him, they cannot satisfy the typical Pentecostal yearning for a repeat of the spiritual and supernatural experiences of biblical personages; hence his desire for “a hermeneutic that takes into account the role of the Holy Spirit and the impact of personal experience”.

On his part, Archer (2009:177) acknowledges that Pentecostals (perhaps it should better be said “some Pentecostals”) use the historical-critical approaches of modernity, mentioning that at present “the historical-grammatical method (exegesis), along with

authorial intent is the favoured means to biblical interpretation". However, he warns that there is more to interpretation than "uniformly [applying] correct standard of principles of exegesis (the historical-grammatical method)". As such, he desires that Bible interpretation should involve "spiritual discernment", since "most doctrinal and ethical concerns cannot be resolved by exegetical method alone". Besides, for him Pentecostal hermeneutic (or any other hermeneutic for that matter) needs to incorporate "the important element of the social location of the readers and their narrative tradition", rather than rely on what he calls "a static, distinctive exegetical methodology", that is, the historical-grammatical approach (Archer, 2009:180).

This study will refrain from squarely evaluating these claims, but wishes to point out that it is obvious from the above views of Fogarty and Archer that the use of historical critical methods as a hermeneutical approach within Pentecostalism does not sit well with some Pentecostals, including some in the academia. In fact, Archer's (2009:167) accent is one of pain when he cites Byrd's (1993:204-205) description of "the first decade of Pentecostal preaching" as reaching for "an *immediate experience* for the listeners and was not characterised by a hermeneutic that spent its time exegeting a text in a historical-critical manner". His perceived regret is that the later adoption of these critical methods led to the loss of the immediate meaning of biblical texts to the faith community that was characteristic of (and good for) the early Pentecostals.

A proper conclusion here should be that there is no general agreement on a specific approach to hermeneutics among Pentecostals. For some time still to come, Pentecostals will need to intensify the debate on a Pentecostal hermeneutic that is both distinctive and appropriate. While the BRM, "Spirit-hermeneutics", and all other non-critical approaches may not be sufficient for Pentecostal interpretation of Scriptures today, a tendency to dismiss these methods or to eliminate their unique elements in favour of a method that is generally accepted across the Evangelical mega-family should be avoided. Here, it appears that Archer's (2009:213) concept of a negotiated approach to meaning (the interrelated but distinctive contributions of the *text*, the *community*, and the *Holy Spirit* to meaning) will be appropriate, but will at the same time

need to integrate some historical-critical concerns. In the view of this researcher, such an approach will give Pentecostal hermeneutics some balance in the meantime.

### **3.4 AN OWN DEFINITION OF PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS**

Based on the foregoing, this study provides a working definition of “Pentecostal hermeneutics” as follows:

*Pentecostal hermeneutics can be defined as an experience-oriented, narrative-oriented, and praxis-oriented practice of biblical interpretation that pays attention to the active role of the Holy Spirit in generating meaning from the canonical texts as they stand presently, and in such a way that promotes the identity and meets the needs of the Pentecostal community.*

This definition attempts to incorporate the major concerns of both early and contemporary Pentecostal thinkers, especially those who are deeply concerned for distinctiveness. It specifies that:

1. Pentecostal hermeneutics is experience-oriented. It is no doubt subjective but, according to Fogarty (2012), not necessarily subjectivised. That is, it is not a situation where every claim of truth by every individual is accepted, but that Pinnock’s (1993:4) “*controlled* liberty of the Spirit” is taken seriously.
2. Pentecostal hermeneutics is narrative-oriented. This speaks to the fact that Pentecostals take Bible stories seriously and in fact feel compelled to re-live the supernatural experiences of biblical characters. They fulfil this by sharing a lot of testimonies.
3. Pentecostal hermeneutics is praxis-oriented. As a matter of fact, the early Pentecostals shared the existential concerns of the Wesleyan Holiness movement for the social conditions of the people. They believed that the Bible had a message for the reader/hearer in his/her present situation. The same attitude still prevails among present-day Pentecostals. Therefore they look for ways to possibly address the biblical message to themselves or their audiences in as practical a manner as possible.

This researcher believes that it is due to a genuine concern for the economic conditions of the people that particularly Pentecostal preachers began to emphasise success and wealth in their preaching. Based on a string of Bible passages, this emphasis has resulted in the so-called “prosperity gospel” or “health and wealth gospel” that is ever so common among Pentecostal denominations and para-churches. This researcher has also observed that a good number of Pentecostal preachers have created numerous charity programmes targeted at distressed population groups or sub-groups. This may not be far from their conviction that the message of the Bible, in this case love and concern for one’s neighbour, should be interpreted practically rather than theoretically.

4. In Pentecostal hermeneutics, the horizons of the text, the community and the Holy Spirit are taken seriously. The text is recognised as the primary source of meaning. Pentecostals have no business with the intention of the author of the text. Relevant meaning is produced in the interpreter’s encounter with the text, not in an unrealistic encounter with some authorial intention. In other words, Pentecostals are synchronic readers of the Bible; that is, they approach the text in its present canonical form, rather than trying to conjecture the way the original author or editor intended it to be, or what the original audience perceived it to mean. In fact, they have respect for the Bible as “Sacred Scripture” and therefore allow the biblical text to speak to them on its own terms (Archer, 2009:215-223).

Secondly, the Pentecostal community constitutes the social-cultural framework within which the Pentecostal hermeneut goes about the interpretive work. The community’s “Central Narrative Convictions”<sup>21</sup> form a filter through which the Pentecostal hermeneut derives meaning from the biblical text. Archer (2009:134) says, “The Pentecostal story is the primary hermeneutical context for reading of

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21 By “Central Narrative Convictions”, or simply “Pentecostal story”/“Pentecostal narrative tradition”, Archer (2009:134, 268) is referring to the sum total of the community’s central beliefs, practices and assumptions that are held together in a coherent communal narrative and that explains who the community is, why the community exists, and how the community envisions to fit into the general society.

Scripture, hence providing the cultural and praxis context for the production of meaning". As such, not only is the interpreter expected to be a recognised member of the Pentecostal community, but he/she is also expected to be accountable to the community in his/her interpretation. Both his/her interpretation and his/her testimonies have to accord with the convictions and aspirations of the community. That is to say, the community has the right to assess and affirm the interpretation and story of the hermeneut or call him/her to account where and when necessary.

The Holy Spirit is involved in the interpretation through the community and through the Scripture (Archer, 2009:247). He guides the community to discern the present meaningfulness of the biblical passage. He is the present voice of God and the present Teacher in the place of the glorified Christ. This involvement of the Holy Spirit is why Pinnock (2013:233-248) prefers to call Pentecostal hermeneutics "Spirit-hermeneutics". It is to this effect that Pentecostals want to be baptised in the Spirit. The anointing of the Spirit would then teach them the truth (cf. 1 John 2:20).

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter of the study set out to understand biblical hermeneutics in general and Pentecostal hermeneutics in particular. It became clear that biblical hermeneutics is the sum total of all the principles and dynamics deployed in an effort to understand the communicative intent of biblical texts. It was clear too that hermeneutics is not an imposed discipline in biblical study, but one that is both necessary and beneficial, given that the nature of human language often lends itself to misunderstanding. Human beings tend to always misinterpret what another person is saying, and as it is between man and man, so and in fact much more it is between man and God – misunderstanding makes the interpreter miss the actual message in the communication process while sometimes creating other meanings that are nowhere close to this actual message.

Pentecostal hermeneutics began to manifest at the turn of the 20th century, when a Christian, revivalist, restorationist, multi-cultural and multi-dimensional movement called “Pentecostalism” arose with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on eagerly waiting American Christians. This phenomenon was called “the baptism of the Holy Spirit”, was conceived to be subsequent to regeneration, and was said to have evidence in recipients speaking in unlearned and/or unknown tongues. Those Christians sought both to recover the power and signs of the NT, particularly the Gospels and Acts, and to realise the eschatological expectation of the coming of the Lord. Thus, they preached a Fivefold Gospel about Jesus, namely, he as Saviour, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptiser, Healer, and soon coming King.

The early Pentecostal approach to Scripture was seen to have been influenced by the aspirations of this Fivefold Gospel. It was literal, immediate, experiential, and pragmatic. In other words, they read the text of the Scripture as they found it, generated meanings that did not necessarily reckon with historical, literary or other contexts, understood texts based on prior personal experiences (of salvation, Spirit baptism, healing, etc.), and interpreted Scripture with the aim of meeting needs. Although some Pentecostals came to embrace evangelical seminary-styled critical methods later in the century, others have insisted that such approaches have nothing useful to offer them and therefore insist on methods that supposedly allow the Holy Spirit the liberty to address the reader in his existential condition with a living Word. They variously call this “Spirit-hermeneutics”, “prophetic” hermeneutics, “spiritual” hermeneutics, etc. In all, advocates of a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutics were seen to make a case for the contribution of the biblical text itself, the contribution of the believing community, and the contribution of the Holy Spirit to the meaning of Scripture.

These elements will be relevant when collecting and analysing some Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 in Chapter 4 and when evaluating them in Chapter 6.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **SOME PENTECOSTAL INTERPRETATIONS OF MATTHEW 25:14-30**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The last two chapters have been devoted to introductions to the parables of Jesus and Pentecostal hermeneutics respectively. The approach in those units was theoretical, and volumes of literature were consulted to acquaint with scholarly thoughts on the respective subject matters. It was seen in Chapter 2 that parables are extended figures of speech, and that their meaning lies in a referenced world rather than in their narrated world. They have specific communicative intents, and as an identifiable genre in the Synoptic Gospels have a history of interpretation in the Church. Some of the ways the parables have been interpreted through history have been quite popular, and one remembers in this connection the allegorical approach of Augustine and the one-point approach of Jülicher, reconstructionist approaches under historical-critical science, multidimensional approaches developed under literary studies (e.g. narrative analysis, speech act theory, reader response theory, etc.), and so on. Like every other parable, Matthew 25:14-30 in particular has been subjected to many kinds of interpretation, some acceptable and others quite questionable. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine how this parable is interpreted particularly among some Pentecostal exegetes.

From Chapter 3, it was seen that there are distinctive characteristics of Pentecostal interpretation of the Bible. Pentecostals approach Scriptures, not so much bothered about knowledge as they are about experience. They want to re-live the events of Bible days. They want Bible stories to become their story. Like biblical personages encountered God, and it is testified to in Scripture, they want to encounter God when they open the Bible to read. God is speaking today through the “rhema” (the revealed word) of Scripture, as well as through miracles and testimonies. In all, they emphasise the respective, functional roles of the text of Scripture, the believing community and the Holy Spirit in realising the meaning of biblical pericopes; and it is assumed in this study that Pentecostals interpret Matthew 25:14-30 in ways that bring out these unique hermeneutical leanings. This chapter now investigates the ways some Pentecostal

interpreters generate meaning from Matthew 25:14-30, to see if indeed there is any correlation between the perception about their hermeneutics and their actual practice.

## 4.2 METHODOLOGY

### 4.2.1 COLLECTION AND VALIDATION OF SAMPLES

**4.2.1.1 Collection of samples.** Forty (40) sample Pentecostal interpretations (SPIs) of Matthew 25:14-30 were collected and analysed. These samples were randomly picked from various source types (STs), ranging from compact discs to internet-based sources (like blogs, articles, YouTube, Facebook, etc.). The STs are represented in a frequency table below:

S/NO.	SOURCE TYPE (ST)	FREQUENCY (f)	% FREQUENCY (%f)
1	<b>Blog</b> (SPI-1, SPI-2, SPI-3, SPI-4, SPI-5, SPI-11, SPI-13, SPI-14, SPI-15, SPI-16, SPI-17, SPI-20, SPI-21, SPI-24, SPI-25, SPI-28)	16	40.0%
2	<b>Podcast</b> (SPI-31)	1	2.5%
3	<b>YouTUBE</b> (SPI-30)	1	2.5%
4	<b>Web publication</b> (SPI-33, SPI-34, SPI-35)	3	7.5%
5	<b>Internet magazine</b> (SPI-7, SPI-8, SPI-12, SPI-32)	4	10.0%
6	<b>Internet devotional article</b> (SPI-26, SPI-27)	2	5.0%
7	<b>General Internet</b> (SPI-6, SPI-9, SPI-10, SPI-18, SPI-29, SPI-36, SPI-37, SPI-38, SPI-39, SPI-40)	10	25.0%
8	<b>Compact disc</b> (SPI-19)	1	2.5%
9	<b>Facebook</b> (SPI-22, SPI-23)	2	5.0%
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	<b>TOTAL</b>	40	100.0%

Table 4.1: Frequency table of sample source types

**4.2.1.2 Validation of sample STs.** This study focuses on some Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30. It was necessary then that it be ascertained that all the samples investigated were of Pentecostal origin. Possible interpretations were searched for under names of known Pentecostal preachers or churches, like E. A. Adeboye of Redeemed Christian Church of God, David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church (a.k.a. Winners' Chapel), Kenneth Copeland of Eagle Mountain International Church (a.k.a. Kenneth Copeland Ministries Inc.), etc. Some direct finds were made under some of the names of these preachers or churches. In other instances, particularly when it was not immediately clear whether an interpreter's church (or Christian organisation) was Pentecostal, the doctrinal beliefs of the church (or Christian organisation) were examined. One major factor that was looked out for was a belief in Spirit baptism with the first evidence of speaking in unknown tongues. This was very helpful in the sample selection process, as scores of similar interpretations were discarded on the basis that the interpreters' doctrinal bases were not Pentecostal.

#### 4.2.2 ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF DATA

The study of the collected SPIs followed a content analysis method. This was because text forms of interpretation required careful reading, and audio/video forms needed careful listening. As the sample tables will reveal, attention was paid to the source type, theme/topic of the teaching, the context of interpretation (Col) of pericope, and the way each Pentecostal interpreter understood the passage. The interpretations were presented in summarised forms, some directly quoted and others paraphrased. Each of the forty (40) SPIs was then presented in a tabular form, with a code *SPI-1* for Sample 1, *SPI-2* for Sample 2, *SPI-3* for Sample 3, ..., *SPI-40* for Sample 40. The analyses are found below:

**SAMPLE 1 (SPI-1): B. A. GICHINA, Winners' Chapel International, Meru, Kenya**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Gichina, 2012:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Deliverance from financial hardship
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on wealth (Matthew 25:14-21)
INTERPRETATION	<i>Faithfulness in financial stewardship:</i> Gichina (2012:1) teaches that one must pass the test of faithfulness over little before God can commit millions to one. According to him, after the servants gave account, the master gave the faithful servants back the money instead of collecting it from them. The lesson in the transaction is that "God is not after your money; He only wants to ensure that you have developed through stewardship a good capacity for Him to multiply you. He wants to ensure that you can handle the blessing He is bringing."

Table 4.2: SPI-1

**SAMPLE 2 (SPI-2): BUMMYLA OGWO**, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Lagos, Nigeria

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Ogwo, 2015:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Divine commendation – sermon by Pastor E. A. Adeboye
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on Christ’s second coming and eternal reward (Matthew 25:14-21)
INTERPRETATION	<p><i>God’s commendation is a blessing:</i></p> <p>Ogwo (2015:1) observes that the wealthy man in Matthew 25:15-21 commended the servant with five talents, who gained five more talents; as well as the servant with two talents, who gained another two talents. However, the one with one talent went and hid his talent in the ground, because he felt he was not given his due to trade with. Alas, on the day of reckoning, he was condemned. The lesson drawn from the story is what Ogwo (2015:1) calls “Action point,” namely: “Think on what to do here on earth, so that you will be commended in Heaven.”</p>

Table 4.3: SPI-2

**SAMPLE 3 (SPI-3): BUMMYLA OGWO**, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Lagos, Nigeria

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Ogwo, 2014:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Faithfulness – Sermon by Pastor E. A. Adeboye
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on Christian ministry and leadership (Matt. 25:22-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p><i>Faithfulness is required of both leaders and followers:</i></p> <p>Ogwo (2014:1) submits that “Unfaithfulness or disloyalty is a challenge facing Christian leadership today. Inability to be faithful, loyal, stable and consistent is the greatest killer of ministries and businesses.”</p> <p>He warns that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Christians are to be faithful to God and to their leaders – both spiritual and secular, and that leaders also are expected to be faithful to their followers and subordinates;</li> <li>2) God only rewards those who diligently (= faithfully) seek him (cf. Heb. 11:6); and</li> <li>3) Christians should be faithful to their calling and be responsible in financial matters.</li> </ol> <p>The teaching ends with an action point, namely: “Resolve to be faithful to your leaders and subordinates today.”</p>

Table 4.4: SPI-3

SAMPLE 4 (SPI-4): E. A. ADEBOYE, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Lagos, Nigeria

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Adeboye, 2010:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Break your fallow grounds
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on success (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Adeboye (2010:1) says, “Your deeds, words, conduct and attitude can either attract positive or negative change. <b>In the parable of the talents documented in Matthew 25:14-30, the man who had a change for increase got there by dint of hard work.</b> He was given five talents and he processed them through labour to obtain five more. <b>If you want God to give you increase, you must be prepared to labour.</b> It is unfortunate that many people who claim to be believers in Christ are fast losing touch with hard work. They desire to increase by doing nothing or through wishful thinking. Come off it! Every gift, talent, skill, ability or resource that was either acquired or innate is given to you to process through labour. Without doing so, there can be no increase. <b>Similarly, the servant with one talent who refused to process it with labour, paid dearly for it. He lost it to somebody else. He also lost his freedom. He became an enemy of his master and was bound and thrown into hell.</b> It is a terrible thing to have a decreasing change! Some people think that the Lord will not do anything about the talent they refuse to develop and invest into God's Kingdom. Oh, what a deception! The Lord will do something about it. And this is a frightening issue. <b>If you fail to discover some of your talents or you bury them like this man, on the day of accountability, the Lord will do something about it.</b>” (emphases not original)</p>

Table 4.5: SPI-4

**SAMPLE 5 (SPI-5): JOSEPH PRINCE**, Joseph Prince Ministries, Inc., Fort Mill, South Carolina, USA

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Prince, 2018:1)
TOPIC/THEME	You have it, so say it
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on faith in God’s word (Matt. 25:29)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Prince (2018:1) cites Matthew 25:29, where Jesus said, “To everyone who has, more will be given. From him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away,” and calls attention to the fact that “Jesus doesn’t go on to say what it is we have. He simply says, ‘But to everyone who has.’”</p> <p>According to him, “Jesus is talking about a firm belief in God’s Word that gives one the courage to say, “I have it!” If you say that you have it, you have it, and more will be given to you. But if you say that you don’t have it, when you actually do because God has freely given us all things (Romans 8:32), then even what you have will be taken away—not by God but by the devil!</p> <p>He goes further to explain God’s invitation to ask for what we need, but also warns that when we ask, we should believe that we receive it (Mark 11:24). He says, “Say you already have it even if you don’t see it in the physical realm yet, and one day, you will see it! ... If you believe that it is yours, you will have it. You will see yourself possessing it and enjoying it, and more will be given to you. But if you say, ‘Well, I don’t feel it and I’m not sure if it will come,’ in essence, you are saying that you don’t have it when you actually do. Then, even what you have will be taken away. So say you have it today!”</p>

Table 4.6: SPI-5

**SAMPLE 6 (SPI-6): BISHOP T. D. JAKES**, The Potter’s House, Dallas, Texas, USA

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article (Jakes, 2014)
TOPIC/THEME	Blurring the lines: talking life and work with T. D. Jakes
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Interview on investment and influence
INTERPRETATION	<p>A section of the interview concerns the demerits of pastoral non-involvement in the marketplace, to which Jakes explains that Jesus’ instruction to “Go into all the world” means all the world systems, which can be reached through arts, language, intellectualism and business. He warns: “If the Church is to be relevant in the world—and not to itself only—it has to have some impact in the world system or it is invisible.”</p> <p>Nancy then asks him: “Talk about the parable of the talents. Is it a spiritual story only?”</p> <p>This is how he responds: “The problem is in the question. To say that something that is spiritual does not affect the secular is where I take issue. Whereas it has spiritual value and comes from Jesus himself, one of the elements in the parable is that the master says, ‘You should have put my money to the exchangers. You should have put it in the bank or invested.’ <b>So a spiritual being is telling a parable about business investments, and about expecting a return.</b> He did not disengage from the world. He affected the world in a profound and powerful way. This is where we miss it as believers. We’re so busy removing ourselves from the world we forget we’re supposed to affect the world. If the wealth of the unjust is laid up for the just, how will it be conveyed?...” (emphasis not original)</p>

Table 4.7: SPI-6

**SAMPLE 7 (SPI-7): LEROY THOMPSON,** Kenneth Copeland Ministries Inc., Fortworth, Texas, USA

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet magazine publication (Thompson, 2011:18-19)
TOPIC/THEME	Let the money flow
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on wealth
INTERPRETATION	<p>Thompson (2011:18-19) teaches that money takes on the character of the believer who possesses it, and that because the believer is a spirit with spiritual authority the money in his possession takes on a spiritual character. He explains that one way that God wants to express himself through the believer is by letting money flow through the believer, and as such the church should begin to teach prosperity and not leave it out of its message (cf. Lam. 3:17).</p> <p>He is concerned for what he calls “money flow blockers,” one of which he identifies as fear. The following is his explanation:</p> <p><b>“According to Matthew 25:14-30</b>, the first two servants in the parable of the talents invested the money entrusted to them and saw it doubled, and so pleased the Master (vv. 14-23).</p> <p>“For the third servant, his mistake was fear. He blocked the money flow because he was afraid. Not only that, he made a wrong assumption about his master, who, in this parable, is a picture of God. He called him a ‘hard man’ who wasn’t really concerned about others. If the master was so hard and thoughtless, why would he have given this servant anything in the first place? The master did care. And so does God. God cares whether or not you have money. All through the Bible he talks about prosperity. He wants it to flow to you. Why? Because when money flows, prosperity flows” (emphasis not original).</p>

Table 4.8: SPI-7

**SAMPLE 8 (SPI-8): DAVID BARTON, Wallbuilders, Aledo, Texas, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet magazine publication <sup>22</sup> (Barton, 2017:23-27)
TOPIC/THEME	America's gift of government
CoI OF MATT. 25:14-30	Mobilising American Christians for political involvement
INTERPRETATION	<p>Barton (2017:23-27) teaches that “When we stand before God at the final judgment, he will ask for an account of what we did with the blessings he gave us,” and on the basis of our response will give commendations to those who deserve. However, he doubts that many would be able to speak up or answer concerning their government when God would ask, “I gave you a government – what did you do with it?”</p> <p>Barton contrasts the first two servants with the third one in “the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 and Luke 19.” While the first two multiplied their talents and were rewarded for being good stewards, the third was afraid and hid his talent – and got into trouble with his master. Then he says, “Like the fearful servant, for years many Christians have chosen not to get involved in what is going on in the world politically. We have let fear, confusion and apathy keep us from taking our proper place in this country.”</p> <p>He continues, “The interesting thing about the servants in this parable is that none of them asked to be a steward over the talents he was given. Still, the master held them accountable. In the same way, as Americans we didn’t ask to be born here. We didn’t ask for this government. Nevertheless I believe God is going to hold us accountable for what we do with what we’ve been given. Being involved in the civil arena is not an option ... especially in America.... <b>Apparently Jesus considered service in civil government as a means of reward, for in the parable of the talents the faithful servants were rewarded by being made rulers over cities (Luke 19)</b>” (emphasis not original).</p>

Table 4.9: SPI-8

<sup>22</sup> While it could not be verified whether David Barton is Pentecostal or not, this article is published in *Believer's voice of victory*, a magazine published by Eagle Mountain International Church/Kenneth Copeland Ministries Inc., which is a Pentecostal outfit.

**SAMPLE 9 (SPI-9): APOSTOLIC FAITH CHURCH, Anthony Village, Lagos, Nigeria**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article (AFC, s.a. [a])
TOPIC/THEME	Parable of the talents (Sunday school lesson for senior class)
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Christ's second coming and reward of believer's earthly labours (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>AFC (s.a. [a]) applies the story to believers who as labourers in the vineyard of the Kingdom, must preach the Word with power, pray for the healing of the sick, and bring back the lost into the fold. The saints must be gathered together in meetings, where talented brethren would deploy their talents in the worship. Like the master in the parable, our Lord distributes the talents, or responsibilities, according to our individual ability. However, while the proportion of gifts is different in each, the same fidelity is required of all, and is equally rewarded. We then must face the question whether or not we are using the talents He has given to us, or if we have wrapped them up and put away. Just as the reward of the three servants depended on their personal responsibility with the talents they received, so our eternal reward or condemnation depends on the way we employ our talents.</p> <p>The document praises the five-talent and two-talent servants for their immediate and persevering commitment to their lord's work, as a result of which they gained more talents. On the other hand, it repudiates the one-talent whose effort in digging the ground to bury his talent could have more usefully been used to improve his talent for his master's benefit. On the master's return the faithful servants came joyfully to greet him, while the unfaithful servant came with a guilty attitude. The lesson here is that "faithfulness and devotion to the cause of Christ put confidence in the soul. Those who possess these attributes have no fear in their hearts when they are called to meet their Master. What a happy moment it will be for us when we can stand with our talents and say, 'Here, Lord, is what you gave me; and here also is what I have been able, by Your grace, to gain for You....'</p> <p>It continues: "Few realise that spiritual responsibility is a tremendous thing and is not to be taken lightly...." For the one-talent servant, however, it</p>

	<p>observes that fear, indolence and rebellion did not allow him to take risk and thereby produce profit, even when he knew that his master would demand for profit from the trust he held. It then submits that “with sin in the heart there is fear; there can be no confidence toward God. ... It is sin that makes people afraid.” The “wicked and slothful servant” was ultimately judged and his talent taken from him. He represents those who love this present world more than eternal life. “When those who have neglected their present opportunities appear before their Lord they will be stripped of every opportunity to do service through eternity for Him and will stand there in disgrace.” Then, like that servant, they will be cast into a region of darkness, where they will find no opportunity for repentance.</p>
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Table 4.10: SPI-9

**SAMPLE 10 (SPI-10): APOSTOLIC FAITH CHURCH, Peckham, London, United Kingdom**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article(AFC, s.a. [b])
TOPIC/THEME	The parable of the talents (Sunday school lesson for junior class)
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Christ's second coming and reward for believers' reward for their earthly labours
INTERPRETATION	<p>AFC (s.a. [b]) observes that both the five-talent and the two-talent servants were rewarded not for the quantity of profit they made but for their faithfulness. But for the one-talent servant, his sin was neglect. He was condemned by his master not for any wicked deed but for neglect. The lesson outline reasons that if people who were full of good works in the name of Jesus but were not saved would be condemned at the judgment (cf. Matt. 7:22-23), what more to fear for those who, like this one-talent servant, cannot boast of any good work for the Lord?</p> <p>The lesson equates the talents in the story with physical abilities, and encourages the children to use every ability faithfully to serve God. From the master's statements of commendation to the first two servants, "I will put you in charge of many things" (vv. 22-23), it is apparent that there will be greater responsibilities after the Lord has come. It says: "We may think we are very busy here working for the Lord, and when He comes our work will be done. But from this parable it seems that our service here is only preparing us for greater things in the land beyond. May we work diligently so that the Lord will be able to use us through all eternity in the land He has prepared for those who love Him!"</p> <p>It also alerts the children to the fact that they would have to give account for the talents that God gave them, as well as for what they might have gained with those talents. It says, "If we use what God has given us we shall receive more, and God is going to require the greater service from us.... If He has given us talents which we are not using for the Lord, we are going to find ourselves slothful servants when He calls us to an accounting." It further warns that like the one-talent servant who despite knowing that his master would return with a demand for accounting dared to bury his talent and never used it, many people today who are looking for the Lord's return but who are not making effort at gaining more Christian graces after their salvation will find after all that they were not ready for the day of reckoning.</p>

Table 4.11: SPI-10

**SAMPLE 11 (SPI-11): SAM ADEYEMI, Daystar Christian Centre, Oregun, Lagos, Nigeria**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Amiola, 2017:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Sam Adeyemi's top five tips for stewardship of finances
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on wealth (Matthew 25:14-29)
INTERPRETATION	Amiola (2017:1) reports that Sam Adeyemi teaches that Christ spoke more about money than about any other subject, particularly more than he did about heaven and hell combined. The reason for this, he says, is that "the secret of the increase or decrease in the volume of money that people ever get to handle is in stewardship." He cites the parable of the talents as demonstrating that it is simply faithfulness that qualifies one for increase. Drawing from the transfer of the one talent from the lazy servant to the one who had made five more from the five already given him, he submits that "over time, some people get to handle more," warning that "stewardship can be terminated" (cf. Luke 16:1-3).

