

**THE STORY OF THE LOST SON:
AN OLD TESTAMENT STORY RETOLD**

Dr. Charles P. Baylis¹

CHAPTER I

GOD’S “LOST SON” FROM DEUTERONOMY 30:1-9

INTRODUCTION

The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32) is one of the most well known of all the gospel stories. However, through the years the interpretations have been many and varied. Some use it for behavioral principles, such as a guide on how to raise children. For instance, the father in the story would be seen as “letting his child go” as a lesson to parents that they should not overprotect their child, but to let him or her experience the “school of hard knocks”. Another view sees the father’s unequal treatment of the two siblings as an example of the unfair treatment of children by parents. In this view, the younger son wastes his life, yet suffers no repercussions while the elder son is conscientious yet unrewarded. Of course, both of these views can be quickly discarded when the context of the story is examined. Jesus is not responding to the Scribes and Pharisees accusations in 15:1-2 with a lesson on raising children or how to be unbiased with one’s offspring.

Most interpreters do correctly see the father’s graciousness as paralleling the way God treats the repentant sinner. The major variance among them is whether the younger son represents a backslidden Christian (originally being in the father’s house would demonstrate he was once saved) or whether he is unsaved and comes to God in salvation (coming back to the house would demonstrate his initial salvation).

But each of these two interpretations has a similar problem, what to do with the elder son? If the younger son is a backslidden believer returning to God, then the clearly antagonistic elder son must be, by contrast, a faithful believer (since he remained in the house), which he obviously is not. If the younger son is returning and thus coming to salvation, then the antagonistic elder son must represent those already saved. However, since the elder son is clearly the literary antagonist, that would cast a negative light on longtime believers.

It is important to recognize that the interpretation is not taking a story and fitting it into the reader’s preconceived categories (e.g., saved, unsaved). For while these

¹ Charles P. Baylis is Professor of Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas. His website teaches The Biblical Story in 14 videos accompanied by additional resources, located at www.BiblicalStory.org, see also the “Resources” button.

categories may be of major importance to the reader's contemporary situation, it may not be the categories that the author is using in his contextual argument. And this is the case in Luke 15. Jesus' categories are not drawn from the reader's relevant categories, but from the Biblical Story. Thus the story must be analyzed by its place in the Biblical plot, and its meaning found in that context.²

THE CENTRAL PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED

The setting of the story occurs in 15:1 where Jesus is offering God's mercy to outcasts from Judaism, tax collectors and sinners. The conflict enters in 15:2 as the Pharisees and Scribes accuse Jesus of acting contrary to God, as they say, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." In their perception the God they worshipped would never have accepted these outcasts in their unworthy state, and thus Jesus could not be Messiah, as He claimed.

It is important to recognize, as many interpreters do, that Jesus tells this story as a direct response to the Pharisees' accusation in 15:2. However, almost universally, interpreters see "The Lost Son" as simply an explanation to these Pharisees that God is merciful.³ Since the Pharisees felt Jesus was a false prophet, a response that reemphasized the exact error of which He was accused would hardly have convinced them (or others). Their belief that God rewarded good works and judged those who were worthless would not be contradicted by a made-up story about a father who welcomed an unworthy son. Since Jesus was responding directly to the Pharisees' accusations, to tell three non-validated stories comparing a sheep owner, a woman, and a father to God was hardly something that would impress them or others. In short, most interpreters' views do not see Jesus as countering their indictment.

² The Bible is dramatic narrative. As such no part of the story can be analyzed on its own since each episode is only a contributor to the overall message. It is like a play in which a scene appears, contributes its needed sequence to the plot, and then disappears. Thus an episode only receives meaning as it is seen in its unique contribution to the whole. Refer to "Finding Jesus in the Old Testament," at www.BiblicalStory.org, "Resources," "Articles" for an explanation of "Dramatic Plot" and how it works, particularly in the Biblical narrative of the Old Testament.

³ Kenneth E. Bailey is a broadly referenced source, yet he joins the others by simply explaining that Jesus averred God was merciful without actually proving it. In addition, he is among these who do not determine the meaning of the story from its larger context. As a result he ends up inputting his perception of historical background. He has written a rather thorough book on "The Lost Son" (Finding the Lost Cultural Keys to Luke 15, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972)) as well as included it in other books such as Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

THE LOGICAL FALLACY OF USING ILLUSTRATIONS AS PROOF

Put another way, telling three stories that make comparisons is not considered proof according to any standard rule of logic. For instance, to review the habits of a sheep owner or a woman and then extract that God acts in a similar manner, would be the logical fallacy of “weak analogy.” In “weak analogy” one uses the literary vehicle of comparison, but without enough in common between the two associated things so that any prediction of parallel traits becomes unreliable.⁴ Said another way, one cannot accurately extract characteristics of God by simply observing sheep owners or women. Similarly in the third story, one cannot assume that character traits of fathers, even good ones, are those of God. Even if the story of the father were an actual event, it would still not be a proof, being the logical fallacy of “anecdotal evidence.” “Anecdotal evidence” is the error of presuming an overarching principle from a unique event. Simply because this may have occurred to some real father⁵ does not mean that it reflects God’s character.

THE OLD TESTAMENT AS THE STANDARD OF PROOF

So, the answer Jesus gives is not just a made-up illustration, but must be from the Old Testament, the accepted standard of truth. So, Jesus simply told them the story of God’s errant “Lost Son,” Israel, drawn primarily from Deuteronomy 30:1-9. By referencing this passage He showed that God promised to extend mercy to exiled

⁴ For a further definition see “The University of North Carolina,” “Writing Center,” “Fallacies,” “What do fallacies look like?” “Weak Analogy.” <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/fallacies/> (Accessed June 10, 2015).

⁵ While it might seem possible that this might have occurred to a natural father, it is quite unlikely that a father would hold a celebration for a worthless squandering son, and not require him to perform some work to repay the debt. That might take the form of letting him work off, at least to some degree, what he had squandered (or some other remedial type of practical experience). This father is unique since he represents God. God’s character is unique. He loves a returning sinner, so much so that He pursues them at all costs. The reason is that His character is merciful. He loves to give mercy. So He runs at the slightest hope that the lost son is returning when He sees him on the horizon. He begs the elder son even though his offspring is rebellious, just on the chance that perhaps he might change and request mercy.

Of note also, is that one cannot repay God for sins in any way, as may be the case with earthly fathers. In respect to God, the only way for sinners to be reconciled is to have their sins totally forgiven by God. Thus the father in this illustration is uniquely God.

