

## CFM Joseph Smith-Matthew; Matt. 24-25; Mark 12-13; Luke 21 – Ep 203

### The Last Week of the Savior's Mortal Ministry

**Focus: Tuesday evening**

#### 4 Events

1. Jesus discusses the coming destruction of Jerusalem, as well as signs of his Second Coming (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21.5-38; Joseph Smith-Matthew)
2. The parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25.1-13; Luke 12.35-36; D&C 45.56-59)
3. The parable of the talents (Matt. 25.14-30).
4. The parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25.31-46)

In order to faithfully adhere to the chronological order of events as presented in the gospel narratives, we made the deliberate decision to structure our podcast recordings accordingly. We acknowledge that this deviation from the prescribed lesson plans outlined in the Come Follow Me format may pose challenges for those using our podcasts for personal study or lesson planning. Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience. We appreciate your listenership.

In Joseph Smith-Matthew, the Savior discusses 4 concerns:

1. False Christs – Deception (JSM 1.6, 9).
2. Wars (JSM 1.23, 28).
3. Famines, pestilences, and earthquakes (JSM 1.29).
4. Gross iniquity (JSM 1.30).

The answer to these problems are straightforward:

1. Treasure up my word (JSM 1.37).
2. Be ready (JSM 1.48).

The parables that follow this instruction that are found in Matthew 25 basically illustrate ways the Saints can do both things: treasure the truth, the word, and be ready for the Savior when he comes.

#### Joseph Smith Matthew

David Seely explains why Joseph Smith Matthew matters and what it is doing:

Matthew 24 as it stands in the Bible poses great problems for many readers in that the events of the destruction of the temple are intertwined with those preceding the Second Coming. The Prophet's revisions altered the order of several of the verses, thus making it plain that the Savior clearly answered both of the questions posed by his disciples. Verses 5 through 20 of Joseph Smith—Matthew answer the question of when the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed and what would happen to the Jews, while verses 21 through 55 answer the question as to what shall be the signs of his Second Coming and the end of the world. For Latter-day Saints, the events leading up to the Second Coming are of primary interest...

“Verses 1 to 20 in Joseph Smith—Matthew talk in some detail about the events leading up to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70: the coming of false prophets and Messiahs, iniquity among the Saints, and persecution and tribulation. In many ways what happened was a type of the

Second Coming, and the graphic fulfillment of those prophesied events serves as a solemn reminder to us that we can expect fulfillment of the passages related to our dispensation. And Latter-day Saints need to know that many of those in A.D. 70 who were righteous were delivered from disaster. Jesus Christ admonished his followers in that day: ‘Stand in the holy place; whoso readeth let him understand. Then let them who are in Judea flee into the mountains’ (JS—M 1:12–13). Eusebius, an early Christian historian, writes of the Christians living in Jerusalem before the destruction: ‘The people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ migrated from Jerusalem.’<sup>1</sup>

Note the difference between the questions:

JSM: “The disciples came unto him privately, saying: Tell us when shall these things be which thou hast said concerning the destruction of the temple, and the Jews; and what is the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world, or the destruction of the wicked, which is the end of the world?” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1.4)

“The disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Matt. 24.3)

David Seely<sup>2</sup> continues:

***Matthew 24 as it stands in the Bible poses great problems for many readers in that the events of the destruction of the temple are intertwined with those preceding the Second Coming.*** The Prophet’s revisions altered the order of several of the verses, thus making it plain that the Savior clearly answered both of the questions posed by his disciples. Verses 5 through 20 of Joseph Smith—Matthew answer the question of when the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed and what would happen to the Jews, while verses 21 through 55 answer the question as to what shall be the signs of his Second Coming and the end of the world. For Latter-day Saints, the events leading up to the Second Coming are of primary interest. The emphasis of this chapter, read together with section 45 of the Doctrine and Covenants, is on our need to be prepared. In giving his Saints knowledge of the coming events, the Lord offers comfort, assuring us that despite fearsome trials and tribulations we may face, he is in charge.

The events that will precede the coming of the Lord are outlined in Joseph Smith—Matthew: false Christs and false prophets will show great signs and wonders (JS—M 1:22); there will be wars and rumors of wars (JS—M 1:23); there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes (JS—M 1:29); iniquity will abound and the love of men will wax cold (JS—M 1:30); the gospel will be preached to all nations (JS—M 1:31); the abomination of desolation will be fulfilled (JS—M 1:32); there will be signs in the heavens (JS—M 1:33); and the “sign of the Son of Man” will appear, which is “the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory” (JS—M 1:36). Some of these events are the same as those that preceded the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70.

