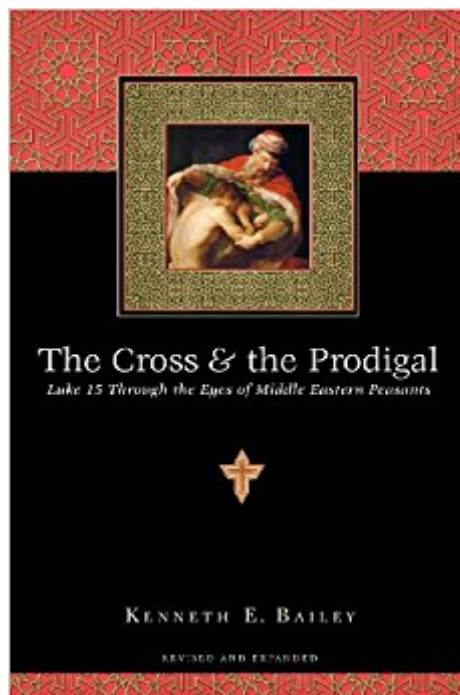




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# The Cross & The Prodigal: Luke 15 Through The Eyes Of Middle Eastern Peasants



## Synopsis

Honored in 2006 as a "Year's Best Book for Preachers" by Preaching magazine. Where is the cross in the parable of the prodigal son? For centuries, Muslims have called attention to the father's forgiveness in this parable in order to question the need for a Mediator between humanity and God. In *The Cross & the Prodigal*, Kenneth E. Bailey--New Testament scholar and long-time missionary to the Middle East--undertakes to answer this question. Drawing on his extensive knowledge of both the New Testament and Middle Eastern culture, Bailey presents an interpretation of this parable from a Middle Eastern perspective and, in doing so, powerfully demonstrates its essentially Christian message. Here Bailey highlights the underlying tensions between law and love, servanthood and sonship, honor and forgiveness that grant this story such timeless spiritual and theological power.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"It is an extremely rare event in New Testament studies when the historical expertise of the scholar is combined with the poetic imagination of the storyteller. Ken Bailey's *The Cross & the Prodigal* unites the professor and the playwright. In the first section of the book the author's unique familiarity with Christian literature of Near Eastern provenance and his intimate knowledge of Near Eastern village life produce a fascinating explanation of the parable of the prodigal son, which emerges not as the sentimental account of the pilgrimage of a sorry sinner, but as the portrayal of God as a

Father who pays every price possible in the search of two lost sons, a portrait contrary to all expectations associated with a patriarch. The book's second section is a play in four scenes in which this understanding of the parable is placed on the stage. Thus, exegetical theology is transformed back into its original medium, the telling of a story." (Ulrich Mauser, Otto A. Piper Professor of Biblical Theology Emeritus, Princeton Theological Seminary)"This book is for those of us who long to know what Jesus was saying to his audience then, so that we can know what the Bible is saying to us now. Ken Bailey's work is very nourishing, spiritually and theologically. And if you like to be surprised with new insights, you will love *The Cross & the Prodigal*!" (The Rev. Marian McClure, Ph.D., Director, Worldwide Ministries, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.))"In *The Cross & the Prodigal*, Kenneth Bailey uses his rare and intimate familiarity with the peasant culture of the Middle East to illuminate three beloved parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. Bailey rightly believes that Christian communities with close connections to the biblical world have many things to teach us about the cultural background of biblical narrative. This classic work, newly revised, provides fresh perspectives for understanding the love of God the Father, and for seeing how the compassion of the cross is present already in the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ." (Philip Graham Ryken, Senior Minister, Tenth Presbyterian Church)"Dr. Kenneth Bailey's unique perspective as one who has spent the better part of his life living in the Middle East unlocks the parables and teachings of our Lord Jesus in remarkably fresh ways. In the unfolding of the prodigal son Bailey demonstrates there is no forgiveness without great cost on the part of the forgiver. This revised edition is a wonderful update and expansion of an already excellent book. I am delighted to commend it." (The Right Reverend John W. Howe, D.D., Bishop, The Episcopal Church Diocese of Central Florida)"*The Cross & the Prodigal* is a little book that changed the minds of Gospel scholars throughout the world. In its original edition (1973) Bailey not only established himself as a leading New Testament interpreter, but he launched an approach to the Gospels that was utterly unique. Over sixty years of life in the Middle East (from Egypt to Iraq) bequeathed to him a discerning knowledge of peasant life; fluency in Arabic; the ability to work in Syriac, Coptic and Aramaic; and an intimate acquaintance with Rabbinic literature. These skills he now applies to the three parables of Luke 15 in order to unlock cultural insights that have eluded scholars for centuries. This approach deserves a name--Middle Eastern New Testament Studies--and today Bailey's legacy belongs with scholars such as Joachim Jeremias: leading parable interpreters whose work has been a watershed for the rest of us." (Gary M. Burge, Ph.D., Professor of New Testament, Wheaton College & Graduate School)

