

Matthew Chapter 24-25 – The Olivet Discourse – Part 16
The Parables of the Olivet Discourse – Matthew 25:1-13 – Parable of the Ten Virgins

Introduction

In this section of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus teaches in parables. There are three parables in this section: the Parable of the Fig Tree, the Ten Virgins, and the Talents. The final section in this discourse (Matthew 25:31-46) informs the disciples about the judgment of the nations after His return.

These parables are in the purview of the kingdom of heaven, which is about the literal Messianic reign and the restoration of Israel. This discourse, although spoken to the disciples, concerns the Remnant, the final generation of Jewish believers during the Time of Jacob's Trouble.

In conjunction with the parables, we find three analogies: the days of Noah, like a thief, and faithful or evil slave. These analogies concern the fact that the day of the Lord and the return of Jesus Christ are going to happen at an unknown time. Therefore, always be ready.

Review

The previous analogy (the faithful or evil slave) deals with the warning that God will hold the leadership in Israel responsible. The reward will be great, and the punishment will be severe. Therefore, the leadership in Israel must always be ready because they will not know when the day of the Lord will come, and the judgment of the Lord will be brutal.

In the next two parables, we see information that is for all the people and not aimed at the leadership.

Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

The entire content of the parable must be put into the context of the kingdom of heaven. This means that this is not about the church nor is there any indication of a believer's evaluation at the Bema of Christ. This is about Jesus returning to Earth. This parable pictures a characteristic of life prior to Jesus returning.

The name of the parable revolves around the main subjects: ten virgins and the groom.

The word *virgin* is "παρθένος parthenos." The Parthenon is a structure dedicated to the Greek idol Athena the Virgin.

Normally, we do not talk about people being virgins, but in Jewish society, virginity was a paramount quality of a young maiden, and they would often be marked publicly by that status.

To translate this as chaste women indicates who they are now. However, this would be incorrect. The word "παρθένος parthenos" indicates "always has been chaste."

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Why is this designation used? These ten virgins go out to meet the groom. This indicates that the background is about a wedding. Because we are not familiar with the culture of Jewish weddings, we often lose the imagery and then the point of this passage. There are seven main customs that accompany a first-century Jewish wedding. From Tomas Constable:

1. The parents arranged the marriage with the consent of the bride and groom.
2. The couple passed an engagement period of many months in which it would become clear, hopefully, that the bride was a virgin.
3. On the day of the wedding, the groom would go to the bride's house to claim his bride from her parents. His friends would accompany him.
4. The marriage ceremony would take place at the bride's home.
5. On the evening of the day of the wedding, the groom would take his bride home. This involved a nighttime procession through the streets where they'd be greeted by maidens of the town at the house of the groom.
6. There would be a banquet that night (and often for seven nights). This often took place at the groom's home.

With that established, we hopefully can better grasp the scene of the story and move forward with the parable.

The number ten seems to be used as a round number so that two groups can easily be designated. I cannot find any significance to the number of maidens.

Verse 2 – Jesus divides them into two groups of five. Five were foolish, and five were prudent. Both of these words are adjectives and later they are used substantively. This indicates that foolishness and prudence indicate a characteristic, not simply a single situation.

The word *foolish* is “μωρός moros” and means stupid, foolish, or useless. This word group indicates thinking and functioning in opposition to what is proper (Matthew 5:13). We also understand this because the word used in contrast is *prudent*.

The word *prudent* is “φρονιμος phronimos.” This word is rooted in “φρήν phren,” which is the verb for proper thinking. “φρονιμος phronimos” means “being wise, having insight, being sensible.” In all these senses, the idea is that their thoughts and activity are in alignment with what is proper and good.

Verse 3 – The foolish ones took their lamps, but they took no oil with them. They were not thinking correctly; they functioned in a way that was not intended. One idea is that they were lazy, but the word is a mental word. So, they were mentally lazy; they did not think it through, which led to their foolish preparation.

Verse 4 - The prudent, the wise ones, took oil in flasks along with their lamps. They understood the instructions, and they acted intentionally, bringing oil in addition to what was in their lamps. The indication is that the prudent thought ahead while the foolish brought just enough for what was expected.

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Verse 8- Notice that in the parable, all the maidens ran into the same situation. They ran out of oil, and they needed to use their reserve to perform their responsibility. However, the foolish did not bring a reserve.

Verse 5-6 – The bridegroom delayed his arrival, and all ten fell asleep. Then they were awakened by a shout and instructed to greet the groom to give him a proper welcome. This arranged greeting was to honor and welcome him back with his bride.

Verses 7-9 – They all got up and trimmed their lamps, but all were running out of oil. Then the foolish ones asked for some oil from the prudent, but there was not enough. The prudent told the foolish that they would have to go out to the dealers and buy some oil.

Verse 10 – While the foolish went out, the groom came. Those who were ready (they were prepared) went in with him to enjoy the wedding feast, and the door was shut. The opportunity to enter was now closed.

Verses 11-12 – Later on, the foolish came back from the dealers requesting to be let in. But the door was shut, and the groom would not let them in, saying, “I do not know you.”

This parable is often stretched to a place that is beyond recognition. Why is this not about the church? Why is this not about the “saved?” What do the items represent?

The context dictates that this is about Israel and entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Many have taken the virgin imagery and tried to tie it to the church. Paul does say that he desires to present the saints as pure virgin (2 Corinthians 11:2), but that has no connection to this parable. To make this parable about the church and a warning to foolish believers, it would indicate that some believers will not gain entrance into the kingdom.

Another mistake is to make the oil in the lamp a reference to the Holy Spirit. Some have it but some do not. This is not communicated in the parable. All had it initially; they all ran out, and some had a reserve.

The virgins, the lamps, and the oil cannot refer to anything spiritual with any consistency.

The point of the passage is to be ready, be watchful, and be wise because the hour of the groom's return is unknown. We know this because Jesus Himself gives them the point of the parable.

Verse 13 – *Be on the alert* is the same word as in Matthew 24:42-43. The point remains the same throughout these parables. Some of the statements are spoken towards a specific group, but the message remains consistent. Be on the alert, be watchful, act with proper thinking, and be ready.

Conclusion

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What does all this mean? We know who the groom is, Jesus. We do not add into the text an interpretation of the bride since she is not mentioned or described. The ten virgins represent the people of Israel. The event is the literal return of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom.

The foolish are those Israelites who are unprepared, unwatchful, and foolish; they are not ready for the return of Jesus. The prudent are Israelites who are ready for His coming.

Any attempt to draw a connection between the parable and the character or understanding of the foolish in regard to eschatology is misguided. We already know how “the many” will act and what they will think. This parable simply highlights that Israel is responsible for being ready at any moment.

What can we take away? It is the same message as before. We should always be thinking and behaving rightly for our own reasons, but the consequences are not the same (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).