



The Parables of Jesus

Syllabus

Craig L. Blomberg, Ph.D.
*Professor of New Testament
Denver Seminary*

INSTITUTE OF
THEOLOGICAL
STUDIES



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Course Description

Most readers sympathize with the disciples when they asked Jesus, “Explain to us the parable that you spoke.” This course surveys various methods of interpreting Jesus’ parables and offers an eclectic model that draws upon the best insights of each. Dr. Blomberg’s semi-allegorical model is then applied to each of the major narrative parables in the Gospels. The course examines differences among parallel accounts, and suggests plausible reasons for the variations. Learners are encouraged to apply the conclusions about the theology and significance of Jesus’ parables to their life and ministry.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, the student should be able to:

1. Gain a greater understanding of the cryptic but important parables of Jesus.
2. Analyze the different schools of thought in the interpretation of the parables of Jesus, and adopt an approach he/she can defend as the most hermeneutically viable.
3. Explore the more controversial points of interpretation surrounding the details of various passages and formulate tentative exegetical conclusions.
4. Apply the parables to contemporary Christian living and ministry.

Course Texts

Blomberg, Craig L. *Interpreting the Parables*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1990.

Kistemaker, Simon. *The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002.

Wenham, David. *The Parables of Jesus: Pictures of Revolution*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1989.

An **NIV Bible** and any synopsis or harmony of the four gospels (i.e., that lays out parallel texts in parallel columns for easy comparison). E.g., K. Aland, *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (New York: UBS, 1982).

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COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Whether you sit in a traditional classroom or study from a distance, you will benefit from interaction, collaboration, and spiritual formation (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 10.3.3.3; 10.3.4.3). In order to meet this need in distance theological education, ITS is developing structures and resources to encourage spiritual formation and community interaction in our courses. In this course, we have included three collaborative learning features:

1. ITS Online Interactivity Forum (see course requirements) – fosters peer-to-peer interaction in a global, threaded discussion (required for all students)
2. Spiritual Formation Project (see course requirements) – fosters mentor-to-learner interaction in a mentor-guided reflection, discussion and application (required for all students)
3. Learning Community Assignments (see end of syllabus) – fosters peer-to-peer collaboration in a group approach to assignments (optional but recommended where possible)

Go to www.ITScourses.org/interactivity/ for the most up-to-date ITS resources.

Course Requirements

1. Lectures and Study Guide questions

Along with listening to the **required 24 lectures**, the student may choose to answer the study questions in the Study Guide. These are not figured into the student's grade but are a valuable way to prepare for the final exam.

2. Reading of Major Text and questions

Attached to this syllabus are **eleven sets of questions** covering the major text by Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*. The required chapters are given with each set of questions along with the lectures with which they correspond. These questions should be answered and submitted either periodically or at the end of the course. The student's seminary advisor should determine when these questions should be submitted.

3. Reading of Supporting Texts

Kistemaker and Wenham should be read in their entirety. Ideally, the student should read the treatments by these two authors of any given parable at the same time as they read Blomberg's treatment of it, at the appropriate point in the course accompanying lectures #9-20. A **three to six page double-spaced** typed paper



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conforming to seminary standards should be written for each book, comparing and contrasting each work with Blomberg's perspectives. Approximately one-third of each paper should point out similarities in methods and conclusions; approximately one-third should call attention to differences; and the final third should assess which of the two approaches, where they differ, is preferable and why.

4. Exegetical Assignment

Utilizing a selection of the books reflected in the bibliography below, or works of comparable detail and quality **approved by the student's seminary advisor**, the student must prepare a **ten-page** intensive study of one of the parables of Jesus analyzed in this series of lectures. Each item in the six objectives should be addressed, but *more attention should center on items d-f*. In other words, following whatever logical organization the student chooses, the paper should:

- a. display awareness of at least three different approaches to interpreting the particular parable and defend an approach the student deems best;
- b. note which parts of the passage have been questioned by scholars not inclined to assign the entire text to the historical Jesus and assess their objections;
- c. fit the parables into their historical context in Jesus' life and their literary context of the gospels (noting any way they differ from one gospel to the next, if the parable appears in more than one gospel);
- d. decide what he/she thinks the central truth or truths of the parable are;
- e. take a stand on any controversial points of interpretation within the passage; and
- f. suggest relevant and legitimate applications of the parable to contemporary Christian living.

All conclusions not original to the student must be appropriately documented and defended by logical argumentation, not merely affirmed. Again standard seminary format is required. This assignment is best completed after all the lectures have been listened to and all the required reading completed so that the various issues are better understood.



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5. ITS Online Interactivity Forum

Participate with other students worldwide in an ongoing asynchronous threaded discussion of two major course topics. Go to www.ITScourses.org/interactivity/ to register for and enter the ITS On-Line Forum. In order to get the fullest benefit from the Forum, complete the assignment **after** you have listened to *all* the lectures. Be sure to return to the forum after finishing the course to see how others respond. Follow these steps to complete the assignment:

- ◆ Post an original answer to each question for your course (75 word min.).
- ◆ Post your response to any previous answer given to each question (75 word min.).
- ◆ Submit a document to your proctor that contains the original questions, your postings, and the postings to which you responded.

NOTE: Please read the “Assignment Instructions” in the Forum for details.

Objective: to develop critical thinking skills through personal interaction with the content of the course and the responses of others within a diverse community of learners.