Israelites who returned to God. That mercy was to be expressed in the Messiah,⁶ and that forecasted day was happening before their eyes.

The story found in the Old Testament told how God gave His son, Israel, his inheritance⁷ in Land of Canaan. But instead of clinging to God, they lusted after the Gentiles, their practices, their gods, and their women.⁸ This wayward son pursued them and found himself in a foreign land, poor and rejected. Deuteronomy 30:1-9 prophesied that one day he would return to God and God would forgive him unconditionally, restore his standing in God's family, and take him into the kingdom. Finally God would once again "rejoice" over this returned son (Deuteronomy 30:9). Thus, by telling them the story of God's son Israel, Jesus was pointing out that these outcast Israelites were returning to God according to prophecy and Jesus was implementing it that very day. Thus the story of "The Lost Son" proved that Jesus was indeed implementing His very place in God's story as the merciful means by which God was pursuing His own "Lost Son."

However, once Jesus had answered the Pharisees' accusations of mercy to the outcasts, Jesus then turned to these Pharisees to explain how their opposition to Jesus and mercy was opposition to God Himself. And to demonstrate it to them he continued his story with the elder son, again based on the Old Testament, this time on the Book of Jonah. In that story, God had forgiven Ninevah, a pagan Gentile city. Yet Jonah had directly opposed God's issuing of that mercy. So Jesus again showed that God is merciful, not only to Israelite outcasts, but also to Gentile pagans. So, like Jonah, the elder son opposed the father's merciful forgiveness. And now the illustration was

⁶ To understand the Old Testament's anticipation of Messiah as the means by which forgiveness of sins would come about, go to www.BiblicalStory.org, "Resources," "Articles," "Finding Jesus in the Old Testament," or "Commentaries," "Introduction to the Biblical Story." Particular passages that linked Messiah directly to the implementation of the ultimate forgiveness of sins were Genesis 3:14-24, Isaiah 53, and particularly Psalm 110 where the "Son" sits (completed action) as a Priest following the completion of the perfect, once for all, sacrifice.

⁷ This timing of the giving of the inheritance is problematic to most interpreters since there appears to be no historical cultural reference to a father giving inheritance before he died. However, this illustrates that this story is not about a typical (or even rare) father and thus parallels may not necessarily be found in the culture. It is the unique story of God, who is unlike any father. It is the story of God and His son, Israel, from the Old Testament. God gave Israel the inheritance first when He gave them the Land of Canaan in which to experience their life with Him.

⁸ See Deuteronomy 7:1-3 for the warning that they should not pursue the women of these nations for they would lead their sons away from God. Solomon did exactly this in 1 Kings 11:1-8. Hosea expresses how the Northern Kingdom will pursue these Gentiles as Gomer's wife, representing Israel, pursued other lovers.

complete. In accusing Jesus of opposing God by giving mercy, the tables were turned. It was the Pharisees who were opposing the very God they claimed to worship.

THE MESSAGE OF LUKE 15: LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE PLOT

In order to analyze narrative literature, the first thing that must be done is identify the literary flow of the plot in order to determine precisely what the author is saying, i.e., his message. Following that, this article will identify the validation by showing the allusion to the Old Testament.

THE SETTING: JESUS MESSIANIC MISSION (15:1)

The beginning statement of the chapter (15:1) reveals the attractiveness of Jesus' message to formerly rebellious Jews; "the tax gatherers and sinners were coming near to listen to Him." Many interpreters see Jesus as simply being kind to sinners and thus an example of how the reader should also act. But was this a case of common friendliness, or was He accomplishing a uniquely Messianic function, that of forgiving their sins?

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is never presented as simply engaging in friendly conversation. Every word He says is related to revealing Himself as Messiah, the means by which sins would be forgiven. So, when these outcasts come to listen to Him it is solely because of His uniqueness as God's Messiah. In the Scribes and Pharisees' statement of 15:2 the uniqueness of Jesus' actions are reinforced, "this Man receives sinners and eats with them."

THE CONFLICT: THE ACCUSATION OF "RECEIVING SINNERS" (15:2)

The conflict of the story is when the antagonist brings a conflict or tension to the Main Character. Here in 15:2, the Scribes and Pharisees, representing Satan, accuse Jesus, representing God.

In the context of Luke, not just anyone could "receive" (*προσδέχεται*, literally, "looking for" or "anticipating"⁹) sinners on behalf of God. This word is used elsewhere in Luke as "looking for" or "waiting for" the Kingdom or the King. It is not used in a casual relationship sense as if someone was giving a simple greeting. Jesus was pursuing

⁹ Gingrich Greek Lexicon, Electronic Version, "προσδέχομαι." It is used elsewhere in Luke to designate "waiting for (NASB)" or "looking for" the Kingdom of God to appear. Then in 15:2 Jesus would be "looking for" or "waiting for" them to return to Him as prophesied. In other words, in context, the word is used for a specific function much beyond a casual relationship.

the repentance of sinners and, upon their return, welcoming them into relationship with God.¹⁰

Implementing this full forgiveness was solely a Messianic function. Earlier in the book this can be seen in the story of the paralytic in Luke 5:17-28 where Jesus forgave his sins. The Pharisees recognized this immediately as a claim to be God's Christ from Jeremiah 31:31-34¹¹ as they stated, "Who can forgive sins except God alone?" Isaiah 53:6 had declared that this complete and final forgiveness would only come through the Messianic sacrifice that God would implement.

Additionally, had Jesus just been being kind to the outcasts, the Pharisees would hardly have been concerned. Contrary to the common perception that Pharisees never did kindly deeds, Jesus noted in Matthew that the Pharisees were contributors to the poor (Matthew 6:2), and so it could not simply have been Jesus' kindness that was so upsetting.

In their accusation (compare with Luke 5:30) they recognize that He is claiming to perform a function granted only to the Christ,¹² God's sole means of giving mercy (see Luke 5:21¹³). They were confronting His claim that He was the Messiah of God.¹⁴ Thus their accusation is more than a kindly question requiring some simple explanation, but a bold confrontation intended to defeat Jesus' claim and prove Him a false prophet worthy of death.¹⁵

¹⁰ As can be seen in the literary parallel when Jesus tells the story of the "Lost Son," there the father is not just keeping company with his returning son, but is "receiving" a returning, repentant, son.

