



Jesus Mañé, The Widow's Mite, 1973, from Art in the Christian Tradition, Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. Image via <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imageLink.pl?RC=48392>. Original source: <http://librairie-emmanuel.fr>.

MATTHEW 24–25; MARK 12–13; LUKE 21

JESUS'S LAST DAY OF PUBLIC MINISTRY & OLIVET DISCOURSE

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The last day of Jesus's public ministry begins with teaching at the temple and ends with a discussion about the destruction of the temple and Jesus's Second Coming. At that time, Jesus Himself did not know when these events would occur. After this last public event, Jesus leaves the temple to a secluded setting on the Mount of Olives to answer His disciples' questions about when His kingdom will come. After His explanation, Jesus further illuminates His message with four parables.

Teaching at the Temple

The widow's mite—Mk 12:41–44; Lk 21:1–4

Mk 12:41 (Lk 21:1). “**Jesus sat over against the treasury.**” As Jesus teaches in the Court of the Women, He can see the treasury along the walls of the courtyard. The Court of the Women was a gathering place for all purified Israelites and was the last courtyard where women and children were allowed to join in temple worship. At the time of the New Testament, women and children were confined to one section of the courtyard.

The temple treasury included thirteen donation containers placed along the north and south walls, adjacent to the two large storage rooms behind them. The collection containers each had a wooden box for a base and a brass funnel opening. The brass portions were in the shape of a trumpet, so they were called trumpets. The metal also amplified the sound of the coins as they were dropped in. The thirteen containers were each labeled for different offerings (for example, new shekel dues, gold for the mercy seat, freewill offerings, and sin offerings). A chief priest set the price for each offering. The historical records show that the prices changed dramatically at times (suggesting that they were not always honest or fair).

Mk 12:42 (Lk 21:2). “**a certain poor widow.**” We do not know the widow’s age—she may have been eighteen, with young children clinging to her knees, or eighty, walking alone. A mite was the smallest monetary denomination. The contrast between the widow’s donation and the “the rich men casting their gifts” amounts to significant financial and emotional differences in the giving.

Mk 12:44 (Lk 21:4). “**cast in all that she had.**” No one seems to notice the widow except Jesus. He sees everything and points her out to His disciples. The value of her offering is not the amount of money given but her sacrifice and faith in God. The same principle extends to our own offerings: the Lord does not need our tithes and offerings—thus the amount we give doesn’t matter—yet we need to learn how to selflessly give our all to God.

Jesus prophesies the temple’s fall—Mt 24:1–2; JS—Mt 1:1–3; Mk 13:1–2; Lk 21:5–6

JS—Mt 1:2 (Mt 24:1; Mk 13:1; Lk 21:5). “**Master, show us concerning the buildings of the temple.**” Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that Jesus and His followers leave the temple courtyards and walk eastward to the Mount of Olives. Looking backward across the Kidron Valley at the temple from that vantage point must have been spectacular. Even though the outbuildings were still under construction during the Lord’s lifetime, the temple continued functioning every day during the entire expansion project (between 19 BC and AD 63). As to not defile the sacred space, Herod trained thousands of priests as stonemasons to work on the sanctuary. Herod designed the temple to be the most beautiful building in the Roman world.¹ However, his focus was not what Moses intended—each furnishing and ritual of the temple was to point to and typify the Messiah, or the Anointed One.²

Josephus served in this temple as a priest and described it in his writings. In 20 BC, Herod’s construction teams began the plans to expand the top of Mount Moriah, flattening the mountain to make a

thirty-three-to-thirty-six-acre platform for the enormous temple complex. The outmost courtyard walls were sixteen feet thick. The innermost sanctuary stood a hundred and fifty feet, or nine stories, high. (As a modern comparison, it was one and a half times higher than the modern Dome of the Rock, whose spire now measures a hundred and fifteen feet tall.) Herod's temple was covered in gold leaf that glistened in the sunlight. Josephus claims that the doors to enter the sanctuary were forty-nine feet high and twenty-four and a half feet wide.³

The outer courtyard was a place for all to gather, and so it was named the Court of the Gentiles. This courtyard took up most of the acreage of the temple mount. At the temple, the space became progressively more holy as one approached the central shrine, so to separate the Gentiles from the sacred spaces, a large surrounding wall framed the Court of the Women and the Court of the Priests. On the wall, a warning was written in three languages that read: "No stranger is to enter within the balustrade round the temple and enclosure. Whoever is caught will be himself responsible for his ensuing death."⁴

Past the Court of the Women and the Court of Israel was the Court of the Priests. This exclusive inner courtyard was where the priests and Levites assigned to work in the temple were washed in the Brazen Sea and assisted at the enormous brass altar. Just a few chosen priests entered the sanctuary to the Holy Place to light the incense twice a day and to restock the twelve loaves of bread and the wine once a week. Finally, the most sacred space, the Holy of Holies, was entered only by the one high priest once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16).

