

**Matthew 25 – Introduction**

Matthew 24 details Jesus' predictions of future events concerning the nation of Israel. His disciples asked Him two questions, for which Matthew records the answer to only the second one. That second question (some see it as having two parts to it) was "what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" He first gives them an overview of the entire future seven-year tribulation period in Matthew 24:4–14 that includes many expected characteristics of that future time period. Such things as false Christ's, earthquakes, famines, persecution, and world-wide evangelism are all included as general markers of that time period.

He then goes into more detail concerning the second half of the tribulation in verses 15–28. This three and a half years will include more intense tribulation, false Christs and prophets; with the added deception of great miracles, and cosmic signs on the horizon. Verse 30 depicts the second coming of Christ and verse 31 highlights a worldwide gathering of elect Jews by the angels.

He then gives some warnings and instructions to urge those alive at the time to recognize that His coming is near. His illustration of the days of Noah indicates that many will be unprepared for His coming. He then gives two illustrations of the need to be prepared. The thief in the house and the wise and evil slave illustrations end chapter 24. Starting in chapter 25, Jesus now gives similar parables concerning the end of the age and the events that preclude the future millennial kingdom.

**Matthew 25:1–13 – Parable of the Ten Virgins**

One of the most interesting aspects of the parables of chapter 25 is how they are introduced. The first word recorded is "Then" This is how these parables begin, with a temporal marker indicating sequence.

**25<sup>1</sup>** "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom."

The Greek *Τότε* here has the sense of "at that time," which is exegetically significant here. After what time? What was the last temporal event that was the subject of Matthew 24 ... it was the Second Coming illustrated by the two parables: the thief and the head of the household ... and the wise and evil slave. What is also interesting is the tense of the verb translated "will be compared" in the NASB. It is a future passive and has the sense of something like ... "At that time the kingdom of God will be likened to ..." This is why most expositors, at least those in our camp, see the parables in Matthew 25 as post Second Coming parables concerning the end of the current age and the beginning of the Messianic age. Jesus' use of the wedding and wedding feast images would be understood by any Jew of the time. The word translated 'virgin' in the NASB is the usual word for a young unmarried woman or a newly married young woman. The point of the passage is that these ten women are part of the marriage party, they are not the bride. They would be the contemporary equivalent of the bridesmaids, though they would have had much different roles in Jesus' day.

Here a little cultural history is in order. Jewish weddings in Jesus' day were quite different from today. Jewish women were betrothed to their husbands by covenant. There would be a short ceremony and the Jewish couple would then separate from each other for a period of about one year. During that time the bride would prepare herself for marriage and the groom would return to his father's house and prepare living accommodations, usually adding an addition to his father's house. When the father is satisfied that the grooms' preparations are complete, he will inform his son to go get his bride and the wedding guests would be gathered in preparation for the wedding ceremony and wedding feast. The timing of this event, in which the father tells the son to go get his bride, is not known in advance by the bride or the ten attendants. One of the main purposes of the wedding attendants, the ten virgins in this parable, is to constantly look for the groom and let the bride know she has only a few moments left before her husband comes for her. The bride would typically be well prepared ... perhaps except for putting on her makeup, etc. ... the last-minute preparations. When the bridegroom comes for his bride the entire wedding party would then proceed to the groom's house for the wedding ceremony and wedding feast.

In this parable, one of the main purposes of the ten virgins is to follow the bridegroom to his father's house. What is the parables application? Since ten virgins are to follow the bridegroom to the father's house, it seems evident that these virgins represent Jews at the Second Coming whose purpose is to enter into the Millennial kingdom. This is their purpose, to enter the

kingdom of God. At the proper time, they were to take their lamps and go meet the bridegroom; who was on his way to get his bride, presumably at night since lamps were part of the parable. The text goes on ...

<sup>2</sup> "Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. <sup>3</sup> "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, <sup>4</sup> but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.

Jesus says the five of them were foolish and five were prudent. The parable illustrates the difference between the foolish and the prudent ones. The foolish took their lamps, but they took no oil with them. The prudent had oil in flasks along with their lamps. It is clear from the passage ahead that each of the ten had oil in their lamps to begin with, but the prudent ones brought extra oil for the trip to the wedding feast. Now it would be customary for the attendants to light their lamps and keep watch for the bridegroom all night. But the text tells us something happened the night the bridegroom was on his way ...