¹¹ Jeremiah 31:31-34 prophesied that "God would forgive their sins" as a future fulfillment, following the institution of the New Covenant in place of the Old.

¹² Joachim Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 132 (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1972), agrees saying, "Jesus makes the claim for himself that he is acting in God's stead, that he is God's representative."

¹³ Jesus' claim to forgive sins on behalf of God was countered earlier in the Book of Luke in 5:17-26. There the Scribes and Pharisees accused Him of blasphemy for His claim to forgive the sins of the paralytic. He responded by performing a visible miracle; the raising of the paralytic to affirm the invisible, that is, His forgiveness of the paralytic's sins. Now in 15:2 their attack on His claim to be Messiah is based on their perception that Jesus' actions were not in conformance with the God He claimed to represent.

¹⁴ The "Messiah" or "Christ" is found in Psalm 2:2 and is the sole representative of God on earth. All things that God does are through His Messiah.

¹⁵ A false prophet was defined in Deuteronomy 18:20 as one who spoke in God's Name, but had not been authorized by God to do so.

THE ACCUSATION OF “EATING WITH SINNERS”

In this instance the claim that He “eats with them” is intended to be similarly demeaning. Eating at a shared table was an act indicating commonality or “fellowship.” So knowing this, it is important for the reader to understand exactly what Jesus was doing and why this so upset the Pharisees. At first glance, like the Scribes and the Pharisees, the reader is very aware that Jesus certainly did not claim to share their unrighteous character. And, in fact, it would seem that there simply was not much that Jesus, as God, would have had in common with these rebellious, hopeless, sinners. One simply did not eat with those who were of unequal status. So when Jesus ate with sinners it would have been perceived that He was considering Himself to be of the same righteous status as they. Since the perception on which the Pharisees determined status was self-righteousness defined by the traditions of religious Judaism,¹⁶ it was incongruous for One who claimed to be the righteous Messiah to be eating with those who were clearly in violation of temple practices.

Yet, when Luke’s contextual meaning is understood, the reason that Jesus ate with sinners becomes all too clear. Had their commonality been based on one’s true righteousness, Jesus would have had to eat alone. But this is not the perspective Luke presents regarding eating at a common table. Luke’s perspective is that God lowered Himself and became a human to be in common with lowly mankind, so that He could save them as brothers.¹⁷ Thus Jesus ate with sinners because of their common humanity and His interest in returning them to a relationship with the Father.

¹⁶ There are multiple times that Jesus accuses the Pharisees of adding to the Law with their traditions. See Matthew 15:1-7, John 7:19-24. For instance, one should note that the Pharisees’ accusations against Jesus for healing on the Sabbath was a standard they had created, since doing deeds of mercy on the Sabbath was exactly what one was supposed to do according to Isaiah 58.

¹⁷ The Book of Luke has long been understood to emphasize the humanity of Jesus. From His humble birth in a stable to poor parents, celebrated by outcast shepherds, to His death as a criminal, along with two other criminals, Luke’s emphasis on His journey as a human being is not to be missed.

Of course this concept was clear as early as Genesis 3:15, where it was prophesied that God would send His full Representative, the Son, the Christ, to come and be a Man so that He could die for His brothers’ sins. The sacrifice that was to come was a human sacrifice for one’s human brother by this Christ, the “Seed of the Woman.” Refer to the Genesis commentary at www.BiblicalStory.org, “Resources,” “Commentaries,” “Genesis.”

This discussion is also found in Hebrews 2:9-11, “⁹ But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of

Understanding this as the basis of commonality, the reader would then expect Jesus to eat, not only with sinners of low religious status, but with sinners of high religious status, since all were human sinners in need of God's mercy. And this is exactly what Luke presents. For ironically, while Jesus did eat with sinners of low religious status in 15:1-2 (as they had accused Him), He also ate with sinners of perceived high religious status (the Pharisees) only one chapter earlier in 14:1.¹⁸ Luke's point is that Jesus had to become human and suffer with all in order to save them (Philippians 2:5-8, Hebrews 2).¹⁹ He came as an elder brother to save his brothers and lead them into the Kingdom. Thus, when Jesus eats with sinners, it is to share God's mercy as a fellow human, the Messiah.²⁰

death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.¹⁰ For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.¹¹ For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren . . . “

¹⁸ Jesus also eats with them in 7:36. In addition, later they will argue that they should enter the kingdom because they ate with Him (13:26), and this gave them commonality with Him. In 15:16, notice that the Lost Son was not able to eat with the Gentiles since they did not consider him of worthy status with them. But in 15:23, the dinner for the Lost Son is due to his same status with respect to the valuing of the father, over against the elder son who will not join them because he feels they both (younger son and father) not worthy of his status.

¹⁹ The story of the Lost Son, a parallel to the story of Jesus in the setting of 15:1-2, shows the father giving up his aura of high status to “run” to the unkempt son and hug him and kiss him. Clearly the father did not give up who he was, but lowered himself, disregarding his physical image, to reach out to the son in forgiveness.

²⁰ This is shown throughout the Book of Luke as Jesus touches unclean things. In the Old Testament the unclean would make the clean, unclean. Now Jesus touches the unclean and it becomes clean since He is the source of the clean. Thus the sinners came to Jesus to have Him make them clean. It was not the other way around where the sinners would make him unclean, as the Pharisees perceived it. He was Messiah and only God could forgive sins or make someone clean. No amount of good works could accomplish either, whether in the Old Testament or the New. The Messiah is now the sole means of the fullness of cleansing as anticipated by the Old Testament ritualistic cleansings.

THE RESPONSE: JESUS' THREE STORIES (15:3-32)

The response of Jesus to the Pharisees' accusations was to tell them three stories, The Lost Sheep, the Lost Drachma, and the Lost Son. This trilogy is a progression, as one might expect.

The first two stories are clearly different than the third in structure. They technically are not stories with plot, but are situational illustrations similar to conditional sentences (If . . . then . . .). Jesus will use these two illustrations as the means of defining the two sides of the argument and their respective, but conflicting, value systems.

THE LOST SHEEP AND LOST DRACHMA:²¹ CONTRASTING VALUES

There are always two strong contrasting sides in stories. First there is the good side represented by the hero protagonist. And then there is the evil side, represented by the antagonist. These two are diametrically opposed. What the protagonist calls good, the antagonist calls evil, and vice-versa. Thus, in analyzing these three stories, the interpreter needs to isolate the contrasting characters and their related philosophies. Of course, the sides will be represented by the two sides of chapter 15, God on one side, versus the Scribes and Pharisees on the other.