The architecture and engineering involved in the temple's construction is mind-boggling. The craftsmen maneuvered into place thousands of five-to-ninety-ton blocks without using any mortar between the stones to secure them. The average stone was the size of a modern dishwasher, but some were as large and heavy as two loaded airplanes. The enormous stones on the outer facade were meticulously carved with borders or frames. Those who saw the temple reported that it was absolutely breathtaking. As the common phrase goes, "He who has not seen Herod's temple has not seen beauty in all his life."⁵ Yet, Jesus repeatedly prophesied that the temple would be destroyed. At that time, this was unfathomable; yet after AD 70 it stood as rubble for nearly six hundred years and witnessed of Jesus's words.

In Matthew's and Mark's Gospels, the JST changes the disciples' comment from telling Jesus about the temple to asking Him about its future. (The JST of Mk 13 parallels much of JST, Mt 24.)

Mt 24:3 (Mk 13:3; Lk 21:7). "*privately, saying, Tell us, when . . . ?*" Only Peter, Andrew, James, and John (two groups of two brothers) ask Jesus about the timing of the future destruction in Mk 13:3. The JST removes their names and replaces them with "*the disciples.*" Jesus's audience of believers—either some of the Twelve or a combination of disciples—gather on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the temple on Mount Moriah, and continue to discuss Jesus's prophecies.

Table 1. Comparison of Mk 13:1–2 and JST, Mk 13:1–2

Mk 13:1–2	JST, Mk 13:1–2
<p>And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!</p> <p>And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down</p>	<p>And as <i>Jesus</i> went out of the temple, his disciples <i>came to him saying</i>, Master <i>show us concerning the buildings of the temple</i>. And <i>he</i> said unto him, <i>Behold ye these stones of the temple, and all this great work, and buildings of the temple? Verily I say unto you, they shall be thrown down and left unto the Jews desolate.</i></p> <p><i>And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things, and do ye not understand them? Verily I say unto you, there shall not be one left here upon this temple, one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And Jesus left them and went upon the mount of Olives.</i></p>

Table 2. Outline of Jesus’s Olivet Discourse

Topic	Reference
Signs of Jesus’s coming	Mt 24:3–8; Mk 13:3–8; Lk 21:7–11
Persecution foretold	Mt 24:9–14; Mk 13:9–13; Lk 21:12–19
Abomination of desolation	Mt 24:15–22; Mk 14–20; Lk 21:20–24
False Christs and prophets	Mt 24:23–28; Mk 13:21–23; Lk 21:25–38

Olivet Discourse: Judgment and Delayed Second Coming

Jesus’s disciples want to learn more about the temple’s destruction, so they follow Him up the Mount of Olives and continue to ask questions: “When shall these things be?” (Mt 24:3; Lk 21:7). Jesus’s response has become known as His Olivet Discourse. Jesus’s revelation must have been a total shock to His Apostles, who felt that the coming of the kingdom of heaven and its King were already there. It was also shocking because Jesus prophesied of three periods of destruction without separating them by time. He included the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by the Romans (AD 68–70), the destruction preceding His Second Coming, and the destruction at the end of the world. All three horrific events are discussed together. This was confusing—yet the Roman war against Judea would be a type of the destruction before Jesus’s Second Coming. The following is an outline of the Olivet Discourse as recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels for your own study.

Matthew 24 and Joseph Smith—Matthew

Just as Jesus’s disciples were interested in the end-times, in Joseph Smith’s day the Saints (and the nation at large) were also fascinated by information on the Savior’s Second Coming and the Millennium. When Joseph Smith translated Mt 24, he felt inspired to rearrange the Olivet Discourse to separate past and future events. He also added 50 percent more text to Mt 24 in the JST. Every verse was changed except one: verse 33.

The Lord also gave other revelations on His Second Coming to the Prophet Joseph Smith. A sampling includes D&C 1, 29, 38, 43, 45, 101, 116, and 133.⁶ Interestingly, D&C 45:16–45 cites approximately thirteen verses from the Olivet Discourse in Mt 24.

The JST of Mt 24 was published in the Pearl of Great Price. Just as the JST of Genesis 1–7 received a new name—that is, the book of Moses—so too the JST of Mt 24 was renamed and became known as Joseph Smith—Matthew (JS—Mt).⁷ This study guide follows the order and text of JS—Mt rather than the KJV verses. The organization of JS—Mt is shown below to separate the past and future events:

Signs of Jerusalem’s impending destruction—Mt 24:1–5, 8–22; JS—Mt 1:4–20

Mt 24:3 (JS—Mt 1:4; Mk 13:4; Lk 21:7). “**what shall be the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world?**” The disciples did not understand what lay ahead in the coming two days, but at this point, they were more interested in the distant future. They asked two questions: first, about the timing of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and second, about the signs of the Second Coming. The end of the world is defined here, almost as if in a parenthetical, as “the destruction of the wicked” (this is repeated in JS—Mt 1:31). The earth itself will not be destroyed. We learn elsewhere that the earth will “receive its paradisiacal glory” and become the celestial kingdom. The destruction described can be defined as a purification and the end of worldliness (Articles of Faith 1:10; D&C 88:10).

