



The Parables of Jesus

Religion 301a, Haverford College

Prof. Anne McGuire, Fall 2009



This Page is Under Construction

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This seminar will focus on a close study of the parables of Jesus in their cultural and literary contexts. Special attention will be given to recent literary analysis of the parables in the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas.

The parables of Jesus are found in the three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the Gospel of Thomas. We will be studying all or most of the parables found in these texts. Click here for a [list of the parables](#) and a [comparative table](#) of the gospel texts in which they appear. In our examination of these stories, we'll consider their literary form and placement within each gospel and the ways scholars of the New Testament and early Christianity have analyzed these texts. Special attention will be given to recent literary analysis of the parables in the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas.

New Testament scholars believe that Mark's gospel was the first gospel to be written, and was used as a source by both Matthew and Luke. Matthew and Luke also had access to other sources, both oral and written, for their accounts of Jesus' teaching. One of these hypothesized sources is known as "Q" (for German Quelle, or Source), and is usually taken to refer to material shared by Matthew and Luke. But the parallel versions of the parables point to a more complicated picture: some parables appear in all three NT gospels and Thomas; some appear only in Matthew and Luke; some in Matthew and Thomas; some in Luke and Thomas. Scholars of the synoptic problem are interested in these inter-relationships and the formation of the gospel traditions in their oral and written form.

Our concern in this course is not so much with the sources, but with the analysis and interpretation of the parables as individual stories, in different versions, and as parts of larger compositions (i.e., Mark, Matt, Lk, Thomas). In this course, we'll examine the parables as parts of these gospel texts, but we will also consider their life as parabolic stories both before and after the writing of the gospels. Most important, we'll consider our own contexts as scholars and interpreters of the parables.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

A. Weekly postings on the course's Discussion Board at the Blackboard site (30%) and active participation in class discussion. This is a seminar course. All students are expected to come prepared to participate actively in discussion, to make presentations in class, and to respond actively to others' presentations and comments.

B. Three 5-Page Papers with oral presentations (40%): Each of these papers should offer a more sustained analysis of some aspects of the primary and/or secondary texts assigned for class, together with an interpretive argument about their significance. At least one of these must have a primary focus on analysis and critique of the secondary literature assigned for class; at least one must focus on analysis and interpretation of the letter assigned.

- A draft of these papers should be prepared by the Tuesday evening before class and made available through Blackboard or email.
- For class, each student should prepare a brief oral presentation of the major points of the paper, together with a selection of textual passages from both primary and secondary sources, and questions for further discussion.
- In light of class discussion, these papers should be revised and turned in by the next class. Dates for these papers will be assigned by the second meeting of the seminar.

C. A Research Paper of 15-18 pages (30%).

- **Intermediate Due Dates**
 - **Wednesday, October 29** - Hand in a brief statement of your topic
 - **Monday, November 24:** Annotated bibliography of 8-10 articles and books on your topic + Outline
 - Optional: If you want feedback on a first draft, please hand it in by F, December 3
 - Some general guidelines from a Harvard web site: [Guidelines on Writing the Research Paper](#)

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

- David B. Gowler, *What Are They Saying About the Parables?*
- Bernard Brendan Scott, *Re-Imagine the World: An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*
- Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation*
- John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*
- Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*
- *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV*
- **Recommended:** *Gospel Parallels*, ed. B. Throckmorton
- *The Historical Jesus in Context*, Ed. by Amy-Jill Levine, Dale Allison, John Dominic Crossan
- *Links to Numerous Web Resources* are included in the syllabus below. Among the most useful are:
 - [New Testament Gateway](#), by Dr. Mark Goodacre, University of Birmingham, England
 - [The Five Gospels Parallels](#) - Website at University of Toronto
 - [Unbound Bible](#), Biola University
- Additional readings may be handed out in class or will be available online or on Reserve in Magill Library



SYLLABUS OF READINGS

[See the full syllabus for complete syllabus assignments]

9/1 Parables and Their Interpreters: Oral Tradition, Gospel Writers, Theologians, NT Scholarship

9/8 From Oral Tradition to Written Texts; Case Study: The Parable of the Sower and its Interpreters

- The Parables of Mark 4 and Its Parallels in Matthew 13, Luke, and Thomas
- Gowler, *What are they Saying about the Parables?*, 1-27
- Amos Wilder, "[Telling from Depth to Depth: The Parable of the Sower,](#)" *Jesus and the War of Myths*, 89-100 [pdf to be posted soon]
- J.D. Crossan, *In Parables*, 39-44
- Hultgren, *Interpreting the Parables*, 13-49; 226-229

9/15 Comparison of Selected Parables in Mark 4, Matthew 13, Luke, and Thomas: Sowers, Seeds, Wheats and Tares; The Banquet Parable

- Parables of Mark 4 and Matthew 13 and their Parallels in GThomas (9, 57, 21, 20, 96, 109, 76, 8) and GLuke (8:5-15, 13:18-19, 13:20-21)
 - The Parables of the Sower, the Seed Growing Secretly, the Mustard Seed
 - The Parable of the Banquet/Marriage Feast (Matt 22:1-14, Luke 14:15-24, Thomas 64)
 - [The Diversity of Early Christianity](#), *From Jesus to Christ* web site

9/22 Parables and Figurative Speech in the Gospel of Mark

- The Gospel of Mark, read entire gospel with attention how the Parables of Mark 4 and 12 and the Markan theory of parables fit into the themes of the gospel
- Focus on the Parable of the Tenants in Mark 12 and its parallels
- Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, selected excerpts to be posted in pdf
- Crossan, *In Parables*

9/29 Looting the Strong Man's House: Parables and Figurative Speech in the Gospel of Thomas

10/20

10/27

11/3

11/10

11/17

12/1

12/8 Interpreting the Parables

- Return to [Dept. of Religion Home Page](#)

Return to [Haverford Academic Departments](#)

This page is maintained by amcguire@haverford.edu, Last updated 9/1/09