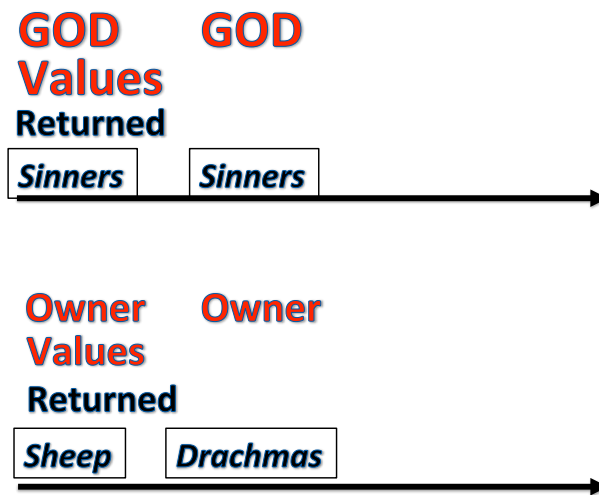
THE LOST SHEEP AND LOST DRACHMA: SCRIBES AND PHARISEES VERSUS GOD. In the first two stories, the contrasting characters are set up very clearly. The Scribes and the Pharisees are purposefully invited to relate themselves to a sheep owner²² (“what man among you having one hundred sheep . . . ?”, 15:4) and the

²¹ It is important that one recognize this word, typically translated “coin,” is “drachma,” or about one day’s wages. The word is “drachma” and should be translated as such. In a day when savings were difficult, 10 days’ wages would be of great value.

²² There is an almost universal, but errant, interpretation that occurs with the Lost Sheep illustration. That is, interpreters identify Jesus (or God) directly with the sheep owner (normally referring to Him as a shepherd) and make Him the Good Shepherd who loves the sheep. The context from earlier in Luke, and very strongly in the preceding chapter (to be dealt with in a subsequent discussion chapter), identifies clearly these two contrasting value systems, materialism versus lost sinners. Thus the contrast continues here as well, that is, Pharisees care about lost sheep, while God cares about lost sinners. While the Good Shepherd is a valid theological identity, it is not here that the author is doing that, but in John 10. Here the point is that the Pharisees are identified with a “sheep owner,” not necessarily a shepherd, but one who owns the sheep. Thus the relationship is strictly that of material value. If one blurs these lines here, then one will lose the authorial intended materialistic contrast of the Pharisee. So these contrasts must be emphasized. This is clearly the case as Jesus pulls the Pharisee into the identification as a materialistic sheep owner when He says, “What man among you . . . ?”

women in the audience are invited to relate to a drachma-owning woman (“or what woman having 10 drachmas . . . ?”), both of whom have lost one of their respective possessions. God’s possessions are presented, by contrast to both the sheep owner and the drachma-owning woman, as lost sinners.

VALUE: RETURNED SHEEP AND COINS VERSUS RETURNED SINNERS. Now the most important thing to discover in the analysis of characters in a story is their contrasting value systems (character desires). “Rejoicing” is the key word shared by both parties, which indicates what each values. Their commonality is that they both rejoice when something they value was lost and is returned. The difference between the two is what causes the rejoicing.



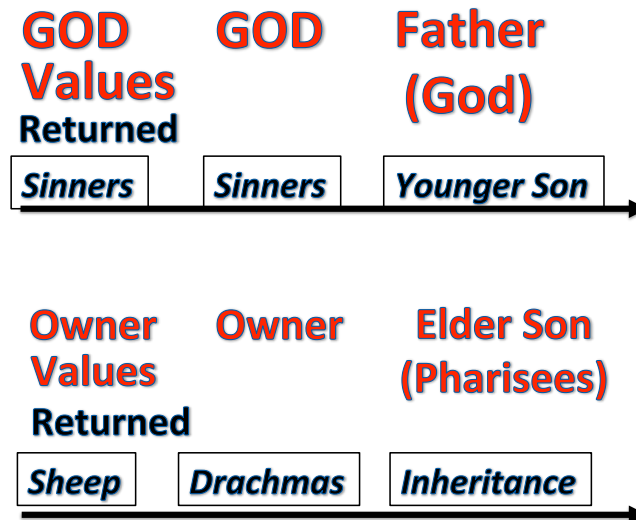
Of course, the Pharisees would have agreed immediately with the excitement over the repossession of this material good (i.e., “a sheep”) that was considered lost. And the women would also agree that they would have great excitement over a lost drachma that had been returned.

But while the Pharisees identified with returned lost wealth, they would have objected when Jesus averred that God was unlike them and did not value returned lost wealth, but instead valued returned lost sinners. Since they already had expressed their objection to welcoming the hopeless outcasts (15:1-2), they would not have changed their objection simply because Jesus told them about how He viewed God.

THE STORY OF THE LOST SON

Having clarified their differences in The Lost Sheep and The Lost Drachma as returned sinners over against returned material wealth, now Jesus will clarify how these two contrasting sides will view the outcasts in a story where the outcasts are represented by the younger son, God represented by the father, and the elder son represented by the

Pharisees. Of course, the outcomes are predictable. As they identify the value of the younger son, God will welcome the returned sinner, while the elder son will be concerned over the lost, non-returnable, material wealth that his sibling had squandered.



SETTING: THE RETURN OF THE LOST SON (15:11-24)

The story of “The Lost Son” is about a son who leaves his father (sinner departing) and takes his inheritance (material identity departing). He finds himself in another country without any respect (sinner lost), while squandering the inheritance on loose living (material identity lost). He then returns (returning sinner) without the inheritance (material identity still lost). (15:11-20a)

It is important to recognize clearly the state of this younger son as he ponders his return home. He had wasted totally the father’s inheritance (lost material wealth) as well as any personal value (e.g., reputation, a sinner against the father), since even Gentiles thought he had no value, since they also related his value to his material possessions. Thus as this son appears on the horizon, he had no material value to offer anyone . . . including the father (representing God). He was even unworthy of the father’s kindness.

THE RESPONSE OF THE FATHER (15:20b-24). It should not be a surprise when Jesus continued the story to show the respective responses of the father (representing God) and the elder son (representing the Pharisees), since the responses were defined in the earlier two illustrations of the lost sheep and lost drachma.