6. Spiritual Formation Project

RATIONALE: Ministry preparation and the Christian life require more than academic exercises. Learners also need personal, spiritual formation, which involves theological reflection and critical thinking on their current practices and assumptions. This process occurs as learners engage in self-reflection and interaction in a community of learning. **With this in mind**, ITS includes in all courses a capstone project addressing these issues and facilitating interaction beyond the formal learning environment (ATS schools, note Standards 3.2.1.3; 4.1.1; 10.3.3.3).

Write a **five-to-six page reflective essay** and **interview a mentor**, discussing the spiritual impact of this course on your life. *Identify your mentor early in the course*, and submit the essay to your grader when you take the final exam. This last project should not be a summary of course content, but an application of course principles. Complete the following:

1. **Personal Reflection and Evaluation: *Reflect on the course*** – To integrate your academic studies with your walk of faith, reflect on the content of the course and evaluate your life in light of what you learned.



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- a. Follow these steps in your reflection:

Step 1: What **one** theme, principle, or concept in the course is the most significant to you personally? Why is it significant?

Step 2: What portion(s) of the course brought this theme/principle/concept to light?

Step 3: Think about your past. Why is it vital now for you to deal with and apply this theme/principle/concept?

Step 4: How should this affect your thoughts and actions, and what *specific steps* should you take to *concretely* apply what you have learned?

- b. Write your answers to the above questions in full paragraph form. (Recommended length for this reflection: **approximately three pages**)
- c. Give a copy of this reflection to your mentor (see #2).

2. Community Reflection and Interaction: *Interview a mentor* – Since the Holy Spirit uses the input of others to guide and form His people, interview a mentor according to the following guidelines:

- a. Who should you interview? (1-3 are required; 4-6 are recommended)

1. Someone with whom you have a reasonably close relationship.
2. Someone who is a mature Christian ministry leader (i.e. a pastor).
3. Someone who is **not** your grader or a family member.
4. Someone who values the spiritual formation process.
5. Someone who is familiar with and values the subject of the course.
6. Someone who has experience using the content of the course in ministry.

NOTE: ***Identify your mentor early in the course***, and give him/her the page entitled “Guidelines for Mentors.”

- b. Focus of the interview – Your interview should focus on the issues and questions you raise in your essay. For example:

- ♦ What feedback can your mentor give in response to your essay?
- ♦ In light of the course content, are the conclusions you made appropriate? Why or why not?
- ♦ What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications might he/she suggest from his/her own life and ministry?



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NOTE: Conduct this interview either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do **not** use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc). Suggested length: 45 minutes.

3. **Synthesis and Application: *Draw your final conclusions*** – Having reflected on the course and the discussion with your mentor, synthesize what you have learned in these three sections:
- a. Section 1: Begin your essay with the personal reflection from #1 above. This should be exactly what you gave your mentor for the interview.
 - b. Section 2: Comment on your interview, explaining what you discussed and the insights you gained from your mentor. Include the following:
 - ◆ What were the mentor's comments regarding your essay?
 - ◆ What advice did he/she give?
 - ◆ How did his/her comments expand or correct your application of the course?
 - ◆ Include the person's name, occupation, and the length of the interview.
 - c. Section 3: Conclude with a synthesis of what you have learned. Answer the following:
 - ◆ If your mentor corrected any thoughts in your "Personal Reflection and Evaluation", how do you feel about these corrections? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
 - ◆ Synthesizing your thoughts from section one and your mentor's insight in section two, what final conclusions have you reached? How is this different from section one?
 - ◆ In light of the interview and further reflection, what additional, *specific* changes need to occur in your life and what *concrete* steps will you take to implement them?

NOTE TO STUDENTS: Your effort in this assignment will determine its benefit. If by the end of this course you have not yet reflected critically on your life in light of what you have studied, allow this assignment to guide you in that process. The instructor for this course will not score your essay based on the amount of spiritual fruit you describe; so do not exaggerate (or trivialize) what you have learned. **The primary grading criteria is that you have thoughtfully considered the principles of the course and realistically sought to apply them to your life.** If you have done this and met the minimal requirements (as noted above), you will earn the full points for this assignment.



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Note on confidentiality: Perhaps the Holy Spirit is dealing with you in some very personal areas of your life. Because of this, your grader will keep your essay entirely confidential and either return or discard it.

Objective: to stimulate reflection and interaction on course principles in order to enhance personal spiritual formation.

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7. Final Exam

*Prior to administering the final exam, the seminary advisor should provide the student with a list of ten essay questions (included in the Proctor materials for the course), related to the major foci of this course. The student should be prepared to write a 20-minute, well-organized, grammatically coherent series of paragraphs in response to each. **The seminary advisor will select six of these ten questions for the actual exam.** Students should practice one or more to determine in advance how much they can write in 20 minutes, but for the actual exam they are *not allowed to use any of their notes or resources and must complete the exam during an uninterrupted 120-minute period of time.**

Course Grading

Questions on <i>Interpreting the Parables</i>	10%
Papers on Kistemaker and Wenham (10% each).....	20%
Exegetical Paper	25%
ITS Online Interactivity Forum	5%
Spiritual Formation Project	15%
Final Exam.....	25%



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Notes Regarding This Downloaded Syllabus

This downloadable syllabus is not exhaustive. It is designed to provide learners with a picture of the course, not a full outline of the course. Grader Guidelines, Appendixes, Bibliographies, Lecture Outlines, and Review Questions have been removed. The complete course syllabus is included with purchase of the course in either a digital or hard-copy format.

Likewise, individuals taking the class for credit are responsible for the syllabus requirements of the specific institution through which the course is offered. Each individual institution has reserved the right to alter or change the syllabus as deemed necessary.