Table 4.12: SPI-11

**SAMPLE 12 (SPI-12): LYNETTE HAGIN**, Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet magazine publication (Hagin, 2009:20-21)
TOPIC/THEME	Going from ordinary to extraordinary: developing your God-given talents
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on success
INTERPRETATION	<p>Hagin (2012:20) teaches that to fulfil God’s plan for our lives, God’s people have to learn to be content with who he created them to be and what talents he has given them, instead of criticising themselves and thereby demeaning God’s creation. She observes that while in Matthew 25:14–30, “a talent was a form of money ... the story also illustrates the importance of using the natural talents God has given us.”</p> <p>She regrets that many are, like the one-talent servant, not using the talents God has given them because they are focused on the talents they do not have (that is, they focus on their deficiencies), or are jealous of other people’s talents. She warns that God wants people to be thankful for the talents he has given them, as well as to appreciate those he has given other people. She says, “Each one of us has our own special gifts and talents, and we need to appreciate the gifts God has given us, as well as the gifts He’s given to others” (Hagin, 2009:21).</p>

Table 4.13: SPI-12

**SAMPLE 13 (SPI-13): ROD PARSLEY, World Harvest Church, Columbus, Ohio, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Ford, 2016:1)
TOPIC/THEME	The parable of the talents by Rod Parsley
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on giving
INTERPRETATION	<p>Rod Parsley observes that giving drops during times of financial difficulty, and exposes many ministries to financial struggle. In the midst of that, there are people who would still give offerings and pay tithes, while there are others who hold back in order to protect what they have. He likens those who dare to give to the “wiser servants” in the parable of the talents who traded with their allocated talents and made gain, while those who hold back are like the “fearful servant” who buried his for fear he would lose it.</p> <p>Parsley draws a lesson from v. 29 as follows: <b>“There’s a lesson here for us today. Sometimes we’re reluctant to give, but God gives us every good thing we have and we must take care of it wisely if we want to reap His abundance. It is hard not to want to hold on to what we have, but if we let go and trust God, He promises that He will give us more!”</b> (emphasis not original)</p>

Table 4.14: SPI-13

**SAMPLE 14 (SPI-14): MATT HAGEE, Cornerstone Church, San Antonio, Texas, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Hagee, 2018:1)
TOPIC/THEME	What is the will of God for my life?
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on use of gifts to serve God
INTERPRETATION	<p>In the teaching Hagee (2018:1) raises questions intended to awaken the thoughts of his reader on their giftedness: “Who has God created you to be? What has He commissioned you to do?” He also states a popular paradox: “What we are is God’s gift to us. What we become is our gift to God,” and then counsels: “As you ask God to direct you, think about your particular skills. What do you enjoy doing? What seems to come naturally to you?”</p> <p><b>“Read through the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30. God has given you a gift, and He wants you to use it. Recognise the talents God has given you. Once you have identified God’s gifts to you, you are ready to put your gifts before Him ....”</b> (emphasis not original)</p>

Table 4.15: SPI-14

**SAMPLE 15 (SPI-15): CREFLO DOLLAR, World Changers International Church, College Park, Georgia, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Dollar, 2015:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Prosperity is not selfish
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on stewardship of financial/material wealth (Matt. 25:1-46)
INTERPRETATION	<p>According to Dollar (2015:1), "There is a mistaken belief that being prosperous is sinful, and having money is against God's will. But if we study the Scriptures, we see that He wants to bless us in every way and in every aspect of our lives, including our finances.... If our heart is right and our motives are pure, it is okay to be prosperous.</p> <p>"We need the heart of a steward (Matthew 25:1-46).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The parable of the bridegroom and the virgins teaches us that we should manage the resources God has given us, and always be prepared for when He comes.</li> <li>2. <b>Jesus also tells a story about a master who gives talents to his servants and punishes the one who did not multiply his talents.</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <b>God expects us to multiply the talents and gifts He blesses us with, not simply receive them and keep them to ourselves.</b></li> <li>b. <b>Our God is a God of multiplication. He wants us to use our abilities to serve others, and He will multiply them.</b></li> </ol> </li> <li>3. The lesson about the sheep on God's right and the goats on His left illustrates how God sees the way we utilise the talents and gifts He gives us.</li> <li>4. Prosperity is not selfish. It is for the purpose of carrying out the business of the kingdom." (emphasis not original)</li> </ol>

Table 4.16: SPI-15

**SAMPLE 16 (SPI-16): CREFLO DOLLAR, World Changers International Church, College Park, Georgia, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Dollar, 2017a:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Prosperity for the believer
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on stewardship of financial/material wealth (Matt. 25:1-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>According to Dollar (2017a:1), “We make a mistake when we think we are our own source for all our needs, instead of God. He blesses us with every good thing that we have, so adopting a stewardship mindset brings us into agreement with his word. As faithful stewards we manage what God gave us, but we must broaden our way of thinking to include more than just our own wealth. Managing his affairs also includes responsibilities like feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and helping those in need.</p> <p>“...Jesus’ parable of the man traveling to a distant country and giving talents to his servants teaches us that God wants to bless us with good things, but he also wants us to be good stewards by increasing those things.”</p>

Table 4.17: SPI-16

**SAMPLE 17 (SPI-17): CREFLO DOLLAR, World Changers International Church, College Park, Georgia, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Dollar, 2017b:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Unmasking the Spirit of Mammon (Part 2)
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Bible study on the spirit of Mammon
INTERPRETATION	<p>According to Dollar (2017b:1), “When studying the Bible, it is very important not to take any one Scripture out of context and try to apply it to any and all situations. When we do this, we miss much of its meaning. Over time, we can get wrong information and reach incorrect assumptions because we made this mistake. This leads to wrong thinking and wrong living.</p> <p>“Taking Scriptures about money out of context is especially risky, because every time Jesus talked about money, it was really about trust. The condition of a person’s heart is often revealed by how they handle money, because wealth always seems to magnify character traits already present. Money is just a tool, but the spirit of mammon tries to use this tool to destroy our trust in God and redirect it to material possessions.</p> <p>“Mammon lies to us and tells us it is more trustworthy than God. Jesus told the parable of the man traveling to a far country who gave his servants talents according to their abilities. When he returned, he learned that two of them had multiplied their talents, but the third one had buried his in the ground and done nothing with it (Matthew 25:14-30). <b>The man who received only one talent and kept it hidden displayed covetousness. He admitted he was afraid; mammon is fear-based.</b>” (emphasis not original)</p>

Table 4.18: SPI-17

**SAMPLE 18 (SPI-18): LISA COMES, Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article (Comes, 2018:1)
TOPIC/THEME	A vision for your finances: God has a plan for your finances
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on financial planning
INTERPRETATION	<p>Comes (2018:1) postulates that money, being a resource and a gift from God, can work in profitable ways when channeled properly and can otherwise also wreak havoc. She submits that God has a plan for his children’s finances. For Comes, <b>Matthew 25:14-30</b> is one of over 2,000 scriptures that have to do with how to handle and manage money. Reflecting on the parable, she praises the first two servants for managing well their initial trusts and thus qualifying for more, while chiding the third servant for ignoring his “talent” and thus reaping “a harvest of no return.”</p> <p><b>“How many of us feel like doing that today? At the beginning of implementing a financial plan, we get afraid just like this servant and wish we could bury our own situation! We might be afraid to look at the numbers, and actually see how far behind we are, or acknowledge the amount of debt we have.</b> But God has not given us a spirit of fear but of love, self-discipline and a sound mind. We have to face the situation in order to change the situation. Change needs to be conceived on the inside before you perceive it on the outside. You have to work with God. It all starts with the decision to change.” (emphasis not original)</p>

Table 4.19: SPI-18

**SAMPLE 19 (SPI-19): LINUS OCHAI, First Love Assembly, Rumuokwuta, Port Harcourt, Nigeria**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	MP3 audio compact disc (Ochai, 2018)
TOPIC/THEME	Survival kits for financial breakthrough
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on how to overcome economic recession
INTERPRETATION	<p>Ochai (2018) teaches that there is always financial hardship, but that for the believer “Heaven’s perspective” is different (cf. Ps. 112:1-4; Is. 60:1-2). Particularly from Isaiah 60:1-2, the darkness that covers the people is recession, while “survival kits” is the light that Isaiah is talking about.</p> <p>The word “survival” is treated in the teaching as an acronym – S.U.R.V.I.V.A.L., viz: S – seek the Lord; U – use your mind; R – re-invent yourself; V – vocal faith; (no information on I, V, A, and L)</p> <p>Particularly on “U – use your mind,” Ochai (2018) teaches that when a believer prays, God gives him a divine idea, which when used brings financial breakthrough. He warns that whereas there is a place for revelation, there is also a place for initiative, which is according to him what most Christians lack and do not appreciate in other people. He finds Matthew 25:14-30 relevant to the point, and observes that the master only gave talents to his servants without telling them what to do with them. The first two servants got the idea of trading with the talents by maximising “the power of their minds,” while the third servant’s mind was on recess. According to him, “a mind on recess will ultimately lead to recession.” (For him, in fact, Nigeria got into recession because her leaders’ minds were on recess when there was abundance and they consequently failed to double the nation’s fortunes.)</p> <p>Ochai’s final words: “Engage your mind. When you do, you can break the backbone of poverty.”</p>

Table 4.20: SPI-19

**SAMPLE 20 (SPI-20): PAUL ENENCHE**, Dunamis International Gospel Centre, Abuja, Nigeria

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Orodo, 2017:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Good packaging key to global relevance
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on success (Matt. 25:14-15)
INTERPRETATION	<p>With reference to <b>Matthew 25:14-15</b>, Orodo (2017:1) reports Paul Eneche as teaching that God has wired everyone on earth with a unique set of potentialities to fulfil a particular purpose on earth, but that there are persons who though multi-talented are facing limitations in many areas of life. Eneche’s explanation to such a limitation is that potentiality alone is not enough for the fulfilment of destiny. One needs “packaging” as well. He describes this “as a coordinated system of preparing goods for sales and end use.” Then, he adds, “As it is with physical products so it is with human potentials. Human potentials require packaging. Without packaging, one can have global potential and still end up localised in life. A person can package himself either for local championship or for global relevance and impact.”</p> <p>He regrets that there are people and organisations with great gifts and abilities but are today wallowing in obscurity and irrelevance for lack of solid packaging, the reason being that though the potentiality is there the quality of delivery is lacking. His concluding exhortation: “Beloved, a great potential that is bankrupt of excellence equals frustration. For the purpose of effectively representing the Kingdom of God in excellence as a child of God, you must determine to package both yourself and what you do for global relevance.”</p>

Table 4.21: SPI-20

**SAMPLE 21 (SPI-21): JOYCE MEYER, Joyce Meyer Ministries, Fenton, Missouri, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Gospel Hotspot, 2017:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Don't let the devil steal it!
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on success (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>The teaching concentrates on the third servant. According to Joyce, God did not entrust him with more than he could handle, yet he failed. Worse, he tried to justify his failure by blaming the master. The second outstanding hermeneutical issue is that she identifies fear as a key to understanding the story. It was the spirit of fear that made him do nothing, and as a result earned the master's chiding as "a wicked, lazy and idle servant."</p> <p>Joyce believes that if the servant had at least invested the money with the bankers, he would have fulfilled the master's expectation to do what he could. Then she says, "That's the way the devil snares us. He causes us to compare ourselves with others and see how much money or talents they have. Or he tells us other people are given more opportunities than we will ever have. But God doesn't ask us to do what someone else does. He asks us to use the gifts and abilities that He has given to us."</p> <p>Finally, she says: "God has a plan for each person. However, clutching what little we have in fear will not allow us fulfill God's plan. Rather, it allows the devil to lie to us and make us give up on our dreams and God's plan for our lives. When we listen to the devil, we soon believe we can do nothing; but if we listen to God, we will eventually receive his commendation based not on how much we accomplish but how faithful we are to the ability he has given us."</p>

Table 4.22: SPI-21

**SAMPLE 22 (SPI-22): UMA UKPAI, Victory Cathedral, Uyo, Nigeria**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Facebook post (Ukpai, 2016(a):1)
TOPIC/THEME	Principles of greatness and creativity
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on wealth (Matthew 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Ukpai (2016) teaches that any man who has only one source of income is an accident waiting to happen, and that children of God have no business with poverty if they know this principle of investment. He says that if they invest in their passion, they will discover what Proverbs 18:16 (KJV) says: “A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.” According to him, “room” means opportunities of greatness.</p> <p>He submits that life will not intimidate those who have invested their talents and gifts to something productive. He also asserts that, <b>according to the parable of talents in Matthew 25:14-30, God seriously frowns at failure to invest in one’s abilities.</b> From the commendation, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” it is clear according to Ukpai (2016), that failure to invest in one’s talent constantly makes one unfaithful.</p>

Table 4.23: SPI-22

**SAMPLE 23 (SPI-23): UMA UKPAI, Victory Cathedral, Uyo, Nigeria**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Facebook post (Ukpai, 2016(b):1)
TOPIC/THEME	Until you get results you are not a candidate for a reward
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on success (Matthew 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Ukpai (2016(b):1) here submits that the decision to quit exploring one’s creativity is a sign of failure, and that no man is a failure until he begins to blame others for his failure. “Therefore,” according to him, “skills are good but when you allow God to use those skills, you will become a champion if you stay consistent in your creativity...”</p> <p>He says, <b>“From the parable of the talents, Matthew 25:14-30, the master was expecting result when he gave out the talents according to their different capacity for greatness. What are you doing with yours? Until your creativity can provide food on the table for you and your family and grant you resources to lift your village, you are only singing the Lord’s song in a strange land of failure.”</b> (emphasis not original)</p>

Table 4.24: SPI-23

**SAMPLE 24 (SPI-24): KENNETH HAGIN,** Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Hagin, 2003:1)
TOPIC/THEME	What have you done with his love?
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on Christian victory through love
INTERPRETATION	<p>Based on John 13:34-35 and Romans 5:5, Hagin (2003:1) teaches that love is automatically put in the believer’s heart the moment he confesses Christ. All the believer needs to do after that is to develop it and allow it overcome the natural tendencies of the flesh that they had been living with before meeting Christ.</p> <p>Hagin (2003:1) concludes the teaching by reiterating that the love of God is given but that we need to act it out – against the wish of the flesh. He illustrates this with the parable of the talent, thus: <b>“In the parable Jesus told about talents, the man given one talent wrapped it up in a napkin and hid it. ‘I’m fearful,’ that’s what we’ve done with love. We’ve hidden it. It’s time to uncover God’s love in our hearts, put our flesh under, and obey God’s commandment to love.”</b>(emphasis not original)</p>

Table 4.25: SPI-24

**SAMPLE 25 (SPI-25): E. A. ADEBOYE, Redeemed Christian Church of God, Lagos, Nigeria**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Adeboye, 2017:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Don't faint!
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on sowing and reaping (success)
INTERPRETATION	<p>According to Adeboye (2017:1), "Sowing precedes reaping, and waiting to reap when one did not sow is waiting for an empty harvest. Moreover, the privilege of reaping where one did not sow is reserved for the hard-working person, not a lazy one." He hinges these dictums on <b>Matthew 25:14-30</b>, and justifies them with v. 29, where the servant with ten talents was given the extra talent that was taken away from the lazy servant.</p> <p>Adeboye (2017:1) believes that if one works hard and excels in whatever assignment the Lord has given one; if one makes sacrifices in doing God's bidding beyond every other person; or if one out-gives everyone else; one will not only enter into abundance, but one may also qualify to receive the harvest of the lazy. He prays for his reader: "Moreover, we see that the lazy servant lost his harvest. May you not lose your harvest to someone else!"</p>

Table 4.26: SPI-25

**SAMPLE 26 (SPI-26): PAULETTE REED,** Patricia King Ministries, Maricopa, Arizona, USA

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet devotional article (Reed, 2017:1)
TOPIC/THEME	God is restoring talents
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on restoration of talents (Matthew 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>For a start, Reed (2017:1) reports of a vision she had while pondering the parable: “I saw with my spiritual eyes a huge golden shovel, and the Lord revealed that He wants to dig up buried talents so His sons and daughters can be filled with joy and thrive. When talents are buried, or unemployed, people lose passion and head down a slippery slope of boredom and lukewarmness. Nowhere does the Bible say it is okay to bury talents, whether age ten or age one hundred.”</p> <p>She interprets the servants in the parable to be “us, the church,” the Master to be Christ, while talents are “everything in our lives that can glorify God – resources, time, money, computers, cars, revelation, hospitality, etc.” For her, all talents belong to the Lord and He only trusts us to care for them, as “stewards of everything, owners of nothing.” The honour of this responsibility, she says, is captured in God’s intention to administrate “His earthly kingdom” through us (cf. Psalm 8:3-6).</p> <p>Reed (2017:1) observes from v. 15 that God does not give one more responsibility than one can handle. The master in the parable gave to each servant “<i>according to his own ability.</i>” In the same way Jesus our heavenly master pays attention to our strengths and weaknesses. He does not demand abilities from us that we do not have, but only expects us to use what He gives us. Thus, “Using our talents brings Him joy, consequently bringing us joy because – the joy of the Lord is <i>our</i> strength.”</p> <p>On the issue of a buried talent, she regrets that whereas that one talent is equivalent to one million dollars (apparently a current value), it is sad to see that the third servant buried his because of fear of failure and missed an</p>

	<p>opportunity to do great things and multiply his talent.</p> <p>From v. 26, Reed (2017:1) observes that the master calls the third servant “wicked and lazy.” She says that while hiding away the talent saved his time and energy, he lost his talent to another. His failure to “research his investment options ... to multiply his talent” denied him the opportunity of becoming “the champion God wanted him to be.” Her lesson from this is: “... No one is born with a gold medal around their neck; practice makes perfect (mature)” (cf. Pro. 10:4-5).</p> <p>Back to the golden shovel in her vision, she says: “It’s thrilling to know that the church is in a season of restoration. Let’s grab that golden shovel and dig up talents that are buried. Don’t lose the gifts from heaven that you’ve been given. Don’t bow to fear and bury your talents, but rather bury your fear and dig up your talents....”</p>
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Table 4.27: SPI-26

**SAMPLE 27 (SPI-27): ANDREW WOMMACK**, Andrew Wommack Ministries of Europe, Walsall, England

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet devotional article (Wommack, __:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on accountability for divine gifts (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Wommack (__:1) teaches that the parable of the talents continues the theme of being ready for the Lord's return, <b>“but it also makes a strong point that we are accountable to the Lord for the gifts He has given us.”</b> According to him, God intends his children to use these gifts to further his kingdom, rather than hiding them away.</p> <p>He also teaches that <b>“this parable also shows the Lord dealing with His servants according to their own individual gifts and abilities.”</b> This is seen in the fact that the servants who doubled their Lord's money were praised equally, even though one had produced more than the other. Then he says, <b>“Every man's work shall be judged as to what sort it is - not what size it is.”</b> This leads him to the regret that most people today are concerned with quantity of ministry instead of quality of ministry, and the warning that “The Lord is going to reward us based on how well we did, not on how much we did.”</p> <p>For him, those who are not governed by the Holy Spirit in their actions will see all their good works burned up on the day of judgment. Only those who acted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will find that their works will endure the test and they will receive a reward.</p>

Table 4.28: SPI-27

**SAMPLE 28 (SPI-28): PASTOR MATTHEW ASHIMOLOWO**, Kingsway International Christian Centre, London, United Kingdom

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Blog post (Ashimolowo, 2017)
TOPIC/THEME	The end-time transference of wealth
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on wealth (Matthew 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>According to Ashimolowo (2017), four kinds of persons are involved in wealth transfer that eventually leads to success of the church’s local and global missional outreach. These are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Makers of the wealth - These are the people who create the wealth.</li> <li>2. Managers of the wealth – These are those who manage the wealth.</li> <li>3. Distributors – This set of persons distribute the wealth by way of being a blessing to others.</li> <li>4. Field marshals – These are visionaries who use the funds given to them to open churches and break new grounds.</li> </ol> <p>Particularly on management, Ashimolowo (2017) observes that God has no problem transferring wealth, but that the problem is that most Christians do not know how to manage it. “When the finance comes to us, we need to know how to handle and manage it.” At this point he cites the parable of the talents to show the respective managerial capacities and dispositions of the three servants. According to him, “The man who had 5 talents had capacity for 5. The man who was given 2 talents had capacity for 2 and the man who had capacity for 1 talent buried it. That must have been about \$547000 in today’s money.... Money is currency because it has current. It is either flowing to you or flowing away.... We must learn how to handle wealth and to perpetuate it.”</p>

Table 4.29: SPI-28

**SAMPLE 29 (SPI-29): MARK CONNER, Citylife Church, Melbourne, Australia**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article (Conner, 2011:1)
TOPIC/THEME	Reflections on the parable of the talents
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on watchfulness (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>According to Conner (2011:1), Matthew 25:14-30 constitutes one of the parables that Jesus used to address the days ahead and of which he demanded of his disciples to be watchful, prepared, faithful and productive. The master represents God while the servants represent various types of people and their response and relationship to God.</p> <p>Reflection #1: Like the master in the parable, God entrusts each one with resources (time, talents, opportunities and our finances) according to their ability (v. 15), and expects them to act as good managers. God believes in his people and trusts that they will manage the resources at their disposal wisely and with an entrepreneurial spirit.</p> <p>Reflection #2: God is pleased when his people use and invest their resources (vv. 16-17), and would praise, commend, celebrate and reward them (v. 21). The first two servants were not treated in regards to the amount they had been given but for their faithfulness with what they had individually received (vs. 21-23). <b>What matters most is not what we have been given but what we do with it.</b> Conner (2011:1) believes that Jesus teaches in the parable that anything we do for the benefit of God and others is pleasing to God – our work, our love, and our service.</p> <p>Reflection #3: God is displeased when, like the third “wicked and lazy” servant, we play it safe and refuse to risk (vv. 18, 25-30).</p>

	<p>Reflection #4: What is God like? According to Conner (2011:1), it is apparent from this parable that God is a risk-taker who gives us resources and wants us to make them grow. Jesus took risks in his earthly ministry and in entrusting his kingdom work to his often fickle followers. Others are also expected to take risks – including leaving all and following him. God wants us to confront our fears and insecurities, step out of our comfort zone, and exercise faith. After this life, our eternal destiny will be based on our faith in Jesus. However, we will be held accountable for what we did with what we were given by God. Conner (2011:1) concludes: “He has made an investment in our lives and he expects a return on it. This is not a heaven or hell issue. It is a matter of rewards (cf. 1Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10). This truth should provide good motivation to ensure that we make every effort to make our life count for the short time we are here on earth.”</p>
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Table 4.30: SPI-29

**SAMPLE 30 (SPI-30): GODWILL OGBOLU, River Istanbul Church, Istanbul, Turkey**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	YouTube video (Ogbolu, 2017)
TOPIC/THEME	Putting your God-given talent to work
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on success (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Ogbolu (2017) teaches that success depends on hard work and that nobody should expect to prosper if they do not show commitment to their work. He illustrates this belief using the parable of the talents. The man in the parable travels to a far country and delivers his goods to his servants as stewards. From this Ogbolu (2017) submits: “Understand that you own nothing but are only a steward, while God owns all. As such, you must be faithful” (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2).</p> <p>He continues, “It is important to notice that the master gave the talents to the three servants according to their respective abilities. Understand that every member of the body of Christ is gifted; everyone has a talent. Nobody should ever be looked at as being gift-less.”</p> <p>On increasing, Ogbolu (2017) says, “When I increase in my ability my giftings will also increase, because the master gives according to ability. If you don’t have the ability there is no need for the master to give you what you cannot handle. If you increase in ability, the master will give you more.... The master’s concern is not the size of each servant’s gift, but the servant’s faithfulness. If all three servants are faithful, they are going to please the master equally. As such, there is no basis for envy. This applies equally to money and other possessions: those who have more have more responsibility placed on them. If you do well with how much God has given you, you are a prosperous man.”</p>

	<p>On accountability, he says, “The gifts and the calling of God are without repentance. Once they are given they are not going to be retrieved; but a day comes when we will stand before the judgment seat of God to give account of what we did with those gifts. Whatever gift God has given you, use it. Your gift used the proper way is worth more than all the money in the world. When the master returned, he called the servants to account. Each presented his scorecard, and the master commends the first two servants equally – indicating that he was looking for faithfulness and not size. But for the third servant, he chided him for not being productive, took the one talent from him, and gave to the one with ten. Then he made a profound statement: ‘Those who have, more shall be given to them; those who do not have, even the little that they have shall be taken from them.’ Why did he give the one talent to the one who had ten? Because he proved himself faithful. God is not a non-profit investor. He wants to profit and therefore wants you to increase what he has given you. Because he does not want to suffer lose, he takes from those who do not want to do anything with what he has given them and adds to those who are faithful.”</p>
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Table 4.31: SPI-30

**SAMPLE 31 (SPI-31): S. S. BILYNSKYJ, Valley Covenant Church, Oregon, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Podcast (Bilynskyj, 2017)
TOPIC/THEME	Trusted with talents
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Christian responsibility with God’s greatest gift
INTERPRETATION	<p>The word “talent” does not mean now what it meant back then. For the first people who heard this parable, a “talent” was a unit of weight. The “talents” given to those servants were money – many pounds of gold or silver. In addition, this story is not about what is thought of today as “talents” – it is not about being good at anything but about being entrusted with a very large responsibility. It is apparent from this story that believers are entrusted with a big responsibility. The master in the parable, going off on a journey, clearly represents the Lord Jesus who died and rose again and went off to heaven. Like the man in the story, he will return someday to see how believers handled the responsibility he gave them. So whatever responsibility Jesus gives believers, they must be faithful to it, for whatever length of time it takes. Like the master in the story, he expects them to receive his trust and to be trustworthy. He expects them to produce some kind of return on His investment in them. Failure to do so comes with serious consequences, like the master reprimanded that lazy servant who did not fulfill his responsibility. Verse 30 switches from the world of the parable to the real spiritual world to talk about that servant being thrown into the “outer darkness,” the place where no one wants to go.</p> <p>What responsibility is it? The believer’s greatest responsibility is God’s gift of his Son for their salvation (cf. Jn. 3:16). God entrusts to them the responsibility of receiving, believing and sharing the good news about Jesus. Their “talents” are the words of the Bible which declares that God loves them and sent Jesus to save them. So what are they to do with that responsibility? The least they can do is give thanks. That is what the master told the man with one talent in verse 27. The least he could do was put it in the bank and</p>

	<p>earn a little interest. The believer's thanks and praise are God's interest in return for what he has given. Rather than bury his precious gift in the ground, believers should hold it up and give Him thanks for it.</p> <p>Still, they can do more with this valuable gift of salvation in Jesus. They can share it with others so that it grows. They can show the love of God in Jesus to other people so that they feel it too, so that they also experience his salvation. That is what the first two men in the parable did. They engaged those talents in business and made more money (vv. 16-17). God wants believers to take His grace and love and salvation in Jesus and go out and make more, to bring more people into that salvation. These two servants were rewarded by the master; he commended them and welcomed them into his joy (vv. 21, 23). Similarly, when believers fulfill their responsibility to their Master, he will give them joy as they enter into eternal life with Him. Those talents in the parable were heavy. It is a heavy responsibility to share Jesus with friends and families. But when done, it brings great and eternal joy.</p>
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Table 4.32: SPI-31

**SAMPLE 32 (SPI-32): BELIEVERS LOVEWORLD CHILDREN’S MINISTRY, Oregun, Lagos, Nigeria**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet magazine article (BLW, 2016:26-30)
TOPIC	Have a sense of responsibility
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching Christian children to be responsible (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>This children’s manual teaches children to be responsible like the first two servants in the parable. It says being responsible means them being trustworthy and accountable for their actions. It also says that becoming responsible citizens means being people who can be trusted to do their best for the good of others, and being ready to act and speak for others. It also means that others can expect you to make a sensible “response” in a situation, including responses like taking care of things and the environment. It cites David (cf. 1 Sam. 17:20-37) and Jesus (cf. Luke 2:41-52) as children who were responsible while growing up, and encourages the children to follow these examples.</p> <p>It concludes with the exhortation:</p> <p>“As a child of God, you have the Spirit of God in you, which is the Spirit of excellence so you do excellent things;”</p> <p>and the confession:</p> <p>“I am a responsible child of God. I know what to do, when to do it, how to do it and I do it. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me. I am a blessing to my world.”</p>

Table 4.33: SPI-32

**SAMPLE 33 (SPI-33): GIDEON YUK, Rowland Heights Foursquare Church, Rowland Heights, California, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Web publication (Yuk, 2015:1)
TOPIC	The servant with one talent
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Counsel to pastors on the need to concentrate on discipleship and church planting
INTERPRETATION	<p>Yuk applies the parable of the talents to the statistics of a certain 2006 study entitled "American Congregations at the Beginning of the 21st Century," said to have been conducted by Mark Chaves. He says that according to the study, half of the churches surveyed in 2006 had 75 people or fewer, and in 2007 90% had 350 people or fewer. Yuk believes that The Foursquare Church is not different from those churches.</p> <p>According to him, the five-talent servant depicts pastors who serve churches with 350 people or more, the two-talent servant pastors who serve churches with 76 to 350 people, and the one-talent servant pastors who serve churches with 75 or fewer people. For him, when Jesus taught this parable, he was getting ready to return to heaven, and as the man in the parable entrusted his property to each servant according to his ability, Jesus entrusted his people to pastors according to their several abilities. Some have more than 350 people in their care, others between 76 and 350 people, and yet others serve 75 people or fewer.</p> <p>Then he says, "Whether we are entrusted with more or fewer souls, the primary focus of our ministry should be reproducing His disciples and churches by what was given to us. We were sent to make disciples and reproduce churches."</p>

	<p>Yuk is worried about the one-talent servant, and wonders why he chose to bury his talent. He suggests that it might have been a protest against being given just one talent, or an obsession with comparing himself with other servants. Just here, Yuk warns: "... It is easy to sympathise with the servant with one talent because we can easily be like him. If we pastor small churches, we can make the same mistake of burying and hiding what God has entrusted to us. We need to understand that we are dealing with the souls of people, which are more precious than talents of gold. I think that this parable teaches that, even if we have 'one-talent' churches, we can also make disciples and plant churches. I have been serving a one-talent congregation, but, by the grace of God, we were able to plant three churches and raise five ministers in the past three years."</p>
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Table 4.34: SPI-33

**SAMPLE 34 (SPI-34): ALY SALZ, Lake Oswego Foursquare Church, West Linn, Oregon, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Web publication (Salz, 2017:1)
TOPIC	Hidden talent
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on maximising Christian leadership
INTERPRETATION	<p>Salz (2017:1) opines that the church often fails to utilise some of its most valuable resources: businesspeople, women, youth and other talented laypeople. Like the failure of NASA to acknowledge the gifts of market women that helped put them on space in early 1960s, she sees “a similar failing in the church, which often fails to appreciate its resources—those gifts wrapped in human bodies.”</p> <p>She wishes to remind the church that in the first century, many pastors, evangelists and other leaders were laypersons, such as merchants and fishermen; and regrets that instead of utilising those resources today, “we too often let them sit on the side-lines.” Salz refutes the claim that lay members are not excluded from any level of leadership – at least this is not true at the local church level. <b>“That means when it comes to the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), we are like a “half-talent steward,” burying half the talent in our midst.”</b> (emphasis not original)</p>

Table 4.35: SPI-34

**SAMPLE 35 (SPI-35): RON FLORES, Las Vegas 6 Foursquare Church, Las Vegas, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Web publication (Flores, 2016:1)
TOPIC	What is your grace capacity?
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Counsel to pastors against worry about church size
INTERPRETATION	<p>Flores (2016:1) had for fifteen years pastored a church with average attendance less than 100, and was presently pastoring one with 150. While he was overwhelmed by this number, his wife, Clara, was not. During a conversation just after a certain missional outreach, Clara challenged him to go for more. Startled and humbled, he began to ask God in prayer: “What’s my grace capacity?” He says by this question he sought to know how many people he could pastor effectively. He claims that in answer to his prayer, a “personal number” was revealed to him. This episode forms the background to his understanding and application of Matthew 25:14-30.</p> <p>He says, “Here’s the rub: I believe there is a small group of pastors who can grow a megachurch. I call these pastors ‘five-baggers,’ taken from Matthew 25:14-30 (NKJV), the end-time Parable of the Talents. I believe the multi-talent servants in this parable are like the pastors who lead our largest churches. All of us have been graced, gifted and favoured—but not all of us are five-baggers. Remember, God’s favour isn’t fair.” He observes that when it comes to church size, most pastors are moved by either guilt or pride, and counsels that “when we hear from God and see how He has gifted us, our motivation becomes obedience covered with gratitude.” For those who might have reached their capacity, he also counsels to plant other churches and send out ministers and missionaries, and be eager to hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21).</p>

Table 4.36: SPI-35

**SAMPLE 36 (SPI-36): KIM SUNG-HAE, Yoido Full Gospel Church, Seoul, South Korea**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article (Chang, 2012)
TOPIC	Dr. Kim Sung-hae: How to use one's God-given talents
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on how to exercise giftedness (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Chang (2012) highlights Dr. Kim Sung-hae's three lessons from Matthew 25:14-30, namely:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Receive the talent with thanksgiving. Sung-hae regrets that many people allow themselves to be distracted by other people's talents and in the process demean theirs. The inevitable result of such an attitude is that such persons would achieve nothing with their talents. On the other hand, if they receive God's gift with a grateful heart, God is delighted and gives them more.</li> <li>2. Do your best with your talents. The servant who buried his talent was reprimanded by his master and the talent taken from him and added to the one who had ten. Sung-hae submits: "We will receive more talents when we do our best with the talents that God has given to us." She also indicates that God is not pleased with a person who makes no improvement, and is the reason he "often challenges a believer's faith, and the person must be willing to step forward in order to fulfil his potential."</li> <li>3. Share your talents with others joyfully. Sung-hae teaches that God does not give talents to his children just to make them successful and happy, but that they use the talents to benefit other people as well as build up the church. She says, "The ultimate purpose of using one's talent is so that someone else can be blessed."</li> </ol> <p>In conclusion, Sung-hae encourages believers to find a need and use the talents they have to meet that need.</p>