Joseph Smith—Matthew contains many specific instructions to those who wish to be prepared for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, with regard to those who say the Lord has returned secretly,

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<sup>1</sup> David Rolph Seely, [“The Joseph Smith Translation: ‘Plain and Precious Things’ Restored,”](#) *Ensign*, Aug. 1997, 15–16)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, emphasis added.

he cautions, “Believe it not” (JS—M 1:25); in the face of iniquity and the love of men waxing cold, the Lord says, “He that shall not be overcome, the same shall be saved” (JS—M 1:30). Joseph Smith—Matthew adds another injunction not found in the King James Version of the Bible: “Whoso treasureth up my word, shall not be deceived” (JS—M 1:37). “Therefore be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh” (JS—M 1:48), we are taught. Additionally, in Doctrine and Covenants 45 the Lord admonishes, “But my disciples shall stand in holy places, and shall not be moved” (D&C 45:32).

### **Events after the apostles and concerning their circumstances**

Verses 1 to 20 in Joseph Smith—Matthew talk in some detail about the events leading up to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in A.D. 70: the coming of false prophets and Messiahs, iniquity among the Saints, and persecution and tribulation. In many ways what happened was a type of the Second Coming, and the graphic fulfillment of those prophesied events serves as a solemn reminder to us that we can expect fulfillment of the passages related to our dispensation. And Latter-day Saints need to know that many of those in A.D. 70 who were righteous were delivered from disaster. Jesus Christ admonished his followers in that day: “Stand in the holy place; whoso readeth let him understand. Then let them who are in Judea flee into the mountains” (JS—M 1:12–13). Eusebius, an early Christian historian, writes of the Christians living in Jerusalem before the destruction: “The people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ migrated from Jerusalem.”<sup>3</sup>

### **There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. (Matt. 24.2; Mark 13.1-2; Luke 21.5-6)**

Some Greek philosophers were unimpressed with magnificent structures, but Jesus’ response goes far beyond this attitude— he speaks of judgment. Some other Jewish groups (including the Qumran sect) also expected the temple to be judged; but most Jews, regardless of their other differences, found in the temple a symbol of their Jewish unity and would have been appalled to think that God would allow it to be destroyed (as in Jer 7:4-15). Some stones were left on others (e.g., part of one wall still stands), but this fact does not weaken the force of the hyperbole: the temple was almost entirely demolished in AD 70.<sup>4</sup>

### **What will these things be? Earthquakes, wars, persecution (Matt. 24.3-14; Mark 13.3-14; Luke 21.7-19)**

#### **For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. (Matt. 24.5)**

Many false messianic figures arose in the first century (and subsequently); they often attracted large and devoted followings. Although Josephus, writing for Gentile readers, describes them as “false prophets” rather than as messiahs, their political aspirations are usually apparent in his descriptions.<sup>5</sup> One such

<sup>3</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5.3, trans. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library (1977), 136.

<sup>4</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (IVP Bible Background Commentary Set), IVP Academic, 2014, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> See: [List of messiah claimants, Wikipedia](#), accessed 2.23.23.

“false messiah” was a man named Menahem.<sup>6</sup> Menahem was a Jewish revolutionary leader who played a significant role in the political events of 64-70 AD in Jerusalem. In 66 AD, Menahem led a group of zealots in a rebellion against the Roman authorities in Jerusalem, which marked the beginning of the First Jewish-Roman War. Menahem and his followers seized the armory of Herod's palace, which gave them access to a large supply of weapons and allowed them to gain control over the city. He also played a key role in the assassination of the high priest Ananus ben Ananus, who was viewed as a collaborator with the Roman authorities. This act further galvanized the zealots and helped to consolidate their control over the city.

However, Menahem's leadership was not uncontested. He faced opposition from other Jewish factions, particularly the Pharisees, who were opposed to the violent tactics of the zealots. Menahem also had to contend with a rival leader named Eleazar ben Simon,<sup>7</sup> who had his own power base in the city.

In the end, Menahem's leadership proved to be short-lived. He was eventually overthrown and killed by his own followers, who were dissatisfied with his leadership. Eleazar ben Simon emerged as the new leader of the zealots, and the rebellion continued under his command.

On the whole, Menahem's impact on the political events of 64-70 AD was significant, as he played a key role in the beginning stages of the [First Jewish-Roman War](#) and helped to consolidate the zealot's control over Jerusalem. However, his leadership was ultimately unsuccessful, and he was unable to sustain his position in the face of opposition from rival factions and internal divisions within his own movement.