<sup>5</sup> "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and *began* to sleep. <sup>6</sup> "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet *him*.' <sup>7</sup> "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

On this night, the attendants did their usual routine and started watching for the bridegroom. But they all fell asleep in the middle of the night while they were supposed to be watching. Now here is where it gets interesting. At midnight, while they were all asleep, the shout of the bridal procession was heard. This meant the bridegroom was on his way to get his bride. Upon hearing the shout, the attendants trimmed their lamps (i.e., lit them if they went out, including putting more oil in the lamp). This is where the five prudent bridesmaids demonstrate their wisdom, they had extra oil for this occasion; whereas the foolish ones did not. What happens then?

<sup>8</sup> "The foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' <sup>9</sup> "But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you *too*; go instead to the dealers and buy *some* for yourselves.' <sup>10</sup> "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut.

Now the foolishness of the 5 attendants is on full display. They realized they had no oil, i.e., they were not prepared for the arrival of the bridegroom. They petitioned the others for oil as their oil had been depleted and their lamps were going out. The prudent ones understood that if they gave oil to the foolish ones, none of them would make it to the bridegroom's house. They refused and told the foolish ones ... 'go get your own oil.' Now while they were away doing that ... the bridegroom came ... those who were prepared and ready went to the wedding feast with the bride and bridegroom ... and the door of the wedding feast was shut.

<sup>11</sup> "Later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' <sup>12</sup> "But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' <sup>13</sup> "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

Notice now what happens ... the foolish ones came to the wedding feast and knocked on the door asking to be let into the wedding feast. Notice the response of the bridegroom to the plea "Lord, lord," ... "I do not know you." This is reminiscent of what other passage in Matthew? Yes, Matthew 7:21–23. "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord ...' I personally do not think this is the scariest verse in the bible as the parable here in Matthew 25 indicates this judgment will be after the Second Coming. I am more afraid of 2 Cor. 5:10 ... "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." This judgment of the five foolish virgins, who were not prepared for the Second Coming, involves being shut out of the kingdom.

The whole purpose of the attendants was to prepare to meet the bridegroom and enter the wedding feast. When the bridegroom says he doesn't know them, that is equivalent to him saying "I haven't met you when I came for my bride, I don't know who you are, and you therefore will not be admitted to the wedding feast." They are too late to enter in. The whole point is that at the end of the age, after the return of Christ, there will be Jews who have prepared themselves for entry into the millennium by accepting the offer of salvation and being alert for Him coming (i.e, they have become believers). They are prepared; they are like the prudent virgins; they will gain entrance to the kingdom. The door to the millennial kingdom will then be closed, and the foolish ones (unbelievers) will not be able to enter, though they will want to enter upon the return of Christ to the earth. They will be denied.

Fruchtenbaum<sup>1</sup> summaries the parable very well (while adding some speculative meaning to the details) ...

The emphasis of the fourth parable is on both watchfulness (vs. 13; watch therefore) and readiness (vs. 10; they that were ready). The virgins represent neither the church nor Israel in this parable, but simply serves to illustrate a point. From the Old Testament, the contrast of the wise and the foolish is a contrast between believers and unbelievers. ... When at the second coming the bridegroom (the Messiah) returns to earth with His bride (the church) for the marriage feast, the virgins will be responsible for both watching for His return and being ready to light the lamps upon His return. The five wise virgins represent the ones who are believers. They will be both ready and watching. They are the ones who have oil, a common symbol of the Holy Spirit. Only the wise ones enter the marriage feast, a common symbol for the Messianic kingdom. Because the Messiah is pictured as already being with His bride (the raptured church), these who have the oil are people who became believers during the tribulation. They are invited to the wedding feast as guests. The five foolish virgins will be the unbelievers and, therefore, will be neither ready nor watching. They do not have any oil. It should be noted that the text does not say that the foolish virgins ran out of oil, but that they took no oil with them (vs. 3). They never had the Holy Spirit to begin with.

That is the whole point of this parable, and it would be wrong to try to develop too many details from a simple parable. In this parable, there is an extended emphasis on watching and readiness, both of which are accomplished by faith in Yeshua the Messiah. Only wise ones enter the marriage feast.

Jesus then closes with the, familiar by now, 'be on the alert, for you do not know the day nor the hour' (of the bridegrooms coming). This was the point of the parable. Be prepared; for after the Second Coming ... there will be no second changes.