Now the interpreter must not miss the point as to why “returning” was of so much value to the father, and that the return, of necessity, must be empty-handed (unworthy). It was because of this father’s unique character. The lesson both sons needed to understand was the value of the father’s character, not their own. And the value of the

father's character was that he loved (i.e., "rejoiced") to give the enjoyment of his character ("mercy) to those who were unworthy of it. In other words all value had to be found in the father's character, not in any of the sons, nor could it ever be. They only had value as they received it from the father.

Thus the father rejoices just as expected (like God did over sinners in the Lost Sheep and Lost Drachma), since this son is a lost sinner (unworthy) who returns. The father's overwhelming desire to repossess this lost sinner is seen when he spots the lost son on the far horizon,²³ runs, hugs and kisses, and ushers him personally back to the feast that he begins immediately.

CONFLICT: THE RESPONSE OF THE ELDER SON.

In the story begun in 15:1, the setting included Jesus receiving the outcasts. Similarly in the Lost Son story, the setting includes the son's departure, return, and the welcoming of the son by the father (similar to Jesus' welcoming the outcasts). And like the conflict of the story occurred with the Pharisees objection in 15:2, so now the conflict of the Lost Son occurs when the elder son objects to the father's action of unrestrained mercy.

Based on the earlier illustrations the reader would also correctly expect the elder son (representing the Scribes and Pharisees) to be angry (selfishly judgmental, the opposite of rejoicing), since the inheritance of the father, which the younger son had taken with him (material identity departed), was now lost forever. In fact, that is exactly what the elder son claims, that this material wealth given to the younger son could never be returned, as he states, "(he) devoured your (the father's) wealth with harlots" (15:30). Jesus mentioned this earlier in the story stating, "he squandered his estate with loose living" (15:13), and "he had spent everything," (15:14). Thus the elder son sees this younger brother as a waster of inheritance, from which wealth he gained his very identity.²⁴ The point was immensely clear, and thought provoking as well. The elder son had assessed his younger brother's identity based on all the valuations he knew . . . and

²³ The Greek text reads "Ἐτι . . . μακρὰν" (15:20), meaning the father saw him, "yet . . . a long way off," implying a great distance, thus implying the father was watching for the son and had not stopped looking since the day he left.

²⁴ But then, there is more. The elder son not only considers the younger son to be a sinner, but considers the father to be that as well. When the elder son says, "Look! For so long . . . I have served . . . but you never celebrated with me . . .", he is calling the father a sinner as well. According to the elder son's value system, the father is wrong and is just like the younger son . . . a sinner.

The father then explains to the elder son that he had to celebrate upon the return of a lost sinner because that is his character. In essence he is saying he cannot help himself. If a sinner returns . . . he must celebrate.

his younger sibling came up wanting. He had absolutely no value. The elder son was correct. His brother was unworthy. What he didn't recognize was that the father's value was not in one's unworthiness, but in their return . . . so that he could give mercy . . . and rejoice.

Finally, the two sides are completely identified. The father (God) loves to extend mercy to lost sinners so they might enjoy his character, and He does exactly that to the returning son. The elder son (the Scribes and the Pharisees) loves his own material identity and thus rejects any reinstatement of this younger son, since he has no worth and he returns none. The story of the Lost Son perfectly illustrates the situation Jesus found Himself in the setting and conflict of 15:1-2.

THE FATHER'S PURSUIT OF THE ELDER SON

Interestingly the story of the Lost Son answers more than the Pharisees' had alleged. Their accusation was that God would not give unrestrained mercy to those outcasts who were coming to Jesus.²⁵ Jesus answered that question when He told of the father in the story, who not only pursued the returning younger son, but also even "ran" as soon as he saw the son on the far horizon. Not only that, but coming to him, he "hugged" and "kissed" the manure-covered son. Jesus was explaining that, like the father in the story, God also has unrestrained exuberance when pursuing returning sinners.

But now Jesus continues, beyond answering the Pharisees' accusation, to point out that God was not only pursuing these worthless "sinners and tax collectors," but that He was also pursuing these rebellious Scribes and Pharisees . . . also worthless sinners.

For now that the father of the story had accomplished the safe arrival of the younger son (outcasts) back into the safety of his house, this father (God) who loves returned sinners, moves again. But this time he leaves the house, not to pursue a returning son, but to beg the elder son (Scribes and Pharisees) to become a returning son, so he might rejoice over him as well. This elegant father, despite the rebellious attitude of his elder son, is driven by the simple hope that the son might also respond and the father would get to extend him mercy as well. So, as he did when he "ran" the younger sibling, the father again leaves his elegant patriarchal image behind and "begs" this elder sibling to join him in the celebration.

Should the Pharisees have understood that they were like the elder son, they would have strongly objected to Jesus' view that God was pursuing their repentance as well. Like the elder son, they considered that they were worthy on their own merits and did not need to "return." What the elder son missed was the simple observation that this father restricts his celebrations to returning worthless sinners. Had he realized that fact,

²⁵ However, this is explained when the verse is seen in the context of Luke, that Jesus came to heal the sick, and all were sick. God is pursuing all men.

and repented of his perceived worthiness, he could have had the celebration he longed for.

THE ELDER SON'S OBJECTION TO THE FATHER'S VALUES

However, the response of the elder son is shocking when seen in contrast to the humble father's request. He speaks one word meant to convey how wrong the father is, as he retorts, "Look! . . ."

Then the elder son vehemently rejects this offer of mercy from the father as something totally unneeded. He had no desire to glorify a father who did not elevate him on his own merits or care about his material accomplishments. He wanted a celebration that centered on his worthy materialistic identity instead of the father's character values, and requested a goat so that he could celebrate with his friends . . . apart from the father. His friends shared a common value system with him, and would certainly rejoice together over his accomplishments.

It is important to recall that the elder son had also received the father's inheritance (15:12), and the author thus intends that these two sons be compared on the basis of what they had done with the father's material wealth. The elder son, by contrast, obviously had not squandered it and thought that his preservation of the father's material goods was what the father should have wanted. And so he saw himself as worthy of a celebration.

Interestingly the more the elder son speaks; the more he reveals his great character flaw. He claimed that "for so many years he had served" the father (15:29). Yet service was always to fulfill the master's desires, not one's own. And the father's desires were for the elder brother to join the celebration of the father's mercy. Yet he would not, thus indicating he did not "serve" the father's desires, but served his own. In fact, his very argument with the father shows that he wants to change the father's desires, not serve them.