Table 3. Verse order of JS—Mt 1 compared to that of Mt 24 KJV

	JS—Mt 1	Mt 24 KJV
Past <i>Jerusalem’s destruction</i>	1	23:39
	2–6	1–5
	7–11	9–13
	12–18	15–21
	19	8
	20–21	22
Future <i>Jesus’s Second Coming</i>	21–22	23–24
	23, 28	6
	24–27	25–28
	29	7
	30	12
	31–32	14–15
	33	29
	34–35	34–35
	36–39	30–33
	40–54	36–51
55	36–51	

JS—Mt 1:5–7. “*many shall come in my name . . . and deceive many; then shall they . . . kill you.*” Jesus warned His disciples that deception and iniquity will abound before His Second Coming. Because of the circulating falsehoods, the disciples will all be persecuted, and many will even suffer martyrdom. We usually honor Stephen as the first Christian martyr, although John the Baptist and Jesus, already martyred, could be considered Christian martyrs. James the son of Zebedee and Salome followed Stephen as the next martyr, as did the other ten Apostles.⁸

JS—Mt 1:11. “*he that remaineth steadfast . . . shall be saved.*” Although the desolation to come will be heinous, those who listen to the Lord’s anointed servants and to His Spirit will escape it. Just as the Israelites who were obedient to the prophet in covering their doors with lamb’s blood were protected from the destroying angel, so too will the steadfast receive divine protection from the worst destructions of the last days. The same was also true at the Roman destruction of Jerusalem because all Christians who followed the apostolic leadership had left Jerusalem before the worst destruction.

JS—Mt 1:12 (Mt 24:15; Mk 13:14). “*see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel.*” In Dan 9:26–27, 11:31, and 12:11, we read of the horrific destruction of Jerusalem that would follow the Messiah’s death: “After the sixty-two ‘sevens’ [‘weeks’ in the KJV], the Anointed One will be put to death and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood.”⁹ It appears that even though very few Galilean villages had a copy of the scroll of Daniel during the Lord’s ministry, these prophecies were known.¹⁰

To avoid this desolating scourge, Jesus tells the disciples to stand in the Holy Place. This is the name of the first room in the temple sanctuary, reserved for just a handful of priests to light the incense and menorah and to replace the shewbread. But the Lord used similar language to refer more generally to holy places in D&C 101:22: “It is my will, that all they who call on my name, and worship me according to mine everlasting gospel, should gather together, and stand in holy places.” Interestingly, this counsel was also given at a time of great persecution and destruction.

JS—Mt 1:18. “*In those days, shall be great tribulation on the Jews, . . . as was not before . . . nor ever shall be.*” Jesus prophesies of the extreme danger and speed of the upcoming destruction. The horrific massacre came as a result of the Jewish revolt in AD 66–70 (just thirty-three years after Jesus’s prophecy and death). The Roman emperor Nero sent an army under Vespasian to eradicate the Jews from their land. In the middle of his destruction, Vespasian was called back to Rome to become the next emperor. His son Titus entered Jerusalem and desolated everything in his path, including the stone temple.

Signs of the Second Coming—JS—Mt 1:21–37

JS—Mt 1:20. “*those days should be shortened . . . for the elect’s sake.*” Jesus prophesies that His covenants will protect the world from utter destruction. He will not allow His elect to fall. In Restoration times, God’s elect have been defined as they who choose to be chosen, or those who live

their covenants.¹¹ The good people who prayerfully testify of Jesus have blessed many generations of the world—just as a sprinkle of salt and a ray of light can effect dramatic changes.

JS—Mt 1:22. *“There shall also arise false Christs, and false prophets, . . . [and] they shall deceive the very elect.”* Jesus repeats His warning about false prophets from JS—Mt 1:9. Paul also taught of the false prophets deceiving the elect when he spoke of the Apostasy in 2 Th 2:1–3; Heb 9:26–28; and Act 20:29. Peter repeated this message in 2 Pe 3:3–9, and John describes anti-Christis in 1 Jn 2:18. True prophets can identify false prophets and their falsehoods. One who has the spirit of prophecy is identified by John the Revelator as one who has a testimony of Jesus (Rev 19:10). In a Springfield, Illinois, court of law, Joseph Smith used this New Testament teaching as his definition and evidence that he was a prophet.¹² In addition to testifying of Jesus, true prophets unmask false prophets by exposing their misinformed philosophies or cunning counterfeits.

