

‘Cut in two’, Part 1: Exposing the Seam in Q 12:42–46

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This publication argues for the existence of a seam between verses 44 and 45 of the parable in Q 12:42–46. In the process, a case is also made for identifying the second half of the parable (Q 12:45–46) as a redactional addition to a more original first half (Q 12:42–44). The arguments that make up this article form the basis for a follow-up article on the redaction of Q 12:42–46 within the context of the Sayings Gospel as a whole.

Introduction

The parable of the loyal and wise slave, as I prefer to call it, appears in both Matthew (24:45–51) and Luke (12:42–46). There is enough verbal and grammatical overlap between the two versions to justify its place in Q (Crossan 1974:22; Dodd [1935] 1958:158; Funk & Hoover 1993:253; Luz 2005:221; Marshall 1978:533; Scott 1989:208–209; Taylor 1989:138; see Bock 1996:1171, n. 3). In their Critical Edition of Q, the International Q Project offers the following reconstruction and translation of Q 12:42–46 (Robinson, Hoffmann & Kloppenborg 2000: 366–375, 2002:124–127):

⁴²τίς ἄρα ἐστὶν ὁ πιστὸς δοῦλος [καὶ] φρόνιμος ὃν κατέστησεν ὁ κύριος ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκειείας αὐτοῦ τοῦ δοῦναι [αὐτοῖς] ἐν καιρῷ τὴν τροφήν; ⁴³μακάριος ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος, ὃν ἔλθων ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ εὐρήσει οὕτως ποιοῦντα. ⁴⁴[ἀμήν] λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπάρχουσιν αὐτοῦ καταστήσει αὐτόν. ⁴⁵ἐὰν δὲ εἴπῃ ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ· χρονίζει ὁ κύριος μου, καὶ ἄρξεται τύπτειν τοὺς [συνδούλους αὐτοῦ], ἐσθί[η] δὲ καὶ πίνη [μετὰ τῶν] μεθυ[όντων], ⁴⁶ἤξει ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἐκείνου ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἣ οὐ προσδοκᾷ καὶ ἐν ὥρᾳ ἣ οὐ γινώσκει, καὶ διχοτομήσει αὐτόν καὶ τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀπίστων θήσει.

[⁴²Who then is the faithful [and] wise slave whom the master put over his household to give [them] food on time? ⁴³Blessed is that slave whose master, on coming, will find so doing. ⁴⁴[Amen], I tell you, he will appoint him over all his possessions. ⁴⁵But if that slave says in his heart: My master is delayed, and begins to beat [his fellow slaves], and eats and drinks [with the] drunk[ards],⁴⁶ the master of that slave will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him to pieces and give him an inheritance with the faithless.]

Exposing the seam

Even from a superficial reading of the parable it is immediately evident that, on the one hand, verses 42–44 belong together, and on the other, verses 45–46 belong together. A closer look at the text supports such an intuitive observation. There are a number of textual indications that betray a redactional seam between verses 44 and 45.

A double ending

The first and most obvious indication of a redactional seam between Q 12:42–44 and Q 12:45–46 is the parable’s idiosyncratic double ending. The parable of the loyal and wise slave is distinctive in featuring two possible outcomes: one positive and one negative (cf. Allison 2004:439; Donahue 1988:98; Etchells 1998:110; Taylor 1989:141; Valantasis 2005:168). Without attempting to address redactional development, Fleddermann (2005:628, 633, 635) tellingly labels verses 45–46 the ‘negative half of the parable’. The only other parable of Jesus to also feature both a positive and a negative outcome is the parable of the wedding feast in Luke 12:35–38 (Kirk 1998:234).¹ With both parables, featuring a double ending is evidence of redactional development (cf. Funk 2006:30). It is only logical to assume that the second ending represents redactional elaboration, not the first ending. In addition, the artificiality of featuring the same character for two opposite endings supports not only the proposal of a seam between verses 44 and 45, but also the claim that the second ending is most probably secondary (cf. Blomberg 1990:191; Bock 1996:1180; Crossan 1974:22; Jeremias [1958] 1963:55–56; Luz 2005:221, 222; Marshall 1978:542; see Funk 1974:53–54). In being disloyal rather than loyal, and reckless rather than prudent, the second character does

1. I do not consider Q 6:47–49 to be a parable (cf. Luz 2005:221, 223).

not fit the criteria established by the opening question, but contradicts them by veering off in a different direction (cf. Nolland 2005:998). As Valantasis (2005:169) correctly notes: 'A switch has taken place in the narrative.'