He also boldly stated he had never neglected a command of the father's (15:29), yet only one verse earlier he had rejected the father's "begging." Commandments are the indication of one's desires. Thus "begging" is an increased expression of one's desires. Yet again he had rejected his father's request.

He also expresses that the father had never rejoiced over him (15:29). Again this should have tipped him off to the fact that he was not pleasing the father's value system. Had he watched the father rejoice over the returning younger son he would have realized what the father valued was²⁶ the repentance of the unworthy.

²⁶ Interestingly the elder son doesn't include the father in the celebration, but simply wants him to give a goat so he can celebrate with his friends (separately from the father), recognizing the father's criteria for celebration was different. If the father were

Not only does he not understand the father's desires, and thus not achieve them, he gains his righteous standing by comparing his own material identity to that of the failed younger sibling. Since the younger son had lost his material identity and the elder son had not, it appeared to him that he was more righteous and thus more worthy.

The father was not going to change (15:32). The father basically concludes the discussion by stating that this is his character, which was mercy, was the way he was and it was not subject to change.

In the eyes of the father, the elder son was doing exactly the same as his younger sibling had, rebelling against his value system (his character). And while this elder son had never physically departed, the father had never had his admiration, that of the father's merciful character. Since he didn't understand he was lost (unworthy), he would not return (i.e., repent). Yet the father still pursued his repentance as well, for he longed to have him join the celebration.²⁷

SUMMARY:

The father's character is one that loves to give mercy to those who are in need and are not worthy. The elder son not only did not realize that, but pursued honor and worthiness on his own terms, through success and material identity. Thus he could not understand how this younger sibling could waste the father's material wealth, be totally unworthy, and still be restored and celebrated. And since he did not understand the father's values, he was not able to respond when the father pursued him so as to give him mercy as well. His problem was simple, the father sought those who were unworthy, and that was both of the brothers. The difference was, one was unworthy and perceived himself as such. The other, the elder brother, was also unworthy, but did not perceive himself as such. He had his own worthiness, but it was worthless in the eyes of the father since the father did not value material wealth. The son needed to realize he was unworthy and "return."

Jesus had made His case. Not only was God pursuing lost outcasts to have them return to Him, He was pursuing the Scribes and Pharisees as lost sinners as well. While God valued returned sinners, the Pharisees had created their own value system of material accomplishments based on selfish ambition. They were "worthy" and thus would not

to be able to celebrate with the elder son and his friends, the father would have to change his value system (what he rejoiced over).

²⁷ But interestingly it would not be simply joining the celebration over his brother's return, but it would be the exact celebration he had condemned the father for not having . . . a celebration for him and his friends, a celebration over his own return. In fact, the celebration that was going on was intended to be for him as well as any returnees, but he had rejected it.

return. They would not experience the merciful character of the Father, as the outcasts did.

JESUS' PROOF FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

At this point this study has only demonstrated the literary flow of Jesus' argument against the Scribes and Pharisees. As previously mentioned, Jesus must prove how this analysis is correct. So Jesus, based on the Old Testament, shows them that God is pursuing returning Israelites, like these outcasts, so that He can extend mercy. And once having shown that, it would be clear that they, not He, were opposing God Himself.

The Old Testament was the requirement put forth by the Gospel writers as proof that Jesus is the Christ of God (Luke 24:47, 44; John 20:31). The Hebrew Scriptures revealed God's story as it anticipated and identified His coming Messiah. This was the common source to determine truth by both the Pharisees and Jesus. Statements such as, "Have you not read . . ." ²⁸ and "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures . . ." ²⁹ or "You search the Scriptures for you think that in them you have eternal life and it is these that speak of Me . . ." ³⁰ reflect Jesus' use of the Old Testament as the commonly accepted foundation of proof. It was the ultimate proof of Jesus' Messianic claims.

THE STORY OF GOD'S LOST SON, "ISRAEL" FROM DEUTERONOMY 28--30

The warnings and prophecies of Deuteronomy 28—30 were still future when Moses preached them. Speaking on the Plains of Moab prior to their entry into the land to conquer Jericho, Moses encouraged them to obey when they entered their inheritance of the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). He also warned them of famine, sickness, invasion, and exile should they disobey (Deuteronomy 28:15-68) by pursuing the Gentiles and their practices (Deuteronomy 7:1-3, 25). In Deuteronomy 30:1, he stated clearly that they would ultimately rebel and be exiled into Gentile lands (Deuteronomy 28--29) from where they would repent and make a final return to God in the last days (Deuteronomy 30:1-2, 4:29-30). ³¹ It was then that God would show compassion and forgive them, change their heart and restore them to the land of Israel and their kingdom, and rejoice over them (Deuteronomy 30:3-9).

²⁸ Matthew 19:4, et.al.

²⁹ Mark 12:24.

³⁰ John 5:39.

³¹ Deuteronomy 4:30 parallels Deuteronomy 30:2 describing also the final return of Israel but adds that it is in the "last days." The last days were the times following the appearance of the Christ and the realization that the fullness of God's righteousness had come to earth in the Messiah.

THE SON'S (ISRAEL'S) DESIRE FOR THE GENTILES

But Israel, like the Lost Son, had desired the things of the Gentiles instead the things God had uniquely given to them to represent Him fully, including their inheritance of the Land of Canaan.³² Yet even while they were at the edge of entering their inheritance, during the very period of time the lectures of Deuteronomy were coming from Moses' mouth, the Israelites were rebelling and implementing their desires for the women and the gods of the Midianites and the people of Moab (Numbers 25:1-9). Moses had warned them against pursuing their women and gods in Deuteronomy 7:1-4. This desire to leave the things of YHWH for the pagans continued into the period of the Judges where they were lured by the decadence of the Canaanites. Samson, like Israel, violated the covenant and his parent's instructions by pursuing a Philistine woman.³³ Ultimately, at the height of the Israelite Kingdom, Solomon also fell victim as he intermarried with pagan women and worshipped their gods (1 Kings 11:1-8). Thus, when God finally sent them into exile in Gentile lands, it was making their desires their judgment (cf. Romans 1:16-31). Thus when the Lost Son left home he was paralleling Israel's exile into Gentile lands by God. They had desired the Gentiles during the time they were in the land, and now God had given them what they wanted. The younger son was leaving the father to fulfill his desires with the Gentiles as Israel had, even to being (self) exiled.³⁴

THE SON'S (ISRAEL'S) SUBJECTION TO THE GENTILES

The northern kingdom, Israel, was exiled into Assyria in 722 B.C. while its sister, the southern kingdom of Judah, was exiled into Babylon in 586 B.C. Daniel prophesied that this Jewish exile (called "The Times of the Gentiles;" Luke 21:24) would last³⁵ through four Gentile Kingdoms; Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and finally Rome (Daniel 2, 7).³⁶ Daniel stated (Daniel 7:13) that these satanically³⁷ controlled Gentile dominions

³² See Hosea for a very detailed description of Israel's desire to pursue the Gentiles as other lovers, instead of their husband, God.

