



# The Bible ... *for Smarties*

## PUZZLES, PARADOXES & PERCEPTION: Introduction to The Parables of Jesus

### SYLLABUS

Summer 2025

Taught by  
David Moseley, Ph.D.

Mondays ~ 6:00-8:00 p.m. PST  
\*\*Taught Online via Zoom\*\*

*Welcome to Introduction to the Parables of Jesus!* This short seminar-style course explores the discipline of academic Biblical Studies, focusing on the various Parables of Jesus in the Gospels section of the Christian Scriptures (the “New Testament”).

**The Mission of the Class is to Nurture Students towards a Nuanced, Critical Interpretation and Understanding of the Texts of the Bible.** The Bible is the most widely read and influential set of texts in human history, and is really a library of many books that chronicle the stories about God’s revelation in two volumes:

- I. The Story of God’s Covenantal Relationship with the Jews in the Hebrew Scriptures (the *Tanakh* or “Hebrew Bible”)
- II. The Life, Teachings, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and the Story of his Followers in the Early Church (the “Christian Scriptures”)

*"A Sower went out to sow ..."*

*"There was a landowner who planted a vineyard ..."*

*"There was a rich man who dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day ..."*

*"The Kingdom of God may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves..."*

*"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers ..."*

*"There was a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son ..."*

*"In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God or had respect for other people ..."*

*"There was a man who had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father ..."*

*"The king will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats..."*

*"There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property ..."*

One of the most distinctive and unique elements of the Gospel portrayals of Jesus of Nazareth is that he was a brilliant teacher who embodied his lessons in strange beguiling stories called "Parables." Nevertheless, the parables of Jesus are frequently misunderstood and mischaracterized, because we are liable to misunderstand the specific *genre* of literature and rhetoric that they belong to (they are not like Aesop's Fables, easily reducible to a simple moral or lesson); and because too often the subversive and challenging messages of the parables have been domesticated and sanitized; and because we live in the 21st century in a democratic, affluent, relatively peaceful world, surrounded by complex technology ... which is about as different a cultural context as can be imagined compared to the ancient Israeli world that Jesus and his followers belonged to.

To truly understand the parables of Jesus requires appreciation of the following elements:

- 1) Understanding the **Genre** of Literature and Rhetoric that they belong to, as short provocative stories intended to make a comparison between life in the kingdoms of this world (the Greco-Roman empire and the diverse Jewish culture of ancient Palestine) and life in the "Kingdom of God."
- 2) Understanding the Historical, Cultural, Social, Political, Economic and Religious **Context** of the worlds within the Parables – worlds that are vastly different to the one we live in.
- 3) Understanding the ways in which Parables **Function** – making "Familiar" things "Strange" so that the reader / audience ("those with ears to hear") can reprogram their perspective and viewpoint, and see the world as God sees it, imbued with the countercultural values of the Kingdom of God.
- 4) Understanding how to **Apply** the Transformation and Reorientation in perspective and worldview that the Parables aim to bring about in the lives of those who truly "hear" them in our contemporary world.

## Seminar Objectives

Participants who have completed the Parables seminars will be able to:

- Understand the Historical Context within which the Religious Texts of Early Christianity were Created and Read / Heard
- Be aware of the Social, Cultural, Political and Religious Issues Relevant to the Formation of the Texts and their Ethical Implications
- Distinguish between various Interpretative Methods used to Study, Examine, Analyze, Research, and Comprehend Biblical Texts
- Appreciate the various Literary Genres found in the texts of the Christian Scriptures, and Understand their Functions for Interpretation
- Comprehend the Significance, Relevance, and ongoing Influence of the Christian Scriptures on Contemporary Life and Debates, both inside and outside of the Church

## Materials and Class Format

Our only text for this class is the Bible, and we will be using the following translation and edition:

*The New Oxford Annotated Bible - New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with the Apocrypha* (College Edition, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed.) edited by Michael Coogan (Oxford, 2018)

[The *New Oxford Annotated Bible* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.) is currently \$35 new in hardback on Amazon (I strongly advise you get the hardback for durability), and contains a wealth of useful introductory essays, maps, and annotations – and is required for all “The Bible ... *for Smarties!*” Classes. If you have a 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. From a previous class, that will be just fine.]