The early Christians expected the end of the world very soon after Jesus’s Resurrection.¹³ Yet, it was not the Second Coming that was imminent but the Apostasy. False teachings were already prevalent by the time of Paul’s ministry; the change was neither passive nor gradual. Jesus foretold of this in Mt 24:24 and later explained through Paul that He allows it: *“Christ suffereth him to work, until the time is fulfilled that he shall be taken out of the way”* (2 Th 2:7, JST).

JS—Mt 1:23–37. *“for the elect’s sake . . . for the Son of Man shall come.”* The Lord outlines twenty signs of the times that will precede and accompany His Second Coming. He does this so His covenant people will be prepared.

- Wars and rumors of wars will break out (JS—Mt 1:23, 28)
- All will see Jesus’s Second Coming; it will be as a sunrise, which covers the earth (JS—Mt 1:26)
- The elect will gather (JS—Mt 1:27)
- Nation will rise against nation (JS—Mt 1:29; unlike the Millennium described in Isa 2:4)
- There will be famine (JS—Mt 1:29)
- There will be pestilence (JS—Mt 1:29)
- Earthquakes will occur in diverse places (JS—Mt 1:29)
- Iniquity will abound (JS—Mt 1:30)
- People’s love will “wax cold” (JS—Mt 1:30)
- Those who are not overcome will be saved (JS—Mt 1:30)
- The gospel will be preached in all the world (JS—Mt 1:31)
- The wicked will be destroyed (JS—Mt 1:31)
- Daniel’s prophecy of the abomination of desolation will be fulfilled (JS—Mt 1:32)
- The sun and moon will be darkened (JS—Mt 1:33)
- Stars will fall (JS—Mt 1:33)
- In the generation that these are fulfilled, Jesus will come again (JS—Mt 1:34–36)

- The tribes of the earth will mourn (JS—Mt 1:36)
- Jesus will come in the clouds “with power and great glory” (JS—Mt 1:36)
- Those who treasure God’s word will not be deceived (JS—Mt 1:37)
- Angels will come before Jesus to gather the elect in heaven (JS—Mt 1:37)

God’s promise to the generation who has to endure this tragic list of destruction is that they will be filled with hope and encouragement if they “treasureth up my word” (JS—Mt 1:37).

Four Parables

Still on the Mount of Olives, Jesus elaborates more on His teachings with four stories or parables. (*Parabole* means “type, figure, and illustration.”) The first two parables are about the timing of these signs, and the next two describe what disciples need to do to prepare. (I will continue with the Joseph Smith—Matthew text as it is much richer.)

Parable of the fig tree—Mt 24:32–44; JS—Mt 1:38–48; Mk 13:28–33; Lk 21:29–36

JS—Mt 1:38–40. “you know that summer is nigh . . . but of that day . . . no one knoweth . . . but my Father only.” By studying the law of the harvest, one can estimate when fruit will be ripe. Jesus encourages us to watch and study in the same way as we prepare for His coming. That even Jesus does not know when He will return is a surprising revelation.

JS—Mt 1:41. “as it was in the days of Noah, so . . . at the coming of the Son of Man.” With God directing mortality, the world’s history (especially its divinely directed history) repeats itself. Despite all the destruction and calamities that will precede Jesus’s Second Coming, people will continue to go about their lives as they did before the great flood in Noah’s day.¹⁴ Initially, those people probably saw the extra-heavy rain as only an annoyance and not as something life-threatening. In 2004, President Gordon B. Hinckley equated the wickedness in our times with the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁵ We have also received an apostolic admonition as recently as the April 2019 general conference: “Let us be about building up Zion to hasten that day.”¹⁶ The righteous can cut short the calamities of the last days (JS—Mt 1:20–21).

JS—Mt 1:46–48. “what I say unto one, I say unto all . . . watch . . . in such an hour as ye think not.” Jesus repeatedly instructs His disciples to watch until the end, which could refer to the end of disciples’ mortal lives, not the final destruction of the wicked.¹⁷ In that case, those disciples will be the angels who join the Lord at His glorious coming (Rev 6:12, 18). Regardless of when our time to meet the Lord comes, the counsel to watch calls for active engagement. The Lord asks that rather than passively wait for His timing, disciples actively wait by becoming spiritually stronger each day. Our preparation affects God’s timing; thus when the Church is ready, the bridegroom can come again (Rev 19:7).