Table 4.37: SPI-36

**SAMPLE 37 (SPI-37): GARY GIBBS, Elim Pentecostal Church, West Malvern, England**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article (Gibbs, s.a.)
TOPIC	Is it time for an adventure?
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	A challenge to rise and pioneer the work of the kingdom of God
INTERPRETATION	<p>Gibbs (s.a.) asserts that Jesus originally told the story as an accusation on the Scribes and Pharisees, “the religious people who didn’t want anything to change: they were totally conservative about their faith. They thought nothing was broken and so nothing needed fixing. The faith had been systematised in the Law; it was all good – and buried in the ground as it were!”</p> <p>“Time for an Adventure”! He cites a certain commentator on the parable as saying, “...There can be no religion without adventure...,” and upon that posits: “Jesus promised us the gift of an abundant life (John10:10) but we are in danger of simply settling for a quite boring existence instead. What is clear from the parable is that faithfulness and fruitfulness are inextricably linked (verses 21 &amp; 23).” He raises a rhetorical question to his reader, whether like the two adventurous servants who invested their talents to be productive, they would use their talents for the sake of the King and the Kingdom, “willing to leave the safety of simply ‘doing church’ on Sunday mornings and midweek house group?”</p> <p>Applying these thoughts to church planting, he submits that “the opportunity” is that “the harvest is plentiful,” while “the challenge” is that “the workers are few” (Matt. 9:37). He challenges both individual believers and the believing community to “never become obsessed simply with surviving.” Why? “The Kingdom of God is about flourishing!”</p> <p>He reminds believers that living by faith is about being spiritually and practically pro-active and taking godly risks, rather than “shrinking back” (cf. Heb. 10:38). He therefore calls on believers to rise and pioneer all kinds of work in the church (Elim). These persons he invites to serve must according to him not necessarily be “five talent” or “two talent” or even “one</p>

	<p>talent” persons. Rather, the issue according to him is: “How will you use what God has given you? Just to finish, the promise in the parable is that if you begin to operate with the gifts you have you will become more fruitful and stronger in your ministry. Conversely, if you don’t exercise, you will lose even what you have.... That is one of the most sobering and scary things I have ever written... So, let's go! If not you, then who? If not now, then when?”</p>
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Table 4.38: SPI-37

**SAMPLE 38 (SPI-38): IVERNA TOMPKINS, Church for the Nations, Phoenix, Arizona, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article (Tompkins, s.a. [a])
TOPIC	Parable of the talents: What have you done with what I gave you? (Part I)
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on accountability to Christ at his return (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Beginning with a claim that now is the fulfilment of prophecy (cf. Matt. 24), Tompkins (s.a. [a]) says, “I surely believe the Lord is poised to return.” However, she is worried what account people will give of their talents when the Lord returns. From the parable, she says rather than try to assign figures to the word “talents,” one should seek to discover the underlying principle (or author’s intent) of the story. She identifies this as the fact that “the master gave something extremely <i>valuable</i> – not only valuable to Him, but to the servants as well”. She explains that the word “talent” means “to bear,” or something “weighty,” connecting it to a description of “glory” as “weight”. Just as the glory of God is “weighty” or “valuable”, so were the talents in the story.</p> <p>According to her, “master” represents Christ, “the absolute owner and proprietor of everything and all people everywhere (Mt. 28:18; Lk.10:22a; Jn.3:35)”, the King who in every visitation and in past revivals had deposited “something precious with us to use and to do”, and “stepped back to see what we would do with what He gave us”. The “servants” are believers, members of the master’s household whom he paid a price for and they belong to him. Then she says, “<b>The subject of this parable is actually ‘Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.’</b>” (emphasis not original)</p> <p>Tompkins (s.a. [a]) says, “I believe the church is now at the place <b>in this story</b> when the Master, Jesus, is coming back. Just as the master in our parable, Jesus will come for an accounting, asking, ‘<b>What have you done with what I gave you?</b>’” She identifies “the master’s trust” as “the extraordinary part” of this parable. She is amazed how the One who created this world, owns everything in</p>

	<p>it, would after providing for everything we need and cannot accomplish for ourselves to secure an eternal destiny in His presence, <b>“turns around and invests in us”</b>. In her consideration, that trust has to do with God depending on us to reveal his message of love to the world and for us to carry everything that his Son is: “Christ in you, the hope of glory’ (Col. 1:27)”.</p> <p>The servants are not all given the same amount, but they are all given equally. Each person is given “according to his ability.” Another point is that they receive very scanty directives – much of what they know is that the master will return to ask for account. Yet another issue is that the differential allocation to these servants does not suggest favouritism, because God does not give anyone more than he or she can bear or handle (1 Cor.10:13). She wants her audience to realise that whether God’s gift looks valuable to the recipient or not, it is from God. Such gifts which the believer receives at salvation include Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word, salvation, and repentance.</p>
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Table 4.39: SPI-38

**SAMPLE 39 (SPI-39): IVERNA TOMPKINS, Church for the Nations, Phoenix, Arizona, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article (Tompkins, s.a. [b])
TOPIC	Parable of the talents: What have you done with what I gave you? (Part II)
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on accountability to Christ at his return  (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Tompkins (s.a. [b]) describes God’s gifts as “faith assignments” (cf. Eph. 2:8-10). According to her, “We’ve all been given assignments – ‘faith assignments.’ <b>That’s what these talents are.</b> They’re things yet to be developed.” We are all servants under submission to another’s authority. However, there are scores of anointed persons who once were serving in the ministry under others, but have never accepted their “two talents” but want to be “the five.” But they need to hear that “a number two person in a number one position always fails.” Then she says, “It does not matter how many gimmicks or natural abilities one may have, we are talking about divine talents – God’s placements. If God didn’t call you to be a number one, then you need to be happy and productive being a number two.”</p> <p>She teaches that people need to be careful with the gifts, assignments and responsibilities that God has given them, as each person’s assignment is uniquely important: “You have a place and no one can do for God in that place as successfully as you can yourself. You are the minister He needs and He has set a great task before you. He trusts you to be faithful in fulfilling your spot.” For those who might complain that they have no talent, Tompkins (s.a. [b]) depends on Ephesians 2:10 to counter them: “...created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance....”</p> <p>She observes that in this parable, the master simply gave gifts to the servants according to their ability, and then left. He gave them opportunity to do whatever they would with the talents. All He asks is an exercise of what He has given – an</p>

	<p>investment of the talent. It was the choice of the one-talent man to begin digging a hole to protect what he had. There are many people like that today – they are saved but are not doing anything with their salvation other than “protecting” it. Another meaning of “digging a hole” is rehearsing the negatives, the hurts, the pains, the regrets of the past, as a result of which they would not try anything new. She says, “Digging a hole – it is like looking at all the past failures, anger, hurts and disappointments and saying, ‘I’m not getting out of the boat again!’ This is self-protection and it makes a person useless in the Kingdom.”</p> <p>According to Tompkins (s.a. [b]), it is time to be accountable. When the Lord asks what we did with our talents, we need to boldly tell him that we did not bury or lose them, but that we doubled them. The Master would commend those who doubled theirs. For them, it was the “reasonable service” that Romans 12:1 (KJV) talks about. For those with multiple gifting, the Lord expects a multiple return. She says, “... All God requires from you is a doubling. And as you double it – ‘unto whom much is given, much is required’ (Lk.12:48) and “unto him that hath not, it shall be taken away” (Mt. 13:12; 25:29) because he can’t handle it! Even what he has shall be taken away and given to the one who has the most (Mt. 25:28).”</p> <p>Tompkins (s.a. [b]) says she used to be confused with why the little was taken and added to the one who had much, until the Lord revealed the truth to her: “Because the one who has the most has the ability and has the dedication and the commitment to handle more.” She then explains that God “adds to us as we are capable and dedicated enough to handle what He gives,” and concludes that the believer’s duty is to take everything God has given him or her and make it multiply.</p>
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Table 4.40: SPI-39

**SAMPLE 40 (SPI-40): IVERNA TOMPKINS, Church for the Nations, Phoenix, Arizona, USA**

SOURCE TYPE (ST)	Internet article (Tompkins, s.a [c])
TOPIC	Parable of the talents: What have you done with what I gave you? (Part III)
Col OF MATT. 25:14-30	Teaching on accountability to Christ at his return  (Matt. 25:14-30)
INTERPRETATION	<p>Tompkins (s.a. [c]) pictures the talents as “faith-gifts” and the respective servants as “faith-stopper” (the one-talent servant), “faith-stepper” (the two-talent servant), and “faith-starter” (the five-talent servant).</p> <p>The “<b>faith-stopper</b>” buried his talent. Many in the church are like him – they fear another failure and therefore would not venture out. They discourage every new or innovative move based on history.</p> <p>The “<b>faith-stepper</b>” is capable but does not initiate things; he only follows successful initiators. He is challenged by the example of another’s (the five-talent man) faith and follows the example to invest his ability. He does not wait till he has “five;” rather he simply takes what he has and works it. The lesson here is that each person should focus on what he has, not what he lacks. While the faith-stopper is a coward, the “faith-stepper” is capable of following what is right. He doubles his investment and receives the same commendation as the one he follows.</p> <p>The “<b>faith-starter</b>” is competent; he knows he has been given five opportunities and understands that he must do everything possible within the framework and sphere of his influence to at least double that. He is a bold leader (cf. Pr. 28:1). Faith-starters are competent people who step out</p>

	<p>ahead of the rest and begin to do something.</p> <p>Finally, she explains the lot of the failed one-talent servant: The master ordered him to be thrown into “outer darkness,” which for her means “obscurity” or “being stopped where they are.” Her lesson from this scene is: “Once you have light, revelation, a truth, you are held responsible by God to work and function within that light. If you do not, the shade comes down and you are <i>out of the light</i>. You are in “darkness” and “without joy.” This could mean “a place of stoppage ... a place where I no longer have illumination when I read the Word, not understanding what it means.”</p>
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Table 4.41: SPI-40

### 4.3 PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From the analyses above, it was observed that the investigated Pentecostal interpreters understand Matthew 25:14-30 in very divergent ways. At this point, only the contexts in which the pericopes were used by them will be considered. These are summarised in the table below:

<b>COGNATE GROUP (CG)</b>	<b>CONTEXT OF INTERPRETATION (CoI)</b>	<b>FREQUENCY (f)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE FREQUENCY (%f)</b>
1	<b>Teaching on finance, success and wealth</b> (SPI-1, SPI-4, SPI-7, SPI-11, SPI-12, SPI-15, SPI-16, SPI-17, SPI-18, SPI-19, SPI-20, SPI-21, SPI-22, SPI-23, SPI-25, SPI-28, SPI-30)	17	42.5%
2	<b>Teaching on giving</b> (SPI-13)	1	2.5%
3	<b>Teaching on responsibility and accountability for God's gifts/talents</b> (SPI-27, SPI-32, SPI-36)	3	7.5%
4	<b>Mobilising for political involvement</b> (SPI-8)	1	2.5%
5	<b>Teaching on Christ's second coming and reward</b> (SPI-2, SPI-9, SPI-10, SPI-38, SPI-39, SPI-40)	6	15.0%
6	<b>Teaching on Christian ministry, leadership and witnessing</b> (SPI-3, SPI-14, SPI-31, SPI-33, SPI-34, SPI-35, SPI-37)	7	17.5%
7	<b>Teaching on faith in the word of God</b> (SPI-5)	1	2.5%
8	<b>Teaching on Christian victory through love</b> (SPI-24)	1	2.5%
9	<b>Teaching on watchfulness</b> (SPI-29)	1	2.5%
10	<b>Teaching on divine restoration of talents</b> (SPI-26)	1	2.5%
11	<b>Interview on investment and influence</b> (SPI-6)	1	2.5%
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 4.42: Frequency table of contexts of interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

Actual interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 by some Pentecostal exegetes were examined in this chapter. Forty of such interpretations were studied from a wide variety of Pentecostal backgrounds that in fact cut across intercontinental borders. While full evaluation of the samples will be done in Chapter 6 of this study, it is already very clear that these Pentecostal interpreters understand Matthew 25:14-30 in a wide variety of ways – and one wonders if all those meanings are faithful to the passage.

Precisely, eleven (11) contexts of interpretation were identified (with some being in fact composite). These included teaching on finance, success and wealth (42.5%), teaching on giving (2.5%), teaching on responsibility and accountability for God's gifts/talents (7.5%), mobilising Christians for political involvement (2.5%), teaching on Christ's second coming and reward (15%), teaching on Christian ministry, leadership and witnessing (17.5%), teaching on faith in the word of God (2.5%), teaching on Christian victory through love (2.5%), teaching on watchfulness (2.5%), teaching on divine restoration of talents (2.5%), and interview on investment and influence (2.5%). As already said, particular evaluation of these interpretations based on Reformed convictions will be done in Chapter 6 of this study, after examining Reformed hermeneutics and attempting a Reformed interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30 in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REFORMED HERMENEUTICS AND THE INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW 25:14-30

#### 5.1 ORIGIN AND MEANING OF REFORMED HERMENEUTICS

##### 5.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 dealt with some issues of Pentecostal hermeneutics while Chapter 4 sampled some Pentecostal interpretations of **Matthew 25:14-30**. The present unit will focus on some issues of Reformed hermeneutics – the origin and meaning of Reformed hermeneutics, the nature and general principles of Reformed hermeneutics, recent approaches to Reformed hermeneutics, and Reformed principles for interpreting Jesus' parables. On the basis of the findings, it will then attempt a Reformed interpretation of **Matthew 25:14-30**. That way, the stage will be set for Chapter 6 to assess the Pentecostal interpretations of the pericope that were collected in Chapter 4. However, before Reformed hermeneutics is discussed, attention will be given to the Reformed tradition generally, as the Christian system in which Reformed hermeneutics is practiced.

##### 5.1.2 ORIGIN, DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTIC EMPHASES OF THE REFORMED TRADITION

**5.1.2.1 Origin of the Reformed tradition.** According to Klooster (1979:32), the motifs “Reformed churches”, “Reformed confessions”, “Reformed liturgies”, “Reformed politics”, “Reformed theology”, etc. entered the language transaction of Christianity following the 16th-century Protestant Reformation<sup>23</sup>. The Reformers had sought to “reform the church according to the Word of God” (Plantinga, 2002:xii). As such, in a historical sense, “Reformed” can be said to be a tradition that arose from, and developed, the attempt in the 16th century to call the Western (Roman) Church to be reformed in line with the canonical Scripture. According to Challies (2016), the church needed to be “carefully and faithfully” rebuilt based on the New Testament, as against “the excesses and perversions” of the Roman church. Such figures as Martin Luther and John Calvin have a pride of place in the history of the Reformation (Wolthuis, 2011:25), but also deserving of credit are the seldom mentioned Huldrych Zwingli and

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<sup>23</sup> Goede (2017:15) agrees with this, but however traces the actual origin of the Reformed faith to the early church fathers in Antioch.

Heinrich Bullinger (both of Zurich) and Martin Bucer of Strasbourg (Bouwsma, 2018; Schirrmacher, 2011).

**5.1.2.2 Definition of Reformed tradition.** A definition of the Reformed tradition can be done from different perspectives, e.g. historical perspective (as already seen in Section 5.1.2.1 above), or doctrinal perspective (as will follow now).

In confessional terms, Wolthuis (2011:25) understands the term “Reformed” to be an emphasis on sixteen (16) doctrinal words/related motifs/biblical texts, viz: (1) Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16); (2) Grace (Eph. 2:8-10); (3) Creation (Gen. 1-2), Fall (Gen. 3), Redemption and Recreation (Col. 1:15-20); (4) Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34); (5) Common grace (Matt. 5:43-48); (6) Personal relationship to Jesus (Rom. 8:38-39); (7) The Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-17); (8) Gratitude (Col. 3:15-17); (9) The Church (Eph. 4:1-16); (10) Word and deed (Jam. 2:14-17); (11) Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2:11); (12) Kingdom (Matt. 6:10); (13) Cultural Mandate (Gen. 1:27-28); (14) Christian education (Prov. 9:4); (15) Christian vocation (Eph. 4:28); and (16) Justice (Mic. 6:8).

Sequel to this heavy doctrinal leaning, the Reformed tradition has developed and does use confessions and creeds that encapsulate its doctrinal convictions. In this connection, mention can be made of Calvin’s confession for the French Reformed Churches (1559), the Belgic Confessions for the Dutch Reformed Churches (1561), the Canons of Dordt (1618-1619), etc. In fact, the tradition is so confessionally-oriented that Plantinga (2001) for instance beautifully develops key Reformed themes in *A sure thing: what we believe and why*, based on a combination of both scriptural passages and confessional articles.

### 5.1.3 ORIGIN OF REFORMED HERMENEUTICS

In 1515 A.D., Martin Luther developed a new hermeneutic that replaced the four-fold hermeneutic that had characterised the Medieval period and was fundamental to the predominant allegorisation of the Bible. This eventually led to the Protestant Reformation, which is itself identified to have been fundamentally “a hermeneutically-driven struggle” (Monergism, 2008). However, this “new” hermeneutic was not new as such, but was actually a recovery of the hermeneutic of the earliest Church Fathers<sup>24</sup>. It was an approach that specified that “each Bible passage has one basic meaning, which

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<sup>24</sup> Goede (2017:15) has already been cited above as tracing Reformed hermeneutics to the early Church Fathers in Antioch.

was firmly rooted in historical truth, and related accurately according to the common principles of human language” (Monergism, 2008).

It can be seen that there are two legs to Reformation hermeneutic: (1) the approach is “historical”, meaning that it relates “real, interconnected historical events that must be acknowledged and understood before the various teachings of the bible (sic) could make sense or have application”. (2) It is also “grammatical”, that is, it “[uses] language the way the normal person would” (Monergism, 2008). These two features made it necessary, eventually, to adopt a historical-grammatical approach to interpreting the Bible. This had to do with properly accounting for the historical as well as the grammatical issues in the text under investigation (Pitchford, 2006).

Luther’s approach reviewed above, plus other hermeneutical realities that came to the fore during and after the Reformation proper, eventually gave birth to what is now called Reformed hermeneutics. Among other characteristic credentials, this hermeneutical approach seeks to account for the historical and grammatical elements of the biblical passage that one is interpreting.

#### 5.1.4 MEANING OF REFORMED HERMENEUTICS

This section now focuses on the meaning of Reformed hermeneutics. It works with an own definition developed based on insights gathered from different scholars<sup>25</sup>.

*Reformed hermeneutics may be defined as firstly an approach to Scripture that stems from the 16th-century Reformation and is practiced by Reformed exegetes; secondly, that submits to the authority of the Scripture as the inspired, infallible, inerrant word of God, and as God’s only means of offering his truth to the church and the world; thirdly, that seeks to retrieve from the text of Scripture the meaning (or message) that fits the text in particular and the overarching redemptive message of the canon; and fourthly, that explores a variety of methods/tools which present themselves as suitable to the text in question and that blend to produce a result that is acceptable to the rule of faith.*

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25 These include Du Toit (2009b:110), Erickson (2001:72), Hesselink (1983:97), Hiebert (2016), Klooster (1979:39), Ligonier (2018), Sproul (2018), Viljoen (2017:25-26), and Wolthuis (2011:27-28).

The following stand out from the above definition:

- (i) On the history of Reformed history, sufficient attention has already been given in Section 5.1.3 above.
- (ii) Reformed hermeneutics holds the authority of Scripture and all its predicates and implications in high esteem. The doctrine of inspiration of Scripture, based primarily on 2 Timothy 3:16-17, but also on 2 Peter 1:20-21, means a belief that the Holy Spirit supernaturally influenced the biblical authors and thus made their writing “an accurate record of the revelation”, or resulted in their writing “actually being the Word of God” (Erickson, 2001:61; cf. Calvin, *Inst.* 1.7.4; Plantinga, 2001:57).
- (iii) The infallibility of the Scripture means that the Bible cannot teach error. Sequel to the doctrine of infallibility, the doctrine of inerrancy means that “the Bible contains no affirmations of anything that is contrary to fact” (Ligonier, 2018; Erickson, 2001:72).
- (iv) For the Reformers, authority of Scripture was “the formal principle”; this position remains the same for Reformed persons (Hesselink, 1983:97; Klooster, 1979:39). In practice, a Reformed person comes to the Scripture as to the only sure means of hearing from God – and indeed hopes for a revelatory encounter with the God of Scripture (Wolthuis, 2011:27-28).
- (v) Reformed hermeneutics seeks to draw a meaning (or message) *from the text*. Therefore, the Reformed exegete does not come to the text with a fancy idea of its meaning (i.e. eisegesis!), but rather investigates the text according to its merit, to hear what it has to say. The message so retrieved is expected to agree with the overall thrust and theology of the complete canon, namely, God’s progressive work for the salvation of man through Jesus Christ.
- (vi) Describing Reformed hermeneutics as “a gospel-centred hermeneutic”, Hiebert (2016) calls one to “read Scripture through the lens of the work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection”, this being “the singular point of all Scripture”. Indeed, the texts of Scripture “point to the reality that the gospel – the work of Christ to save sinners as part of redemptive-history – is the main point of Scripture and must therefore guide our interpretation of Scripture”. The Reformed principle that checks the agreeability of interpretation with the

canon is known as “the analogy of faith” or “the rule of faith”, and works with the assumption of the unity of Scripture (Sproul, 2018).

- (vii) Reformed hermeneutics engages a variety of methods/tools in investigating biblical texts. As will be seen in Section 5.3.1 below, Du Toit (2009b:110) and Viljoen (2017:25-26) recommend a multidimensional approach to Scriptures, so that one method will make up for the deficiency of the other. This way, the exegete reaches down to as much of the communicational goal of the text as is humanly possible.

The above definition of Reformed hermeneutics as it stands may not be exhaustive, but at least identifies some of the most prominent elements in any conscientious Reformed interpretation of the Bible. Other relevant issues will be raised in the course of this literature review.

## **5.2 THE NATURE AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF REFORMED HERMENEUTICS**

Reformed hermeneutics can be identified and distinguished from other approaches to the Bible, and can be described in some unique ways. To that extent, it has a nature of its own as well as general guidelines for practicing it. This section now turns attention to the nature and general principles of Reformed hermeneutics.

### **5.2.1 THE NATURE OF REFORMED HERMENEUTICS**

**5.2.1.1 Reformed hermeneutics is a spiritual encounter.** It was indicated above that a Reformed exegete comes to the Scripture with the hope of encountering the God of Scripture. The encounter here envisaged means a meeting between God and man that transforms the man. According to Wolthuis (2011:27-28), Reformed hermeneutics aims at encountering the God who *is present* with his people (cf. Exo. 3:12; Matt. 28:20) and *acts* among them (cf. Ps. 118:23; Matt. 21:42). Accordingly, reading Scripture is a theological (or spiritual) exercise – it is an encounter with the “God who acts in and through Scripture”. This is however unlike the Pentecostal idea of encounter with God through the Scripture: while for the Pentecostals Bible reading is an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to speak to their spirits, thus making encounter different from exegesis (Davies, 2013:251); for the Reformed exegete both exegesis and encounter coincide. At least, from its very cradle, Luther did not make any distinction between the two, but sought by historical-grammatical method to meet Christ in all of Scripture (Monergism, 2008). This, indeed, renders as superfluous and perhaps

ridiculous Hanko's (1991) preference for what he calls a "grammatico-historical-spiritual" or "spiritual-grammatical-historical" method, by which he wishes to access "the meaning of the Holy Spirit" that is allegedly missed by the otherwise standard grammatical-historical method.

**5.2.1.2 Reformed hermeneutics is text- and context-based.** This point was hinted at in the definition of Reformed hermeneutics. It needs to be underscored here that, according to Du Toit (2009b:112), "The text is the final arbiter of meaning. The first and decisive rule of exegesis is respect for the supremacy of the text." This statement has methodological implications, among others determination of the genre of the text, as well as textual criticism, as of prime importance. Context also plays a role in Reformed reading of the Bible. This covers all aspects of textual context (Du Toit, 2009b:114-115). On socio-historical context, for instance, Du Toit (2009b:113, 115) says,

Unless we know the social or life setting of an utterance, multitudes of meanings are possible. (113)

It is ... absolutely indispensable that the exegete should piece together all available contextual information and integrate it into the reading process. (115)

A fitting conclusion on the text- and context-based nature of Reformed approach is not just that the text has a superior place (which is equally claimed by other approaches, even if superficially); but that Reformed reading of Scripture involves reading not just between the lines but also behind the letters. This excludes, at least theoretically, fancy readings that teem with an endless variety of meanings.

**5.2.1.3 Reformed hermeneutics is a Christian hermeneutic.** Reformed hermeneutics assumes that God's work and word are meant *for his people*. Wolthuis (2011:33) states categorically: "Scripture is first and foremost an internal document for the people [of God]." This in turn has a hermeneutical implication: "This communal understanding does mean that a Christian community is an interpretive community." The reading of Scripture by members of this interpretive community is dictated by the community's Christian perspective. To that extent, Reformed interpretation of Scripture is not envisaged to be objective as such, for indeed communal bias is never absent in interpretation (Wolthuis, 2011:33). This means that Reformed hermeneutics allows for communal presuppositions.

## 5.2.2 THE GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF REFORMED HERMENEUTICS

This section examines a few general principles of Reformed hermeneutics. These include:

**5.2.2.1 The analogy of faith.** The analogy of faith (Lat.: *analogia fidei*) is based on the doctrine of inspiration and basically means that Scripture is its own interpreter. Put more explicitly, “the supreme arbiter in interpreting the meaning of a particular verse in Scripture is the overall teaching of the Bible” (Sproul, 2018). That is, Scripture should always be interpreted in the light of the entire canon. Sproul says again, “The inspired and infallible rule of faith is the whole of Scripture, whose textual parts must be understood in light of its textual-theological whole.... Or it could be stated this way: the context of every biblical text is all biblical texts.” This is important to note.

**5.2.2.2 The analogy of the Scriptures.** The analogy of the Scriptures (Lat.: *analogia scripturae*) means “the interpretation of unclear, difficult, or ambiguous passages of Scripture by comparison with clear and unambiguous passages *that refer to the same teaching or event*” (Muller, 1985:33). The claim of clarity of sacred Scripture is a Reformed motif. However, all passages are not equally clear. Therefore, those that are clear come into service as aid for interpreting others that are not equally clear (Kaiser, 2007:247).

**5.2.2.3 The literal sense of interpretation.** Very importantly, texts of Scripture must be interpreted in the sense in which they are written. This is what is called the literal sense (Lat.: *sensus literalis*) of interpretation. According to Sproul (2018), this does not imply giving “a ‘woodenly literal’ interpretation” to every text of the Scripture, but that the genre of such texts be respected as of primary importance. In other words, historical narratives must be interpreted as historical narratives, parables must be approached as parable (e.g. Matthew 25:14-30), symbols must be treated as symbols (as in apocalyptic texts), poetic texts as poetry (as in the Psalms), letters as letters (as in the epistolary letters), etc. Sproul is sure of responsible interpretation if this principle is followed.

## 5.3 RECENT APPROACHES TO REFORMED HERMENEUTICS

### 5.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Reformed hermeneutics has of late realised that it stands to gain more from a combination of interpretive methods than just sticking to one or a few “traditional” methods. To highlight this, some scholarly thoughts are here cited:

Regarding the use of methods, there is an emerging consensus that, in order to determine this essential message, no single method will suffice. Responsible exegesis needs a multi-dimensional approach, making use of all the relevant methods available.... Several disciplines contribute towards a better understanding of our exegetical task.... No serious scholar can afford to ignore the contribution of these disciplines.

(Du Toit, 2009b:110)

The submission above finds concurrence with Viljoen (2017:25-26):

A text can be approached in a number of different ways. (25)

The interpretation of a text involves many aspects, and this rather necessitates a multifaceted process. It could be detrimental to stick to only one method or to neglect the insights provided by a variety of approaches. Depending on the questions asked, various methods can complement and reinforce one another. (26)

Each perspective on a text has its limitations, but with a plurality of methods, the methods can strengthen each other to arrive at a richer and more integrated grasp of the meaning. (26)

Here, Du Toit and Viljoen define, as it were, the present situation with biblical interpretation; that is, that interpretation is done from multiple vantage points. However, it is not any methods or any number of methods arbitrarily chosen, but such that is determined by the text at hand and the need being pursued. Viljoen (2017:26) calls this “a problem-oriented approach”, and by it proposes an approach in which “the challenges and issues presented by the text suggest which method should be used”. He continues, “Although a set of methods is available, the researcher uses these methods according to the requirements of the text and the question to be answered.” In that wise, for instance, “a problem-oriented approach” employs both “historical” and “text-immanent” methods to address interpretive needs. This section now highlights some of the methods that are available and beneficial to biblical interpretation.

### 5.3.2 DIACHRONIC METHODS

These are methods that investigate the historical, social and cultural contexts within which the texts arose, and the situation with the first readers that the texts sought to address (Du Toit, 2009b:122). Areas of historical investigation necessary for biblical interpretation include questions of introduction, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism (Viljoen, 2017:27-31).

According to Viljoen (2017:27), historical approaches are rooted in historical criticism, which primarily seeks to know the process that resulted in the written document. It entails a variety of methods, which, contrary to the pessimistic notion that they intrinsically undermine the integrity of the biblical text as canonical Scripture, can provide useful tools for successfully interpreting the biblical text, depending of course on how they are used. According to Viljoen (2017:27),

The basis of this approach is that the biblical texts are historical as they stem from a historical context. These texts are primarily referential, referring to entities beyond the texts themselves, and not purely “literary”. In order to interpret these texts, one has to have some understanding of their historical contexts....

(Viljoen, 2017:27)

However, there are some dangers that the interpreter has to be wary of when using diachronic tools. To start with, Goede (2017:16) has warned that although the historical data that surround the biblical text are indispensable, they are at the same time *not* determinative of meaning. In fact, for him, using socio-historical data as a hermeneutic key to understanding the text amounts to an affront on the *sola scriptura* principle (Goede, 2017:24). One major pitfall to avoid is therefore making historical information determinative of meaning. Diachronic studies also tend towards reconstructionism, which results are at best hypothetical (Lategan, 2009b:94).

### 5.3.3 SYNCHRONIC METHODS

Synchronic methods are those methods that deal with the text as it stands. They do not raise historical-critical questions like have been reviewed above, but rather deal with the text as a form of communication whose message can be validly unlocked in the interaction between it and the reader in the here-and-now. A few of such methods include:

- Text-immanent approaches, according to Viljoen (2017:32), recommend that the texts “be read as ‘self-contained worlds’, regardless of the original

authorial intent of the text ..." (cf. Du Toit, 2009b:122). He explains further: "With a text-immanent approach, an exegete reads the text as the literary product at hand.... Individual words, phrases and scenes are engaged with one another, and their meanings are dependent on their interplay." (Viljoen, 2017:33-34)

- Contributions of linguistic science, structuralism and literary theory. According to Lategan (2009a:45), what concerns modern linguistics is the structure of the text's inter-relationships. Those issues are variously investigated through such apparatuses as discourse analysis, narrative analysis, semiotics, etc.
- Pragmatic approaches. Pragmatics leverage on "the 'performative' power of language", that is, the assumption that communication affects participants in the process. Examples of pragmatic models include speech act theory, rhetorical theory, reception theory, etc. (Lategan, 2009a:48-49).
- The contribution of communication science. Du Toit (2009b:110-120) demonstrates palpable interest in the contribution of communication science to NT exegesis. His motivation is that the NT texts are forms of communication, and therefore communication theory certainly has implications for their exegesis. Among all the elements involved in textual communication (of which the NT is an example), he highlights primacy of the text and the context, in that order, as being determinative of meaning (Du Toit, 2009b:112-113).