Small forms

One cannot help but notice that the first half of the parable is made up of a series of small forms. Each of the first three verses qualifies technically as a separate literary small form (Fleddermann 2005:627, 633, 635, 636; Jacobson 1992:197). Verse 42 introduces the parable with a rhetorical question (Dodd [1935] 1958:158; Luz 2005:221). Verse 43 constitutes a macarism or beatitude (Bock 1996:1179; Crossan 1983:59; Hays 2012:50; Jacobson [1982] 1994:101, n. 9; Kirk 1998:234; Luz 2005:221; Nolland 2005:998; Scott 1989:211). Verse 44 is an amen saying that functions both to buttress the beatitude in the previous verse, and to conclude the train of thought (Marshall 1978:541; cf. Kirk 1998:234; Scott 1989:211). In obvious contradiction to Q 12:42–44, verses 45 and 46 harbour no literary small forms whatsoever. The lack of small form indicators in Q 12:45–46 is certainly suggestive of redactional invention. What is more, this shortage strongly suggests that Q 12:45–46 was added to Q 12:42–44, as opposed to the other way around.

Literary emphasis

That the pericope should be dissected between verses 44 and 45 is further suggested by the fact that verse 44 features no less than two literary emphases, namely the exclamation 'amen' (ἀμήν)² and the phrase 'I tell you' (λέγω ὑμῖν). The combination of these two exclamations strongly suggests that verse 44 was the original ending of Q 12:42–44 (cf. Allison 2004:440). The phrase 'I tell you' is particularly telling, since it is often used in Q to conclude a pericope.³ Although intended more as a synchronic than a diachronic observation, Fleddermann (2005:636) agrees that the latter phrase 'brings the first half of the parable to a close.' If Q 12:42–44 originally ended at verse 44, it is justified to regard Q 12:45–46 as a secondary addition.

Narrative mode

If emphatic exclamations betray verse 44 as the original conclusion of Q 12:42–44, a shift in narrative mode reveals a new beginning at verse 45 (cf. Allison 2004:441). Whereas verses 42–44 are narrated by an omniscient, third-person narrator, verse 45 introduces the protagonist's internal dialogue through first-person narration (Scott 1989:211). The phrase 'says in his heart' (εἶπη ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ) represents a familiar Semitic idiom that qualifies whatever follows as

internal dialogue (Allison 2004:441; Bock 1996:1181; Marshall 1978:542). The change in narrative mode is therefore quite deliberate.

Redundant re-identification of character

The re-identification of characters in verses 45–46 is also fairly incriminating. The opening question introduces the main characters as a 'master' (κύριος) and an appointed 'slave' (δοῦλος). In order to link the subsequent logion with the preceding question, these characters are once again identified specifically as 'that slave' (ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος) and 'his master' (ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ) in verse 43 (Fleddermann 2005:636). Such linkage is necessary to indicate continuation of the narrative and argument, although it might also be an indication of redactional development at an earlier stage (cf. Zeller [1982] 1994:122). With the association between verses 42 and 43 established, and the characters appropriately identified, the author is free to reference both main characters in verse 44 through a verb suffix (καταστήσει) and two personal pronouns (αὐτοῦ & αὐτόν) (Fleddermann 2005:636). There is no longer any need to identify the characters specifically as 'master' (κύριος) or 'slave' (δοῦλος). One would therefore expect the author to continue using only verb suffixes and personal pronouns when referencing these characters in the rest of the parable. Yet, verse 45 re-identifies the servile character unnecessarily as 'that slave' (ὁ δοῦλος ἐκεῖνος), and verse 46 re-identifies the slaveholder unnecessarily as 'the master of that slave' (ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἐκεῖνου) (cf. Fleddermann 2005:637). These re-identifications seem like a deliberate, albeit artificial, literary attempt to connect these characters with the ones in verses 42–44, and to prevent confusion between the two individual characters themselves. Particularly noticeable is the repeated use of the demonstrative pronoun (ἐκεῖνος) and the wordiness of the phrase 'the master of that slave' (ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἐκεῖνου) (cf. Taylor 1989:140). Besides illuminating the seam between verses 44 and 45, these features of Q 12:45–46 betray an obsession with literary exactitude and lucidity. Such fixation strongly suggests that a redactor was responsible for these two verses.