³³ Judges 14:1.

³⁴ Hosea makes this point; that the exile was simply God giving them over to their desires (Hosea 2).

³⁵ While there was a partial return to the land under Persia³⁵, it was acknowledged even then that the Gentile dominion still continued (Nehemiah 9:36-37).

³⁶ Exile here is defined as being under the dominion of another nation, even though some still lived in the occupied land.

³⁷ That demons control these four kingdoms is found in Daniel 10:13, 20.

would only be eliminated when a “Son of Man” appeared during the fourth kingdom. The “Son of God” (Psalm 2:7-9) would finally come and destroy the Gentile Kingdoms and bring in the final Israelite Kingdom of God.

THE SON’S (ISRAEL’S) RETURN AND THE COMPASSION OF THE FATHER

The portion of the prophecy of Deuteronomy that was yet to occur when Jesus arrived was Israel’s return to God and His compassionate response prophesied in Deuteronomy 30:1-3. When Israel repented God would change their heart (“I will circumcise your heart”; 30:6), so that they would never again disobey. Subsequently, God would then return them to the land (Deuteronomy 30:3-4) and restore the Kingdom to them abundantly (Deuteronomy 30:5-9).

THE FATHER’S (GOD’S) FORGIVENESS OF THE SON (ISRAEL)

The Old Testament had forecast that an ultimate forgiveness of sins would be made available in the last days that was unlike what was available under the Old Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This full forgiveness of sins would not be available until Messiah came. Isaiah 53:6 had stated that this mercy would one day be offered to Israel through the Messiah’s sacrifice, “All we (Israel) like sheep have gone astray and we have turned everyone to His own way and the LORD has laid on Him (the Messiah³⁸) the iniquity of us all.” According to Psalm 2 the Father would administer everything exclusively through His Christ (Psalm 2:2, also titled the “Son of God;” Psalm 2:7). As the fourth and final Satanic kingdom of Daniel’s prophecy (i.e., Rome) arose and prospered, the last Old Testament prophet arrived (Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1). John the Baptist³⁹ announced the imminent availability (Matthew 3:2) of God’s compassion (Deuteronomy 30:3) in the “forgiveness of sins” (Jeremiah 31:34) and the “circumcision of heart” (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:29) required for Israel to receive the Kingdom. Daniel’s “Son of Man” had now arrived and was available to give them this forgiveness of sins and new heart. His message, “Repent (or return; *μετανοείτε*⁴⁰) for the Kingdom of

³⁸ Isaiah 40-66 is about the conquering of Babylon (the first of the Gentile kingdoms which extends into the following three) and the return of the exiles under the great Davidic King, the ultimate warrior, who conquers the earth. This Servant of YHWH, the King, then is the sacrifice for sin (Isaiah 53). That sacrifice was similar to the Passover Lamb so that Israel could be delivered from Egypt, and Pharaoh would be conquered.

³⁹ John the Baptist’s statement to “Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 3:1-2) was an indicator that the Last Days were upon them in the appearance of Messiah to eliminate the “Times of the Gentiles,” and restore the rule to God.

⁴⁰ For an explanation of the use of the word “return” or “repent” (*μετανοεω* and *ἐπιστρέφω*) and its use in the New Testament as related to *שׁוּב* in Deuteronomy 30:1-3, see this author’s article, “Repentance in the Book of Acts in the Light of Deuteronomy 30:1-

Heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2), was repeated by Jesus (Matthew 4:17) as He arrived to administer the changes required for entry into the kingdom.⁴¹ Following that regeneration of heart He would bring in the Kingdom of God prophesied in Deuteronomy 30:7-9.

DEUTERONOMY 30:1-9 AND THE DAY OF MESSIAH

Thus, when Jesus told them the story of the Lost Son on that day in Israel, He was telling how God’s lost son, Israel, was to return to God according to Deuteronomy 30:1—9. He showed that His actions of welcoming repentant sinners were not only in accordance with the character of God, but were actually fulfilling that prophecy through Himself as God’s Anointed One (Psalm 2:2) in the “last days,” which had now begun. As God’s Messianic representative He was seeking sinning Israelites and joyfully receiving them upon their repentance. The sinners and tax collectors were the first in a long line of Israelites who would come to the Christ in the “last days”⁴² prior to the “Son of Man’s” ultimate establishment of His earthly Kingdom.

Thus, Jesus defense was complete. He was indeed performing the Messianic action of administering forgiveness as He fulfilled prophecy and introduced the Last Days, the forgiveness of sins, and the welcoming of repentant Israelites into the kingdom.

6” in *The Michigan Theological Journal*, 1:1 (Spring 1990): 19-34. Also refer to another article by this author, “Naomi in the Book of Ruth in Light of the Mosaic Covenant” in *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 161 (October – December 2004): 413-31. The frequent use of the word נָשׂא by both Naomi and Ruth is discussed with respect to its allusion to Deuteronomy 30:1-2. Both articles may be obtained from the website, www.BiblicalStory.org, “Resources,” “Articles.”

⁴¹ Throughout the Old Testament it was continually prophesied that Israel would not gain their permanent kingdom until they received a new heart different from that of Adam. It had to be like God’s character so that they could fully obey God (Ezekiel 36:26-27). This was also referenced as “circumcision of heart” (Deuteronomy 30:6), as opposed to “circumcising their own heart” (Deuteronomy 10:16, see also Jeremiah 4:4). Under the New Covenant their character would be changed to a righteous one like God’s. This would allow them to obey (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This character would be imputed into them (God says “I will”). This is reflected throughout the New Testament as in John 3:3 where Jesus, alluding to Ezekiel 36, stated that the kingdom of God could not come until man was regenerated (that is, the new birth).

⁴² Reference Hebrews 1:1-2, 2 Timothy 3:2.