While these synchronic methods are without doubt very useful, they have limitations that must be handled carefully. Viljoen (2017:34) warns that "one should not read the text as if in a self-contained autonomous world as the text originally plays off in a historical setting". Such a mistake usually results in fundamentalism/Biblicism (Goede, 2017:24; Du Toit, 2009b:115) or multiple meanings (Du Toit, 2009b:113) – such multiplicity that Viljoen (2017:34) cites Stanton (1992:380) to comically describe as "a picnic" of meanings. Finally, since there is no standard against which to measure such meanings, relativism is an ultimate consequence (De Klerk and Van Rensburg, 2005:6).

In all, what is important is to know the array of methodological alternatives available to the exegete, which methods to combine and how, so that the strength of the one

complements the weakness of the other(s) (Viljoen, 2017:36). When doing the exegesis of Matthew 25:14-30, these considerations will be brought to bear.

## 5.4 REFORMED PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING JESUS' PARABLES

### 5.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Whereas there are many agendas and methods for interpreting the NT texts in general and the Gospel parables in particular; and, in fact, whereas Reformed hermeneutics currently adopts, on good reason, a multifaceted approach to biblical interpretation; the Reformed faith specifies some principles for interpreting the parables of Jesus. Those principles are intended to insure the integrity of the meaning generated from the parables; that is, that as far as possible, the meaning is true to the canonical text. This section therefore investigates some of such principles:

### 5.4.2 THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PARABLES

**5.4.2.1 M. Silva.** Much as the Gospel genre generally has a theological goal (Silva, 2007b:161), the parables of Jesus, as a sub-genre within the Synoptic Gospels, also have a theological orientation. First, Silva (2007b:162-163) draws attention to the mission of Jesus as the Messiah, which, declared by Simeon when Baby-Jesus was presented at the temple, was that he was “destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34). In light of this mission, Silva (2007b:163) explains that “Christ is both cornerstone (or capstone, Matt. 21:42-44) and a rock of stumbling (Rom. 9:32-33); he is both the fragrance of life to those who believe and the smell of death to those who reject him (2 Cor. 2:14-16).”

In other words, when viewed in light of the so-called “hardening theory”<sup>26</sup> of the parables of Jesus (cf. Mark 4:11-12), Jesus partly used parables to discriminate among those who heard him. However, these stories did not “create sin” in the hearts of otherwise innocent people; but when addressed to those who had willfully set themselves to oppose the Lord (cf. Mark 3:6, 22), “the parables [became] instruments of judgment

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26 The “hardening theory” of the Gospel parables is a popular orientation among parable (or, generally NT) scholars (cf. Ellisen, 2001:22-26; Scott, 1989:22-25; Snodgrass, 2008:21-22; Stiller, 2005:15; Zimmermann, 2009:173-174). It is based on Mark 4:11-12 (cf. Isa. 6:9-10): “He told them, ‘The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, “they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!”’” The theory, couched in different words and explained in different ways by the different authors cited above, generally proposes that Jesus used parables to deny particularly those who were not open to his teaching access to the mystery of the kingdom of God. There are other scholars, however, who argue against the very idea of obscuring the same message that he wanted people to clearly and urgently understand. These include Dodd (1961:4), Jeremias (1972:15-18), and this researcher.

whereby 'whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him' (Mark 4:25)". Whereas there were other merits/uses of the parables of Jesus (concreteness, simplicity, relevance, subtleness, etc.), Jesus used parables (though not exclusively, contra. Mark 4:11-12) to fault those whose hearts were already hardened against him.

In terms of the relevance of the foregoing theological consideration to this section of the study, Silva (2007b:163) aptly says: "Any attempt to interpret the parables without taking into account this factor will fail to do justice to Jesus' teaching."<sup>27</sup> This is very instructive. The second theological significance to be looked out for in Jesus' use of parables is that the parabolic method of teaching was a fulfillment of prophecy: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world" (Matt. 13:35//Ps. 78:2). For Silva (2007b:163), the primary understanding here is that "Jesus' parables fulfill God's eternal plan to reveal his truth to his people". To the mind of this researcher, this position can be easily defended with such Scriptures as

Psalm 147:19-20:

*He has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel.  
**He has done this to no other nation; they do not know his law.***

and

John 14:6:

*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. **No one comes to the Father except through me.**"*

(emphases not original)

It can be seen from the psalm above that it is in the character of God to reveal his truth to his covenant people, and also from John's witness that Jesus ("the parable of God"; Zimmermann, 2009:163) is the embodiment of God's truth. Therefore, that Jesus spoke parables to reveal God's truth to God's people is a defensible theological conclusion.

Silva (2007b:163-164) also points out a secondary understanding of Jesus' use of parables as, according to the wording of the text of Matthew 13:35 (cf. Psalm. 78:2), that there is a close relationship between creation and redemption. He says,

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<sup>27</sup> Silva (2007b:163) makes this sweeping statement for all parables despite the fact that the discussion in the material centres on just the parable of the sower (cf. Mark 4:1-9). There is no convincing reason as yet to challenge this position.

God's truths are, as it were, "built into" the created order. Jesus does not haphazardly look into nature, hoping to find interesting illustrations! As one who is both Creator and Saviour, he can simply draw out of the created order those parallels that help us understand his purpose.

This is also an emphatic detail to note, especially in the light of Wolthuis' (2011:28-29) incontrovertible claim that there is a redemptive context to Reformed hermeneutics.

**5.4.2.2 J. Van der Watt.** Van der Watt (2009:332-334) makes useful comments with regards to the contribution of the theological perspective to understanding parables. He asserts that as narratives, when parables are put in a particular theological framework (this suggesting a particular direction of interpretation), their meanings can successfully be opened up. This statement implicitly means that one given parable can mean more than one thing depending on the theological matrix within which it is used. Van der Watt explains this phenomenon using the interface between Matthew's version of the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:1-9) and its subsequent explanation (vv. 18-23).

When Jesus' disciples demand to know why he speaks to the people in parables (v. 10), he answers, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them" (v. 11). According to Van der Watt (2009:332), what Jesus' discussion in Matthew 13:11-17 indicates is that no other person will understand the parables except the disciples. He then suggests that this refers to "the theological framework within which the parables are told and should be understood". He further suggests that that framework is "the coming of the gracious kingdom of God in and through the presence and works of Jesus". In other words, if the disciples share this theological framework, they will gain the ability to correctly interpret the parables; otherwise, they will be denied "the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven", just like "the people" (v.10).

In view of this theological grid, Van der Watt (2009:333) advises:

Parables should therefore not be read in isolation or as individual narratives, but the message of the parables should be entered through the message of the Gospel..., which is the dynamic message about the coming of the Messiah, the dawning of the kingdom as a reality-changing phenomenon in this world, and of the presence of God. This means that no parable should be interpreted contrary to this message, but should rather enlighten and reflect this message.

From this, it is clear that both Van der Watt (working from Mathew 13:1-17) and Silva (working from Mark 4:1-11) agree that valid interpretation of parables requires a biblically-defined theological grid. The former identifies it as “the dynamic message about the coming of the Messiah”, “the dawning of the kingdom ... in this world”, and “the dawning... of the presence of God” (Van der Watt, 2009:333); while the latter says it is on the one hand Christ’s dualist, earthly mission of causing “the falling and rising of many” (Luke 2:34), and on the other hand a prophetic fulfillment in terms of God’s commitment to revealing his truth to his people, as well as a validation of the close relationship between creation and redemption (Silva, 2007b: 163-164). So, interpretation of parables, particularly in the Reformed tradition, must pay keen attention to the theological agenda that lies behind them.

### 5.4.3 THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE PARABLES

**5.4.3.1 M. Silva.** For Silva (2007b:164), “parables must be understood historically, that is, by identifying the specific situations in which they were used”. Using the parable of the prodigal son (cf. Luke 15:11-32), for instance, he shows that while the story legitimately has an evangelistic flare, one would gain more insight into its message if one considers that it is connected to the complaint of some Pharisees and teachers of the law that Jesus was too open to “sinners” (vv. 1-2). Like the two preceding parables (the parable of the lost sheep, 15:3-7; and the parable of the lost coin, 15:8-10), the parable of the prodigal son is primarily a rebuke to the religious leaders, who like the older son in it cannot bring themselves to rejoicing with God and his angels over the salvation of a sinner.

Cultural issues also accrue to the historical setting of the parables. In the story under review, the son’s request for a portion of his father’s estate would likely have been understood as a wish for his father’s death, whereas for non-Palestinian, 21st-century readers it has a less severe implication. Moreover, from the way the story stands, it should have been expected that the older son do something to reconcile his brother to his father (in view of the younger brother’s covert wish for the father’s death and the father’s naturally expected, offensive response). But, alas, not only does he fail in this expectation; but he also accepts his share of the estate, and thus shares in his younger brother’s sin. This perspective reveals that whereas he protests towards the end of the story against his father’s acceptance of his brother back, it is only a matter of self-righteousness. He is as guilty as the younger brother.

Finally, the father's running to meet the younger son, as against the expectation in the Middle East for a mature man to walk slowly and with dignity, shows the father's humility and thus "becomes a powerful picture of the God of grace". According to Silva (2007b:165), these cultural details do not change the primary meaning of the parable, but give "insight into the 'overtones' of the story that add greatly to our understanding of Jesus' teaching".

**5.4.3.2 J. Van der Watt.** In terms of the cultural setting of parables, Van der Watt (2009:333) (using the terminology "socio-cultural framework") says, "Understanding the socio-cultural ecology of parables is clearly of crucial importance in interpreting them." This position is according to him relevant because parables, as narratives that employ everyday realities to convey spiritual meaning, are "firmly rooted in the culture and society of their origin". Moreover, because the punch of the parable very often "lies in the subversion of a cultural, social or religious convention", the interpreter who does not want to miss the message of the parable needs to be familiar with those conventions. For instance, he points to the need to probe into the importance of lamps and punctuality in the parable of the ten virgins (cf. Matt. 25:1-13), the importance of a wedding robe in the parable of the wedding banquet (cf. Matt. 22:1-14), and the agricultural method captured in the parable of the sower (cf. Matt. 13:1-9). What is clear is that, as he has already said, without being abreast with all such realities in the originating societies and cultures of the parables, it will be difficult to unlock the meaning of such stories.

#### 5.4.4 THE LITERARY CONTEXT OF THE PARABLES

Silva (2007b:165) observes that the biblical writers did not compose "detached, neutral narratives", but rather told their stories from a particular slant, and in doing so interpreted the events to their readers. For this reason, he says:

When we study the parables, therefore, we should be interested not only in their function during the ministry of Jesus but also in the way they are used by the gospel writers. Under divine inspiration, they bring to bear the teaching of Jesus on the later situation of the churches. A careful study of this feature sheds light on how we may use the parables as well.

(Silva, 2007b:165)

Silva singles out Matthew's thematic approach, as well as his effort at addressing Jesus' words to the church (or churches) to which he was writing, as an example of this. For

instance, in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (cf. Matt. 20:1-16), the historical setting can according to him be legitimately delineated. However, Matthew applies it to the Christian church by telling the story just after the rich young ruler walked away in disappointment following his failure to come to terms with the demands of the kingdom as spelt out by Jesus (cf. Matt. 19:21-22).

For Silva, the issue here, like in other portions of Matthew, is about discipleship commitment or the lack of it. In the encounter of Matthew 19:16-30, the young seeker shows no commitment by walking away (v. 22), whereas Peter re-states his commitment to discipleship (v. 27). Interestingly too, Matthew does not only highlight Jesus' assurances to his true disciples of many blessings and eternal life as reward for their commitment (vv. 28-29), but also ends the story with Jesus' saying, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first" (v. 30). This same statement is repeated at the end of the next parable (20:16) (Silva, 2007b:166).

Silva's understanding of this literary arrangement is that Matthew seeks to challenge the Christian readers to the fact that exactly what Jesus is saying to the Pharisees also applies to them. They should not sit at ease; otherwise they who are confident in the congregations may lose their seat to the same persons they do not consider fit for the kingdom. On the relevance of the literary context of parables to this study, Silva (2007b:166) aptly says,

In short, the careful study of the parables involves not only seeing them in the historical context of Jesus' ministry but also understanding how they function in the narrative of each gospel. We should not treat the gospel writers as journalists who should have tried to avoid interpreting the facts they report. Rather, they were inspired theologians and preachers whose own presentation of Jesus' work is an essential key in our appreciation of the biblical text.

#### 5.4.5 PARABLES SHOULD BE READ WITHIN AND ACCORDING TO FRAMES PROVIDED IN THE CONTEXT

Van der Watt (2009:329) says, "The golden rule is that the interpretation of parables should be guided by sensitivity to the confines of the co-text and context."<sup>28</sup> Continuing,

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28 Du Toit (2009b:113-114) explains that "co-text" (or linguistic context) has to do with "the structured arrangement of linguistic signs in a given document, e.g. when we refer to the place of the sermon on the Mount *within the context of Matthew* or of the beatitudes *within the context of the Sermon on the Mount*". On its parts, "context" (or more specifically, social context) has to do with "the life setting within which the participants in a given passage exist and function". Du Toit (2009b:114-115) goes

he says, “Perhaps the most important contextual help in interpreting parables comes from what may be called *frames*.” According to him, frames are not part of the physical narrative or story, but are usually the introduction or conclusion of the particular narrative, “indicating what the framework of interpretation should be, according to the literary context of the particular parable”<sup>29</sup>.

He observes in Matthew 18:23-34 that while the story of a king who graciously forgives his indebted servant might ordinarily be understood in just any way, its frames limit its application. In the introduction, Peter asks how many times he should forgive (v. 21), and Jesus answers: “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times” (v. 22). In the conclusion Jesus says, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart” (v. 35). Accordingly, Peter’s question about the possible frequency of forgiveness (v. 21) and Jesus’ response (vv. 22, 35) are the guiding lights for interpreting the parable. In other words, the parable has to do with the ethical duty of forgiving others of their “little” offenses, knowing that God had forgiven and is still forgiving the weightier sin of rebellion against his love and the gift of his Son.

Van der Watt (2009:330) also draws attention to how the frames of the same story (the parable of the lost sheep) in Matthew 18:10-14 and Luke 15:1-7 differ and therefore specify different meanings in the respective gospel contexts. In conclusion, he rightly says,

This alerts us not to jump to conclusion simply on the basis of the narrative alone, but the context of the parable should be taken seriously. Frames determine meanings.

(Van der Watt, 2009:331)

#### 5.4.6 PARABLES SHOULD BE READ IN RELATION TO EACH OTHER

Van der Watt (2009:331) alerts the reader of biblical parables to the relevance of the network of parables to their meaning. He observes that many parables “are grouped together and form an interrelated interpretive context, which means that these parables should be read in relation to each other, forming interpretive frameworks for each other”. He cites the “kingdom parables” in Matthew 13 and the trilogy of parables in Luke 15 as

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further to distinguish other contexts of any given biblical passage, namely, intra-textual versus extra-textual context, and general versus immediate context; but all these fall outside the scope or need of this present section.

<sup>29</sup> Van der Watt (2009:329) observes that form critics in particular have a high view of “frames” of the parables as hermeneutical keys provided by the evangelists.

examples of these networks. In the former, for example, he points out that each of the parables contributes to the larger picture of the kingdom. The interdependence among this cluster of parables and the progression with each succeeding parable is in the view of this researcher beautiful to behold:

The kingdom of God comes through the word of God (Sower and Seed – 13:3-9, 18-23); it will start small but end large (Mustard Seed – 13:31-32); it will infiltrate the whole community (Yeast – 13:33); believers will co-exist with unbelievers until judgment time (Weeds among the Wheat – 13:24-30, 37-43); it must be the most important thing in the lives of people (Hidden Treasure and Fine Pearl – 13:44-46) and at the final judgment the great divide will come (Fish Net – 13:47-50). By reading these parables together a larger and more comprehensive picture of the kingdom emerges.

(Van der Watt, 2009:331)

One cannot agree more. Parables derive their meanings from their network-contexts. They are not isolated, self-contained, or self-sufficient stories, but stories that produce meanings in relation to one another. Therefore, one cannot but sorrow over the general practice of ostracising parables from their generic clusters or divorcing them from their frames or other contextual indicators, and treating them as self-contained stories that can mean anything to the fancy of the interpreter. Such cold-blood murders are indeed unforgivable crimes in the court of faithful hermeneutics – and for that matter, the court of Reformed hermeneutics.

## **5.5 A REFORMED EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 25:14-30**

### **5.5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The preceding sections of this chapter have dealt with theoretical issues on Reformed hermeneutics. They showed that Reformed exegetes, preachers and scholars have a distinctive way of approaching the Christian Scriptures. In particular, the last section dealt with Reformed guidelines for interpreting the parables of Jesus. It highlighted the compelling and inescapable need to interpret the parables based on their theological significance, historical setting, literary context, frames, and in relation to each other.

This section now focuses on the task of hearing God through **Matthew 25:14-30**. It takes a Reformed approach that accounts for the guidelines just highlighted. While not assuming finality or infallibility of the interpretation (De Klerk and Van Rensburg, 2005:6, 8-9), it hopes that, with prayer, the unfailing help of the Holy Spirit and the contributions

of all the material resources at its disposal, the outcome will come as close as it possibly can to the mind of God.

## 5.5.2 EXEGESIS OF MATTHEW 25:14-30

### 5.5.2.1 Literary considerations

**5.5.2.1.1** *The genre of Matthew 25:14-30.* **Matthew 25:14-30** is a parable (v. 14; cf. 25:1), and Matthew is a Gospel. Therefore, the Reformed principles for interpreting parables (Section 5.4) will be accounted for.

**5.5.2.1.2** *Text demarcation of Matthew 25:14-30.* The text of **Matthew 25:14-30** in *The Greek New Testament* (1998, 4th edition) and *The UBS Greek New Testament* (2007, A reader's edition) is clearly demarcated as a unit. There is no reason to question this demarcation. Thus, this study adopts the textual unit as a complete pericope and will work with it as such.

### **5.5.2.1.3** *The place of Matthew 25:14-30 in the book, and in the Bible*

#### 5.5.2.1.3.1 The place of **25:14-30** in the book of Matthew

**5.5.2.1.3.1.1** *Motivation.* Reformed hermeneutics requires on the one hand that Scriptures be understood in terms of their textual composition and contextual network (cf. Section 5.2.1.2 above). This means that without a good grip of the textual context the meaning derived from a text may not be reliable. In this connection, mention is often made of the meaning of a text in the context of a larger collection of material; e.g. the meaning of **Matthew 25:14-30** in the context of 24:1-25:46, or even in the book of **Matthew**. This guarantees an understanding of the particular text in the light of the larger corpus, and as well warns that that text has no autonomous meaning unless viewed in the light of the whole. In this section, attention is given to how **Matthew 25:14-30** fits into and derives meaning from the book of Matthew, as well as from 24:1-25:46. It will be seen, too, particularly in Section 5.5.2.1.3.2 below that **25:14-30** being a parable, its meaning becomes clear when the exegetical effort leans on the non-figurative portions of 24:1-25:46 and even the other, less complicated illustrations in the corpus (see "analogy of the Scriptures" in Section 5.2.2.2 above).

**5.5.2.1.3.1.2** *The structure of Matthew and how 25:14-30 fits into it.* Combrink (1988:77) warns that it is not easy to draw a concrete conclusion on the structure of **Matthew**, even alleging "a real danger ... of this gospel's being put into a strait-jacket". On the assumption that it is an imposed scheme, he rejects the otherwise popular Pentateuch-

modeled, five-bloc structure (5-7; 10; 13; 18; 23-25) and rather “cautiously” favours a chiasmic arrangement believed to possibly have originated from the author. Also rejecting the Pentateuch model, Carson and Moo (2005:136-138) propose a seven-part literary structure of **Matthew**, viz: “the prologue” (1:1-2:23), “the gospel of the kingdom” (3:1-7:29), “the kingdom extended under Jesus’ authority” (8:1-11:1), “teaching and preaching of the gospel of the kingdom: rising opposition” (11:2-13:53), “the glory and the shadow: progressive polarisation” (13:54-19:2), “opposition and eschatology: the triumph of grace” (19:3-26:5), and “the passion and resurrection of Jesus” (26:6-28:20). Notwithstanding the overlap between the discourse and narrative materials that they observe, Carson and Moo (2005:136) assay to follow literary markers in the Gospel in outlining its structure.

On its part, the *Life Application Bible* (1991:1637) gives three broad outlines, namely: “birth and preparation of Jesus, the King” (1:1-4:11), “message and ministry of Jesus, the King” (4:12-25:46), and “death and resurrection of Jesus, the King” (26:1-28:20). Kingsbury’s outline (cited by Carson & Moo, 2005:135) is similarly in three parts: “‘The Person of Jesus Messiah’ (1:1-4:16)”, “‘The Proclamation of Jesus Messiah’ (4:17-2-16:20)”, and “‘The Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Messiah’ (16:21-28:20)”. He is said to simply follow the phrase “ἀπὸ τότε” [= “from that time on”] (4:17; 16:21), which for him indicates progress in the plot.

There are many more proposals, like Carson and Moo (2005:134-136) have reviewed. However, this study adapts a three-part, broad structure. The proposed outline covers: *introduction of Jesus the Messiah and King: his lineage, birth, and parentage* (1:1-4:11); *the ministry of Jesus the Messiah and King* (4:12-25:46); and *the passion and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah and King* (26:1-28:20). Each of these three parts is internally cohesive, and progressively moves from the incarnation of the Messiah and King, to his active earthly ministry, and climaxes in his atoning death and resurrection. The second part (4:12-25:46) is delineated in such a way that gives prominence to the teaching/actions of Jesus the Messiah and King, which in turn portray/demonstrate the reality of “ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν” [= “the kingdom of heaven”]. The scheme below will show this kingdom emphasis.

### 5.5.2.1.3.1.3 Scheme 1: The place of 25:14-30 in the book of Matthew

#### INTRODUCTION OF JESUS THE MESSIAH AND KING: HIS LINEAGE, BIRTH AND PREPARATION

1:1-4:12: Jesus' Jewish descent is traced back to both King David and Abraham; he is born according to both angelic and prophetic predictions, John the Baptist heralds Jesus' ministry and baptises him, and he overcomes the tempter

#### THE MINISTRY OF JESUS THE MESSIAH AND KING/TEACHING ON "THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN"

4:11-25: Jesus begins to proclaim "the kingdom of heaven"

##### JESUS THE MESSIAH AND KING'S 1ST BLOC OF TEACHING: SERMON ON THE MOUNT

5:1-7:29: Jesus teaches about the lifestyle expected of those who have (already) found "the kingdom of heaven"

##### JESUS THE MESSIAH AND KING PERFORMS MANY MIRACLES

8:1-10:42: Jesus' power meets various existential needs, and he introduces his disciples to the proclamation of "the kingdom of heaven"

##### JESUS THE MESSIAH AND KING'S 2ND BLOC OF TEACHING: THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

11:1-13:52: Jesus teaches on the nature and impact of "the kingdom of heaven," explaining it with parables

*13:1-23: Jesus tells the parable of the four soils*

*13:24-30, 36-43: Jesus tells the parable of the weeds*

*13:31-32: Jesus tells the parable of the yeast*

*13:44: Jesus tells the parable of hidden treasure*

*13:45-46: Jesus tells the parable of the pearl merchant*

*13:47-52: Jesus tells the parable of the fishing net*

##### JESUS THE MESSIAH AND KING ENCOUNTERS VARYING RESPONSES TO HIS MINISTRY

13:53-18:35: Jesus teaches and heals, and different people react differently

##### JESUS THE MESSIAH AND KING FACES OPPOSITION FROM RELIGIOUS LEADERS

19:1-23:39: Jesus teaches and acts as King, and is repeatedly confronted by religious leaders

##### JESUS THE MESSIAH AND KING'S 3RD BLOC OF TEACHING: THE *PAROUSIA* OF THE KINGDOM

24:1-25:46: Jesus teaches on the way the kingdom of heaven will appear, and uses parables to warn his disciples on watchfulness for the *parousia*

*24:1-28: Jesus warns his disciples against false alarms of the parousia*

*24:29-35: Jesus teaches his disciples on the visibility of the parousia*

*24:36-51: Jesus warns his disciples to be watchful for the parousia*

*25:1-13: Jesus tells the parable of the ten virgins to illustrate the parousia and the judgment that will follow*

*25:14-30: Jesus tells the parable of the talents to illustrate the parousia and the judgment that will follow*

*25:31-46: Jesus teaches with the imagery of sheep and goats to illustrate the judgment that will follow the parousia*

#### THE PASSION AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS THE MESSIAH AND KING

26:1-28:20: Jesus begins to suffer, is betrayed, is denied justice, dies, is buried, resurrects and gives the Great Commission to his disciples

#### 5.5.2.1.3.2 The place of **25:14-30** within 24:1-25:46

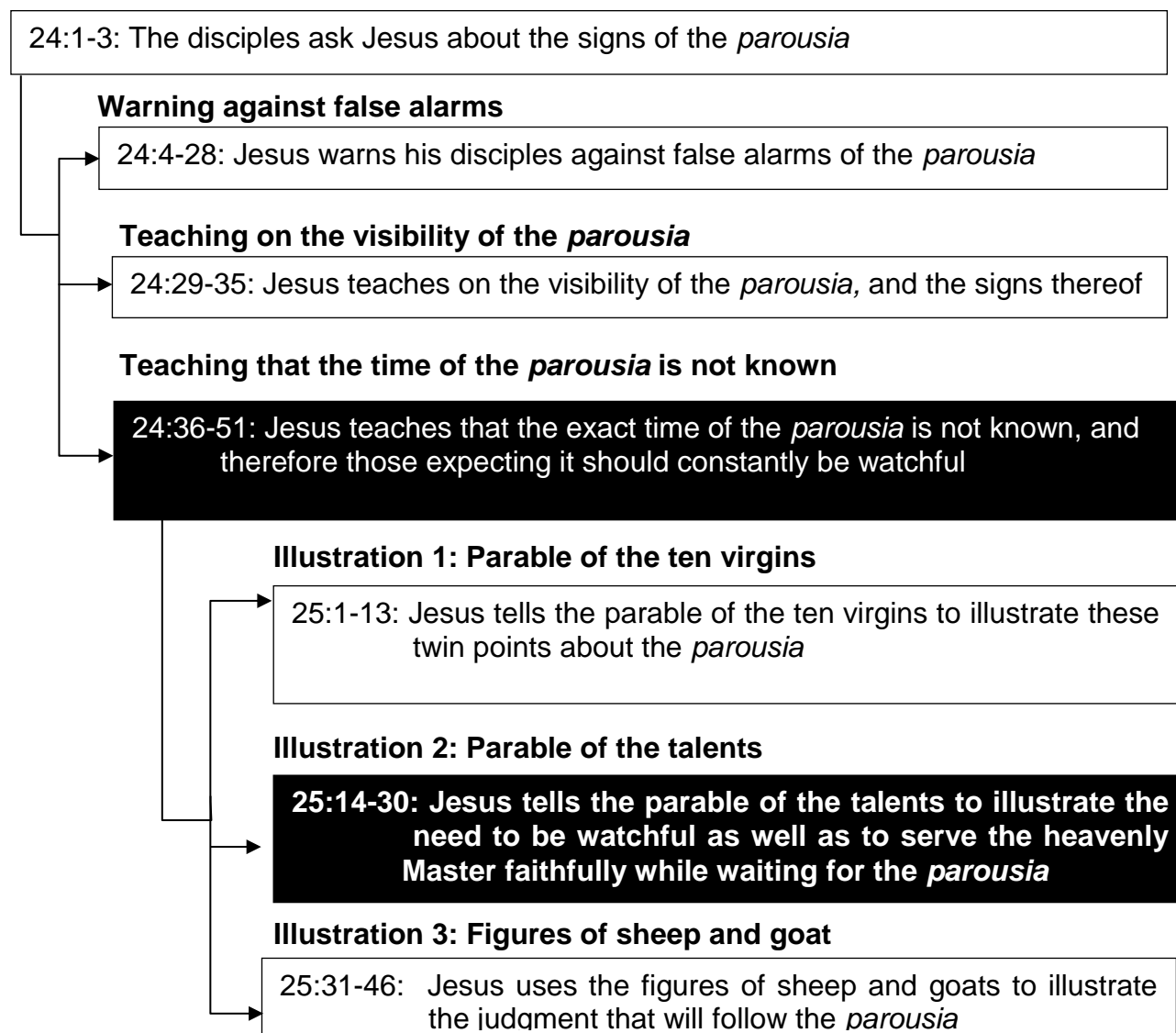
5.5.2.1.3.2.1 *Motivation.* Carson and Moo (2005:138) identify the 24:1-25:46 teaching bloc as “The Olivet (eschatological) Discourse”. The interest of this study is however not in the locale of the teaching (Mount Olive), but in the content (eschatology). There is no reason not to agree with these authors that the discourse is absolutely eschatological. **25:14-30** is one of Jesus’ explanations of the *parousia* of “ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου” [= “the Son of Man”] and “ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν” [= “the kingdom of heaven”], in answer to the disciples’ question at 24:3 about the time and manner of that event. **25:14-30** is the fourth of a series of five (5) parables that variously address the disciples’ question: the thief at night (24:43), the faithful and wise household servant (24:45-51), the parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13), **the parable of the talents (25:14-30)**, and the sheep and the goats (25:31-46). Carson and Moo (2005:138) are therefore right when they identify 24:42-25:46 (of which **25:14-30** is a part) as “[a] series of parables [that] presents variations on the theme of watchfulness” for the *parousia*. In all, **25:14-30** contributes to Matthew’s theme on eschatology.

Combrink (1988:61) also makes a useful observation on **25:14-30**: it is for him one of five passages in Matthew that use the idiom “ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων” [= literally, *the weeping and the grinding of teeth*; NIV: “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*”] (v. 30). This is a reference to “the terrors of the end-time”. In this respect, it is a counterpart to 24:51 in the 24:1-25:46 eschatological corpus. The others lie outside this bloc (8:12; 13:42; 22:13). That expression in **25:14-30** not only shows how heavily Matthew comes down when speaking of the *parousia* and its implications, but also demonstrates cohesion between **25:14-30** and the other four in Matthew (8:12; 13:42; 22:13; 24:51) and, outside Matthew, Luke 13:28.

5.5.2.1.3.2.2 The place of **25:14-30** within 24:1-25:46

**24:1-25:46: Jesus' teaching on the *parousia* of the Son of Man and of the kingdom of heaven**

The basic teaching: Be watchful and faithful in service, because no-one knows the exact time of the *parousia*



Scheme 2: The place of **25:14-30** within 24:1-25:46

5.5.2.1.3.3: Analysing the thought structure of **Matthew 25:14-30**

Having seen how **Matthew 25:14-30** fits into 24:1-25:46 and the entire book, it is also necessary to probe its internal thought structure. This will help to see how the thought units in the pericope are connected to one another.