### **Matthew 25:14–30 – Parable of the Talents**

The parable of the talents is a rather lengthy teaching concerning the same general topic; preparedness for the coming king. It involves three servants and seems to be parallel to the wise and foolish servants in the previous chapter; 24:45–51. The parable of the talents also involves the conduct of the servants while the master is away and give hints at rewards and punishment upon the return of the master.

The setting is outlined in the first verses of the parable ...

<sup>14</sup> "For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them.

<sup>15</sup> "To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey.

The parable open with the phrase 'for it is just like ...' indicating that a comparison of some kind is being made. What is the comparison here? The last thing Jesus said was at the conclusion of the previous parable ... namely, 'be on the alert ...' How are those alive before the Second Coming to be alert? The parable explains this ...

A man is going on a journey and he wants his trusted slave to take care of his possessions and manage his affairs while he is gone. Apparently, this is required because the man could be gone for a long while. He recognized that his slaves were gifted in different ways and he doled out talents in accord with those abilities, i.e., 'to one he gave 5 talents, to another 2, and to another 1.' A talent is a large sum of money and the amount varied from place to place. Then he went away on his journey. Notice that the slaves had no idea when the master would return and the slaves are now responsible for the managing of the master's talents, presumably in a way that benefits the master (vs. 15).

The response of the slaves during the master's journey is the highlight of the parable ...

<sup>16</sup> "Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. <sup>17</sup>

"In the same manner the one who *had received* the two *talents* gained two more. <sup>18</sup> "But he who received the one *talent* went away, and dug a *hole* in the ground and hid his master's money.

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<sup>1</sup> Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G., *The Footsteps of the Messiah, A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Ariel Ministries, 1982, pp. 639–640.

Notice the one who was given five immediately went to work gaining five more talents; the one given two did likewise and gained two more. But the third slave did not work at all to gain additional talents, but rather buried it in the ground. Perhaps he feared losing it while he was trying to make more. Those of us that invest in the stock market can relate to this fear. The point is, this slave did not even try to gain more talents. Then the master finally comes back from his journey.

<sup>19</sup> "Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> "The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' <sup>21</sup> "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>22</sup> "Also the one who *had received* the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' <sup>23</sup> "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

The text says the accounts were now settled. The one given five earned five more, the one given two earned two more. The first two slaves were rewarded with more responsibility, commensurate with what they accomplished. Also, the phrase 'enter into the joy of your master' is just a wonderful picture of the millennial age. Now the master turns to the third slave, the one who did nothing with what was given him.

<sup>24</sup> "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no *seed*.' <sup>25</sup> 'And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup> "But his master answered and said to him, 'You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no *seed*.' <sup>27</sup> 'Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my *money* back with interest. <sup>28</sup> 'Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.'

Notice what the third slave does. Put yourself in the parable for a second. You are the third slave; you have just watched the first two receive praise and reward from the master ... but before the master gets to you, you realize that you did nothing with what was entrusted to you. You are likely going to fear going before the master. This slave then tries to justify his inaction by almost blaming the master for his harshness ... 'I knew you to be a hard man ... reaping where you did not sow ... gathering where you scattered no seed.' And he gives the master back his one talent and probably says "see, I didn't lose your talent." Now, ordinarily a human master might be flattered at the veiled complements of being a good master, but this master sees through this slaves' excuses and addresses him as 'you wicked, lazy slave.' The master then explains that, at a minimum, he should have gotten some positive return, no matter how small, for the one talent. The rest of the parable is obvious: the one talent is taken away and given to the first slave. Why? Jesus explains that in verse 29 ... Then that slave is cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. I again look to Fruchtenbaum<sup>2</sup> for a summary ...

The fifth parable emphasizes diligent laboring, which was also the point of the third parable. Again, the distinction is made between believers and unbelievers. The believers were laboring, and the unbelievers were not laboring. *But his lord answered and said unto him, You wicked and slothful servant (vs. 26)*. The servant is called 'wicked,' showing he was unsaved, and he is called 'slothful,' indicating he was not laboring. The servant is unsaved, so he is cast into the outer darkness.

## Remaining Schedule

May 26 – Matthew 25:31–46, parable of judgment, Sheep and the Goats

June 2 – Matthew Eschatology Review – Introduction to the Sermon ...

June 2 – I will be preaching on the gathering of Matthew 24:31. Specifically, how are we to view the current nation of Israel as it pertains to prophetic fulfillment? Is it a fulfillment of the vision of the valley of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37?

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<sup>2</sup> Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G., *The Footsteps of the Messiah, A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Ariel Ministries, 1982, pp. 641.