Kenneth E. Bailey (1930–2016) was an acclaimed author and lecturer in Middle Eastern New Testament studies. An ordained Presbyterian minister, he served as Canon Theologian of the Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh. The author of more than 150 articles in English and in Arabic, his writings include *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, *The Good Shepherd*, *Open Hearts in Bethlehem: A Christmas Drama*, and *The Cross and the Prodigal*. Bailey spent forty years living and teaching in seminaries and institutes in Egypt, Lebanon, Jerusalem and Cyprus. For twenty of those years he was professor of New Testament and head of the Biblical Department of the Near East School of Theology in Beirut where he also founded and directed the Institute for Middle Eastern New Testament Studies. Bailey was also on the faculty of The Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research in Jerusalem. Traveling around the globe to lecture and teach, Bailey spoke in theological colleges and seminaries in England (Oxford, Cambridge, Bristol) Ireland, Canada, Egypt, Finland, Latvia, Denmark, New Zealand, Australia, and Jerusalem. He was active as a Bible teacher for conferences and continuing education events in the Middle East, Europe, and North America, and he taught at Columbia, Princeton, and Fuller Seminary.

Kenneth Bailey puts real flesh on the story--such as when the parable says "the father ran to meet him" he explains the depth of what that meant for that father to do that in that culture. It gave me a deeper understanding of the loving, longing heart of the Father for his children. And that's only one instance....there were many eye opening culture mores explained. There was no new interpretation of the parable--simply great depth of meaning.....what does it mean in that culture for a son to ask for his share of the inheritance before the death of his father? What does it mean for a hebrew to go to a gentile country and spend his money? Why was the only job the hebrew son could find was herding pigs? How would his village respond to his return? Very insightful.

The late Kenneth Bailey presents the story of The Prodigal Son - or, as it's often called, now, The Forgiving Father - in a way which portrays the overflowing compassion of a true father. Christ is not the father in the story, but Bailey portrays the father as the archetype of Christ in his love and care for the returning son. He makes very clear that there are two stories in this parable: the story of the son's return; the story of the older brother who becomes the archetype of the Scribes and Pharisees - they have no compassion and no forgiveness, illustrated by the older son's rejection of his brother, even in the brother's abject penitence. Wonderful depth of perception and wealth of appreciation of this amazing parable.

What an absolutely amazing book giving the most interesting and unexpected perspective to the oh so familiar by now parable! One can really see how it was in Jesus's time and what was going on behind "the scenes" of the stories He used. The Father, the Prodigal and the Older Son, I would never see this story but the way presented by the author. Very happy that I purchased this book. Highly recommend.

Interesting interpretation of the parable of the Prodigal.

I really enjoy Bailey's style, and this book was a bit less technical than some of his others, making it even more easy to read and grasp. He takes a relatively short story and expands on the underlying concepts and cultural understandings that the original hearers would have grasped when they heard it. He adds so much background story to it, that it really comes to life more. My only complaint, and it is a relatively slight one in light of the whole story, is that Bailey kind of misses the mark in identifying the parties of the story. In identifying the prodigal son as just mankind, he misses the covenant significance behind it. The father figure is indeed representative of Yahweh as he points out, but the older son would be representative of the two southern tribes that were technically still within the covenant with the Father, with the prodigal son representing the ten Northern tribes who were not. Like the prodigal son, those tribes were cast out, dispersed throughout the nations, but they were promised (as seen in Isaiah, Hosea and Ezekiel 37, and elsewhere) that one day they were to be brought back into the fold. As we see this beginning to happen under the ministry of Paul, we see the building frustration of the Pharisees who were dealing unkindly to the idea, just as the older son in the story did. But as I said, while this is a technical issue of sorts, it doesn't really alter the thrust of this book's underlying story, that of the Father's love even for the people who despised him beforehand, but were now returning to the fold. I just think that bringing in that identification would add a slightly deeper meaning to the story, as well as bringing in the connection and tying together the promises from the OT that were about to take place. Even without that though, he brings out the extent of the Father's love, which bends over backwards in the face of cultural mandates, and acts in a way that is so contrary to the actions required of someone in the father's position, that it should bring the readers to a greater appreciation of what Yahweh has done for His people.

An excellent read, very informative.

This play was written by an American University (Beirut) theologian. It probably shows how the Prodigal son was interpreted by those who heard it. Both this and Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes are recommended to anyone searching for a more personal interpretation of the Bible. Buy it so you can make your own notes and insights.

Kenneth Bailey adds insight upon insight to a story familiar to Christians and non-Christians alike. Bailey explains the various nuances of this parable that are easy to understand, and reminds us that the prodigal son parable is not just about the younger son, or about the older son, but about how Christians are called to be like the Father, and at great cost to the Father (hence, "the Cross" in the title).

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