Scheme 3 below is an analysis of the thought structure of **Matthew 25:14-30** on macro level:

**Matthew 25:14-30: 2nd parable to illustrate the need for and manner of watchfulness for the *parousia*, a motif developed in 24:36-51**

The *parousia* of “the kingdom of heaven” is like a property owner ready to travel

25:14a: Ὅσπερ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ἀποδημῶν  
*“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey,*

The property owner entrusts his wealth to his slaves while he is away

25:14b: ἐκάλεσεν τοὺς ἰδίους δούλους καὶ παρέδωκεν αὐτοῖς τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ,  
*who called his servants and entrusted his property to them.*

He distributes his wealth according to each slave’s ability

25:15: καὶ ὧ μὲν ἔδωκεν πέντε τάλαντα, ὧ δὲ δύο, ὧ δὲ ἓν, ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν δύναμιν, καὶ ἀπεδήμησεν. Εὐθέως  
*To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.*

The five-talent slave invests his trust and gains five more talents

25:16: πορευθεὶς ὁ τὰ πέντε τάλαντα λαβὼν ἠργάσατο ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐκέρδησεν ἄλλα πέντε·  
*The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more.*

The two-talent slave invests his trust and gains two more talents

25:17: ὡσαύτως ὁ τὰ δύο ἐκέρδησεν ἄλλα δύο.  
*So also the one with the two talents gained two more.*

The one-talent slave contrasts his colleagues by simply safe-keeping his trust, and gaining nothing on it

25:18: ὁ δὲ τὸ ἓν λαβὼν ἀπελθὼν ὥρυξεν γῆν καὶ ἔκρυψε τὸ ἀργύριον τοῦ κυρίου αὐτοῦ.  
*But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.*

The property-owner finally returns and demands account of stewardship from his slaves

25:19: μετὰ δὲ πολὺν χρόνον ἔρχεται ὁ κύριος τῶν δούλων ἐκείνων καὶ συναίρει λόγον μετ’ αὐτῶν.  
*After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.*

The five-talent slave accounts for 100% profit on his trust

25:20: καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ τὰ πέντε τάλαντα λαβὼν προσήνεγκεν ἄλλα πέντε τάλαντα λέγων Κύριε, πέντε τάλαντά μοι παρέδωκας· ἴδε ἄλλα πέντε τάλαντα ἐκέρδησα.

*The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.'*

His master commends him and offers him his master's joy

25:21: ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ Εὖ, δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ καὶ πιστέ, ἐπὶ ὀλίγα ἦς πιστός, ἐπὶ πολλῶν σε καταστήσω· εἰσελθε εἰς τὴν χαρὰν τοῦ κυρίου σου.

*"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"*

The two-talent slave accounts for 100% profit on his trust

25:22: προσελθὼν «δὲ» καὶ ὁ τὰ δύο τάλαντα εἶπεν Κύριε, δύο τάλαντά μοι παρέδωκας· ἴδε ἄλλα δύο τάλαντα ἐκέρδησα.  
*"The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.'*

His master commends him and offers him his master's joy

25:23: ἔφη αὐτῷ ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ Εὖ, δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ καὶ πιστέ, ἐπὶ ὀλίγα ἦς πιστός, ἐπὶ πολλῶν σε καταστήσω· εἰσελθε εἰς τὴν χαρὰν τοῦ κυρίου σου.

*"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"*

The one-talent slave makes excuses for not profiting on the trust

25:24-25: προσελθὼν δὲ καὶ ὁ τὸ ἓν τάλαντον εἰληφώς εἶπεν Κύριε, ἔγνων σε ὅτι σκληρὸς εἶ ἄνθρωπος, θερίζων ὅπου οὐκ ἔσπειρας, καὶ συνάγων ὅθεν οὐ διεσκόρπισας· καὶ φοβηθεὶς ἀπελθὼν ἔκρυψα τὸ τάλαντόν σου ἐν τῇ γῆ· ἴδε ἔχεις τὸ σόν.  
*"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'*

His master chides him for not profiting on the trust

25:26-27: ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Πονηρὲ δοῦλε καὶ ὀκνηρὲ, ἤδεις ὅτι θερίζω ὅπου οὐκ ἔσπειρα, καὶ συνάγω ὅθεν οὐ διεσκόρπισα; ἔδει σε οὖν βαλεῖν τὰ ἀργύριά μου τοῖς τραπεζίταις, καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐγὼ ἔκομισάμην ἂν τὸ ἐμὸν σὺν τόκῳ.

*"His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'*

Motivation for confiscating the unprofitable slave's trust and passing it to one with already "full hands"

25:28: ἄρατε οὖν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ τάλαντον καὶ δότε τῷ ἔχοντι τὰ δέκα τάλαντα·  
*'Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.'*

The master orders the unprofitable slave to be thrown out into a place of suffering

25:29: τῷ γὰρ ἔχοντι παντὶ δοθήσεται καὶ περισσευθήσεται· τοῦ δὲ μὴ ἔχοντος καὶ ὃ ἔχει ἀρθήσεται ἀπ' αὐτοῦ.  
*For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him.*

The master orders the unprofitable slave to be thrown out into a place of suffering

25:30: καὶ τὸν ἀχρεῖον δοῦλον ἐκβάλετε εἰς τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον· ἐκεῖ ἔσται ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων.  
*And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

#### 5.5.2.1.4 Translating Matthew 25:14-30

25:14: The NIV translates τοὺς ἰδίους δούλους with *his servants*. The Greek phrase for “his servants” is ὑπηρετῆς του. A better translation for τοὺς ἰδίους δούλους would therefore be *his slaves* or *his bondservants*. This idea will be investigated and if found to be valid, will be used in the study.

#### 5.5.2.1.5 Word study of important concepts in Matthew 25:14-30<sup>30</sup>

5.5.2.1.5.1 Motivation. In Section 5.2.2.3, the literal sense of Scripture was specified as one of the general principles of Reformed hermeneutics. This section now applies that principle, by way of investigating the way some key words are used in **Matthew 25:14-30**, to foster understanding of the text. The concepts chosen for this analysis are ὁ κύριος, δούλους and τάλαντον. These choices are made because the entire story revolves around ἄνθρωπος [= “a man”, NIV] (v. 14) who is later identified as ὁ κύριος τῶν δούλων [= “the master of those servants”, NIV] (v. 19); while the activities of τοὺς ἰδίους δούλους [= “his servants”, NIV] (vv. 14) involve τὰ τάλαντα [= the talents] they receive from their master (vv. 15-18); and finally, the master’s judgment of the servants is based on their respective activities with the talents (vv. 19-30).

1.5.2.1.5.2 Study of ὁ κύριος (vv. 19, 21, 23, 26)/Κύριε (vv. 20, 22, 24)

5.5.2.1.5.2.1 Consulting Volume 2 of Louw and Nida (1989) lexicon. The inscription under ὁ κύριος/Κύριε in Volume 2 of Louw and Nida (1989:149) is the following:

κύριος, ου	<i>m</i>	
a.	Lord	12.9
b.	owner	57.12
c.	ruler	37.51
d.	sir	87.53

κύριος: units

ὀνομάζω τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου	
say that one belongs to the Lord	53.62

τῷ ἰδίῳ κυρίῳ στήκει ἢ πίπτει	
honour depends on master’s judgment	87.56

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30 This step adapts De Klerk and Van Rensburg’s (2005:63-76) model of word study.

5.5.2.1.5.2.2 *Interpreting the data from Volume 2.* From the data in Louw and Nida, it can be deduced that the word κύριος is used in four (4) different semantic domains in the NT, namely, semantic domain 12 (κύριος<sup>a</sup>), semantic domain 57 (κύριος<sup>b</sup>), semantic domain 37 (κύριος<sup>c</sup>), and semantic domain 87 (κύριος<sup>d</sup>). These respectively occur in one sub-domain each, namely, 12.9, 57.12, 37.51 and 87.53. The fixed idiomatic expression ὀνομάζω τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου occurs in semantic domain 53 and sub-domain 62, while τῷ ἰδίῳ κυρίῳ στήκει ἢ πίπτει occurs in domain 87 and sub-domain 56.

5.5.2.1.5.2.2 *Focus within context.* It is not immediately clear whether **Matthew 25:14-30** is dealing with κύριος<sup>a</sup>, κύριος<sup>b</sup>, κύριος<sup>c</sup>, or κύριος<sup>d</sup>. It will therefore be necessary to examine these four entries.

5.5.2.1.5.2.3 *Consulting Volume 1 of the Louw and Nida (1989) lexicon<sup>31</sup>.* The inscriptions under the respective semantic domains and sub-domains in Volume 1 of the Louw and Nida lexicon are summarised as follows:

- 12.9** κύριος<sup>a</sup>, *ou m*: (a title for God and for Christ) one who exercises supernatural authority over mankind – ‘Lord, Ruler, One who commands’; e.g. Matt. 1:20; 1 Cor. 1:3 (p. 139).
- 57.12** κύριος<sup>b</sup>, *ou m*: one who owns and controls property, including especially servants and slaves, with important supplementary semantic components of high status and respect – ‘owner, master, lord’; e.g. Gal. 4:1; Lk 19:33; Jn 13:16 (p. 559).
- 37.51** κύριος<sup>c</sup>, *ou m*: one who rules or exercises authority over others – ‘ruler, master, lord’; e.g. Matt. 6:24 (p. 478).
- 87.53** κύριος<sup>d</sup>, *ou m*: a title of respect used in addressing or speaking of a man – ‘sir, mister’; e.g. Matt. 13:27 (p. 739).

The literary context of **Matthew 25:14-30** does not suggest the applicability of κύριος<sup>a</sup> and κύριος<sup>c</sup>: κύριος<sup>a</sup> falls under semantic domain 12 (Supernatural Beings and Powers), and the nature of παραβολή (*parabolē*) does not support supernatural phenomena in the narrated world.<sup>32</sup> κύριος<sup>c</sup> appears under semantic domain 37 (Control, Rule), where there is however no indication of ownership of property or slave. The story is conversely

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31 This step will not follow all of Louw and Nida’s details for want of space. Only essentials from the model are adapted.

32 It was demonstrated in Section 2.2.3.2 above that, unlike myths, parables are never set in supernatural contexts.

one that involves a man who *owns property and slaves*. He is “master” in the sense of κύριος<sup>b</sup> (vv. 19, 21, 23, 26), and in terms of social status qualifies to be addressed by his slaves as κύριος<sup>d</sup> (vv. 20, 22, 24). Further investigation will therefore focus on κύριος<sup>b</sup> and κύριος<sup>d</sup>.

#### 5.5.2.1.5.2.5 *The relative position of the semantic domain*

##### **κύριος<sup>b</sup>**

κύριος<sup>b</sup> occurs as entry 57.12 in sub-domain A [“Have, Possess, Property, Owner”] of semantic domain 57. There are twenty-one entries in sub-domain A (57.1 – 57.21). Of all these, only κύριος<sup>b</sup> (57.12) stands as κύριος [= master] who owns property as well as slaves (see **Matt. 25:14**). The rest of the entries are eliminated for one short-coming or the other (that is, in terms of the context of **Matt. 25:14-30**).

##### **κύριος<sup>d</sup>**

κύριος<sup>d</sup> occurs as entry 87.53 in sub-domain C [“High Status or Rank (including persons of high status)"] of semantic domain 87. There are thirty-nine entries in sub-domain C (87.19 – 87.57). Following the conclusion on κύριος<sup>b</sup> above as κύριος [= master] who owns both property and slaves, it is simply assumed that his slaves address him as κύριος<sup>d</sup> [= “Sir”]. As already noted above, this is most likely the sense in which they call him “Κύριε” in vv. 20, 22 and 24. (Further examples: Matt. 13:27; 25:11.)

#### 5.5.2.1.5.2.6 *Final conclusion regarding the meaning of κύριος/Κύριε in Matthew 25:14-30*

It is to be concluded, without further investigation and on the basis of evidence in Louw and Nida (vols. 1 and 2), that ὁ κύριος in **Matthew 25:14-30** means a master who is recognised to have both property and slaves. Also, when his slaves call him Κύριε, they do so as a mark of deserved respect to him.

#### 5.5.2.1.5.3 Study of δούλους

5.5.2.1.5.3.1 *Consulting Volume 2 of Louw and Nida (1989) lexicon.* The inscription under δούλους/δούλων in Volume 2 of Louw and Nida (1989:67) is the following:

δοῦλος, ου m	slave	87.76
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5.5.2.1.5.3.2 *Interpreting the data from Volume 2.* The word δοῦλος features in a single domain, namely domain 87 in the NT. This domain indicates social status, in this case the status of a slave as well as slaves that have regained their freedom. There are five

(5) sub-domains in the semantic domain. The word is not used in any idiomatic expression. Louw and Nida (1989:67) indicate “slave” as a possible meaning.

*5.5.2.1.5.3.3 Consulting Volume 1 of the Louw and Nida (1989) lexicon.* The inscription under semantic domain 87 and sub-domain 76 in Volume 1 of Louw and Nida (1989:741) is the following:

**87.76** δοῦλος, *ou m*: one who is a slave in the sense of becoming the property of an owner (though in ancient times it was frequently possible for a slave to earn his freedom) – ‘slave, bondservant’; e.g. Matt. 8:9; Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10.

*5.5.2.1.5.3.4 Contrasting it with adjacent semantic domains.* Adjacent semantic domains 84 – 90 were analysed, and it was found that there are no direct semantic relations between these adjacent domains with δοῦλος in domain 87. Besides, all six domains investigated deal with the description of qualities, effects or relations of objects, not even the objects themselves. Therefore that δοῦλος shows up in their midst indicates, perhaps, that the value of the human-object, *slave*, is as good as not existing.

*5.5.2.1.5.3.5 Contrasting with sub-domains.* δοῦλος occurs in sub-domain E [“Slave, Free”]. This sits close to sub-domain D [“Low Status or Rank (including people of low status)”, and contrasts with subdomains B [Honour or Respect in Relation to Status] and C [High Status or Rank (including persons of high status)]. This analysis draws attention to the fact that a slave was somebody of low social status.

*5.5.2.1.5.3.6 Contrasting the meanings of the words in the sub-domain.* δοῦλος occurs as entry 87.76 in Sub-domain E [“Slave, Free”] of semantic domain 87. Apart from δοῦλος, there are ten (10) entries in sub-domain E (87.77 – 87.86). The sub-domains indicate different kinds/states of slaves. However, sub-domain 87.76 refers to slaves in the strict sense of the word. Such slaves occupied the lowest portion of the social pyramid, with virtually no right or regard.

*5.5.2.1.5.3.7 Final conclusion regarding the meaning of δοῦλος in **Matthew 25:14, 19.***

It is clear that δοῦλος refers to a slave in the strict sense of the word. As such, he occupied the lowest rung of the social ladder. That is to say that he was a property of his owner and had no decisions of his own, but was subservient to his master in all things. Any reaction contrary to this expectation would then have been viewed seriously

by the master, and the slave would be met with the severest punishment. This conclusion fits the context of **Matthew 25:14-30**.

5.5.2.1.5.4 Study of *τάλαντον* (vv. 15-18, 20, 22, 25, 28)

5.5.2.1.5.4.1 *Consulting Volume 2 of Louw and Nida (1989) lexicon*. The inscription under *τάλαντον* in Volume 2 of Louw and Nida (1989:241) is the following:

<i>τάλαντον, ου η</i>	coin	6.82
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5.5.2.1.5.4.2 *Interpreting the data from Volume 2*. The word *τάλαντον* features only in semantic domain 6. This domain indicates a variety of artifacts, and comprises twenty-two sub-domains. The word is not used in any idiomatic expression. Louw and Nida (1989:67) indicate “coin” as a possible meaning.

5.5.2.1.5.4.3 *Consulting Volume 1 of the Louw and Nida (1989) lexicon*<sup>33</sup>. The inscription under semantic domain 6 and sub-domain 82 in Volume 1 of Louw and Nida (1989:63) is the following:

**6.82** *τάλαντον, ου η*: a Greek monetary unit (also a unit of weight) with a value which fluctuated, depending upon the particular monetary system which prevailed at a particular period of time (a silver talent was worth approximately six thousand denarii with gold talents worth at least thirty times that much) – ‘talent’. *μὲν ἔδωκεν πέντε τάλαντα* ‘to whom he gave five talents’ Mt 25:15.

In Mt 25:15-28 what is important is the relative number of talents or sums of money. In a number of translations the respective amounts are stated in terms of local currency. For example, in English one may speak of five thousand dollars as equivalent to five talents, though in terms of buying power, five talents would be worth much more than five thousand dollars. What is important, however, in this story is not the precise sums of money but the relative amount which was given to the different servants.

The ‘ten thousand talents’ referred to in Mt 18:24 would be equivalent to millions of denarii. The sum in this parable is perhaps greatly exaggerated, precisely in order to emphasise the vast difference between the two debts. It is also true, of course, that in ancient times persons with extensive mercantile businesses sometimes became slaves as a result of defeat in war, and they were purchased by business syndicates together with their business enterprises, which they would continue to manage.

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33 The entry under *τάλαντον* in Louw and Nida (1989:63) is lifted completely here. This is because it fortunately discusses *τάλαντον* from the context of **Matthew 25:14-30**.

#### 5.5.2.1.5.4 Final conclusion regarding the meaning of *τάλαντον* in **Matthew 25:14-30**.

For the investigation of *τάλαντον*, it should suffice that Louw and Nida cite **Matthew 25:15** in elucidating its meaning. Their citation of the same text under investigation in this study implies that *τάλαντον* as used in **Matthew 25:14-30** has a singular meaning, namely money. (The same idea also prevails in Matthew 18:24 above.)

#### 5.5.2.1.5.5 Summary of the investigation of *ὁ κύριος*, *δούλους* and *τάλαντον*

The above investigation creates specific contexts of meanings of the Greek words *ὁ κύριος*, *δούλους* and *τάλαντον* in **Matthew 25:14-30**.

*ὁ κύριος* means a master in the sense of having material property and slaves (vv. 19, 21, 23, 26), while its variant, *Κύριε*, is a courteous way of addressing him by his slaves.

*δούλους* means a male slave in the strict sense of being a property of the master and not having own right (vv. 14, 19, 21, 23, 26, 30).

*τάλαντον* means a unit of money in Greek economy (vv. 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 25, 28).

These are the specific senses by which this study understands these terms in the parable as the “image-providing world”.

### 5.5.2.2 Interpreting Matthew 25:14-30 in terms of its frames

The parable has a lean introductory frame that is given meaning only by the previous pericope (“Ὡσπερ γὰρ” [= “Again it will be like”, *NIV*] in **25:14** links up with 25:1). This implies that whatever 25:1-13 means, the meaning of **25:14-30** will lie close to it. Scott (1989:219) agrees with this idea when he says,

Matthew uses a clumsy construction [*referring to “Ὡσπερ γὰρ”*] to couple this parable to Ten Virgins, which concludes with Jesus’ command “Watch, therefore, because you do not know the day or hour (25:13). ‘For,’ *gar*, ties A Man Entrusts Property<sup>34</sup> to this concluding command, and ‘as’, *hōsper*, indicates that it is a comparison, an anecdote that will illuminate the preceding conclusion.

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34 Scott names the Gospel parables by their first words, rather than by the conventional nomenclature. In fact, A Man Entrusts Property is the title of both **Matthew 25:14-30** and Luke 19:11-27, which he identifies as different “performances” of the same parabolic structure (Scott, 1989:218).

The parable has no closing frame as such, but builds the prospect of grinding of teeth in outer darkness into the story itself (v. 30). However, as shown above, the introductory frame is sufficient for a preliminary conclusion that the parable addresses the need for watchfulness for the *parousia*. However, this idea will be investigated further in the sections that follow.

### **5.5.2.3 Theological considerations**

**5.5.2.3.1 Motivation.** The Bible is a unity, notwithstanding that the various documents were written by different persons, under different circumstances, and at different times. That is to say, all the documents unite to say the same thing. In supporting this assertion Hiebert (2016) says,

... The material content of Scripture is a unity that focuses on the redemptive-historical or covenant-historical. The Bible is itself revelation and it possesses its unity as a record of the revelatory work of God focused on his redemptive work culminating in Christ.... The emphasis in Scripture, then, is on the work of Christ as revealed by the progressive nature of God's revelation of himself in redemption.

This observation is apt, and implies that the exegete seek how a pericope they are investigating contributes to the progressive revelation of God's redemption plan. To that extent, any interpretation that goes in a contrary direction should be queried. Put another way, the one message of the canon, code-named "the analogy of faith" or "the rule of faith" (see Section 5.5.2.1 above), keeps interpretation under check, to be sure that it accords with redemption as the overarching motif of the entire Scripture. This Reformed principle is now in view as Matthew's theology is tested against the overall theology of the canon.

### **5.5.2.3.2 The theological relevance of Matthew to the canon**

**5.5.2.3.2.1 Matthew's** theology of salvation-history. **Matthew's** theology is salvation-historical and Christological in orientation. It portrays Jesus as both Messiah (cf. 1:1) and Son of God (cf. 3:17; 11:27; 17:5; 27:54). As Messiah, he fulfills the messianic expectations of the OT; and as Son of God, he brings the salvation of God. Furthermore, as the Son of God, he teaches the will of God (cf. 5:17-20) and inaugurates God's kingdom by obeying God's will (cf. 3:15; 4:17; 8:16-17; 20:28). In **Matthew** the kingdom of heaven is understood as the rule of God, through Jesus, in power and righteousness, in love and forgiveness (McKnight, 1996).

5.5.2.3.2.2 **Matthew's** theology of the "New Israel." **Matthew's** theology also paints a bold portrait of the church (his readers, followers of Jesus; cf. 4:18-22; 28:16-20) as the "true and New Israel" (cf. 16:18; 18:17), who have succeeded Abraham's physical offspring (cf. 3:7-10) and are now bringing forth the fruit that God wants from his people (21:33-44). **Matthew** presents the church as "the new people of God ... inhabiting a world that is the preliminary life to a fuller, more glorious life that will come when the Son of Man appears in his glory" (16:28; 25:1-46). These people of God, like the natural Israel, are burdened with the sin of disobedience and its consequence (cf. 13:24-30, 36-43), and therefore need the solution that Jesus proffers, namely, the need in the face of the coming kingdom to repent (4:17) (McKnight, 1996).

5.5.2.3.2.3 Further explanation of **Matthew's** theology. Combrink (1988:99) supports the idea that **Matthew** pursues the goal of salvation-history of the entire biblical canon. Similarly, Trout (2015:1, 4, 5-7) more recently underscores a salvation-historical goal in **Matthew**. A number of other scholars share the same general notion that "kingdom of God"<sup>35</sup> is a key motif in not just **Matthew**, but also in the entire canon. It is for Goldsworthy (2012:75) "the central theme in Scripture", and for Scobie (2003:106) "a central biblical theme". On his part, Waltke (2007:144), an OT scholar, eulogises God's kingship as the concept that "best accommodates all of the blocks of writing in the Old Testament", while on the other hand an NT scholar, Yarbrough (2012:100) has written recently that "we could conceivably array all of biblical theology along an axis entitled 'kingdom of God'".

It is also obvious that **Matthew** links the OT "expectations" to NT "fulfillment". Trout (2015:3ff) counts several of Matthean to-fulfill-what-was-said clauses (and their variants) in direct reference to the OT (1:22-23; 2:15; 2:17-18; 2:23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10), and by these demonstrates the unity and continuity between the OT and the NT. He then adds very insightfully, "In each instance the formula indicates that a trajectory set by the original context has reached its culmination in Jesus. What the events in the law and prophets foreshadowed has arrived in Jesus' ministry" (Trout, 2015:4). In this light, Matthew's Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and prophets.

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35 According to Trout (2015:4), βασιλεία occurs 55 times in **Matthew**, with 32 of those occurring in the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν [= "the kingdom of heaven"]. This study prefers the use of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, specifically because this is the form in which it appears in **Matthew 25:1**.

Trout (2015:7) further asserts that fulfillment and kingdom must be conceptualised together. That is to say, fulfillment of OT expectations are realised in the kingdom that Jesus brings. Indeed, that kingdom means the dawning, in and through Christ, of the eschatological rule of the God (Trout, 2015:4). God had all through the OT been reigning (cf. 1 Chron. 16:31; Ps. 93:1; 99:1), but had yet to wait for his Son's first advent to begin the full realisation of his kingdom. In Matthew 12:28//Luke 11:20, Jesus acknowledges his work (of exorcism) as fulfilling the kingdom. But before this, the earlier preaching of his forerunner, John the Baptist, pointed to this fulfillment (cf. Matt. 3:1-3). The keys of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν that Jesus promised the church had to do with this fulfillment as well (cf. Matt. 16:19). During his passion, particularly in response to Caiaphas' question whether he was the Son of God or not, his answer turned towards the marvels of his future kingdom (cf. Matt. 26:63-64). Finally, after his resurrection, he announced his universal authority as King (cf. Matt. 28:18) (Coetzee, 1995:34).

On a last note, NT notion of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν has two dimensions. While the OT expectation of the eschatological realisation of the Messiah's advent was a one-day event ("the Day of the Lord," cf. Is. 13:6, 9, 13; Jer. 46:10; Eze. 7:19; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 5:18, 20; Zeph. 1:14, 18; Mal. 4:1, 5), the NT envisages a two-phased advent. These are the so-called "already" and "not-yet" phases. Coetzee (1995:23) states as follows:

With a "two-phased advent" we mean that Christ's revelation (in the New Testament) made it clear for the first time that there is "an advent" and "yet another advent" of the Messiah. That is: *an advent which has already been realised* – to bring about the wonderful deliverance by God in and through his Son by way of the crucifixion and resurrection, *and another advent, the real parousia* – when God's final judgment will come to eternal reality.

**Matthew** captures both phases of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. The "already" phase was realised with the incarnation all the way through the ascension of Christ as already shown above, while the "not-yet" phase would be awaited till his second advent. **Matthew** has textual evidence of this expectation; in particular **Matthew 24:1-25:46** is one such textual bloc. In other words, **Matthew 25:14-30** makes a direct and incontrovertible contribution to the canonical subjects of salvation-history, God's kingdom and its expectations.

### 5.5.2.3.3 *The theological contribution of Matthew 25:14-30 to the kingdom motif*

Matthew 25:14-30 is one of the many Matthean texts that pursue the biblical teaching on the phase of the kingdom that is yet to be fulfilled; that is, the “not-yet” phase of the kingdom: “**Τότε** ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν δέκα παρθένοις .... **Ὡσπερ γὰρ** ...”; “**At that time** the kingdom of heaven will be likened .... **Again**, it will be like ...” (Matt. 25:1, 14, *NIV*, emphases not original). Τότε (“At that time”) shows that the story that follows is about the not-yet dimension of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Carson and Moo (2005:138) concur this when they identify Matthew 24:1-25:46 as an eschatological<sup>36</sup> discourse, and that 25:1-46 (of which **25:14-30** is a unit) is a series of parables that presents variations on the theme of watchfulness for the future manifestation of the kingdom. Combrink (1988:87) also agrees on “kingdom” as a major theme in **Matthew**<sup>37</sup>. This conclusion will be clearer in the analysis of the text of **Matthew 25:14-30** that will follow in Section 5.5.2.4 below.

### 5.5.2.3.4 *Relationship of Matthew 25:14-30 to other Synoptic Gospels*<sup>38</sup>

5.5.2.3.4.1 Comparison of Matthew’s eschatology to Mark and Luke’s eschatology. **Matthew** is not alone in the emphasis on the kingdom. Not to consider other sections of the NT, the Synoptic Gospels agree a great deal on this theme. All three of **Matthew**, Mark and Luke have considerable amounts of material on kingdom (e.g. Mk. 1:15; 4:11, 26, 30; 9:1, 47; 12:34; 14:25; Lk. 4:43; 6:20; 8:1,10; 9:2, 11, 27, 60, 62; 13:18, 20, 28, 39; 19:11-27). Mark 13:1-37 and Luke 17:20-21:38 are parallels of the eschatological material of **Matthew 24-25**. The Marcan version is spiced up with a short parable (Mk. 13:34) to illustrate its already accentuated motif of the necessity of watchfulness for the kingdom (Mk. 13: 5, 9, 23, 29, and especially 33-37). In details this parable is not exactly like Matthew’s **parable of the talents (25:14-30)**, but in flow they sound much the same. Luke 21:34-36 similarly displays emphasis on watchfulness, but a parallel parable (Lk. 19:11-27) to **Matthew 25:14-30** exhibits different wording and characterisation.

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36 Coetzee (2005:24) defines eschatology as “the doctrine of the final days or things” or “the doctrine of the future-expectations”.

37 He actually identifies four such themes: “Christology”, “kingdom and church”, “the fulfillment of the law”, and “salvation history”.

38 This comparison of **Matthew** to other Synoptic elements will be selective, in terms of what has direct bearing with this study.

5.5.2.3.4.2 Comparison of Matthew 25:14-30 to Luke 19:11-27. In literary terms, Luke's "parable of the minas"<sup>39</sup> (19:11-27) is embedded in Luke 17:20-21:38, which as it were dismembers the narrative of **Matthew 24:1-25:46**. In other words, Luke's plot development does not follow the same progression as in **Matthew** in discussing the motif of the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ [= "the kingdom of God", a variant of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν in **Matthew**]. For instance, while **Matthew 24:1-25:46** begins with the disciples' admiration of the temple (24:1), from which the entire eschatological discourse flows; Luke delays the disciples' admiration of the temple till 21:5, and Jesus' explanation after that is less figurative than in **Matthew**.

In terms of communicational goal, **Matthew 25:14-30** and Luke 19:11-27 are framed differently. In Sections 5.5.2.1.3.2.1 and 5.5.2.3.3 above, it was briefly indicated that **Matthew 25:14-30** is framed by the call to watch for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (cf. Matt. 25:1, 13; also 24:36, 42, 44). By Luke's framing, the parable of the minas seems to rather address itself to the delay<sup>40</sup> of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Two indicators in 19:11 should suffice to illustrate this take-it-easy disposition of Luke:

**Ἀκουόντων δὲ αὐτῶν ταῦτα προσθεὶς εἶπεν παραβολὴν, διὰ τὸ ἔγγυσεῖναι Ἱερουσαλὴμ αὐτὸν καὶ δοκεῖν αὐτοῦς ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι·**

*While they were listening to this, he went on to tell them a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once." (NIV)*

(Luke 19:11, emphases not original)

Firstly, Scott (1989:221) acutely observes that Luke's introductory frame Ἀκουόντων δὲ αὐτῶν ταῦτα, 19:11a, ties 19:11-27 closely to the conversion of Zacchaeus (19:1-10). He says, "Having proclaimed salvation's immanence, Luke now warns against mistaking salvation for the kingdom's coming. The parable provides an allegorical timetable for the coming of the kingdom, for those things that are 'not yet.'" Van Eck (2011:1) agrees that the parable's introductory frame just highlighted links the

39 According to Scott (1989:224), sixty (60) μνᾶς (minas) is equal to one (1) talent, or one hundred (100) denarii. However, while a μνᾶ (mina) is considerably less than a talent, it is still a large sum of money from a peasant's viewpoint.

40 Scott (1989:219, 221) agrees with this assertion when he observes that **Mathew 25:14-30** stresses the "theme of exhortation to vigilance until the end" while Luke 19:11-27 uses the parable to address "the delay of the Parousia".

parable to the Zacchaeus-narrative, which resulted in some presuming that the long awaited *parousia* was fast approaching.

The second indication of a not-too-soon *parousia* is the second part of 19:11: διὰ τὸ ἐγγυσεῖναι Ἱερουσαλήμ αὐτὸν καὶ δοκεῖν αὐτοὺς ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι. Luke is responding to the anxiety (or perhaps eagerness) of the people by utilising this parable about the *parousia*. It is not yet, and therefore they should relax their nerves.

One wishes to also observe from the whole episode of Luke 17:20-21:36 that while the *parousia* is certain (17:24), **πρῶτον δὲ** δεῖ αὐτὸν πολλὰ παθεῖν καὶ ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι ἀπὸ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης [= “**But first** he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation”, *NIV*] (17:25, emphases not original). It was this suffering that Jesus referred to as fulfillment (18:31-33), but, alas, his disciples “did not understand any of this” (v. 34). It was to be only after that – and not necessarily *immediately* after that! – that the expected eschatological event would take place.