On one condition

Verse 45 begins with both the contrastive conjunction 'but' (δὲ) and the conditional conjunction 'if' (ἐάν), thereby introducing Q 12:45–46 with a contrastive conditional clause (cf. Fleddermann 2005:628, 633, 635). Semantically, this beginning to verse 45 serves to indicate that the appointed slave also has a second option, which is in some way opposite to the first one (Bock 1996:1180–1181; cf. Crossan 1974:22). It is strange, however, that the preceding verses do not also feature a conditional sentence, introduced by 'if' (ἐάν). Whenever a narrative or argument features a choice with two options, each with its own consequences, it is customary to present the first option as 'if ... then', and the second option as 'but if ... then'. The lack of a conditional clause in the first half of the parable therefore suggests that the author of Q 12:42–44 did not wish to introduce a choice

2. Luke has 'truly' (ὀληθῶς) (Bock 1996:1180; Fleddermann 2005:627–628; Marshall 1978:541; Nolland 2005:998).

3. Cf. Q 7:28 as the conclusion of Q 7:24–28; Q 10:12 as the ending of Q 12:10–12; Q 10:24 as the conclusion of Q 10:21–24; Q 11:51 as the ending of Q 11:49–51; Q 12:59 as the conclusion of Q 12:58–59; Q 13:35 as the consummation of Q 13:34–35; Q 15:7 as the application of Q 15:4–5, 7; (Q 15:10 as the application of Q 15:8–10; Q 17:34–35 as the conclusion of Q 17:26–27, 30, 34–35. On a few occasions, the same phrase is also used to introduce a pericope (cf. Q 11:9; 12:22). Finally, the phrase 'I tell you' is also sometimes used in the middle of a pericope, but in those cases it features to buttress the preceding claim (cf. Q 7:26; 12:27). Yet, in not one of these latter cases does the subsequent content develop in an opposite or alternative direction, which is indeed what happens with Q 12:45–46.

with two options at all, even though the existence of such a choice is implied (cf., however, Luz 2005:222; Marshall 1978:540). The author of verses 42–44 wanted to focus solely on a singular positive action with its consequences, and had no intention of explicitly mentioning or describing a second option or its consequences. It is therefore safe to assume that the material introduced by ‘but if’ (ἐὰν δὲ), meaning verses 45–46, comprise a secondary expansion of the parable.

The doubling of narrative elements

Not only the existence of a redactional seam between Q 12:44 and Q 12:45, but also the probability that Q 12:45–46 represents redactional elaboration, are further suggested by the fact that verses 45–46 double the elements of verses 42–44. The singular action in verse 42 of feeding the slaves is paralleled by the two actions in verse 45 of keeping improper company and beating fellow slaves. Similarly, the single reward in verse 44 of being appointed over everything is mirrored by the two punishments in verse 46 of being ‘cut in two’ (διχοτομέω) and receiving an inheritance with the faithless. The text-critical principle according to which the shorter reading is more likely to be original (*lectio brevior*) could here be applied to the redaction of Q 12:42–46 (cf. Brotzman 1994:128).

The redactional acts of multiplying the desired conduct of verse 42 into two separate accusations in verse 45, and doubling the single reward into two separate forms of punishment, were likely intended to shift the parable’s emphasis, and reallocate its focus, to the second half (cf. Blomberg 1990:192; Hunter 1971:12; Taylor 1989:146, 149, 150; see Donahue 1988:98–99). In the process, the spotlight was moved away from encouragement and motivation towards accusation and condemnation (cf. Blomberg 1990:191; Kloppenborg⁴ 2000:141). This tactic was highly effective, convincing not only ancient authors (like Matthew), but also modern scholars (like Jacobson 1992:197; Taylor 1989:146, 149, 150) that the parable’s emphasis and meaning are both to be found in the parable’s second half (cf. Allison 2004:441; Blomberg 1990:192; Hunter 1971:12; see Donahue 1988:98–99).

