

COURSE SYLLABUS

NT505: The Parables of Jesus

Course Lecturer: Craig L. Blomberg, PhD

About This Course



This course was originally created through the Institute of Theological Studies in association with the Evangelical Seminary Deans' Council. There are nearly 100 evangelical seminaries of various denominations represented within the council and many continue to use the ITS courses to supplement their curriculum. The lecturers were selected primarily by the Deans' Council as highly recognized scholars in their particular fields of study.

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 the course, the student should be able to do the following:

- Gain a greater understanding of the cryptic but important parables of Jesus.
- 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.
- Explore the more controversial points of interpretation surrounding the details of various passages and formulate tentative exegetical conclusions.
- Apply the parables to contemporary Christian living and ministry.

Accessibility

If you have particular accessibility needs, please contact the CUGN Registrar at the beginning of the course. This will allow us to work directly with you to make efforts to accommodate your situation and ensure as full as possible accessibility to the course.

Course Lecturer



Craig L. Blomberg, PhD

Education:

- University of Aberdeen, Scotland, PhD
- Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, MA
- Augustana College, BA

Teaching Career:

- Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary
- Professor at Palm Beach Atlantic College
- Senior Research Fellow in Cambridge, England at the Tyndale House
- Visiting professor at St. Petersburg Christian University in Russia, ACTS in Canada, the Seminario Teológico Centroamericano in Guatemala, the Irish Bible Institute in Ireland and at the Wiedemann-Bibelschule in Germany
- Special guest lecturer or visiting professor at numerous universities in Australia and New Zealand

Other Career Highlights:

- Ordained Baptist minister
- Helped train church leaders through conferences across the Pacific Rim
- Campus Crusade for Christ
- Active member and regular contributor to the Evangelical Theological Society

Publications:

- In addition to writing numerous articles in professional journals, multi-author works, and dictionaries or encyclopedias, he has authored or edited numerous books, including *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, *Interpreting the Parables*, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, and *From Pentecost to Patmos: An Introduction to Acts through Revelation*.

Online Professor

If you are taking this course for credit, CUGN will assign one of its faculty members as the online professor for this course. This professor will contact you upon enrollment in the course and will guide your study. Your online professor will be available to you by email and, at set times, by chat room or other real-time technology. Your online professor will do the following in order to stimulate student involvement and facilitate effective learning:

- Evaluate and assign grades to all coursework.
- Provide assistance with technological problems that may occur.
- Answer questions that may arise.
- Issue your final grades.

Course Texts

Required:

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).

Textbooks can be ordered through our online store at CUGN.org, through your local bookstore, or through your preferred eReader when available.

Academic Honesty

At CUGN, we believe all we do is “as unto the Lord” and we thus hold to a high academic standard of honesty; we do not tolerate plagiarism and cheating. Students found guilty of any form of academic dishonesty face consequences ranging from interaction with the Academic Dean to expulsion from CUGN.

Quizzes and Exams: Any student found guilty of cheating on a quiz or exam will automatically receive a score of zero for that quiz or exam. A second offense will result in automatic course failure and possible disciplinary action and/or expulsion from CUGN. Please view the [CUGN Academic Catalog](#) for a full definition and examples of cheating.

Plagiarism: If a student’s work is found to be plagiarized, consequences will vary depending on the nature of the plagiarism.

If an offense is deemed unintentional, the student will have an opportunity to resubmit the work. A second offense will result in an automatic score of zero for that assignment, which may also result in failure of that course.

More serious plagiarism offenses could result in automatic course failure, disciplinary action, or expulsion from CUGN. Please view the [CUGN Academic Catalog](#) for a full definition and examples of plagiarism. If you have questions about plagiarism, or would like to request resources for learning how to avoid plagiarism, please contact our Registrar’s Office at registrar@cugn.org or toll free at (888) 487-5376 ext. 3.

Course Methods

Throughout this course, a number of methods will be used to engage the students in learning and processing information, and applying the learning to their lives. These methods include the following:

Media/Materials

The course will include media presentations of lectures and supplementary materials to be listened to and/or read throughout the lessons of the course.