**THE FATHER’S (GOD’S) PURSUIT
OF THE ELDER SON (THE PHARISEES): JONAH 4**

The story of the Lost Son’s departure, return and celebration, seems so complete that it is not infrequent to hear it alone without the part about the elder son. In fact, the elder son provides a difficulty for some interpretations and so is ignored in many quarters. But as was shown in the literary structure of Luke 15, the elder son’s objection is the “conflict” of the literary structure that is parallel to the “conflict” introduced by the Scribes and Pharisees in 15:2. So if seeing the Deuteronomy basis for the “Lost Son” portion of the story proves the rightness of Jesus’ actions in 15:1-2, then the story of the “elder son” would also require an Old Testament basis to prove the Pharisees were wrong. Thus, Jesus appends the story of the elder sibling to the story of the “lost son” using none other than the Book of Jonah.

THE PHARISEES, LIKE JONAH, OPPOSED GOD’S MERCY

The similarities between Jonah and the elder son are fairly obvious. Just like Jonah was angry with God for His mercy toward unworthy Ninevah, the elder son became angry at the merciful character of the father toward the lost son.

Jonah’s response to God:	But it was bad to Jonah a great evil, ⁴³ and he became angry (וַיִּהְיֶה) . . . (Jonah 4:1)
Elder son’s response to the father	But he became angry (ὠργίσθη) . . . (Luke 15:28)

And just as God came to explain to Jonah about His character of mercy, so the father tried to explain His character of mercy to the elder son. God had pursued Jonah as well as the father pursuing the elder son.

God’s response to Jonah:	Then the LORD said, “. . . should I not have compassion (חַסְדִּי; “pity”) on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons ⁴⁴ who do not know <i>the difference</i> between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (Jonah 4:11)
Father’s response to the elder son:	and his father came out and <i>began</i> entreating him . . . And he said to him, . . . “But we had to be merry and

⁴³ It is not to be missed how Jonah calls what God does as “evil,” the opposite of God’s “good” character.

⁴⁴ Like the Pharisees, Jonah had compassion on a plant (physical thing), but not on people.

rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found.”
(Luke 15:28, 31-32).

It was immensely clear that not only was God going to show mercy to returning Israel, but according to the Abrahamic Covenant He would extend that mercy to the Gentiles (e.g., Ninevah). God was a merciful God to all the repentant. Yet the elder son was, like Jonah and the Pharisees, opposing the very character of God. And the father was, like God, pursuing the Pharisees for their repentance so that God could celebrate over them as well.

JESUS IS THE NEW JONAH, THE ADMINISTER OF GOD’S MERCY

But there was much more. The Book of Jonah was not simply used to parallel the elder son’s attitude to Jonah’s failure. The Book of Jonah actually prophesied the rebellion of Israel (in Jonah) against the Messiah (the One who would be the message of mercy), who was yet to appear. Thus the very rebellion that was taking place that day in Israel as the Pharisees opposed Jesus, was fulfilling that prophecy.

The Book of Jonah had told the story of a prophet of God who, like the nation he represented, opposed the very message of mercy that he carried for His God. In the failure of Jonah to administer God’s mercy from his heart, the book anticipated a Greater Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; the Messiah) who would come from within that rejecting nation. Yet He, unlike Jonah, would administer His message of mercy willingly from His very character, for Jesus was that message of mercy. In fact the message of mercy that Jonah carried was the very mercy that was to come in this Messiah. Luke 11:29-30 expresses that Jesus was that new Jonah who would wholeheartedly administer the ultimate forgiveness of sins, first to the nation, Israel (Matthew 10:6, Luke 9:1-2, 10:1), and then to the Gentile nations (Matthew 28:19, Luke 24:47). Thus the Scribes and Pharisees were opposing, like Israel and the original Jonah, not only God, but also the prophesied Messiah who was to administer God’s mercy as the long awaited New Jonah. Luke records Jesus stating that this (formerly) reprobate City of Nineveh, who accepted the preaching of the old Jonah, will judge the Nation Israel for rejecting the New, and Greater, Jonah.

³⁰ "For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. . . . ³² "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

(Luke 11:30, 32)

THE BOOK OF JONAH AND JESUS' DEFENSE

In using the Old Testament as the basis for His stories, Jesus had proven the Scribes and Pharisees were not only wrong, but were opposing God and His very Messiah in the implementation of God's purpose for Israel. Interestingly enough, any opposition to God and His Messiah would ultimately be met with judgment that would be executed by this Christ Himself (Psalm 2). Now the tables had totally turned. The accusers were guilty of the very capital crime and punishment that they had proposed for Jesus; that of opposing God's character. Yet, inherent in Jesus' message, based on the Book of Jonah, this merciful God was pursuing the Scribes and Pharisees that day as Jesus tried to convince them of the mercy of God that was offered through Him.

SUMMARY:

JESUS DEFENDS HIMSELF BY SHOWING HE IS FUFILLING PROPHECY AS THE CHRIST

To interpret the story of the Lost Son correctly, one must be aware of the contextual issues. The Pharisees were accusing Him of being a false Messiah worthy of death. Jesus had to defend Himself from that serious accusation which required nothing less than an accurate use of their common source of truth, the Old Testament. Jesus did this using Deuteronomy 30:1-9 (the story of the Lost Son) and the Book of Jonah (the story of the Elder Son). In doing this, He showed He was entirely in conformance to the prophecies of the Messiah, and the Scribes and Pharisees were shown to be the rejecters of God and His mercy. Ultimately, if they persevered in their rejection of Him they would perish at His hands (Psalm 2). However, should they recognize Him, they too could receive that mercy.

CONCLUSION

Today, the Story of the Lost Son continues. Hopeless sinners, "lost sons," continue to come to Jesus for this long awaited forgiveness. Some are Jews, and like the sinners and tax collectors they see their hopelessness and come to their Messiah, Jesus. Others are Gentiles, who, like the people of Nineveh, also come to this Jewish Messiah. But still others, Jews, like the Scribes and Pharisees, object to God's compassion. They still claim their God is a God of earned righteousness who will justify them because they are physical "children of Abraham" (Luke 3:8). These self-righteous deny that they are hopeless and in need of the mercy of God through Jesus. But one day the Deuteronomy 30:1-2 prophecy will be completely fulfilled when the nation Israel, God's son, realizes that they, like the "Lost Son" must return to God (Zechariah 12:10) and this Messiah will "welcome" them and return to save them and return them to the inheritance in the Land of Israel (Zechariah 14). Then God will once again "rejoice" over them (Deuteronomy 30:9).