Parable of the good and wicked servants—Mt 24:45–51; JS—Mt 1:49–55; Lk 12:41–46
JS—Mt 1:49–50. “a faithful and wise servant . . . shall find so doing.” To be ready for the Lord, we must be serving God. In Matthew, the wise are those who traveled far and sacrificed much to worship the toddler Jesus. The wise are also described as those who build their foundation on the rock of our Redeemer (Hel 5:12). Now, the wise are those who are faithful and are doing the Lord’s work.

JS—Mt 1:51–54. “that evil servant shall say . . . My lord delayeth his coming . . . appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.” This group—people who have feigned allegiance to God but have not maintained His image in their countenance, mind, and heart—are still God’s servants. If we lose faith in God’s plan, do not see His hand in the unfolding of the world, or become self-centered (the equivalent in the parable to eating and drinking without attention to God’s plan), then we may fall into this category. The Lord warns that frivolity and pleasure now will be met with weeping at the Judgment.

JS—Mt 1:55. “thus cometh the end of the wicked . . . not yet, but by and by.” Although Jesus just admitted that He did not know the exact timing of His return, He did know that it was not time yet, just as those watching the fig tree don’t know exactly when the fruit will be ripe but know the harvest has not come yet. However, we live in a day when our prophet has warned us that the time is short: “As President of His Church, I plead with you . . . [to] do the spiritual work to find out for yourselves, and please do it now. Time is running out.”¹⁸

Parable of the ten virgins—Mt 25:1–13

To emphasize that His disciples will need to prepare as they wait for His Second Coming, Jesus gives two powerful parables: those of the ten virgins and the talents. In the Doctrine and Covenants, seven verses across six revelations refer to the parable of the ten virgins, making it the most referenced parable in that book.¹⁹ This confirms the modern need to understand this parable as we prepare for Jesus’s great Second Coming.

Mt 25:1. “kingdom of heaven.” Previously we discussed Matthew’s unique use of this three-word phrase.²⁰ The same phrase is found in the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants.

Mt 25:1. “likened unto ten virgins . . . to meet the bridegroom.”²¹ The main character of this parable is the bridegroom. When we look at the parable symbolically, the bridegroom is the Son of God and the ten virgins and bride represent the Church, or God’s covenant people. In the Old Testament, Zion and Jerusalem represent the bride of Jehovah. This symbolism stemmed from Isa 62:5: “As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.” This image of marriage was carried further; whenever the Israelites broke their covenant with God for idolatry or sins, the Old Testament referred to it as adultery and spoke of a “bill of divorcement.”²²

Jesus’s parable incorporates part of the wedding festivities that were the custom at the time. After a wedding was arranged (usually before the girl was twelve and a half years old), the families held a betrothal festivity. Then, about a year later, family and friends gathered for the final wedding ceremony at the groom’s parent’s home. After everything was prepared, the groom’s family and friends formed a

processional to escort the bride from her home to his. The procession of townspeople sang, danced, and carried torches as they paraded through the town. A days-long sumptuous feast followed the wedding vows.

In the meantime, the young bride's closest companions (usually in their young teens) prepared her by helping her bathe, dress, put on perfume, and style her hair. In Pharisees' families, this was the last public exposure of the bride's hair for the rest of her life. After her wedding, the bride must always wear a veil to cover her head and face in public.²³ Customarily, both the bride and groom wore a garland wreath, and if they were wealthy, they each wore a golden headdress.

Once the processional returned to the groom's home, the final ceremony began. The groom gave his bride a ring and completed their wedding vows: "You will be my wife according to the law of Moses."²⁴ After the ceremony, the bride moved into the groom's family home for a few years until the couple were old enough to be financially independent.²⁵

Mt 25:2. "five . . . wise, and five . . . foolish." Jesus's storytelling grabs attention immediately. His simple, well-known images have an unusual or new twist that draws in the hearer and brings them to listen more closely. His labels immediately cause the listeners to wonder what makes one wise and another foolish. Quoting Elder Marvin J. Ashton, John and Jeannie Welch said of the foolish:

"They were not pagans, heathens, or gentiles, nor were they known as corrupt or lost, but rather they were informed people who had the saving, exalting gospel in their possession, but had not made it the center of their lives. They knew the way, but were foolishly unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom. . . . All had been warned their entire lives." . . . These are cautionary tales to all disciples: look to your own life and behaviors.²⁶

Mt 25:3–4. "foolish took their lamps, and took no oil . . . the wise took oil." The cultural practice of the day required one going out at night to bring a small clay lamp full of oil, and prudent people brought another small flask or vessel of extra oil.