**5.5.2.3.5 Conclusion.** It should therefore be concluded that all three Synoptics discuss the kingdom of God, with a corollary emphasis on watchfulness for its *parousia*. The brief analysis of Mark in Section 5.5.2.3.4.1 above underscores watchfulness as the central motif (cf. 13:33-37). For Luke, while the parable of the minas apparently lends itself to a delayed *parousia* (which **Matthew’s** discourse also does, 24:7, 14), the eschatological discourse that begins at 17:20 ends with the imperative to watch (21:34, 36): Προσέχετε δὲ ἑαυτοῖς ... ἀγρυπνεῖτε δὲ ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ [= “Be careful .... Be always on the watch...” *NIV*]. This means that 19:11-27 is not addressing any other goal than vigilance. This is obviously “the proper response” to Jesus’ varied teaching on the kingdom in 17:11-21:36 (Carson & Moo, 2005:200-201). The “theological framework” set up by Luke 17:20-37 and 21:5-33, plus particularly the closing exhortations to “Be careful” (21:34) and “Be always on the watch” (21:36), subsumes and determines the meaning of all the details within that space<sup>41</sup>.

In view of the unity of Scripture, Matthew 24-25 cannot have a different goal with the eschatological discourse than to call the faithful to a watchful stance. It goes without saying, then, that **Matthew 25:14-30**, like Luke 19:11-27, is a parable that illustrates the theme of watchfulness for the *parousia* of the kingdom.

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41 It should be recalled from Section 5.4.2.2 above that Van der Watt (2009:330-333) convincingly argues that the theological framework of a parable is determinative of its meaning.

#### 5.5.2.4 Interpreting Matthew 25:14-30 in terms of 25:1-13 and 25:31-46

**5.5.2.4.1 General overview.** Here effort will be made to understand **Matthew 25:14-30** in relation to the other two parables that respectively precede and succeed it. One of the Reformed principles for parable interpretation was shown in Section 5.4.6 above to be reading parables in terms of each other. In applying that principle here, the meaning of **Matthew 25:14-30** is sought in its “interrelated interpretive context” (Van der Watt, 2009:331).

##### **5.5.2.4.2 Meaning of Matthew 25:14-30 in relation to Matthew 25:1-13.**

Zimmermann (2015:269) agrees with this researcher’s sentiments that Matthew 25:1-13 is about the *parousia*. He says, “The parable of the ten virgins is embedded in the so-called eschatological discourse that comprises chapters 24 and 25 of the Gospel of Matthew and whose central topic is the *parousia* of the Son of Man.” “Ὡσπερ γὰρ” [literally, “For-as”; *NIV*: “Again”] in **Matthew 25:14** directly links with 25:1-13, and particularly with vv. 1 and 13, which respectively say:

Τότε ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν δέκα παρθένοις,

“*At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins...*,” v. 1 *NIV*

Γρηγορεῖτε οὖν, ὅτι οὐκ οἴδατε τὴν ἡμέραν οὐδὲ τὴν ὥραν.

“*Therefore keep watch, for you do not know the day or the hour,*” v. 13 *NIV*

Verse 1 of 25:1-13 clearly indicates that the story that follows wants to paint a picture of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, in this particular case the manner of its coming. It begins with “Τότε ...” [literally, “Then ...”; *NIV*: “At that time ...”]. At what time? This question can successfully be answered from the context of 24:1-51. The startled disciples anxiously ask when the temple would be destroyed as predicted by Jesus, and what would be the sign of his coming (24:2-3). In response, Jesus warns against false alarms of his *parousia* (24:4-8, 23-28). He then explains that his *parousia* will be visible across the heavens, and will affect all the nations and four winds of the earth (24:30-31). It is imminent (24:32-35), but its timing is unpredictable (24:36); hence the emphatic imperative to be watchful (24:42, 44).

“Τότε” in 25:1 therefore refers to the time of the coming of the Son of Man in his glory (24:30). Incidentally, 24:30 (a non-figurative statement) also begins with “Τότε”: “καὶ **τότε** φανήσεται τὸ σημεῖον τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν <τῷ> οὐρανῷ ...” [= “And

**then** will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven<sup>42</sup> ...”; “**At that time** the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky ...”, *NIV*]. Jesus’ use of “τότε” here in 24:30 refers back to 24:29, which predicts a cataclysm that will precede the *parousia*, and finally answers the disciples’ question of what the sign of the end of the age would be (24:3). In this light, therefore, “Τότε ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν δέκα παρθένοις ...” [= “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins...,” *NIV*] in 25:1 can be paraphrased as “The awaited advent of the kingdom of heaven can be likened to ten virgins ....”

In terms of literary cohesion, these data show that 24:30-51 and 25:1-13 are pursuing the same goal of explaining that the *parousia* of Christ and of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν will be effected at a time that no-one knows and hence urge watchfulness for it. Twice in 24:30-51 (vv. 42, 44), the disciples are urged to “keep watch”/“be ready”, while the closing frame of 25:1-13 makes the same demand: “Therefore keep watch.”

Therefore, “Ὡσπερ γὰρ” [= “For-as’] in **25:14** (the beginning of the second parable in that series), already shown to have a literary relationship with 25:1-13, is evidence that the story that follows (**25:14-30: the parable of the talents**) is equally about the *parousia* of Christ and ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. This is all the more evident seeing that the Greek text of **25:14** neither repeats nor uses a variant for

Τότε ὁμοιωθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ...

*“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ...” 25:1, NIV*

nor uses any pronoun for

ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν”

“the kingdom of heaven”<sup>43</sup> 25:1, *NIV*

In terms of communication science, Du Toit (2009b:131) indicates that this is a case of using the linguistic tool of cohesion called “ellipsis”<sup>44</sup>. One then sees how Matthew’s silence on “ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν” in **25:14** produces cohesion between 25:1-13 and **25:14-30**.

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42 This is a literal translation according to *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (1990).

43 The “it” used by the NIV text at **25:14** is obviously introduced by the translators to make sense in the English. The King James Version (KJV) and the New King James Version (NKJV) use “the kingdom of heaven” in italics – indicating that the phrase is not original, but is used to make sense in the English.

44 According to Du Toit (2009b:131), “Ellipsis takes place when a word or phrase is omitted that is essential to the meaning of a statement, but can easily be retrieved from the context.”

**5.5.2.4.3 Meaning of Matthew 25:14-30 in relation to Matthew 25:31-46.** In terms of the relationship between **25:14-30** and 25:31-46, it should be noticed that the latter begins with “Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ...” [= “When the Son of Man comes in his glory...”, *NIV*]. This phrase coheres with “καὶ ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ μετὰ δυνάμεως καὶ δόξης πολλῆς” [= “They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory”, *NIV*] (24:30b). 24:31-46 is therefore another facet of Jesus’ answer to the disciples’ question in 24:3. With the figures of sheep and goats Jesus explains **the judgment** that will take place “Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ. The judgment in 25:31-46 will favour the “sheep” (the righteous) and disfavour the “goats” (the unrighteous). In **25:14-30**, there is judgment as well: the faithful slaves are favoured by the master/judge, while the unfaithful slave is reprimanded by him. Together, these two pericopes urge preparation (watchfulness/readiness) for the *parousia*, so that one might receive a favourable verdict when one’s work is judged.

**5.5.2.4.4 Conclusion.** The pericope **25:14-30** is about the *parousia* of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου and ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Complementary to 25:1-13 (parable of the ten virgins) and 25:31-46 (the sheep and the goat), it highlights an aspect of the *parousia* of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου and ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, namely the need to be alert and ready.

**5.5.2.5 Historical data on Matthew 25:14-30.** In Section 5.4.3, it was shown that the historical setting of the Gospel parables contributes to their meaning. The historical background of **Matthew 25:14-30** is now investigated to see how it fosters understanding of the parable.

To explain the imminence of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, Matthew finds Jesus’ parable of the talents useful. According to Ellicot (2004), the parable exploits the Eastern way of dealing with property in the absence of the owner. The property owner entrusted his assets to his slaves with an expectation of gain at his return. *In that case, his return and evaluation of their performance were critical.* **Matthew 25:14-30** addresses just these. In the same way that the slaves of the property-owner typically feared their master’s return and therefore worked hard to win his commendation, the expectation of the

*parousia* of the Son of Man by his disciples/slaves should greet them with godly fear and they should be faithful in their Master's service and make kingdom-gains for him.

Ellicot (2004) and Henry (2004) support this interpretation. According to the latter, Christ leaves no room for laziness among his servants. Having received their all from him, they are to work for him in return. This is urgent because the day of reckoning will come without prior notice, and his servants will have to present an account of what they did with the advantages they received in Christ. Those who do well will be rewarded accordingly, but those who fail to produce for their Master will be punished severely. Here, Scott's (1989:220) assertion about Matthew's community as one in which some were ready for the *parousia* and others not, seems fitting. Commenting on the network of parables of which **Matthew 25:14-30** is a member, he says, "Set in series, the stories promote a stark either-or situation that prepares for the sermon's concluding judgment scene with its final either-or." Then for the parable itself he says, "In context, A Man Entrusts Property drives home not only the necessity to watch for an unknown hour but also the stringent demand on faith to produce an increase *or* to face a tragic judgment" (Scott, 1989:220, emphasis not original).

For Ellicot (2004), the presence of an opportunity – big or small, as symbolised by the varying amounts of talents that each servant in the story receives – brings with it a sense of responsibility. "So faithfulness in a very little receives its full reward", as well as with big opportunities (v. 18). Those who show faithfulness as expected here are welcomed into the joy of their "divine Master" (v. 21b) – a thing that is not common with earthly masters! But for the slothful slaves, their "talent" is taken from them (v. 28). Ellicot is also careful to note that "talents" in the story are different from the slaves' respective abilities, and therefore warn against interpreting "talents" in the story as natural abilities.

## 5.5.2.6 Putting it all together: interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30

### 5.5.2.6.1 Metaphoric transfer of signals from the parable to ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν

Parable of the talents - Matt. 25:14-30 (The “image providing” domain)	Kingdom of heaven (The “image receiving” domain)	Motivation	Further explanation
ἄνθρωπος/ὁ κύριος/Κύριε [= Master] (vv. 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26)	ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου [= the Son of Man (Jesus Christ)]	<p>Jesus is the “αὐτοῦ” [= “he”, <i>NIV</i>] in 24:3 (cf. v. 1), as well as τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου/ὁ Υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου” [= the Son of Man”, <i>NIV</i>] in 24:30,44//25:31.</p> <p>He is “ὁ κύριος ὑμῶν/Κύριε” in 24:42//25:37,44, as well as “ὁ Βασιλεὺς” in 25:34,40; and refers to God as “τοῦ Πατρὸς μου” [= “my Father”, <i>NIV</i>] in 25:34.</p> <p>Finally, he is “τοῦ νυμφίου” [= “the bridegroom”, <i>NIV</i>] in 25:1,5,6,10 and “Κύριε” in 25:11 (cf. Zimmermann, 2015:263)</p>	
“δούλους”/“δοῦλοι” [= “Slave/Slaves”] (vv. 14, 19, 21, 23, 26, 30)	Disciples of Jesus	<p>Jesus is addressing his disciples [<i>Gk.</i>: μαθηταῖ] in 24:4-25:46 (see 24:3 in particular). These are the same whom Jesus says must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him (Matt. 16:24). This indicates a commitment level that leaves nothing of personal interest hanging before the follower against his Master’s interests.</p> <p>Moreover, from a historical context, a property owner entrusted his assets to his slaves (Ellicot, 2004). This specification excludes the crowd/world from the context of the parable.</p>	<p>μαθητῆς [= “a disciple”, Matt. 10:42; Jn. 19:38] is a follower/pupil of a rabbi.</p> <p>The NT views the disciples as “δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ” [= <i>lit.</i> “slaves of Christ”, <i>NIV</i>. “servants of Christ”] (cf. Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1; Jude 1:1). This is used in the sense of them having surrendered the totality of their lives, “being completely dependent on and obedient to” (Life application, 1991:2025) to Christ as their “Lord/Master”.</p>

“τάλαντον/τάλαντα” [= “talent/talents”] (vv. 15-18, 20, 22, 24, 28)	Opportunities/tools of service, given according to individual ability	From 25:31-46, the content of kingdom-awaiting activities comprises service	“τάλαντον/τάλαντα” as literal units of money are not invested in the kingdom of heaven as a way of watching for its <i>parousia</i> . If it were so, then the five-talent and two-talent slaves would not have received the same commendations (vv. 21, 23)
The master’s return (25:19)	The <i>parousia</i> (= second advent) of the Son of Man	The whole of 24:4-25:46 deals with the <i>parousia</i> of the Son of Man (24:30,39,42,44; 25:31)	The figurative “returning”/“coming” of the master/bridegroom in all the parables in 24-25 must as of congruence/coherence be speaking of the same subject of the <i>parousia</i> of the Son of Man (24:46, 50; 25:5-6, 10)
Settled accounts (25:19)	He will settle accounts	Everyone will have to give account of his/her work when Jesus returns (Rom. 14:12; 1 Pet. 4:5)	
Master’s joy (25:21, 23)	The kingdom of heaven	The story is about the <i>parousia</i> of the kingdom of heaven (24:3, 30-31; 25:1, 14)	In 25:1-13, the kingdom of heaven is pictured as a wedding banquet (v. 10); while in 25:31-46, the “sheep” are to “[δ]εῦτε οἱ εὐλογημένοι τοῦ Πατρός μου, κληρονομήσατε τὴν ἡτοιμασμένην ὑμῖν βασιλείαν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου” [= “take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”]
Outer darkness (25:30)	Hell	At the <i>parousia</i> , the Son of Man will send the “goats” to Hell (25:41, 46)	Hell is described as the place where there will be the grinding of teeth (Matt. 13:42, 50) and is a place reserved for workers of iniquity (Luke 13:23-30)

Table 5.1: Table showing metaphoric transfer of signals from the parable to ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν

#### **5.5.2.6.2     *Final conclusion on the meaning of Matthew 25:14-30***

Like the master who left his assets in the hands of his slaves returns to call for accounts, so will the Son of Man return to the earth at his second advent (when he will also set up his not-yet-fulfilled kingdom), to demand for an account of stewardship from his disciples. Like the two faithful slaves, disciples of Jesus should live with the consciousness of the imminent return of their Lord and Master, because its exact time is not known by any man. Accordingly, they should be constantly watchful and ready.

One way to be ready is to use the opportunities/tools of service he has given them. As each disciple reckons with him, he will praise those who served him faithfully, gainfully and according to their best ability. Not only so; he will above all welcome them into the kingdom of heaven, where they will share their Master's joy. But for those who only claimed to be his disciples but did not serve him faithfully or gain anything for his kingdom, he will reprimand and send them to Hell, where they will weep and grind their teeth in pain.

Finally, watching for the coming of the Son of Man and for his heavenly kingdom does not warrant idling about or making excuses for failure in the service of his kingdom, but impels his disciples to use all the opportunities/tools at their disposal to faithfully and gainfully serve their Master and the interests of his kingdom. This is how they can be sure of securing a place of joy in the coming kingdom; otherwise they will lose their place to those who are faithful.

### **5.6     GENERAL CONCLUSION**

Above was a painstaking examination of the meaning and implications of Reformed hermeneutics. It shows respect to the genre of the text under investigation, its literary context, and its historical as well as theological significance. Reformed hermeneutics adopts a combination of both synchronic and diachronic tools for interpretation, this being dictated by the realities in the text itself. As such, Reformed hermeneutics is a comprehensive approach to Scripture that takes advantage of the insights of all relevant tools in its quest to access the truth that is in the text. This was demonstrated in the attempt at a Reformed exegesis of **Matthew 25:1-30** in the last section. Reformed guidelines for interpreting the gospel parables were closely followed.

In the final analysis, it was found that **Matthew 25:14-30** is a fictional story that Jesus used to illustrate the need for his disciples to be watchful and keep a faithful posture while waiting for his return. They are his slaves, and are absolutely accountable to him; and therefore must serve him to the best of their abilities. He will surely reward them with his eternal joy if they are found to be “good and faithful” slaves. If they are not found to be faithful, he will condemn and throw them out of his kingdom into darkness, where they will suffer in bitterness and gnashing of teeth. These findings will be used in the next chapter to evaluate the interpretations of **Matthew 25:14-30** by some Pentecostals.

## CHAPTER SIX

### EVALUATION OF THE DISPARITIES OR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PENTECOSTAL AND REFORMED INTERPRETATIONS OF MATTHEW 25:14-30

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

This study proceeded with the central theoretical argument that, when examined in the light of Reformed hermeneutics, some Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 are questionable and therefore not plausible<sup>45</sup>. This basis assumption will now be tested for validity or otherwise. To do this, it should be recalled that the preceding chapter attempted a Reformed exegesis of Matthew 25:14-30<sup>46</sup>, while the one before it collected forty (40) sample Pentecostal interpretations (SPIs) of the same passage. The result of the Reformed interpretation (RI) here referred to will now be kept as a standard, and keen interest will be demonstrated in the disparities or differences between it and the result of each of the 40 SPIs. The exercise will seek to evaluate such disparities or differences, and hence to answer the question whether those SPIs are questionable and therefore implausible as presumed in the central theoretical argument above; or whether they agree with RI at any point at all, and therefore are acceptable.

#### 6.2 THE CREDIBILITY OF REFORMED HERMENEUTICS AS AN EVALUATIVE APPARATUS

The central theoretical argument above and the evaluation of the SPIs that is about to be done, implicitly presuppose that Reformed hermeneutics is a valid interpretive system and hence that its results can be trusted to shed light on the credibility (or otherwise) of the results of Pentecostal hermeneutics. This section will however first assess the credibility of Reformed hermeneutics as an evaluative system. Put another way, it wishes to answer the question whether Reformed hermeneutics has the credibility to sit as judge over Pentecostal hermeneutics. A few points will be raised in this regard.

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<sup>45</sup> See Section 1.5 above.

<sup>46</sup> See Section 5.5 above.

## 6.2.1 COMPREHENSIVENESS

It was demonstrated in Sections 5.1.4 – 5.3.3 above that Reformed hermeneutics is a comprehensive approach to Scripture. By that is meant that a Reformed exegete takes a whole lot of factors into consideration while trying to understand what a text of Scripture means. Paramount among these factors are respect for the authority of Scripture, concern for how the meaning so derived fits within the framework of the overarching redemptive message of the whole canon, careful selection of methods that will best give a reliable meaning, and insistence on the text and its context (in that order) as primary determinants of meaning. A few of these factors are briefly reviewed below.

**6.2.1.1 Reformed respect for the authority of Scripture.** Reformed hermeneutics presupposes that Scripture is authoritative. It is the only basis for the Christian faith and its practice. As such, it should be allowed to say only what it has to say or to be silent where it wishes to be silent (Calvin, *Inst.* 1.14.4; Klooster, 1979:44; Pitchford, 2006). This is another way of saying that Reformed hermeneutics is wary about deriving interpretations from biblical passages that are not fitting to the text.

**6.2.1.2 Reformed presuppositions.** Reformed hermeneutics does not deny the fact that there are presuppositions that guide its task. According to Wolthuis (2011:33), Reformed interpreters see themselves as members of an interpretive community, by which is not only meant that they recognise themselves as belonging to a community that interprets the Bible, but also that their community's presuppositions influence the approach and results of their interpretation. This is in agreement with reality, for in modern times, the role of presuppositions in interpretation has increasingly been recognised (Du Toit, 2009a:ix).

**6.2.1.3 Reformed exegesis and its result.** Reformed hermeneutics is critical in its approach to Scripture. That is, it raises searching questions and seeks to provide answers to them, rather than coming with fanciful ideas to the passage<sup>47</sup>. As such, it concentrates on the text and context of the passage under investigation, rather than imposing strange and incongruent meanings on the text. According to Du Toit (2009b:110), the problem with deriving multiple meanings from a text, particularly those that fall outside “the network of constraints created by a given utterance” leads to yet

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47 The former is called *exegesis*, and the latter *eisegesis*.

another problem, namely, failure to retrieve “enough essential” (or an authentic) meaning of the text. Reformed hermeneutics keeps a very close watch on this temptation, and rather heeds the principle that “[t]he text is the final arbiter of meaning”, and therefore that “[t]he first and decisive rule of exegesis is respect for the supremacy of the text” (Du Toit, 2009b:112; cf. Section 5.2.1.2 above). Similarly, Reformed hermeneutics avoids fundamentalism by paying attention to all necessary contextual information on the text (Du Toit, 2009b:115).

Closely related to the text- and context-orientation of Reformed hermeneutics is its concern that the result of exegesis agree with the overarching redemptive message of the Bible (= “the analogy of faith” or “the rule of faith”; see Section 5.2.2.1 above). This is perhaps one of the most crucial points to note about the credibility of Reformed hermeneutics, and Sproul’s (2018) metaphor is apt to describe its merit:

The inspired and infallible rule of faith is the whole of Scripture, whose textual parts must be understood in light of its textual-theological whole. *This insures that the theological forest is not lost for the individual textual trees.*

(emphasis not original)

This makes it clear that Reformed hermeneutics is a thoroughly biblical enterprise. In other words, the complete canon forms the framework within which each text is understood. Perhaps no system can be safer than this.

**6.2.1.4 Reformed methodology.** Reformed hermeneutics also has a solid point to make here: it is not limited to one method of analysis but combines a number of methods in effort to reach a most plausible conclusion. It recognises the deficiency of all methods taken individually, and therefore seeks to complement the deficiency of one method by the strength of another. Here, synchronic methods are combined with their diachronic counterparts; and even within these two broad systems, a number of methods are called up according to the demands of the text and the need at hand (Viljoen, 2017:26). This combination of methods, as already indicated, is a plus to the quest for meaning of biblical texts under the Reformed system.

Mention also needs to be made of the Reformed principles for interpreting Jesus’ parables, since in the final analysis, the investigation here has to do with a parable. Reformed hermeneutics requires that rather than deal with a biblical parable as an

independent entity (which it really can never be!), the exegete reckon with the theological, historical, and literary significance of the parable, as well as its meaning in terms of its frames and counterpart parables (Silva, 2007b:161-166; Van der Watt, 2009:331-334; cf. Section 5.4 above). This keeps the meaning of any given parable well within the confines of its literary and contextual frameworks and provides a safeguard against incongruent meanings. These yardsticks were useful in the Reformed interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30 in Chapter 5. This goes further to prove that Reformed hermeneutics is credible, and does also boost the confidence of the RI of Matthew 25:14-30 to judge the SPIs in the section that follows.

### **6.3 EVALUATION OF THE SAMPLE PENTECOSTAL INTERPRETATIONS OF MATTHEW 25:14-30 IN THE LIGHT OF REFORMED HERMENEUTICS**

Reformed hermeneutics presumes to be careful with interpretation of the Bible. This section, relying on this claim, wishes therefore to use the RI as a yardstick for evaluating the SPIs of Matthew 25:14-30.

#### **6.3.1 METHODOLOGY**

It should be recalled that the final conclusion of the RI (see Section 5.5.2.6.2 above) was that Matthew 25:14-30 is absolutely an illustration of the manner of the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν [= “the kingdom of heaven”] and hence a call to be ready for it (cf. Matt. 24:36, 42, 44; 25:13). This watchfulness (or readiness, 24:44) entails being faithfully (and gainfully) engaged for their Master, the Son of Man. When he comes, he will judge and reward his disciples (including those who only superficially claimed to be his disciples) on the basis of their faithfulness with the opportunities/tools of service he had placed at their disposal.

Evaluation of the SPIs of Matthew 25:14-30 will be done by first identifying the disparities or differences between each SPI and the RI. Such disparities or differences will then be assessed in light of the result of the RI. However, the SPIs will be investigated on the basis of the eleven (11) Cognate Groups (CGs) created in Table 4.42 above (which is also repeated below for ease of reference). Then, a composite conclusion will be reached on the relevance of the SPIs that make up the particular CG, and from there a final conclusion will be reached on the plausibility or otherwise of the samples.

COGNATE GROUP (CG)	CONTEXT OF INTERPRETATION (Col)	FREQUENCY (f)	PERCENTAGE FREQUENCY (%f)
1	<b>Teaching on finance, success and wealth</b> (SPI-1, SPI-4, SPI-7, SPI-11, SPI-12, SPI-15, SPI-16, SPI-17, SPI-18, SPI-19, SPI-20, SPI-21, SPI-22, SPI-23, SPI-25, SPI-28, SPI-30)	17	42.5%
2	<b>Teaching on giving</b> (SPI-13)	1	2.5%
3	<b>Teaching on responsibility and accountability for God's gifts/talents</b> (SPI-27, SPI-32, SPI-36)	3	7.5%
4	<b>Mobilising for political involvement</b> (SPI-8)	1	2.5%
5	<b>Teaching on Christ's second coming and reward</b> (SPI-2, SPI-9, SPI-10, SPI-38, SPI-39, SPI-40)	6	15.0%
6	<b>Teaching on Christian ministry, leadership and witnessing</b> (SPI-3, SPI-14, SPI-31, SPI-33, SPI-34, SPI-35, SPI-37)	7	17.5%
7	<b>Teaching on faith in the word of God</b> (SPI-5)	1	2.5%
8	<b>Teaching on Christian victory through love</b> (SPI-24)	1	2.5%
9	<b>Teaching on watchfulness</b> (SPI-29)	1	2.5%
10	<b>Teaching on divine restoration of talents</b> (SPI-26)	1	2.5%
11	<b>Interview on investment and influence</b> (SPI-6)	1	2.5%
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<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>40</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Table 4.42: Frequency table of contexts of interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30

### 6.3.2 EVALUATION OF THE SPIs

#### 6.3.2.1 CG-1: Teaching on finance, success and wealth

(SPI-1, SPI-4, SPI-7, SPI-11, SPI-12, SPI-15, SPI-16, SPI-17, SPI-18, SPI-19, SPI-20, SPI-21, SPI-22, SPI-23, SPI-25, SPI-28, SPI-30)

#### **SPI-1: Deliverance from financial hardship**

1. SPI-1 deals with financial issues and at no point refers to the issue of the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, or to the need of Christ's disciples to be ready for their Master's return. This alone is enough to render the interpretation implausible.

2. Again, whereas RI sees the gains in the parable (vv. 20, 22) as belonging to the Master, SPI-1 sees it as belonging to the believers. This is not correct, and could make Christians vulnerable to the wanton tendency to pursue wealth as an end in itself.

#### **SPI-4: Break your fallow grounds**

1. SPI-4 deals with material success, as against the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν; and emphasises hard work as the key to increase (positive change), while failure to labour with one's talent (i.e. natural ability) results in a loss. Besides falling for the temptation to interpret "talent" as natural ability (whereas it is only a symbol of opportunity/tool of service), the focus of SPI-4 on material things disqualifies it as an acceptable interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30.
2. Whereas RI calls Christ's disciples to be ready for ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, SPI-4 calls believers to develop and invest their talents into "God's Kingdom", so that (in a material sense) they will have what to present for reckoning at the return of the Lord. One cannot but question focus on "God's Kingdom" as in the *now*, whereas the text and RI focus on the "not yet" kingdom.
3. The context of SPI-4 also indicates that those who fail to increase their talents will not only lose them to others, but will be thrown into Hell like the one-talent servant. The literal understanding of "talent" in SPI-4 has also unfortunately led to a tendency of thinking that the final judgment will be about material success or failure, whereas it will for real have to do with one's salvation status or otherwise.

#### **SPI-7: Let the money flow**

1. In SPI-7 the parable is about the flow of money and prosperity, whereas in RI it is about ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. In SPI-7, the issue is courage versus fear with respect to investing money; in RI the issue is being ready for the return of the Son of Man and his kingdom. On this point alone, SPI-7 is a far cry from the message of the parable, which is readiness for the *parousia* of Christ and his kingdom.
2. In SPI-7 the first two servants represent courageous investors who by their courage allow money/prosperity to flow; the third servant represents a fearful investor and therefore blocks the flow of money/prosperity. In RI, on the contrary, the issue is faithfulness/unfaithfulness while waiting for the *parousia* of the Son of

Man and his kingdom, and no idea of courage or fear for investment is explicitly or implicitly indicated.

3. In SPI-7 an idea of a caring God is obvious, while in RI neither the text nor the context of Matthew 25:14-30 indicates anything about God's care. This idea is therefore an imposed one.
4. However, SPI-7 identifies the master in the story as a symbol of God, which is in close affinity with RI's identification of him as a symbol of Christ.

### **SPI-11: Sam Adeyemi's top five tips for stewardship of finances**

1. It is very castigating for SPI-11 to assert that Jesus spoke more about money than he did about heaven and hell combined. That is, that he taught more about wealth than he did about ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. This assertion is strange and lacks biblical support. In Sections 5.4.2 and 5.5.2ff above, it is clear from RI that Jesus' message centred primarily around ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Everything he said or did served the purpose of explaining or accentuating that motif. Therefore SPI-11's assertion of a wealth teacher in the person of Jesus is not acceptable.
2. SPI-11 understands the story in a literal sense, and hence keeps money and its stewardship in view in its interpretation, while RI understands the story in a figurative sense and rather looks for what these symbols reference in the religious domain. SPI-11 therefore fails a key hermeneutical test of firstly recognising the genre of the story before attempting its interpretation.

### **SPI-12: Going from ordinary to extraordinary: developing your God-given talents**

1. Like RI, SPI-12 rightly identifies "talents" in the parable as forms of money; but unlike RI it also says the concept illustrates "the importance of using the natural talents God's has given us". Thus, unlike RI, it fails to effect a metaphoric transference of meaning from the world of the parable to the world of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν; but rather equates the first-century Greek concept τάλαντα (money) with contemporary Western meaning (natural ability). This is misleading.
2. SPI-12's second point is the need to appreciate and be focused on one's giftedness, rather than to whine about one's deficiency or envy others' talents. This follows logically from the first point. Based on the context of the text, namely, eschatology, neither the text nor RI has this ethical lesson in view.

### **SPI-15: Prosperity is not selfish**

1. Like RI, SPI-15 does well to relate Matthew 25:14-30 to 25:1-13 and 25:31-46 while searching for its meaning. However, its key understanding of the parable, namely, a teaching on right/wrong attitude towards financial prosperity and talents/natural gifts, does not find support from RI or even the text itself.
2. The corollary ethical demand to serve others with one's gifts, so that God would multiply them, does not also fit into the context of the parable or its RI.

### **SPI-16: Prosperity for the believer**

1. SPI-16 suggests acts of kindness (feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and helping those in need) as proof of the believer's faithful stewardship over God's gifts. According to RI, this does not follow from the text. In fact, a hint at such responsibilities is only found in Matthew 25:31-46, where they are used as a basis for judging the "sheep" and the "goats".
2. While SPI-16 and RI agree in terms of emphasis on profitable stewardship, the former unfortunately does not relate this to the primary message of the parable, which according to RI is vigilance for the parousia of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

### **SPI-17: Unmasking the Spirit of Mammon (Part 2)**

1. SPI-17 begins its interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30 on a very commendable note, stating that any given Scripture passage must be read in context and that the application of such a passage is equally limited. He also warns that not adhering to this principle leads to wrong understanding and consequently wrong living. This sounds very promising and one wants to see how much of this affects the result of SPI-17. However, it is incredible that the same author has presented three different interpretations of the same passage (SPI-17 and SPI-16/SPI-15 above). It is doubtful how all three interpretations fit the same passage.
2. Specifically on SPI-17, it may be accepted that Jesus used the metaphor of money to teach on trust (cf. Matt. 25:14-30; Lk. 16:1-15; 19:11-27), but this is not the general rule as SPI-17 claims (cf. Matt. 18:21-35; 22:15-22//Lk. 20:20-26; Lk. 15:8-10). According to RI, there is also no idea of tension between trusting in God and trusting in Mammon in the passage, like SPI-17 states.
3. RI does not also find fitting SPI-17's representation of the one-talent servant as being covetous. Whereas the third servant confessed to fear (and that does not

still warrant the concept of Mammon!), there is absolutely no idea of covetousness in the passage.