An interpolation

The reference in verse 43 to the master’s return with the phrase ‘upon coming’ (ἐλθὼν) is both syntactically awkward and semantically unnecessary in the context of the statement as a whole (cf. Kloppenborg 1995:293–294). It is possible, if not likely, that the main redactor was responsible for adding the word ‘upon coming’ (ἐλθὼν) into verse 43 in order to link the master’s return in the first ending with the master’s return in the second ending. It might be relevant to the present discussion that Luke added the exact same lexis in verse 45 (Bock 1996:1182; Fleddermann 2005:628; Marshall 1978:542;

4. For a short period of time, including the year 2000, John S. Kloppenborg’s surname features as ‘Kloppenborg Verbin’ in his publications. In earlier and later publications, his surname only features as ‘Kloppenborg’. To avoid confusion, I will feature his surname throughout this article as ‘Kloppenborg’, but add the ‘Verbin’ between brackets where applicable in the bibliography at the end.

Nolland 2005:998). That ἐλθὼν is a secondary intrusion into verse 43 is not a given, though, since the presence of this word is explicable (albeit somewhat redundant) on the literal level of the narrative (cf. Dodd [1935] 1958:159). Even so, the presence of ἐλθὼν in verse 43 does seem to advance the agenda of the main redactor. If ἐλθὼν were indeed introduced into Q 12:42–44 by the same hand that authored Q 12:45–46, it would provide strong evidence that the first half of the parable preceded the second half in the literary evolution of this pericope.

Technical style

A related indication of the disunity between Q 12:42–44 and Q 12:45–46 is the technical style of each. Whereas Q 12:42–44 is syntactically succinct and compressed, Q 12:45–46 is syntactically elaborate and convoluted (see Fleddermann 2005:635–636). The former is reminiscent of not only Semitic style and syntax, but also the general style of the historical Jesus. Conversely, the latter is characteristic of not only Greek style and syntax, but also scribal activity in general. Like the aforementioned doubling of narrative elements, the syntactical disparity between the two halves of the parable tapers for a redactional application of the text-critical principle of *lectio brevior*. To be clear, the foregoing argumentation is not a claim that the first half of the parable reaches back to the historical Jesus, but rather that the first half of the parable is much more likely to form part of Q’s inherited tradition than the second half. On the one hand, the authenticity of Q 12:42–44 is neither advocated nor denied. On the other hand, it is being argued that Q 12:45–46 is highly unlikely to be authentic.

Parallelism

In its final form, the formal arrangement of Q 12:45–46 is highly suggestive of redactional intent. Verse 45 forms an antithetic parallelism with verse 43 by describing the opposite behaviour, and verse 46 forms an antithetic parallelism with verse 44 by spelling out the opposite consequences (Bock 1996:1181; Crossan 1974:22; 1983:59–60; Scott 1989:211; cf. Allison 2004:439; Luz 2005:221; see Taylor 1989:141–144). Such literary arrangement seems like a deliberate attempt to unify a pericope that is intrinsically multipart.

Tone

A change in tone is noticeable when the two halves of the parable are compared. We already saw that Fleddermann (2005:628, 633, 635) divides the parable into a ‘positive’ and a ‘negative’ half. Q 12:42–44 is wholly and highly positive, not only in its ultimate conclusion of a significant reward, but also in its descriptions of the characters and their conduct. The appointed slave is described as ‘wise’, ‘loyal’ and ‘blessed’. His main task to feed fellow slaves on time is also decidedly positive. The latter would have been particularly true in the estimation of ancient audiences from lower socio-economic strata. By contrast, the tone of Q 12:45–46 is intrinsically negative. The slave is imagined as keeping questionable

company and resorting to physical violence against his fellow slaves. His double punishment is extremely severe. To be sure, the tone of Q 12:45–46 is more than just ‘negative’; it is manifestly threatening. On the level of interpretation, verse 45 was probably intended as an accusation, while verse 46 was probably intended as a threat. This explains why some scholars have described the whole parable as threatening in tone (see e.g. Kloppenborg 1987:148–154). It would seem, though, that this description applies only to the second half of the parable. The accusation of verse 45 reveals the conditions under which the threat of verse 46 would be applicable. The rest of the parable is wholly and intrinsically unthreatening.