Mt 25:3. "oil." In early Christianity, olive oil symbolized the Spirit (Act 10:38; 1 Jn 2:20). Likewise, the oil is identified as the Holy Ghost in D&C 45:56–57: "They that are wise and have received of the truth, and have taken the Holy Spirit for their guide, and have not been deceived—verily I say unto you, they shall not be hewn down and cast into the fire, but shall abide the day."²⁷

Olive oil was a basic staple of life in Israel at the time of Jesus. The first pressings of oil were used in temple sacrifices and ritual purification. Moses and his predecessors made consecrated oil for anointing the tabernacle, priests, kings, prophets, and altars as well as for preparing the Passover lambs. As mentioned previously, Jesus's title Christ is translated into English as the "Anointed One," or as "Messiah" in Hebrew. Jesus is the agent of the At-one-ment, but the Holy Ghost is the medium of the Atonement.

Mt 25:4. "vessels." What the KJV renders as "vessel," other versions translate as "flask," "jar," or "container" (ESV, NIV, GNT). John and Jeannie Welch point out that the Greek word, *aggeiois*, is also

used for blood vessels.²⁸ Taking this image a step further, the vessels of oil can represent our need to internalize the oil of the Spirit so that it can run through our whole being and give us light, life, and direction.

Mt 25:5–6. “*While the bridegroom tarried, they . . . slept. And at midnight . . .*” The bridegroom comes so much later than expected that everyone falls asleep. Allegorically, the Savior’s Second Coming has been expected by diverse groups of Christians for nearly two thousand years. Even though Jesus did not know when His Second Coming would happen (Mk 13:32), the parable teaches that it would be later than expected. Each generation, though, will go to see their Maker, so Jesus warned that all need to “take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (Mk 13:33).

Mt 25:7. “*arose, and trimmed their lamps.*” This verse is referenced and elaborated on in D&C 33:16–17: “The power of my Spirit quickeneth all things. Wherefore, be faithful, praying always, having your lamps trimmed and burning, and oil with you, that you may be ready at the coming of the Bridegroom.” Living the gospel of Jesus is more than not doing wrong; it is actively doing those things that fill us with the Spirit of God.

Mt 25:8–9. “*Give us of your oil . . . buy for yourselves.*” These verses can be confusing. As a people who try to share our goods and give to those in need, the wise virgins’ refusal to share may sound selfish or startling. Why not share a little oil, even if you only have an ounce or two? That is what the widow of Nain did for Elijah! Yet Jesus’s oil is not the same. What the Lord is talking about cannot be shared. President Spencer W. Kimball explained:

The kind of oil which is needed to illuminate the way, light up the darkness is not shareable. How can one share a tithing receipt; a peace of mind from righteous living; an accumulation of knowledge? How can one share faith or testimony? How can one share attitudes or chastity, or a mission? How can one share temple privileges and security? Each one must obtain that kind of oil for himself.²⁹

This oil or spirituality must be experienced and developed individually (D&C 122:7). We must cultivate our own level of faith and testimony. In this sense, to carry an empty vessel is to have Church membership without covenants, obedience, or the Spirit. We deceive ourselves if we think we are complete when our spiritual vessels are empty.

Mt 25:10. “*while they went to buy, the bridegroom came.*” The lamps (symbolic of one’s covenants, or the testimony of Church members) may at one time have been able to give light, but without the oil (that is, the Spirit), they could not be rekindled. Though oil was a readily available basic staple, the women likely could not find any because of the late hour.

The Greek word used for “shut,” *kleio*, is the same word Josephus used to describe the state of mind of the Jews who came to Jerusalem for the Passover and for refuge two years before the city was destroyed.

Mt 25:12 (JST). “**Ye know me not.**” The JST makes a substantial change to the message. The difference is understanding the character of the God we worship: our God *always* knows us, and it is we who do not know Him.³⁰

Parable of the talents—Mt 25:14–30; Mk 13:34; Lk 19:11–27

Mt 25:14. “*For the kingdom of heaven is as a man . . . who called his own servants, and delivered unto them.*” This parable starts with the same phrase (“the kingdom of heaven is like”) as many past parables that refer to the Judgment and Second Coming of the Lord. However, the phrase is italicized in the KJV, which means it is not original to the Greek text but rather was inserted by the translators, probably to follow the earlier well-established pattern. Jesus begins with a man traveling to a far country, referring to the second estate (that is, mortal life) of God’s plan of salvation for His children. Jesus will no longer live among His people but will delegate to others. He asks His servants to do as He did and minister to others. The Doctrine and Covenants references this parable twice (D&C 60:2, 13; 82:18).

Mt 25:15. “*unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one.*” A talent was the largest quantity of money and was a monetary weight or coin (*talent* did not gain its modern definition of “abilities” until the Middle Ages—perhaps from this parable). Historians surmise different values for the coin. One estimate is that a talent was worth fifteen years of labor. Another suggests that one talent was worth six thousand denarii, or six thousand days’ wages. Two denarii provided a man and his family one day’s living; thus, one talent provided three thousand days (about eight years) of living for an entire family or nearly a decade for just a couple.