- **Audio-based teaching**

The primary teaching session in each lesson is provided in audio format. If available, we also provide the option of reading the lesson from a transcript of the audio lecture (found in the course Audio Lecture section).

- **Readings**

Reading from the required textbook(s) is assigned in this syllabus.

Mentor Relationship

Students are required to seek out a mentor with whom they can discuss the spiritual impact of the course on their life. The goal of this process is to facilitate the student's growth through interaction with a mature believer.

Spiritual Formation Project

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 through the course's Spiritual Formation Project.

Course Requirements

1. **Time:** The student is required to spend a minimum of 120 hours in this course. All course requirements must be completed within 6 months of enrolling in the course.
2. **Recorded Lectures:** The student is required to listen to all 24 audio lectures recorded by Dr. Craig L. Blomberg.
3. **Study Guide Questions:** 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 study the material.
4. **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 professor should determine when these questions should be submitted.
5. **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 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.

6. Exegetical Assignment: Utilizing a selection of the books reflected in the bibliography below, 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.

7. 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, CUGN 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:

A. 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.

- i. 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?

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

B. 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:

- i. 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.”

- ii. 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?

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.

C. 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:

- i. Section 1: Begin your essay with the personal reflection from #1 above. This should be exactly what you gave your mentor for the interview.

- ii. 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.
- iii. 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.

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.

Course Grading

Your grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Questions on <i>Interpreting the Parables</i>	15% of Course Grade
Papers on Kistemaker and Wenham (15% ea.)	30% of Course Grade
Exegetical Paper	30% of Course Grade
Spiritual Formation Project	25% of Course Grade
Total	100%

Grades will be issued within two weeks of the end of the course.

Student Name: _____ Course: _____ Interview
Date/Time: _____

Guidelines for Mentors

(Students, give this sheet to your mentor for the Spiritual Formation Project.)

Thank you for your involvement in this student's CUGN coursework. We believe the Christian life is more than an academic exercise, so we encourage students to critically reflect on their life in light of what they learn and then apply those insights to the daily life of faith.

Therefore, students taking CUGN courses are required to complete a final assignment called the "Spiritual Formation Project." This assignment involves two parts: an essay and an interview:

The ESSAY: After completing their coursework, students reflect on the content of the course, evaluate their lives, and discuss the one theme, principle or concept that is most significant to them and why. Students are to identify specific ways this theme/principle/concept should apply to their lives and what action steps they plan to take in order to make these changes a reality.

The INTERVIEW: After writing this reflection, students give a copy to their mentor and meet with him/her to discuss their thoughts and get feedback. The goal of this interview is to facilitate the student's growth through interaction with a mature believer.

NOTES ON THE INTERVIEW:

- You do not need to be familiar with the course to participate in this interview. You will primarily respond to the thoughts of the student. (However, general knowledge of the subject matter of the course and/or experience applying it to ministry is valuable.)
- Prior to meeting with the student, read his/her "Personal Reflection and Evaluation" and prepare to discuss the following:
 1. What feedback can you give the student in response to his/her essay?
 2. Are the student's conclusions from the course appropriate? Why or why not?
 3. What additional advice, deeper insights or broader applications would you suggest from your own life and ministry?
- Meet with the student either in person (preferred) or over the phone. Do not use electronic communication (i.e. email, instant messenger, etc.).
- Suggested length of the interview: 45 minutes

Thanks again for participating in this project! You have a real opportunity to guide this student in the application process and to help him/her connect academics to life – *a valuable process for all who wish to grow in Christ.*

NOTE: If the student's school makes any changes to this assignment, their requirements should replace those described here.