An imperfect analogy

Few scholars would disagree that Q 12:45–46 references the final judgement. Despite the apparentness of the parable’s apocalyptic application, its artificial nature protrudes beneath the surface. In the process of adding verses 45–46 to the parable, the redactor created an imperfect analogy for apocalyptic judgement, especially if compared to the rest of Q. Regarding both reward and punishment, life carries on as normal for everyone except the appointed slave. This eventuality indicates that the parable does not imagine a dramatic cessation of the space-time continuum. In both the cases of reward and punishment, the consequences take place within the narrative world of the story. The narrative world is not discontinued or drastically changed. This feature differs entirely from the descriptions of apocalyptic cessation and finality in other Q texts, like Q 3:7 and Q 17:27. The parable does not seem to imagine a ‘next world’, whether this-worldly or other-worldly, but rather a change occurring *within this world* for the Jewish leaders only (cf. Funk 2006:46, 71). Such a description of the apocalyptic end is fundamentally at odds with the rest of Q.

Additional clues of elaboration

Five additional clues point to the secondary nature of verses 45–46. The first is the general tendency of textual redactors in the early church to affix the most extensive and significant expansions to the end of Jesus’ parables, generally making only smaller and lesser alterations to the beginning and middle of these parables (Jeremias [1958] 1963:103; 1966:81; cf. Crossan 1979:31; Funk 2006:30). The second is the fact that verses 42–44 are semantically independent, meaning that they could stand alone without any loss of meaning, whereas verses 45–46 are dependent upon the preceding material for the generation of its meaning. The third is the intertextual parallel with the story of Joseph in Genesis 39 (see Allison 2000:87–92; Luz 2005:223–224), which coheres perfectly with verses 42–44, but is diametrically contradicted by verses 45–46, since Joseph was neither guilty of the misdeeds described in verse 45, nor punished in any way after becoming the Pharaoh’s personal slave. The fourth is the near-perfect fit of the parable to the situation of the early church, which, upon closer inspection, relates solely to verses 45–46 (e.g. Marshall 1978:534; cf. Funk & Hoover 1993:253,

342; Scott 1989:210; see Bock 1996:1171). Finally, a number of scholars have noticed the verbal and conceptual similarities between the Son of Man saying in Q 12:40 and the second ending of the parable in Q 12:46 (e.g. Kloppenborg 1987:150; 1995:293; Luz 2005:223).⁵ Either the wording of verse 40 was modified to match the parable’s second ending, or the wording of verse 46 was modified to fit the content of the Son of Man logion. A third possibility is that both verses were constructed at the same time to correspond to each other. Whatever the case, the similarity in wording between these two verses is suggestive of editorial activity and organisation (cf. Kloppenborg 1995:293).

Findings

A rather strong case has been made for the existence of a redactional seam between verses 44 and 45 of the parable in Q 12:42–46. In the process, an equally strong case has been made for viewing the second half of this parable (Q 12:45–46) as a redactional addition to its first half (Q 12:42–44). The parable’s second half is extremely unlikely to be authentic, since it cannot possibly stand on its own and remain comprehensible, amongst other reasons. The authenticity of the parable’s first half is an open question, depending to a large extent on how one interprets this earlier version of the parable. It remains now to determine the implications of these findings for our understanding of Q’s redaction.

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Competing interests

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⁵Verse 40: ‘the Son of Man comes at an hour you do not expect’ (ἢ οὐ δοκεῖτε ὥρα ὃ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχεται); verse 46: ‘the master of that slave will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know’ (ἦξει ὁ κύριος τοῦ δούλου ἐκείνου ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἢ οὐ προσδοκᾷ καὶ ἐν ὥρᾳ ἢ οὐ γινώσκει).



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