In the Greco-Roman world, household slaves and servants were often given money at the end of their service (often when they reached age thirty) to use in starting up on their own.³¹ The different amounts listed in the parable may have represented the different number of years each person worked.

Mt 25:16 (JST). “*traded . . . and gained other five.*” Those who use the Lord’s blessings to build His kingdom can double the effects of their efforts. In D&C 82:18–21 the Lord declared that improving our talents is directly related to how we conduct ourselves in our stewardship responsibilities.

Mt 25:21, 23. “*Well done, thou good and faithful servant.*” God’s love will bless us at the Judgment with mercy, but His judgments will reflect how well we have carried out our stewardships. In modern Western culture we may not understand the master-servant relationships but can imagine what it means to be a steward and servant. We have the Lord’s example as He took on the role of a slave to wash others’ feet and heal, feed, clothe, and comfort everyone who asked for help. We should do likewise.

Mt 25:26, 30. “*slothful servant . . . outer darkness . . . weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” Hell represents a place for the unrepentant.³² The story shows us how to apply ourselves in the stewardships we are given and speaks of repentance.

Jesus will judge the world—Mt 25:31–46

Mt 25:32. “*as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.*” Jesus associates His judgment with a pastoral scene of a shepherd in the field separating his animals, not a cold, austere figure demanding respect and silence. He will also have His closest friends helping with the task of making sure everyone goes where they desire.

Mt 25:40. “as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” The blessing of serving those around us is doubly magnified on God’s Judgment Day. If we have helped the stranger, naked, hungry, and prisoner, we have also helped our God. His work is to redeem, feed, and clothe, so even without realizing it, those who offer loving service on any level are serving God. His work and glory become ours.

Notes

1 George A. Barton, “Temple of Herod,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Cyrus Adler (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906): “The Jews were loath to have their Temple pulled down, fearing lest it might not be rebuilt. To demonstrate his good faith, Herod accumulated the materials for the new building before the old one was taken down. The new Temple was rebuilt as rapidly as possible, being finished in a year and a half, although work was in progress on the out-buildings and courts for eighty years.”

2 2 Ne 11:4; Mosi 3:15; Alm 13:16; Ex 29:36–37; 40:10; and so forth.

3 Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 5.188–189, 215–216, 219–221; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.391–395, 410–420.

4 Barton, “Temple of Herod.” It is known as the Soreg inscription. A portion of it is found in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum.

5 Talmud, *Bava Basra* 4a.

6 Several verses address the Lord’s Second Coming, including D&C 19:11; 29:14–21; 45; 49:7, 22; 76:63; 88:87–91; 88:95, 99, 104; 128:24; 130:1, 14; 133:2, 20, 46, 125; Isa 13:9–11; 40:3–5; 45:23; 49:11; 52:10; 60:2; 63:1; Dan 7:13; Joel 3:16; Mic 1:3; Zech 12:10; 13:6; 14:4; Mal 3:2; Mt 24; Jud 1:14; Rev 1:7; 3:11; 6:12, 17–18; 8:1; see also the Topical Guide. The Book of Mormon further explains that Jesus’s First and Second Comings are typified and represented throughout covenant history in both the Old and New Testaments. See, for example, 2 Ne 11:4; 25:20; Mosi 3:15; 13:30–33; 16:13; Alm 25:15; 33:19–21; 34:14; 37:38–40; Eth 13:6.

7 In 1851, the British mission president, Apostle Franklin D. Richards, wanted to share key passages from the JST and the Doctrine and Covenants with the European Saints. He compiled some of his favorites into a pamphlet and published it as the Pearl of Great Price. One portion of the JST that he included was Mt 24. Over time, parts of that collection were canonized.

8 Peter was crucified upside down in Rome in about AD 64; James son of Zebedee was beheaded in about AD 44; Andrew was crucified; Philip was crucified in about AD 54; Bartholomew was crucified; Matthew was killed with a halberd in about AD 60; Thomas was killed by spear; James son of Alphaeus was beaten by club, then crucified and stoned; Jude was crucified; Simon the Zealot was crucified in about AD 70.

9 Dan 9:26 NIV; see also Hos 3:4 and Jer 19:4.

10 Large cities had synagogues with multiple scrolls, but smaller towns could afford only the Five Books of Moses and the Psalms. After those six, the next most common biblical scroll available at the time of Jesus was Isaiah.

11 *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1980), 4:266. The Prophet Joseph Smith endorsed and published the following address by Brigham Young on the subject: “This is the election that we believe in . . . in the words of the beloved Peter and Paul, we would exhort you to ‘work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure’ (Philippians 2:12, 13); ‘Giving all diligence to make your calling and election sure’ (2 Peter 1:10); for this is that sealing power spoken of in Ephesians (1:13, 14)—‘in whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth; the gospel of your salvation, in whom also, after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of Promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, until the praise of His glory’ (2 Peter 1:11); ‘For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.’” Also see another sermon by Joseph on the subject in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 334.