Course Bibliography

(Recommended Books for Exegetical Papers)

- Bailey, Kenneth E. *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976.
- Bailey, Kenneth E. *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
- Beasley-Murray, G. R. *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Borsch, Frederick H. *Many Things in Parables*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.
- Carlston, Charles E. *The Parables of the Triple Tradition*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975.
- Crossan, John Dominic. *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Dodd, C. H. *The Parables of the Kingdom*. London: Nisbet, 1935.
- Donahue, John R. *The Gospel in Parable*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988.
- Drury, John. *The Parables in the Gospels*. London: SPCK, 1985.
- Hendrickx, Hermann. *The Parables of Jesus*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986.
- Hunter, A. M. *Interpreting the Parables*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.
- Jeremias, Joachim. *The Parables of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972.
- Jones, Peter R. *The Teaching of the Parables*. Nashville: Broadman, 1982.
- Kirk, Andrew. *The Good News of the Kingdom Coming*. Downers Grove: IVP, 1983.
- Kissinger, Warren S. *The Parables of Jesus: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1979.
- Linnemann, Eta. *The Parables of Jesus: Introduction and Exposition*. London: SPCK, 1966.
- McArthur, Harvey K., and Robert M. Johnston. *They Also Taught in Parables*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.
- Scott, Bernard B. *Hear Then the Parable*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989.
- Stein, Robert H. *Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981.
- Via, Dan O., Jr. *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967.



Reading Questions

NOTE: The following eleven sets of questions cover *Interpreting the Parables* by Craig L. Blomberg (IVP, 1990). Given with each set of questions are the required chapters from the text and the lectures with which they correspond. Read the necessary chapters, answer the questions, and submit your answers. Ideally, you should complete this reading and these questions *as you work through the lectures and the other reading*.

Set 1

(Chapters 1-2; to accompany Lectures 1-4a)

1. Summarize in your own words the two or three major themes that run throughout the five-point presentation of the scholarly consensus on parable interpretation (pp. 15-19).
2. Do the same for the "minority report" (pp. 19-21).
3. Compare the two positions labeled "Parables vs. Allegory" and "Parable as Allegory." Again, try to formulate two or three key statements which sum up what is at the heart of the debate between these two perspectives (pp. 29-47).
4. What is the most central contribution of an analysis of modern literary criticism to the debate about parable and allegory (pp. 49-58)?
5. What is the most central contribution of an analysis of the rabbinic parables to the debate about parable and allegory (pp. 58-68)?



Reading Questions

Set 2

(Chapter 3; to accompany Lectures 4b-5)

1. Summarize in your own words the three major aspects of form criticism (pp. 72-75).
2. Which of these three items is most acceptable or valuable from an evangelical perspective and why (pp. 75-94)?
3. Which of Jeremias' "laws of transformation" of the parable tradition most accurately describe genuine tendencies of the tradition and why (pp. 79-94)?
4. Briefly describe the nature and relevance for a study of the parables of the hypothesis of "memorizing Jesus' teachings" (pp. 95-97).
5. Briefly describe the nature and relevance for a study of the parables of the new insights from oral folklore (pp. 97-98).



Reading Questions

Set 3

(Chapter 4; to accompany Lecture 6)

1. Explain how redaction criticism enables the parable interpreter to highlight distinctive themes of a given evangelist (pp. 105-110).
2. Explain how redaction criticism enables the interpreter to explain the significance of the larger contexts of a given parable (pp. 110-118).
3. In your own words, with a sentence or two for each "invalid allegation," explain the seven pitfalls of redaction criticism which parable interpreters should avoid (pp. 118-128).



Reading Questions

Set 4

(Chapter 5; to accompany Lectures 7-8)

1. Briefly assess the strengths and weaknesses of the new hermeneutic as applied to the parables (pp. 134-144).
2. Briefly assess the strengths and weaknesses of structuralism as applied to the parables (pp. 144-152).
3. Briefly assess the strengths and weaknesses of poststructuralism as applied to the parables (pp. 152-160).



Reading Questions

Set 5

(Chapter 6, secs. 6.1-6.5; to accompany Lectures 9-10)

1. How is the parable of the Prodigal Son an excellent paradigm or prototype of the most common pattern of three-point parables (the so-called monarchic pattern (pp. 172-179))?
2. In what ways do the three main points of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin resemble the three points of the Prodigal Son? In what ways do they differ (pp. 179-184)?
3. In what ways do the Two Debtors and Two Sons also closely mirror the three parables of Luke 15 in structure and message(s) (pp. 184-190)?
4. In what ways is the Faithful and Unfaithful Servants most different from the previous parables surveyed in this chapter (pp. 190-193)?