### **SPI-18: A vision for your finances: God has a plan for your finances**

1. SPI-18 uses Matthew 25:14-30 to teach about financial management in a literal sense, while in the light of RI the passage being a parable calls attention to something religious, namely, watchfulness for ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
2. Having already missed the point of the passage in (1) above, SPI-18's deduction about God having good plans for his children's finances, and its exhortation against pre-investment fear or reluctance to move for a change of one's deplorable financial situation, do not find support from the passage.

### **SPI-19: Survival kits for financial breakthrough**

1. SPI-19 paints a picture of economic recession against the darkness that covers the people in Isaiah 60:2a, and the proposed survival kits as the light that breaks forth for God's people (vv. 1, 2b-3). This equation in itself is worrisome in terms of Reformed hermeneutics.
2. Then as panacea for surviving economic recession, SPI-19 proposes that one use his or her mind. It proposes that the first two servants in the parable used their minds (that is, maximising the power of their minds) and thus traded with the amounts of talents given them, while the third servant's mind was on recess, thus leading him to economic recession. It concludes that Nigeria has for instance gone through its seasons of recession for the similar reason that its leaders' minds have in the main been on recess.

This socio-scientific understanding of the parable does not pay attention to historical matters and thus freely associates the parable with a recent Nigerian economic situation. It is unacceptable in the light of RI.

### **SPI-20: Good packaging key to global relevance**

1. SPI-20 uses a synchronic approach to equate "talents" in the passage with "potentials" and from there discusses the issue of packaging. This negligence of the diachronic meaning of "talents" as units of money is misleading from the start, and makes the interpretation collapse in the face of RI.
2. Also, even if the interpretation was correct, whereas RI understands the parable as referring to the "not yet" βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, SPI-20 in typical Pentecostal

manner talks about the well-packaged, talented child of God as representing the kingdom of God in excellence *here and now*. This is equally misleading as far as the text of Matthew 24:14-30 is concerned.

**SPI-21: Don't let the devil steal it!**

1. Many hermeneutical issues are obvious in SPI-21: “fear” is adopted as the hermeneutical key for understanding the passage; “God” and “master” are one and the same person in the story; “money” is different from “talent” in the passage; the devil snares people by making them compare what they have with what others have and thus give up on working at theirs; and the devil makes people clutch to the little they have in fear and thus inhibit the fulfillment of God’s plan for themselves.
2. These are all strange conclusions as far as Matthew 25:14-30 is concerned. For RI, watchfulness, not fear, is the hermeneutical key. It is only after a metaphoric transference has been effected from the parabolic world to the religious world that “master” becomes Jesus, not even God the Father. “Talent” and “money” mean the same thing in the parable (except that the former specifies units of the latter; cf. vv. 15, 27), and only mean opportunities/tools of service in the image-receiving world. Finally, there is no explicit or implicit mention of “the devil” (or its equivalents) or his activity in the passage, or even in the entirety of Matthew 24:1-25:46, and therefore cannot be smuggled in or made to play such a prominent role in the interpretation as SPI-21 accords it.

**SPI-22: Principles of greatness and creativity**

1. Unlike RI, SPI-22 understands “talents” in contemporary terms and fits its interpretation and application to that linguistic framework.
2. Moreover, the idea of investment in the parable seems to be all for the benefit of the talent-carrier, not for the Master (Jesus Christ), whose βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν in the referenced world is according to RI the actual issue.
3. All that “God” does in SPI-22 is to seriously frown at those who fail to invest into their abilities, whereas in RI it is those who do not prepare for Christ’s return that he reprimands and banishes from ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. In other words, SPI-22 has no view of eschatology or eternity, whereas these form the matrix of RI’s

understanding of the passage. Thus, the integrity of SPI-22 is in doubt and therefore it is not acceptable.

**SPI-23: Until you get results you are not a candidate for a reward**

1. SPI-23 equates “talent” with creativity and emphasises material gain (food for family and resources for communal development) as evidence of fulfillment. Neither creativity nor fulfillment is an issue in RI’s understanding of the parable. Therefore SPI-23 is not acceptable.

**SPI-25: Don’t faint!**

1. SPI-25 stresses the correspondence between sowing and reaping. It sees the first two servants as reaping a harvest of hard work, while those not sowing any seed should not deceive themselves by expecting a harvest. It goes further to guarantee that those who do more than others for the Lord will be given more (v. 29), while those who lazy about will lose what they had.
2. This interpretation is reached from a literal standpoint, and depends too much on one verse (v. 29). RI on its part respects the genre of the story as a parable, and as well takes the whole story as a unit, which still does not having complete meaning unless it is related to the larger context of Matthew 24:1-25:46.
3. As it stands, SPI-25 is not a plausible interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30.

**SPI-28: The end-time transference of wealth**

1. According to SPI-28, the three slaves in the parable are symbolic of “managers of the wealth” in the wealth-chain needed for the church to fulfill her global mission. The teaching proposes that God has no problem transferring wealth to the church, but that the challenge before the church is being able to “handle and manage it”.
2. Neither the first point above nor the injunction to “learn how to handle wealth and to perpetuate it” finds support in the text or RI. SPI-28 is therefore unacceptable.

**SPI-30: Putting your God-given talent to work**

1. SPI-30 uses the parable to illustrate the necessity of hard work as the only way to success, stating that as stewards who own nothing, believers should be faithful to God as the owner of all things (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2). RI does not have any clue of hard work from the passage, let alone deducing that it is an exclusive key to success.

2. SPI-30 also equates “talents” in the parable to contemporary meaning as giftedness. Thus, it submits that everybody in the body of Christ is gifted and should focus on their gifts rather than trying to be like others. While this is true and in fact biblical, RI does not find that teaching in Matthew 25:14-30.
3. SPI-30 also introduces the idea that when one increases one’s ability (that is capacity to handle things), one’s gifting will increase, since the master gives gifts according to one’s ability (cf. v. 15). While RI recognises the textual correspondence between individual ability and amount of talents given each slave, it reads “ability” *in the text* as “a fixed factor”, not a variable that can be increased or decreased. One can actually increase one’s ability, but that idea is neither evident in the text nor necessary for its interpretation.
4. On accountability, SPI-30 encourages believers to use God’s gifts in their lives so that they will be able to make a rewarding account before the judgment seat of God. It warns that God is not “a non-profit investor” and hence does not want to suffer loss. According to SPI-30, this justifies why God takes his capital from those who do not want to gainfully invest it and gives to those who are faithful (cf. v. 29). This interpretation is literal; that is, it does not recognise the genre of the text as a parable so as to search for its significance in the image-receiving world. RI rather approaches the text according to its genre and therefore accords it a metaphoric meaning, namely, watchfulness for ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, and does not at all have monetary investment in view.

### **Conclusion on the evaluation of SPIs in CG-1**

Of the seventeen (17) samples evaluated in this cognate group, none addressed the communicational goal of Matthew 25:14-30 identified by RI to be the need to watch for the parousia of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Only two (2) samples (SPI-4 and SPI-20), representing **11.8%** of the weight of CG-1, venture to mention the kingdom of God; still, both fail to address the motif of vigilance for the “not yet” βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, but rather apply their interpretations to an “already” kingdom. All the other fifteen (15) samples, representing **88.2%** of CG-1, concentrate their interpretations on wealth, success, hard work, material/financial reward, etc. This shows how far away CG-1, which boasts of a whopping **42.5%** of all the samples investigated (see Table 4.42 above), is from the motif of watching for ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

### **6.3.2.2 CG-2: Teaching on giving (SPI-13)**

#### **SPI-13: The parable of the talents by Rod Parsley**

1. Against the background of economic crunch, SPI-13 observes two (2) attitudes to giving: some still give to God's work, while others hold back in order to protect what they have. He goes on to liken the givers in hard times to the "wiser servants" who traded with their allocated talents and made gain in the parable, while those who hold back are like the "fearful servant" who buried his talent for fear he would lose it. In light of RI, it is difficult to establish how Matthew 25:14-30 is about giving or not giving in difficult times, let alone the equations between givers and the first two slaves and between non-givers and the third slave.
2. Equally problematic is the exhortation that if people give trusting God, he would fulfill his promise of giving them more. Whereas this is a biblical teaching (cf. Acts 20:35; 2 Cor. 9:6-8), RI does not find this exhortation in the passage. Therefore, SPI-13 is questionable and unacceptable.

#### **Conclusion on evaluation of SPI-13 in CG-2**

This cognate group, representing **2.5%** of the total samples investigated, is a complete departure from the end-time motif (or kingdom-theme) of Matthew 25:14-30. Its discussion of motivation for giving in hard times is alien to the passage, questionable and unacceptable.

### **6.3.2.3 CG-3: Teaching on responsibility and accountability for God's gifts/talents (SPI-27, SPI-32, SPI-36)**

#### **SPI-27: Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit**

1. Like RI, SPI-27 acknowledges that the parable is about the return of Jesus Christ, but turns around to equate "talents" with divine gifts for furthering the kingdom – divine gifts for which God's children will be accountable. This betrays the facts that SPI-27 is dealing with a *now*-kingdom and that it follows an anachronistic reading of the text, rather than metaphorically transferring meaning from the parabolic world to the referenced world of spiritual reality.
2. SPI-27's emphasis on faithfulness to one's ability in serving the Lord is acceptable to RI, as well as that God's judgment is concerned with quality more than it is with quantity (cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-15).

3. However, the bridge that SPI-27 constructs between the story and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is surprising. Also unclear is the claim that a work done under the Spirit's guidance will endure the fire of God's judgment, and vice versa. Neither Matthew 25:14-30 nor 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 cited above suggests the role of the Holy Spirit in attesting to the quality of work that will be acceptable or unacceptable at the judgment.

**SPI-32: Have a sense of responsibility**

1. SPI-32 is addressed to children and seeks to cultivate habits of responsibility and trustworthiness. It also seeks to motivate good citizenship and good neighbourliness in terms of taking good care of the environment and responding to social needs. This is understandably a good lesson drawn for children, but basing it on Matthew 25:14-30 does not fit. As has been maintained from the start, the parable is about watching for ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, and cannot for children become something else. Children as well as adults need to prepare for Christ's second advent; so there is no justification whatever to transform a text that could have addressed that need to something else.

**SPI-36: Dr. Kim Sung-hae: How to use one's God-given talents**

1. SPI-36 concentrates on the concept "talents" in the passage, and interprets it in terms of its contemporary English meaning as natural gifts/special abilities. This is contrary to RI's understanding of the concept in its historical setting as units of money.
2. The above understanding of SPI-36 leads to wrong conclusions and exhortations, namely, to receive one's talents with thanksgiving, thus receiving more from God; to do one's best with the talents, thus attracting more from God; and, to joyfully share one's talents with others, thus fulfilling the purpose for which God gave them in the first place. These are good Christian teachings, no doubt, but have no basis on Matthew 25:14-30. In that case, the ideas here taught are read into the passage. In other words, SPI-36 is an example of eisegesis, while RI is an example of exegesis of the passage.

### **Conclusion on evaluation of SPIs in CG-3**

Only one (1) sample (SPI-27), representing **33.3%** of the cognate group, mentions in passing the return of Christ as the communicative intent of the parable, as well as says something about the final judgment. Even so, it veers off this eschatological trajectory and discusses “talents” as natural gifts and as well advances an idea of a kingdom *here and now*. The other two (2) group members, representing **66.7%** of CG-3, busy themselves with thoroughly mundane issues, without any attention on the “not yet” kingdom motif. CG-3 is therefore a collection of questionable and unacceptable Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30.

#### **6.3.2.4 CG-4: Mobilising for political involvement (SPI-8)**

##### **SPI-8: America’s gift of government**

1. SPI-8 effects a metaphorical transfer of data, but does so from the parabolic world of Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27<sup>48</sup> to the American political world, whereas RI metaphorically transfers data from the parabolic world to the world of the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Thus, SPI-8 is faulty from this very start.
2. Consequently, it likens American Christians who have allegedly allowed fear, confusion and apathy to keep them from political involvement to the third slave who for fear hid his talent. In RI, it is acknowledged from the text that the third slave hid his talent for fear of his master. However, that the parable could be applied to political issues is not acceptable to RI given that the context strongly limits the meaning of Matthew 25:14-30 to issues pertaining to the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
3. SPI-8 also equates the fact that the slaves did not ask to be given talents but were all the same held accountable for the talents they received, to the fact that although Americans did not choose to be born Americans, they are nonetheless accountable to God for what they have been given (a nation and a government). This interpretation follows from (1) above, but is not convincing in the light of RI.

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48 SPI-8 does not pay attention to the nuances between Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27. So it begins with *talents* (Matthew) and concludes with ten cities (Luke). This in itself is a hermeneutical problem.

4. Equally doubtful is SPI-8's assertion that by telling the parable (Matt. 25:14-30//Luke 19:11-27), Jesus meant to underscore the mandate that being "involved in the civil arena is not an option ... especially in America" and that "[a]pparently Jesus considered service in civil government as a means of reward, for in the parable of the talents the faithful servants were rewarded by being made rulers over cities (Luke 19)". On the basis of RI, the claim that Jesus had Americans and their civil concerns in mind when telling the parable is scandalously untrue.

#### **Conclusion on evaluation of SPI-8 in CG-4**

Weighing 2.5% of the total samples, CG-4 is a complete hermeneutical deviation from the spirit of the text of Matthew 25:14-30. There is no connection whatever between the text and political concerns. That this otherwise fanciful eisegesis is totally implausible is obvious; hence it is unacceptable.

#### **6.3.2.5 CG-5: Teaching on Christ's second coming and reward**

(SPI-2, SPI-9, SPI-10, SPI-38, SPI-39, SPI-40)

#### **SPI-2: Divine Commendation – Sermon by Pastor E. A. Adeboye**

1. SPI-2 deals with Matthew 25:14-21, thus failing to treat Matthew 25:14-30 as a textual unit. On the other hand, RI deals with complete textual units (which is why it began with text demarcation of Matthew 25:14-30 in Section 5.5.2.1.2 above), in order to have access the complete and balanced message of the text. In this light, SPI-2 is not expected to produce any meaningful interpretation, worse so that Matthew 25:14-30 is a parable and failure to account for the whole story inevitably leaves SPI-2 with a skewed interpretation.
2. SPI-2 also reads thoughts into the mind of the third slave when it speculates that he was whining because he had not been given his due to trade with. RI duly recognises that the text specifies that each slave received a certain number of talents "each according to his ability" (v. 15). For SPI-2 to say otherwise is in fact to counter-read the text.
3. In any case, the conclusion to be mindful of earthly work as a determinant of heavenly reward is in tune with RI.

### **SPI-9: Parable of the talents (Sunday school lesson for senior class)**

1. In SPI-9 the slaves in the story are figures of believers, who as labourers in the vineyard of the Kingdom must preach the Word with power, pray for the healing of the sick, and bring back the lost into the fold. Thus, it deduces an “already” perspective of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν from the parable, whereas in RI the context of the discourse is the “not yet” perspective (Matt. 24:3; also note Τότε, “At that time,” in 24:23, 30; 25:1 and Ὡσπερ γὰρ, “For-as”/“Again” in 25:14). These data point to an *expected* kingdom, not one which is already here.
2. RI also queries SPI-9’s specification of the “labours” in “the vineyard of the Kingdom” to include powerful preaching, praying for healings, and restoration of the lost. Neither the text nor its context suggests such specific duties.
3. Mention of “talented brethren” who deploy their talents in worship meetings, indicates a Western understanding of the concept “talent”. This leads to the assertions that the Lord distributes talents (or responsibilities) in the church according to individual abilities (like the master in the parable did); that fidelity to one’s talent is an uncompromised requirement for reward; and that eternal reward or condemnation depends on the way individuals employ their talents. While these are fine lessons, they cannot stand up before the RI of Matthew 25:14-30. The premise, namely, the anachronistic meaning of “talent” in the passage, was wrong and therefore all that follows must be logically wrong, too.
4. Contrasting the cheerful accounting of the first two slaves with the drab accounting of the third, SPI-9 draws a lesson that those who are faithful and devoted to the cause of Christ will have confidence in the soul and have no fear in their hearts when they are called to meet their Master. It predicts that it will be a happy moment for individuals to stand before the Lord with their talents and report on the gains made for him. RI agrees with these assertions in part: the day of reckoning will be a happy day for the faithful (cf. Matt. 25:10, 21, 23, 28, 34). However, RI parts ways with SPI-9 if the latter maintains the Western understanding of “talents” up until the individual would stand before the Lord.
5. SPI-9 further explains, based on the distributed talents, that “spiritual responsibility is a tremendous thing and is not to be taken lightly”, and regrets that fear, indolence and rebellion did not allow the third slave to demonstrate this knowledge by taking risk and thereby producing profit for the master. Within the

framework of RI, it seems in the first place that at this point SPI-9 has metaphorically transferred the meaning of “talents” in the parable to the spiritual world. This shift, as well as the interpretation, is acceptable to RI.

6. However, to allege sin in the third slave’s heart as being responsible for his fear and lack of confidence before his master (but did he really lack confidence to face his master?), might just represent a piece of eisegesis. More so that he is made to represent those who love this present world more than eternal life.

### **SPI-10: The parable of the talents (Sunday School lesson for Junior class)**

1. Comparing SPI-10 and SPI-9 above again<sup>49</sup> shows how one Pentecostal author<sup>50</sup> approaches the same text in different ways and ends up with different results. This brings to mind Lategan’s (2009a:50) question of who determines meaning between the reader and the text. Of course, Du Toit (2009b:112) answers that it is the text (see Section 5.2.1.2 above). These two authors are Reformed scholars and like this present researcher, would disagree with any arbitrarily determined meaning of biblical texts. This brief excursus makes it clear that the integrity of SPI-10 (and by implication SPI-9 above) is questionable. Still, its content will be examined in light of RI.
2. SPI-10 keeps the last judgment in view, but interprets the story as a factual one, not fictional. While RI agrees with the first part of this observation, it queries SPI-10 for failing to recognise the genre of the story as a parable and therefore that it needs metaphoric transfer for its meaning to be unlocked.
3. RI also agrees with SPI-10 on the point that the story emphasises faithfulness in one’s work for the Lord over against quantity of profit that one makes. This is supported by the evidence in Matthew 25:21, 23, where the master commends the first two slaves equally, notwithstanding that the first produced more profit than the second.
4. However, SPI-10’s emphasis on good works as a basis for the last judgment takes the communicational goal of the story off watchfulness for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (according to RI) and re-focuses it on doing good works

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49 A similar scenario was seen with SPI-15, SPI-16 and SPI-17 (see Section 6.3.2.1 above) and is the same case with SPI-38, SPI-39 and SPI-40.

50 The author in this instance is Apostolic Faith Church, though SPI-9 emanates from Lagos and SPI-10 from London.

to be acceptable to the Lord on the last day. This interpretation does not fit the context of the text, not to mention its contradiction of NT (and Reformed) soteriology (e.g. Rom. 1:16-17; Eph. 2:5, 8-9).

5. Equally problematic are SPI-10's equation of "talents" with natural abilities and its inference from vv. 21 and 23 that there is more work to do in the "land beyond" than here on earth. This is still because it sees the story as a factual one and therefore pays attention to details as such. In the view of RI, the story is all about watchfulness for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν; it is not about, and in fact gives no information on, what persons will be doing after the advent of the kingdom.
6. Against the background of Western understanding of the concept "talents" in SPI-10, it exhorts its audience to use and profit from their talents (= natural abilities), as a guarantee to receiving more and as a way of preparing for reckoning when the Lord returns. This does not accord with the text or its RI; but worse so that it further warns Christians that those who are looking forward to the day of the Lord but are not making effort to gain more Christian graces (whatever this means!) in addition to their salvation will be found wanting on that day. This finds no support from the text and therefore cannot be accepted.

**SPI-38: Parable of the talents: What have you done with what I gave you? (Part I)**

1. SPI-38 proceeds with a view of the imminence of Christ's return, stating that the prophecies of Matthew 24 are being fulfilled today. There is nothing to argue at this point, since of course all NT discourse of Christ's second advent greets one with a sense of imminence (cf. Mk. 13:32-37; Rom. 13:11-12; Heb. 10:37).
2. SPI-38 refrains from assigning figures to the word "talents", but interprets it as "something extremely *valuable* – not only valuable to Him, but to the servants as well". Building on an understanding that the word "talent" means "to bear" or something "weighty", she connects it to a description of "glory" as "weight", and explains that just as the glory of God is "weighty" or "valuable", so were the talents in the story. An obvious problem with this interpretation of "talents" is that at both synchronic and diachronic levels, the concept represents concrete, countable reality (unit of money) in the parable (see Sections 5.5.2.1.5.4.3 – 5.5.2.1.5.4.4 above; cf. Louw & Nida, 1989:63), and therefore does not support any form of abstraction.

3. RI agrees with SPI-38 in identifying the “master” in the parable as representing Christ and the “servants” as members of God’s household.
4. However, RI disagrees with SPI-38 when the latter sees the King (Christ) giving the talents (= glory, “something” weighty) out at “every visitation and ... past revivals” and “[stepping] back to see what we would do with what He gave us”, and the “talents” as “something precious ... to use and to do”. In RI, the story portrays a period between Christ’s first and second advents, not any specific event(s) in the experience of the church, no matter how “glorious” it might have been. In terms of metaphoric transfer of significance, RI interprets “talents” in the parable to be opportunities/tools of service that Christ gives to his disciples while they wait and watch for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, not particularly those that are “precious” as specified by SPI-38.
5. RI also does not agree with SPI-38 in suggesting that the subject of the parable is “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done”. While the parable is about the kingdom of God, the context does not suggest any connection with Matthew 6:5-15 or any human activity (like prayer, cf. Matt. 6:9ff) *required* to actualise ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. As has been sufficiently argued, it is about watching for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
6. SPI-38 evidently pushes for too many details and an allegorical interpretation when it sees in the story God, who after blessing believers with his priceless salvation, “turns around and invests in us”. This inference of a further investment drawn from the parabolic distribution of talents, finds no support in either the text or its RI.
7. Also, insofar as RI identifies “talents” in the parabolic world as “opportunities/tools of service” in the referenced (religious) world, it is within acceptable limits for SPI-38 to suggest that God’s trust given to the believer is the responsibility to reveal the message of his love to the world. However, the other assertion in this connection, namely, to carry everything that his Son is: “Christ in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27)”, does not have a standing before RI. The passage does not in any way lean towards some benefit of becoming a believer or the responsibility/privilege of displaying such benefits.
8. Contrary to SPI-38, it is implausible to think of the talents given by the master in the parable as symbolic of salvific gifts, not to mention that these allegedly include Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word, salvation, and repentance. The parable,

in both its narrative and referenced worlds has nothing to do with soteriology or its benefits, but is thoroughly about watching for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

**SPI-39: Parable of the talents: What have you done with what I gave you? (Part II)**

1. SPI-39 persists in a literal view of “talents” in the parable as gifts of God, particularly “faith assignments” (cf. Eph. 2:8-10) – “things yet to be developed”. “Talents” in the parable do not suggest this, and RI understands the concept as units of money.
2. SPI-39 also deduces a leadership principle from the parable: one must submit to a higher authority; and, no matter how anointed, a “number two person” (equating the two-talent slave) should not want to occupy the “number one position” (equating the five-talent slave’s position), otherwise they will fail because that is not where God has called them to. This is of course a nice teaching on its own, but it lacks merit as far as Matthew 25:14-30 is concerned. Imposing it on the text amounts to eisegesis.
3. For those who make excuse of not having talent/gifts (roughly approximating the one-talent slave), SPI-39 explains from Ephesians 2:10 that they have been created in Christ for good works that God had prepared in advance for them to do. In other words, it is not true that they do not have talents (= “faith assignments”). Again, this is strange to the text, and RI repudiates such fine details.
4. SPI-39 also allegorically interprets the third slave’s digging of the ground to hide his talent as representative of Christians who are not doing anything with their salvation other than “protecting” it; as well as in another instance, rehearsing the negatives, the hurts, the pains, and the regrets of the past, as a result of which they would not try anything new. It concludes that this is self-protection and that it makes a person useless in the kingdom. This allegorisation is altogether rejected by RI. (Reformed principles for interpreting the Gospel parables [see Section 5.4 above] exclude allegorisation except where so evident in the Scripture itself, e.g. Matt. 13:1-23//Mk. 4:1-20.)
5. SPI-39’s requirement to “double” all gifts in order to win the Master’s commendation similarly allegorises the first two slaves’ doubling of their talents, and suffers the same judgment as in (4) above. This much, it is also

unacceptable that doubling of gifts fulfills the “reasonable service” of Romans 12:1.

6. SPI-39 comes to a head regarding the so-called “spiritual”/“charismatic”/“prophetic” hermeneutics (or “rhema”) and “Spirit-hermeneutics” of Pentecostalism (see Sections 3.3.2.1.2.1 and 3.3.2.1.2.2 respectively, above) when it claims an interpretation of Matthew 25:29 from “the Lord”. Here, “the Lord” explains that the confiscated talent of the third slave is added to the one who already has ten because the latter “has the ability and has the dedication and the commitment to handle more”. The lesson then follows that God “adds to us as we are capable and dedicated enough to handle what He gives”, and therefore the believer’s duty is to take everything God has given him or her and make it multiply.

In light of RI, allegorisation features much here. Besides, it is worrisome that a Spirit-hermeneutical interpretation of the parable produces a result that is unreliable. One then wishes to ask how the Holy Spirit explains (Gk.: ἐρμηνεύει) a Scripture in a way that does not accord with its communicational goal, namely, watchfulness for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. It may not be wrong, then, to conclude that what Pentecostals call “spiritual”/“charismatic”/“prophetic” hermeneutics, “rhema,” or “Spirit-hermeneutics” is something less reliable than they realise.

**SPI-40: Parable of the talents: What have you done with what I gave you? (Part III)**

1. SPI-40 goes further to interpret “talents” in the parable as “faith-gifts” and the respective slaves (in reverse order) as “faith-starters”, “faith-steppers” and “faith-stoppers”. These are symbols of people with different attitudes to leadership, particularly in terms of initiating change or projects. Again, and in fact without bothering about the allegorical details of these symbols or the lessons so drawn, this interpretation of the parable that tends towards leadership is implausible. There is nothing in the parable that has to do with leadership; it rather calls attention to watch for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
2. It is unacceptable, too, that SPI-40 interprets “outer darkness” (Matt. 25:30, KJV) as “obscurity” or “a place of stoppage ... a place where I no longer have illumination when I read the Word, not understanding what it means”. This interpretation is consequent upon an understanding of the one-talent slave as

Christians who have light/revelation/truth but willfully choose not to work or function within it. Because of this, they are allegedly condemned to “darkness”, where they are “without joy”. To be sure, SPI-40 is not explaining what will happen when Jesus returns, not least Hell (which the context of the parable indicates, Matt. 25:30), but an existential experience of confusion while pursuing this earthly life.

Insofar as RI consistently sees watchfulness for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν as the message of the parable; envisages ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων [= “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, *NIV*] in τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον [= “outer darkness”, *KJV*] (25:30); and the next pericope 25:31-46 talks about κόλασιν αἰώνιον [= “eternal punishment”, *NIV*] and ζῶην αἰώνιον [= “eternal life”, *NIV*] (v. 46), “outer darkness” in 25:30 can mean nothing else but Hell. It symbolises a place of eternal punishment rather than an abstract, existential experience of forfeiture. SPI-40’s understanding here reveals its failure to investigate the meaning of words/concepts in the original language or even in the context of the text, before attempting to interpret and apply them. The very opposite of this is what RI did while attempting an interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30.

### **Conclusion on evaluation of CG-5**

The percentage weight of CG-5 stands at **15.0%** of the total number of samples examined in this study. It is also the most elaborate of all the eleven (11) cognate groups of samples, due primarily to the fact that the samples under it generally tend towards allegorisation, and therefore turn up much detail that needed to be exhaustively evaluated. This is also the only CG that at least on face value focuses interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30 on the second coming of Christ and rewards. However, the evaluation shows that contents of those interpretations diverge to things that have no business with the second coming, the “not yet” kingdom, or eternal rewards.

The SPIs in this group generally approach the text of Matthew 25:14-30 as a factual narrative, and therefore take most of its detail seriously. This has led to unjustifiable

truncation of the text (SPI-2 = **16.7%**)<sup>51</sup>, allegorisation (SPI-9, SPI-10, SPI-38, SPI-39 and SPI-40 = **83.3%**), and even multiple meanings (SPI-9/SPI-10, SPI-38/SPI-39/SPI-40 = **83.3%**). Also evident is reading of ideas that are not congruent with the text into it (SPI-2, SPI-9, SPI-10, SPI-38, SPI-39, SPI-40 = **100.0%**), as well as a view of the kingdom as “already” rather than “not yet” (SPI-9, SPI-38, SPI-39 = **50.0%**), and ahistorical readings of “talent” (SPI-9, SPI-10, SPI-28, SPI-39, SPI-40 = **83.3%**). Most importantly, all six (6) SPIs (= **100.0%**) that purported to be about the coming of Christ and eternal rewards turn out in general to be motivations for all kinds of things but the coming kingdom. Although there are a few points of contact with the conclusion of RI (see, for instance, point 3 under SPI-2, point 4 under SPI-9, points 2 and 3 under SPI-10, and points 1 and 3 under SPI-38 above), CG-5 has not dealt with the matter of the coming of Christ and the kingdom as a primary motif. The “rhema” by which these SPIs were received stands to be questioned. It is therefore concluded that the interpretations in CG-5 are questionable and hence unacceptable.

#### **6.3.2.6 CG-6: Teaching on Christian ministry, leadership and witnessing**

(SPI-3, SPI-14, SPI-31, SPI-33, SPI-34, SPI-35, SPI-37)

##### **SPI-3: Faithfulness – Sermon by Pastor E. A. Adeboye**

1. SPI-3 interprets the parable in terms of faithfulness to particularly Christian leadership structure. Christian leaders should be faithful to God, their superiors, as well as their followers. While this is a laudable Christian lesson, and “faithfulness” is in fact a recurring motif in the parable (Matt. 25:21, 23), RI does not see this interpretation to be “faithful” to the text in its completeness. This is a case of extrapolating the concept of faithfulness from the text and its context<sup>52</sup>, and then building a leadership lesson around it, perhaps leveraging on the master-slave structure in the text. Moreover, it shows that SPI-3 reads the text as a factual narrative, whereas it is parabolic and its meaning should be sought for in another domain.

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51 These data overlap and therefore the percentages are not complementary fractions of 6 (total number of SPIs in the group is 6). Rather, each case is weighed against the number 6, and from there the percentage is calculated.

52 This is a miniature of the so-called Bible Reading Method (BRM) of Pentecostal hermeneutics (see Section 3.3.2.1.1 above).