Handouts, Outlines and copies of SlideShows will be provided, as well as access to other Online Resources. Ultimately, what you get out of the class will depend on what you decide to put into it. There are no written assignments – just a few parables assigned as reading each week. You are most welcome to just sit and watch / listen quietly to the presentations and discussion during our weekly Zoom class meetings ... and you’re also most welcome to ask questions and engage in the discussion and debate about the meaning of the parables that these challenging short stories are intended to provoke.

## Course Instructor

**David Moseley, Ph.D.** Teaches Religious Studies & Philosophy and is Director of Global Education at The Bishop’s School, La Jolla. Dr. Moseley holds undergraduate and graduate Degrees in Law, Theology and Philosophy from Oxford University; and a Doctorate in Theology & Music from Cambridge University. Dr. Moseley taught Theology and Biblical Studies at the University of San Diego for 16 years; he was formerly Theologian-in-Residence at St. Paul’s Episcopal Cathedral in San Diego; a founding member of the Faculty of the San Diego Diocesan School for Ministry, where he taught all the Biblical Studies classes for a decade; he has Led Trips to the “Holy Land”; and Teaches Adult Education Classes in Parishes throughout the County, and

online through his “The Bible ... *for Smarties!*” program. Dr. Moseley’s teaching style is enthusiastic, fun and engaging – he uses multimedia techniques and an interdisciplinary approach to fully explore the depth and nuance and inexhaustible fascination that he finds in the study of Biblical texts.

## **Registering for the Class**

The cost of the class is \$150 (for 6 x 2-hr online classes -- a total of 12 hours of class time). [Scholarships are available upon inquiry.]

If you'd like to take the Introduction to the Parables class, you can either Venmo me the money (@David-Moseley-17) or mail a check made out to "David Moseley" with "Parables Class" in the Memo Line, depending on your preference:

Dr. David Moseley  
P.O. Box 27031  
San Diego  
CA 92198

**\*\*Zoom Recordings of other “The Bible ... *for Smarties!*” classes are available for purchase, with access to all supporting materials (assignments and reading lists, outlines, slide shows, and other resources). Classes that are available on recordings include:**

1. A Short Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics (Three 2-Hr Classes)
2. Hebrew Scriptures 1 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – Torah & Historical Books
3. Hebrew Scriptures 2 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – Prophets & The Writings
4. Christian Scriptures 1 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – The Christian Gospels
5. Christian Scriptures 2 (Twelve 2-Hr Classes) – Beyond the Gospels

Please email me if you have any interest in purchasing access to these recordings.

And please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Dr. David Moseley  
[drdavidmoseley@gmail.com](mailto:drdavidmoseley@gmail.com)  
Cell: (858) 414-8169

***Best Wishes for the Class!***



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## PUZZLES, PARADOXES & PERCEPTION The Parables of Jesus

Summer 2025

Mondays ~ 6:00-8:00 p.m. PST

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### Schedule

Week 1: June 2<sup>nd</sup>

Week 2: June 9<sup>th</sup>

Week 3: June 16<sup>th</sup>

Week 4: June 23<sup>rd</sup>

Week 5: June 30<sup>th</sup>

Week 6: July 7<sup>th</sup>

During the class we will be examining in depth many of the most important and challenging parables in the Gospels, including:

- ❖ The Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18)
- ❖ The Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20)
- ❖ The Two Sons, The Tenants & The Wedding Feast (Matthew 21-22)
- ❖ The Wise Virgins, The Talents, and The Sheep & Goats (Matthew 25 / Luke 19)
- ❖ The Good Samaritan (Luke 10)
- ❖ Lost Things – The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Prodigal Son (Luke 15)
- ❖ The Dishonest Steward (Luke 16)
- ❖ The Rich Man & Lazarus (Luke 16)