Reading Questions

Set 6

(Chapter 6, secs. 6.6-6.11; to accompany Lectures 11-12)

1. Which details of the Ten Bridesmaids should be allegorized and which not? Which feature is an allegorical waver and what does that mean (pp. 193-197)?
2. How can the Wheat and Tares be considered a triadic parable when it contains at least seven elements for which Jesus gives an explicitly allegorical interpretation (pp. 197-200)?
3. How does the Dragnet resemble and differ from the Wheat and Tares (pp. 201-203)?
4. Which of the three points of the Rich Man and Lazarus seems least prominent and why (pp. 203-208)?
5. How do the three points of the Children in the Marketplace correspond to the three "characters" of the somewhat unconventional triangular diagram for this parable (pp. 208-210)?



Reading Questions

Set 7

(Chapter 7, secs. 7.1-7.4; to accompany Lectures 13-14)

1. How do the three main points of the Talents compare and contrast with the three main points of the Pounds (pp. 214-221)?
2. How do the three points of the Laborers in the Vineyard correspond to the three concluding remarks of the narrative itself (pp. 221-225)?
3. How can we defend the authenticity of the elaborate allegorical interpretation of the Sower attributed to Jesus in the three Synoptic Gospels (pp. 226-229)?
4. Rank in decreasing order of importance the three main points of the Good Samaritan and justify your ranking (pp. 229-233).



Reading Questions

Set 8

(Chapter 7, secs. 7.5-7.9; to accompany Lectures 15-16)

1. What is the most crucial difference between the main lessons of the Great Banquet and the main lessons of the Wedding Feast (pp. 233-240)?
2. How do the three lessons of the Unforgiving Servant correspond to each of the parable's three episodes (pp. 240-243)?
3. How do the three lessons of the Unjust Steward correspond to the three conclusions of Luke 16:8-9 (pp. 243-247)?
4. Why does the Wicked Tenant seem to teach four points instead of three? If this is the case, why is the fourth point nevertheless subordinated to the other three (pp. 247-251)?



Reading Questions

Set 9

(Chapter 8, secs, 8.1-8.1.6; to accompany Lectures 17-18)

1. How does the eight-stage structure of the Pharisee and Tax-Collector illumine its central foci and overall impact (pp. 256-258)?
2. How might the Pharisee and Tax-Collector and the Two-Builders each be viewed as a triadic parable? Why are they better taken as dyadic (pp. 256-260)?
3. Compare and contrast the two main points of the Unprofitable Servant and the Seed Growing Secretly (pp. 260-266).
4. Compare and contrast the two main points of the Rich Fool and the Barren Fig Tree (pp. 266-271).



Reading Questions

Set 10

(Chapter 8, secs. 8.1.7-8.3; to accompany Lectures 19-20)

1. Compare and contrast the two main points of the Unjust Judge and the Friend at Midnight (pp. 271-277).
2. How might the Householder and the Thief be considered a monadic parable (pp. 277-278)?
3. How might each of the three pairs of monadic parables be viewed as dyadic (pp. 278-287)?
4. Do the lessons of these six parables have any themes in common? If so, specify (pp. 278-287).
5. What other passages have sometimes been called parables and what do they teach (p. 287)?



Reading Questions

Set 11

(Chapter 9; to accompany Lectures 21-24)

1. Why does a structural classification of the parables seem preferable to a topical classification (pp. 290-296)?
2. In one or two sentences for each topic, what do the parables teach about the debates about the kingdom of God with respect to (a) present vs. future; (b) reign vs. realm; and (c) personal vs. social transformation (pp. 296-309)?
3. Evaluate the following claim: Jesus taught the unbelieving crowds exclusively in parables after the decisive turning point in His ministry reflected in Matthew 13, at which time He realized He had been rejected by a majority within Israel (pp. 309-313).
4. What can the parables teach us about Jesus' self-understanding (pp. 313-323)?