### **SPI-14: What is the will of God for my life?**

1. SPI-14 proceeds with an interpretation of the concept “talent” as “gift” (skill). It then exhorts that one should recognise one’s gift and put it before God (that is, use it for God) as a reciprocal gesture. This interpretation ignores the historical significance of the concept “talent” and indeed of the entire parable. Its failure to address the matter of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν implies that it has missed the point of the parable and is therefore not acceptable.

### **SPI-31: Trusted with talents**

1. SPI-31 agrees with RI on many points: both agree that the meaning of “talent” in the parable and its meaning in contemporary times are different; both agree that “talent” in the parable metaphorically represents responsibility, although SPI-31 particularly envisages a large (or big) responsibility; both interpret the master’s travelling and after a long time returning in the parable as Jesus Christ who after his resurrection ascended into heaven and will return to reckon with those whom he gave responsibility; both expect trustworthiness and profitability from Christ’s servants (here, RI prefers “slaves”), otherwise which the failed servants/slaves will be cast into the outer darkness (cf. Matt. 25:30).
2. However, whereas RI only identifies “talents” as responsibility (generally, opportunities/tools of service), SPI-31 goes ahead to specify it to be receiving, believing and sharing the good news about God’s gift of his Son for man’s salvation. Consequently, the believer’s “talents” are the words of the Bible which tell us the story of this salvation.
3. Following the master’s chiding of the third slave for failing to deposit his money in the bank to give him interest, SPI-31 infers that God’s return on his investment in the believer’s salvation is thanksgiving to him. One only wonders how salvation and thanksgiving come to be the main issues in this interpretation, whereas in RI the main issue is to watch for the coming of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, and other issues are subservient to this meta-motif.
4. According to SPI-31, the responsibility of sharing the message of salvation with friends and family is as heavy as the talents in the parable, but when done brings great and eternal joy. Like the first two slaves engaged their talents in business and made more money (vv. 16-17) and pleased their master (vv. 21, 23), God wants his people to go out with his grace, love and salvation in Jesus, and bring

more people into that salvation. While this is a very appealing conclusion, it lacks a basis in Matthew 25:14-30 and is thus unacceptable to RI.

**SPI-33: The servant with one talent**

1. SPI-33 matches the five-talent slave with pastors in charge of churches of 350 members or more, the two-talent slave with pastors in charge of churches with 76-350 members, and the one-talent slave with pastors in charge of churches with 75 or fewer members. Neither this correspondence nor the corollary assertion that when Jesus wanted to ascend into heaven, he entrusted his people to pastors according to their several abilities, is explicitly or implicitly implied in the pericope. RI does not support this interpretation because it reads the concept of pastoral ministry into the passage, whereas the passage has only to do with watching for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
2. It is also not reasonable to interpret the idea of productivity in the parable to imply that pastors are under duty to reproduce disciples and plant churches with what they have been given. The implausibility of this interpretation also follows from the logic of the rejection of the first point above.
3. The idea of the one-talent slave's protest against his being given just one or his envy of those who received more than him is also strange to the text. None of the three slaves relates in any way with each other in the text; their relationships are individually and directly with the master. Then also should be mentioned that such detail as a proposed envy or protest ends up allegorising the parable.
4. SPI-33's comparison of the souls of men with "talents of gold", as the former being superior to the latter, and hence the challenge to pastors of "one-talent" churches that they can still make disciples and plant churches, is to say the least very fanciful; but there is no basis in the text.

**SPI-34: Hidden talent**

1. In a very fanciful way too, SPI-34 likens the hidden talent of the third slave to the deliberate failure of the church to engage the services of laypeople. It regrets that instead of reckoning with these "valuable resources", "those gifts wrapped in human bodies" – businesspeople, women, youth and other talented laypeople – the church "too often [lets] them sit on the side-lines". The conclusion that "when it comes to the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30), we are like a "half-talent steward, burying half the talent in our midst", follows from the preceding

argument. For RI, “talents” in the parable are units of money and only mean opportunity/tools of service for ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν when its meaning is metaphorically transferred to the referenced world. They are at all nothing close to “valuable [human] resources” or “gifts wrapped in human bodies”. SPI-34’s conclusion is unacceptable to RI or indeed any truly biblical interpretation of the parable.

### **SPI-35: What is your grace capacity?**

1. SPI-35 correctly describes Matthew 25:14-30 as “the end-time Parable of the Talents”. However, like SPI-33 above, it describes pastors who either grow or lead mega-churches as “five-baggers” (NKJV), warning that not all pastors have been “graced” or “gifted” to run mega-churches. The problem with SPI-35 is that, like SPI-33, its linkage of the pastoral ministry and grace for running so-called mega-churches do not find a basis in the text itself, nor does RI find any useful meaning in SPI-35’s interpretation of the text the way it has done.
2. In fact, the problem with SPI-35’s begins when it mentions only in passing that Matthew 25:14-30 is “the end-time Parable of the Talents”, but does not use that information in the course of interpretation. This is one fact that RI has kept seriously in view throughout its exegesis of the text: both in language and in context the text has to do with nothing else but ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.

### **SPI-37: Is it time for an adventure?**

1. Contrary to SPI-37, RI does not see Matthew 25:14-30 as a conflict parable; it is rather an illustrative parable to elucidate the demand of watchfulness for ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. It was in fact addressed to Jesus’ disciples, not the religious leaders; let alone challenging their self-satisfied religious system – “buried in the ground as it were!” (Here alluding to the third slave’s buried talent.)
2. The inference of an adventure linked to the first two slaves leads up to SPI-37 stating that religion must be an adventure where talents are willingly used for the sake of the king and his kingdom. Two issues are noticed here: one, SPI-37 interprets “talents” in terms of skills or special abilities, while RI interprets it as opportunities/tools of service. Secondly, that religion (i.e. the Christian faith) must be adventurous (as with the first two slaves) as against being boring (as with the third slave) is a questionable deduction from the text. Nor can in true Reformed

hermeneutics can the abundant life that Jesus talks about in John 10:10 be reduced to the adventure project that SPI-37 envisages in the parable.

3. Further in SPI-37, since the kingdom of God is about flourishing (still an allusion to the first two slaves), Christians should not settle for mere survival (the third slave). In this light, it continues, the church should plant churches as a response to the plentiful harvest in the world (cf. Matt. 9:37). Believers should be spiritually and practically pro-active and take godly risks by rising and pioneering all kinds of work in the church, rather than “shrinking back” (cf. Heb. 10:38).

The matter gets more complicated when SPI-37 says that such believers do not need to be “five talent” or “two talent” or even “one talent” persons, but should rather be concerned about how they will use what God has given them. Equally worrisome is the conclusion that if one begins to operate with the gifts one has, one will become more fruitful and stronger in one’s ministry. To say the least, all these deductions and conclusions have nothing whatever to do with the parable. Where is the demand to watch for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν in all these? RI sticks with this kingdom motif contextually determined rather than “importing” fanciful ideas into the text.

### **Conclusion on evaluation of CG-6**

Allegorisation is high in CG-6 (SPI-31, SPI-33, SPI-34, SPI-35 = **57.1%**). The story is read as a factual narrative (SPI-3 = **14.3%**). SPI-3 (**14.3%**) also demonstrates BRM by extrapolating the concept of “faithfulness” and building some teaching around it. The concept “talent” continues to be understood as natural ability (SPI-14, SPI-37 = **28.6%**). Virtually all the SPIs in this CG (i.e. **100%** of the CG) import strange ideas into their understanding of the parable, but particularly SPI-37 (**14.3%**) sees it as a conflict story, which is not evident from the context. In the end, it should be concluded that these SPIs discuss things outside the motif of watchfulness for ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, and therefore are unacceptable.

#### **6.3.2.7 CG-7: Teaching on faith in the word of God (SPI-5)**

##### **SPI-5: You have it, so say it**

1. RI does thought structure analysis of Matthew 25:14-30 as a means of understanding how each thought or verse is connected to others within the

pericope (see Section 5.5.2.1.3.3 above). This leaves no thought or verse standing in a self-contained world, and therefore limits its meaning to the overall communicational goal of the pericope. However, SPI-5 uproots Matthew 25:29 from the thought unit of Matthew 25:14-30 as well as from the literary context of Matthew 24:1-25:46, and then mills a meaning of “faith in the word of God” out of it. This sounds profound but is actually not fitting.

The verse says:

τῷ γὰρ ἔχοντι παντὶ δοθήσεται καὶ περισσευθήσεται·  
τοῦ δὲ μὴ ἔχοντος καὶ ὃ ἔχει ἀρθήσεται ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ.

*For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. NIV*

This is part of the judgment pronounced by the parabolic master on the Πονηρὲ δοῦλε καὶ ὀκνηρὲ [= “wicked, lazy servant”, *NIV*] (v. 26), and actually indicates that there are persons who presume to have a guaranteed place in the coming kingdom but will forfeit it and its benefits because they have not conformed to its demand of faithfulness (cf. Matt. 8:10-12; 25:11-12; Lk. 4:25-27). It is not clear, therefore, how this verse becomes an autonomous teaching on faith in God’s word in SPI-5.

2. Besides, SPI-5 does not recognise either Matthew 25:14-30 as a parable or 25:29 as part of a parable, but goes ahead to interpret it literally. This is why it freely argues that Jesus does not specify what his audience has or does not have, but simply says, “For everyone who has” (v. 29). RI does not pay detailed attention to Matthew 25:29, but some comments are also necessary at this point. In the first place, quoting this portion of the verse as it stands shows that SPI-5 does not care about the syntactical implications of dismembering the whole sentence, “For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance” (v. 29a). The same verdict also holds for the disconnection of v. 29 from v. 28, where the unfaithful slave’s talent is to be seized, and from v. 30 where he is to be banished to τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον [= “outer darkness”, *KJV*] to face ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων [= “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, *NIV*].

Secondly, Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.” Conversely, an interpretation like SPI-5 that is not truly a message “heard through the word of Christ” is a dangerous ground for faith. Perhaps this is one of the unfortunate Pentecostal “rhema” interpretations to reckon with. One can now only wonder how many persons in the audience of SPI-5 have taken in this teaching on “faith in the word of God”, or on praying with the belief that “you already have it”. This is no faith at all, because its foundation is faulty. SPI-5 is highly questionable as an interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30.

### **Conclusion on evaluation of CG-7**

SPI-5 is the only member of CG-7. Evidence above shows that it does not fulfill any rule of careful interpretation. It does not respect general syntactical rules, nor considers the genre or structure of the story. This tearing of v. 29 from the pericope is a damaging hermeneutical practice and is rejected in totality.

#### **6.3.2.8 CG-8: Teaching on Christian victory through love (SPI-24)**

##### **SPI-24: What have you done with his love?**

1. Against the backdrop that love is implanted in the believer’s heart at the point of new birth (cf. Jn. 13:34-35; Rom. 5:5) and that the believer is expected to develop it against the wish of the flesh, SPI-24 illustrates the failure of believers to heed this demand with the one-talent slave’s resolve to hide his talent. In the same way, believers have allegedly hidden the love of God; hence SPI-24’s exhortation that it is time to “uncover God’s love in our hearts, put our flesh under, and obey God’s commandment to love”. Even though they are not mentioned, the context of the teaching implies that the first two slaves represent believers who are generous with their love.

This cut-and-paste illustration on the demand to love is very strange to the parable. In RI Matthew 25:14-30 illustrates nothing other than the need to watch for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. This implies that SPI-24 is unacceptable.

### **Conclusion on evaluation of CG-8**

It is already clear from the evaluation above that this interpretation is questionable and therefore unacceptable. It has nothing whatever to do with Matthew 25:14-30.

#### **6.3.2.9 CG-9: Teaching on watchfulness (SPI-29)**

##### **SPI-29: Reflections on the parable of the talents**

1. At the start SPI-29 gives the impression that it will focus on the issue of being ready for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, but soon veers off to issues of earthly investment and profit-making, and then deduces that the parable “is not a heaven or hell issue, but a matter of rewards (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10).” The concluding exhortation also follows the same logic: “This truth should provide good motivation to ensure that we make every effort to make our life count for the short time we are here on earth”.

This exhortation is not necessarily in favour of the eternal consequence of life on earth (which would align with RI), but is about making effort to please God by earthly successes. It states in this light, “After this life, our eternal destiny will be based on our faith in Jesus. However, we will be held accountable for what we did with what we were given by God.” It is sad that SPI-29 does not see heaven or hell but only reward in the parable. One would only ask what such metaphors as τὸ σκότος τὸ ἐξώτερον [= “outer darkness”, *KJV*] and ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων [= “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, *NIV*] (25:30) mean in the passage; as well as what κόλασιν αἰώνιον [= “eternal punishment”, *NIV*] and ζωὴν αἰώνιον [= “eternal life”, *NIV*] (25:46) mean in the next pericope (25:31-46). This explicit denial of the eternal implications of the actions/inactions referenced by the parable makes the submissions of SPI-29 doubtful.

2. SPI-29’s four-point reflection on the parable borders on God (as a risk-taker) investing in people according to their several abilities and expecting them in turn to take all necessary risks to invest their resources (time, talents, opportunities and finances) so as to please him with their profit. It asserts that Jesus took risks in his earthly ministry and in entrusting his kingdom work to his often fickle followers. They should in turn take risks – including leaving all and following him.

They should confront their fears and insecurities, step out of their comfort zones, and exercise faith.

However, investment, risk-taking, and other similar issues have no place in the referenced world of the parable.

### **Conclusion on evaluation of CG-9**

The interpretation in this CG is doubtful and unacceptable in the light of RI.

#### **6.3.2.10 CG-10: Teaching on divine restoration of talents (SPI-26)**

##### **SPI-26: God is restoring talents**

1. SPI-26 begins with a claim to a vision of “a huge golden shovel”, and the intention of “the Lord” to dig up buried talents to make way for his children to rejoice and thrive. Here, it is immediately clear that what follows is a “rhema” kind of interpretation.
2. In SPI-26, the slaves are “us, the church” and the master is Christ. These connections look to be in order at this point. However, corresponding talents with “everything in our lives that can glorify God – resources, time, money, computers, cars, revelation, hospitality, etc.” needs a closer check. These betray an idea of “talents” as resources that are *possessed* by individuals, whereas the text does not in any way suggest such possessiveness.
3. Besides, SPI-26 gives an equivalent value of one talent as one million dollars, and hence deeply regrets that the slave did not take such an opportunity to multiply his talent. This is regrettably an ahistorical reading of the text. The story has nothing to do with money in the referenced (religious) world, and cannot now be socio-scientifically interpreted or applied in monetary terms.
4. In the same way, the story is not about success, excellence or self-fulfillment, so that, as indicated by SPI-26, there should be the need to become a champion that God wants. The historical background to the parable, as well as literary evidence, shows that the gains so mentioned were for the master, not the slaves themselves. In the same way, when meaning is transferred to the referenced world, the profitability of the disciples is for Christ as the Master, not for the disciples. Reward only comes to them as commendation for their faithfulness and

profitability – and only so when the Son of Man comes back, not here and now. It is misleading to use the parable as motivation to pursue success.

5. From the narrative evidence that each slave received talents according to his ability (v. 15), it is correct to draw the conclusion that Jesus pays attention to individual strengths and weaknesses and does not demand of anyone what his ability cannot carry. Problem arises, however, when SPI-26 asserts that God has trusted the church with the talents in order to administrate “His earthly kingdom” through her (cf. Psalm 8:3-6). Mere mention of “earthly” kingdom (whatever that means!) summarily disqualifies SPI-26 from being considered as a reliable interpretation. It has been clearly demonstrated that the parable is about the “not yet” kingdom of God, not a present or some earthly kingdom.
6. “Using our talents brings Him joy, consequently bringing us joy because – the joy of the Lord is *our* strength.” This is a typical BRM way of stringing verses of Scripture to form a teaching. Here, SPI-26 is stringing the master’s pleasure in Matthew 25:21, 23 with Nehemiah 8:10b. How it fits into the passage at hand is a different matter entirely.
7. The golden shovel mentioned in (1) above must be used to dig up hidden talents and bury fear. This “prophetic” shovel might have much work to do, but certainly not in Matthew 25:14-30. Points (2) – (6) above indicate how problematic this interpretation is. It is baffling how God would grant a vision and yet it does not accord with the Scripture being interpreted. The author of SPI-26 needs to hear Calvin (*Inst.* I.9.3) and Hesselink (1983:100) on the hermeneutical need for “the correlation of Word and Spirit”. SPI-26 rather confirms Hesselink’s fear that “[t]he Spirit apart from the Word can lead into new doctrines and one-sided experientialism which do not conform to God’s objective revelation in his written Word”. Such experientialism is what to expect, as is apparent in SPI-26, unless the Spirit in actual fact confirms the *written* Word of God (Calvin, *Inst.* I.9.3).

### **Conclusion on evaluation of CG-10**

This CG is rich in many aspects of Pentecostal hermeneutics. It demonstrates so-called “Spirit-hermeneutics” (points 1, 7) as well as BRM and socio-scientific approaches (points 3, 6). Other Pentecostal-type emphases are orientation toward an earthly kingdom (point 5) and success (point 4). In the end, the two points of contact with RI

(points 2, 5) are not enough for accepting it as correct interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30.

### **6.3.2.11 CG-11: Interview on investment and influence (SPI-6)**

#### **SPI-6: Blurring the lines: talking life and work with T. D. Jakes**

1. SPI-6 cites Jesus Christ, a spiritual being, as “telling a parable about business investments, and about expecting a return”. This refers to Matthew 25:14-30, and takes particular note of the master’s chiding of the one-talent slave for failing to at least invest his money with exchangers or the bank. This business slant is, according to SPI-6, as valid as the “spiritual” meaning of the story.
2. These claims must be queried because the story has nothing whatever to do with business investment or returns. Neither its content nor its context has any leaning on investment. Therefore, while the call in SPI-6 to influence the world with the Christian faith is a valid one, couching that call with Matthew 25:14-30 is to force a relationship on two incompatible entities.

#### **Conclusion on evaluation of CG-11**

The conclusion of CG-11 is thoroughly business-oriented. It sounds like TOW-Project’s s.a.) proof-text claim that the parable of the talents is “[o]ne of Jesus’ most significant parables regarding work ... set in the context of investments” (Section 1.3.2 above). However, it is abundantly clear from the context that nothing like that is intended in the parable. Therefore, it is here concluded that CG-11 is a questionable interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30.

## **6.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ON THE EVALUATION OF THE SPIs**

The forty (40) SPIs investigated above produce a diversity of results that are incongruent with Matthew 25:14-30 as well as with the salvation-historical (or redemptive-historical) motif of the biblical canon. At the theoretical level (Chapter 3), Pentecostal hermeneutics sounded promising; but the examples evaluated above show that in some cases interpretation does not necessarily correlate with theory. Whereas Matthew 25:14-30 is meshed in a larger eschatological discourse unit (Matthew 24:1-25:46) and calls attention to the need to always be ready for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, all the SPIs examined above discussed entirely different issues. The few that ever mentioned “kingdom” meant not the “not yet” kingdom that the context of the parable signifies, but the “already” (or even an earthly) kingdom. They generally ignored

the genre and historical significance of the text. Allegorisation was heavily evident, and the so-called “Spirit-hermeneutics” (or “rhema”) played a significant role.

It is therefore to be concluded that Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 in cases as discussed above are questionable and therefore cannot be depended upon for a useful message from the passage.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this last chapter of the study, a brief and coherent summary of the findings of the preceding chapters will be done, namely, the concept of Gospel parables and parable research (Chapter 2); the nature of and approaches to Pentecostal hermeneutics, particularly how these affect Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 (Chapters 3 and 4); the nature of and approaches to Reformed hermeneutics generally, as well as particularly Reformed principles for interpreting the Gospel parables, and how these and other Reformed principles affect the interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30 (Chapter 5); and finally what the disparities or differences are between Pentecostal and Reformed interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30. Then effort will be applied to drawing a final conclusion on the investigated Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 vis-à-vis a Reformed exegetical attempt on the passage; that is, whether or not the examined Pentecostal interpretations of the passage are plausible (Chapter 6). Finally, some recommendations will be made based on the final conclusion reached.

#### 7.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In Chapter 2 it was found out that parables constitute a distinct genre in the Synoptic Gospels, and that they were a central teaching tool for Jesus during his earthly ministry (cf. Matt. 13:3, 34; Mk. 4:2, 33-34). With roots in the OT מָשַׁל (transliterated “mashal”) and NT παραβολή (transliterated “parabolē”), parables are extended figures of speech whose narrative claim(s) is (are) fictional but verisimilar in the narrated world, and whose truth-significance is realistic in the referenced world. They elucidate, and lend themselves to a metaphoric transfer of meaning from one domain of understanding (usually the natural world) to another domain (usually the religious world).

Parables are prophetic tools, indeed “stories with intent” (Snodgrass, 2008:8), used to pass God’s message across to his people to help them change their ways and return to God. On some occasions, they function as weapons of controversy, like when Jesus had to rebuke unbelieving people or repudiate attitudes that were inimical to the kingdom of God. Also very importantly, parables and the kingdom are very closely related in the NT. They presuppose the kingdom, seek to explain different motifs of the

kingdom, and in fact make sense only against the backdrop of the message of the kingdom.

It was also observed in Chapter 2 that the church and the academia have often understood the parable-genre in different ways, as a result of which interpretation of any given parable by different exegetes, especially across Christian traditional boundaries, can almost be guaranteed to turn up varying results<sup>53</sup>. From the allegorical agenda of the patristic era, to the one-point approach of Jülicher's era, and now a multidimensional, literary approach that takes account of the concerns of many different theories, parable research is now a richer venture than it was before.

Chapter 3 examined biblical hermeneutics in general and Pentecostal hermeneutics in particular. It made it clear from the onset that the Bible lends itself to human interpretation, being simultaneously a divine and a human book; that interpretation of the Scripture has actually been pursued right from OT times up until the present time; but also that the Holy Writ places a demand on its interpreters to interpret it correctly, if they must get from it the very message of God. This conversely alerts one to the endless possibilities of misinterpreting and misapplying the texts of Scripture, even with dire theological and existential consequences, and hence the need to pay attention to certain rules in order not to run haywire with strange ideas purported to be from the texts of Scripture. Biblical hermeneutics is therefore the discipline that mobilises all the needed spiritual, intellectual, technical and creative tools to gain valid understanding of the communicative intent of a text of Scripture in a way (or ways) that makes (or make) sense to the reader in his/her existential situation.

Pentecostal hermeneutics, associated with the early-nineteenth-century-born Pentecostal Movement, is defined in this study as an experience-oriented, narrative-oriented, and praxis-oriented practice of biblical interpretation that emphasises the active role of the Holy Spirit in generating meaning from the canonical texts, and in such a way that promotes the identity and meets the needs of the Pentecostal community. For Pentecostals, the authority of Scripture and the authority of (spiritual) experience are relatively important. Also characteristic of Pentecostal interpretation is an inductive

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53 This is in fact the situation while comparing Pentecostal and Reformed interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 in Chapter 6 above, as well as even among the sample Pentecostal interpretations themselves in Chapter 4.

reading approach known as “Bible Reading Method” (BRM). BRM is partly a synchronic interpretive strategy that would extrapolate a verse from its larger context and then would string together all the verses that relate to the investigated word, theme or topic, and from there would form a doctrinal understanding of the issue. The other part of it is that as a modified proof-text approach, BRM involves the interpreter looking up a specific word in any English Bible concordance, making a list of all its occurrences, and drawing out “truth” on the basis of the reading of the texts. On the whole, Pentecostal hermeneutics emphasise the immanence of God, the narrativity of the Scriptures, the role of the charismatic community, and the role of the Holy Spirit. Its enterprise is said to be “spiritual”/“charismatic”/“prophetic” hermeneutics or “rhema” (McKay, 2013:57-58), or “Spirit-hermeneutics” (Pinnock, 2013:239-240).

In Chapter Four, forty (40) sample Pentecostal interpretations (SPIs) of Matthew 25:14-30 were collected and analysed. These samples were randomly picked from various sample source types (STs). The STs were validated by checking to be sure that they were truly of Pentecostal origin. One major factor that was looked out for was a belief in Spirit baptism with the first evidence of speaking in unknown tongues. Once that was established, the SPIs were grouped into Cognate Groups (CGs) and their contents analysed accordingly. Care was taken to note the context of interpretation (CoI) of the parable in each case. The interpretations were found to be divergent, with 17 samples (42.5%) apparently focusing on finance/success/wealth, 6 samples (15.0%) on Christ’s second coming, and the rest on a variety of other interests.

To test the credibility of the SPIs analysed in Chapter 4, effort was made in Chapter 5 to interpret Matthew 25:14-30 according to Reformed hermeneutical principles. The Reformed interpretation (RI) of the passage was comprehensive in approach, critically combining both synchronic and diachronic methods. The text and its context were *inter alia* heavily emphasised as landmarks for the exegesis. RI also sought to satisfy the general Reformed principles of the analogy of faith, the analogy of the Scriptures, and a search for the literal sense of the text. Particularly for parables, the Reformed principles that were found to be useful for the analysis were a search for the theological significance of Matthew 25:14-30, its meaning in historical and literary contexts, as well as in relation to its frames and the neighbouring parables. Following this multifaceted investigation, it was concluded that Matthew 25:14-30 is a parable about the *parousia* of Christ and of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν [= “the kingdom of heaven”], and that it is calling

the disciples of Christ to be vigilant/watchful/ready for the *parousia*, in view of the fact that the exact time of its advent is not known by any man. The need to faithfully and profitably serve Christ while waiting for this event was also highlighted.

Thereupon, Chapter 6 sought to know if the SPIs focused on the motif of vigilance for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. This was done by comparing and contrasting the SPIs with the RI. The disparities or differences were evaluated using the conclusion of the RI. In the end, it was found that none of the 40 SPIs addressed this motif. They rather addressed a variety of other subjects that neither the text nor its context suggests. Even the SPIs in CG-5, which seemed at face value to deal with the *parousia* motif ended up diverting to mostly mundane issues. Those which mentioned “kingdom” scarcely meant the “not yet” kingdom of heaven, but the “already” or even an earthly kingdom of God.

Besides the results of the SPIs, their methods were also observed to range between anachronistic and allegorical readings, not to mention obvious eisegetical tendencies or “rhema”-type interpretations. Chapter 6 therefore reached a conclusion that confirms the central theoretical argument of this research; that is, that some Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30, when examined in the light of Reformed hermeneutics, produce questionable results and are therefore implausible.

### **7.3 CONCLUSION BASED ON THE FINDINGS**

It is here recalled that in Chapter 1, Fee and Stuart (2003:149) were cited as having said, “For all their charm and simplicity, the parables have suffered a fate of misinterpretation in the Church second only to the Revelation.” The wide variety of the Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 (the parable of the talents) investigated in Chapters 4 and 6 above, as well as their corresponding deviation from the ever so explicit motif of vigilance for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν in the literary context of the story, tend to affirm this claim. Based on the findings above, this study wishes to conclude as follows:

1. That the Gospel parables are fictional stories whose meaning does not lie in the narrated world but in a referenced world. Particularly, they are about ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, and are as well prophetic and conflict tools.

2. That, unlike Reformed hermeneutics (see Sections 5.4 and 5.5 above), the SPIs of Matthew 25:14-30 did not seem to follow any standard rules. The very wide variability of meanings among the forty (40) SPIs tends to give evidence to this assertion.
3. That none of the Pentecostal interpretations focused on the motif of vigilance for the *parousia* of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν that Matthew 25:14-30 actually seeks to communicate.
4. That where “kingdom of God” was ever mentioned, it had to do with the “already” phase of the kingdom, whereas without much exegetical trouble, the literary context shows that the text is part of an eschatological discourse and therefore has to do with the “not yet” aspect of ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.
5. That the SPIs also give evidence that some Pentecostals practice anachronistic (or literal) and allegorical readings of Matthew 25:14-30. In part, this accounted for the ahistorical reading of a major concept in the parable, namely, “talent”, which interpretation included money and special, natural/spiritual abilities. On the other hand, it implies returning to the allegorical approach of the patristic era, about a century after Jülicher had exposed the error of that method.
6. That there are also evidence of eisegesis and “rhema”-type interpretations of the text, which in all cases deviated from the text’s communicative intent.
7. That the forgoing, especially points 4 and 5 above, were responsible for most of the SPIs concentrating on the narrated world, rather than metaphorically transferring meaning to the referenced (religious) world as it should be with the Gospel parables.
8. In short, it can safely be concluded from the samples that all the SPIs of Matthew 25:14-30 are questionable, and therefore implausible.

#### **7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE FINDINGS**

1. Of primary acknowledgement here is the fact that the Reformed interpretation of Matthew 25:14-30 done in Section 5.5 above proceeded with a humble tentativeness. That is to say that its conclusions were never assumed at any point to be final. Therefore, as an evaluative tool, more study needs to be done to further open up the parable and ground the exegetical result as authoritative for evaluating other attempts.

2. More samples of Pentecostal interpretations of Matthew 25:14-30 should be studied to further test the unsatisfactory conclusions reached above. Perhaps more Pentecostal interpretations will be found to be truly unsatisfactory, or there may be others that will otherwise be vindicated.
3. Meanwhile, on the basis of the results produced by the above investigations, it is obvious that Pentecostal interpreters of Matthew 25:14-30 need to stop and re-assess their methods. They need to critically evaluate their approaches and results within the larger Evangelical hermeneutical framework. While they cannot but keep their identity as a unique community of interpreters, this recommendation should help them avoid, as best as they can, what Stanton (1992:380) describes as “a picnic” of meanings.
4. Particularly, they should learn from the insights of Reformed principles for interpreting the Gospel parables (see Section 5.4 above), as well as from general Reformed hermeneutical procedures (see, for instance, Section 5.5 above). These principles and procedures try to keep the result of exegesis as close as possible to the communicative intent of the text – and this should be the goal of Pentecostal interpretation of the Bible, ever before considering devotional, pragmatic or other issues.
5. Fee and Stuart (2003:149) were cited in the preceding section as asserting that the Gospel parables have been exposed to misinterpretation in the Church “second only to the Revelation”. That statement is a wake-up call against the anachronistic, allegorical and eisegetical readings generally observed in the SPIs. While, according to Lategan (2009a:59), “[t]here is no safeguard against deliberate contra-readings and there is no guarantee that readers will read in continuation of the trajectory of the biblical communication itself”, Pentecostal interpreters, as a people who claim to believe in the authority of Scripture (Archer, 2009:53-54; Oliverio, 2012:133-134), will need also to *deliberately* “ask where the good way is, and walk in it” (Jer. 6:16c). That way, they will be sure, like the Berean believers (cf. Acts 17:11), to practice a hermeneutic of biblical authority, not of trust of this or that interpreter (Elliot, 2018).
6. Generally and on the basis of Scriptural injunctions, Christians should heed the warning to “correctly [handle] the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15; cf. Eze. 19:14c; 2 Cor. 1:13), remembering, as indicated in Section 3.1.1 above, that proper understanding and proper application of Scripture have both theological and

existential consequences for the believer (Klein *et al.* 2004:19; Lategan, 2009a:13).

7. To cap all that has been said, this researcher wishes to close this work with a reflection on Elliot's (2018) answer to an own question, "What must we do to restore a safe 'hermeneutical house'?" In his answer he says,

Christians can be no less careful with the interpretation of Scripture than the inspired writers were themselves. Truly, the church of Jesus Christ must be the Scripture-driven church. God's inspired, inerrant Word must be our sole authority, and our infallible critic, in every area of life and ministry – beginning with our interpretation of His Word.

This counsel for biblical hermeneutics is, in the opinion of this researcher, one that is apt for the study at hand and indeed any attempt at interpreting the texts of the Christian Scripture.

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