After Menahem, another “false messiah” that came to power was Simon bar Kokhba. [Simon bar Kokhba](#), born Simon ben Koseva, (d. 135 AD) led what has been called the Bar Kokhba revolt against the Roman Empire. For three years, bar Kokhba ruled as the nasi, or prince, of a semi-independent secessionist state in Israel. Some rabbinical scholars, including the great sage [Akiva](#), proclaimed bar Kokhba as the

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<sup>6</sup> Some sources indicate that Menahem was referred to as a messiah figure by his followers. The historian Josephus, who wrote about the Jewish-Roman War and the events leading up to it, mentions that Menahem was hailed as a messianic leader by the people of Jerusalem. According to Josephus, when Menahem entered into the violent fray in 66 AD, “took some of the men of note with him, and retired to Masada, where he broke open king Herod's armory, and gave arms not only to his own people, but to other robbers also. These he made use of for a guard, and **returned in the state of a king to Jerusalem..**” (Josephus, [The Wars of the Jews, Book 2, chapter 17, 433.](#))

It is important for modern readers to note, however, that the term “messiah” had different connotations at the time than it does today. In Jewish tradition, a messiah was a person anointed by God to lead the Jewish people to redemption and freedom from oppression. This could take many forms, and there were different expectations and interpretations of what a messiah would do. Some believed that the messiah would be a military leader who would defeat Israel's enemies and establish a Jewish kingdom, while others saw the messiah as a spiritual leader who would usher in an era of peace and enlightenment. It is not entirely clear exactly how Menahem's followers saw him as a messiah, and whether they believed he would fulfill any specific messianic prophecies. However, it seems certain that his leadership was seen as a means of achieving freedom and liberation for the Jewish people, and that he was viewed as a heroic figure who could lead them to victory over their oppressors. See: Richard Horsley, *Menahem in Jerusalem a Brief Messianic Episode among the Sicarii: Not “Zealot Messianism,”* *Novum Testamentum*, Vol. 27, Fasc. 4 (Oct. 1985), p. 334-348.

<sup>7</sup> Emboldened by his success, he behaved as a king, and claimed the leadership of all the troops. Thereby he aroused the enmity of Eleazar, another Zealot leader, and met death as a result of a conspiracy against him (ib. ii. 17, § 9). He is probably identical with the Menahem b. Hezekiah mentioned in Sanh. 98b, and called, with reference to Lam. i. 17, “the comforter [“menahem”] that should relieve” (comp. Hamburger, “R. B. T.” Supplement, iii. 80). See: [“Menahem ben Judah,” Pseudo-Messiahs, Jewish Encyclopedia](#), accessed 2.23.23.

Messiah. He died during the rebels' last stand at the fortress of Betar, after which the rebellion was brutally crushed and the land was left largely decimated, cementing both the slowly growing Jewish diaspora and the schism between Christianity and Judaism.

### **False Christs**

Elder McConkie wrote this about this subject:

The promise of false Christs who will deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect, who will lead astray those who have made eternal covenant with the Lord, is a far more subtle and insidious evil.

A false Christ is not a person. It is a false system of worship, a false church, a false cult that says: "Lo, here is salvation; here is the doctrine of Christ. Come and believe thus and so, and ye shall be saved." It is any concept or philosophy that says that redemption, salvation, sanctification, justification, and all of the promised rewards can be gained in any way except that set forth by the apostles and prophets.<sup>8</sup>

### **Flee to the mountains! (Matt. 24.15-28; Mark 13.14-23; Luke 21.20-24)**

Josephus, who lived through the war of AD 66–70, thought the “abomination of desolation” (the reference is to Dan 9:27; cf. 11:31; 12:11) happened in AD. 66, when Zealots shed the blood of priests in the temple. Others date the abomination of desolation three and one-half years later, in 70. The Jerusalemites had considered it a sacrilege for the Roman standards, which bore the image of the worshiped emperor, to enter Jerusalem (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.59; cf. 1QpHab 6.4). But in the year 70, when the temple was destroyed, the Romans erected these standards over the eastern gate of the temple and sacrificed to them, as they proclaimed Titus, their general, the supreme leader (Josephus, *Jewish War* 6.316). Both views may be true: if the phrase means “abomination that causes desolation,” then the abomination of AD 66 may have led to the desolation of AD 70. The mountains were full of caves and represented the safest place to flee. Earlier David eluded Saul there; the second-century BC Jewish revolutionaries, the Maccabees, practiced guerrilla warfare from the mountains; later, Jewish refugees hid there in the war of AD 132–135. Later Christian sources report that the Jerusalem Christians, warned by prophecies before Jerusalem’s fall, fled to a place called Pella in the Decapolis, far to the north.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Abomination of Desolation (Matt. 24.15)**

The “abomination that brings about desolation” in Daniel 9:27 occurs after the cutting off of the Messiah (a passage subject to various interpretations); Daniel 11:31 sounds as if it should have occurred in the second century BC, and 12:11 at the time of the end, so some interpreters have felt that the prophecy was accomplished in stages. Some interpreters believe that parts of Daniel’s prophecy remain to be fulfilled; others believe that all of it was fulfilled in the first century.