12 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1433, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/76>: “If any person should ask me if I were a prophet, I should not deny it, as that would give me the lie; for, according to John, the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy; therefore if I profess to be a witness or teacher, and have not the spirit of prophecy, which is the testimony of Jesus, I must be a false witness; but if I be a true teacher and witness, I must possess the spirit of prophecy, and that constitutes a prophet.”

13 Early American Christians from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (especially the twenty thousand Millerites who gathered for the event in 1844 only to be disappointed) also believed the Second Coming was imminent.

14 Thomas S. Monson, “Dare to Stand Alone,” October 2011 general conference, quoted President Ezra Taft Benson as saying, “While this generation will be comparable in wickedness to the days of Noah, when the Lord cleansed the earth by flood, there is a major difference this time: [it is that] God has saved for the final inning some of His strongest . . . children, who will help bear off the kingdom triumphantly.” Three decades ago, at the April 1993 general conference, Elder Neal A. Maxwell said, “Just as foretold, our days actually are fast resembling the days of Noah, especially notable for their pattern of corruption and violence.”

15 Gordon B. Hinckley, “Standing Strong and Immovable,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, January 10, 2004, 20: “I do not know that things were worse in the times of Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . We see similar conditions today. They prevail all across the world. I think our Father must weep as He looks down upon His wayward sons and daughters.”

16 D. Todd Christofferson, “Preparing for the Lord’s Return,” April 2019 general conference: “The Spirit made clear to me that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is uniquely empowered and commissioned to accomplish the necessary preparations for the Lord’s Second Coming; indeed, it was restored for that purpose. Can you find anywhere else a people who embrace the present era as the prophesied ‘dispensation of the fulness of times,’ in which God has purposed to ‘gather together in one all things in Christ’? . . . This great and last dispensation is building steadily to its climax—Zion on earth being joined with Zion from above at the Savior’s glorious return. The Church of Jesus Christ is commissioned to prepare—and is preparing—the world for that day.”

17 Mt 28:19–20; Lk 21:32; Act 2:16.

18 Russell M. Nelson, “Come, Follow Me,” April 2019 general conference.

19 D&C 33:16–17; 45:56–57; 63:54; 88:92; 133:19.

20 See, for example, my comments on Mt 13:11.

21 An Aramaic manuscript of this chapter ends, “Went to meet the groom and the bride” (ABPE), but most only include meeting the groom (symbolizing the Lord).

22 Isa 50:1; Jer 3:8; see also Isa 50:1; 62:5; Hos 2:2–5.

23 Mishnah, *Ketuboth* 2:1: “She went forth [to the marriage] in a litter and with hair unbound . . .” (brackets in Danby’s translation). *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., 22 vols. (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference USA, 2007), 13:565: “Until the destruction of the temple both the bride and groom wore distinctive headdresses, sometimes of gold.”

24 Ken Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 190, 206. A typical marriage contract or ketubah read as follows: “This ketubah before God and man that on this . . . day . . . the holy covenant of marriage was entered between bride-groom and his bride. . . . Duly conscious of the solemn obligation of marriage the bridegroom consecrated to me as my wife according to the laws and traditions of Moses and Israel. I will love, honor, and cherish you; I will protect and support you; and I will faithfully care for your needs, as prescribed by Jewish law and tradition.” The bride made the following declaration to the groom: “In accepting the wedding ring I pledge you all my love and devotion and I take upon myself the fulfillment of all the duties incumbent upon a Jewish wife.” Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period: 450 B.C.E to 600 C.E.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 411. Wednesdays were chosen as the day for a virgin’s wedding. “This is explained in the Babylonian Talmud by the fact that the court sat on Thursdays and thus if the groom claimed that the bride had not been a virgin he could immediately complain to the court.” Thursday was the wedding day for a widow so that her husband could devote three days to her before he returned to work. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 13:566.

25 For more, see Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ’s Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Sound Publishing, 2015), chapter 4.

26 John W. Welch and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 143.

27 Compare 1 Sam 16:13, which describes the anointing of King David.

28 Welch and Welch, *Parables of Jesus*, 142. “From it we get the English word angiogram, an X-ray procedure for the detection of blockages in blood vessels.”

29 Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1972), 253–256.

30 See, for example, D&C 6:14, 20–22; 121; 122:1–7; Rom 5:4; 8:37–39.

31 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:545; Campbell, *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, 135. Some sources record a release at age thirty, others at thirty-five or forty. The process of releasing a slave was known as manumission.

32 See D&C 76:44, 103, 109; 85:9; 101:81–91.