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus felt that Daniel was fulfilled when revolutionaries slaughtered the priests in the temple in AD 66, committing a sacrilege for which God brought about the desolation of the temple (human bloodshed in the temple desecrated it. This sacrilege would have been the signal for Christians to flee Jerusalem (24:16); early Christian historians tell us that Christian prophets warned the Jewish Christians to flee Jerusalem at this time. ***Three and a half years later, the temple was left***

<sup>8</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah*, Chapter 5, False Worship Abounds Before His Coming.

<sup>9</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 163.

***“desolate” in 70, when the Romans destroyed it with fire and then erected their own standards on the site.*** As Jewish people knew (it is lamented in the Dead Sea Scrolls), these standards bore the insignia of the Roman emperor, who was worshiped as divine in the Eastern Mediterranean; they would thus have sealed the site’s desecration. Jerusalem’s citizens had felt that even bringing these standards into Jerusalem temporarily (as Pilate had done roughly three and one-half years before Jesus uttered this warning) defiled the holy city. On several occasions the Jerusalemites had shown that they preferred death to their temple’s defilement.<sup>10</sup>

### **History of Jerusalem Temple Defilement**

David Seely<sup>11</sup> provides historical context:

In the final days before the Babylonian destruction in 587 B.C., Jeremiah was disturbed that the people were confident of deliverance from their enemies and trusted in "lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord." (Jer. 7:4.) While they were guilty of adultery, murder, lying, and stealing, and of oppressing the poor, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (Jer. 7:6, 9), they came and stood before the Lord—before the house that bore his name—and declared, "We are delivered to do all these abominations." (Jer. 7:10.) Jeremiah reminded the people of the previous destruction of the temple at Shiloh and then prophesied, "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant." (Jer. 26:9.) And it was Jeremiah's words from the same sermon that Jesus earlier had used when he had cleansed the temple: "My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (Matt. 21:13; Jer. 7:11.) He alluded to Jeremiah to make the same point: just as the Lord did not deliver his people in their wickedness from the Philistines at Shiloh, or from the Babylonians in 587 B.C., neither would he deliver "whited sepulchres" from the Romans.

The burning of Herod's grandiose temple implied a national disaster that transcended the physical destruction of a building. The temple represented first and foremost the presence of the Lord in the midst of his people—the true King in the midst of his kingdom—the kingdom of God. It represented the covenant he had made with his people from the beginning that they would be his people and he would be their God. In Old Testament times, it came to represent the eternal covenant that had been made with the dynasty of David, from whose loins would come Jesus the Messiah, and was a symbol of a once great empire. In the New Testament period, it represented the proud national religion of a semi-autonomous state, which in the days of the Maccabees had cleansed the temple from the "abomination of desolation" decreed by Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C.

***Therefore, this prophecy must have been a shock to the disciples who had witnessed the coming of the "kingdom of heaven" and the presence of the King.*** How were they to understand the destruction of this great symbol and the devastation it would entail? And how was this event to be related to the return of the Savior in his glory, signaling the end of the world?

### **Solar signs (Matt. 24.27-31; Mark 13.24-27; Luke 21.25-28)**

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<sup>10</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 107-108, emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> David Seely, "The Olivet Discourse," *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, (ed. Jackson and Millet), Deseret Book, 2004, emphasis added.

Elder Maxwell taught:

I testify that Jesus is truly the Lord of the Universe, “that by [Christ], and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God.”<sup>12</sup> Having purchased us with His atoning blood in the great and marvelous Atonement, Jesus thereby became our lawgiver. It is by obedience to His laws and His commandments that we may return one day to His presence and that of our Heavenly Father.<sup>13</sup>

The foregoing cosmic facts should bring us to our knees even now, long before that later judgment day, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Christ.<sup>14</sup> I testify that Jesus fulfilled these great roles as creator and lawgiver out of His desire to immortalize all of Heavenly Father’s children, with the most valiant to live in His Father’s house which has many mansions.

When Christ comes again, it will not be to the meekness of the manger. It will be as the recognized Redeemer and the Lord of the Universe! Then, ***in a great solar display, stars will fall from their places***<sup>15</sup> in a witnessing way with much more drama than at His birth when “the stars in the heavens looked down where he lay.”<sup>16</sup> Yet in the vastness of His creations, the Lord of the Universe, who notices the fall of every sparrow, is our personal Savior, of which I give apostolic testimony in the holy name of Jesus Christ, amen!<sup>17</sup>

#### **Lightning out of the east (Matt. 24.27)**

**For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.** (ὡσπερ γὰρ ἡ ἀστραπή ἐξέρχεται ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν καὶ φαίνεται ἕως δυσμῶν οὕτως ἔσται καὶ ἡ παρουσία τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.) **Matt. 24.27**

Joseph Smith said:

“How are we to see it? As the lighting up of the morning or the dawning of the morning cometh from the east and shineth unto the west, so also is the coming of the Son of Man. The dawning of the morning makes its appearance in the east and moves along gradually. So also will the coming of the Son of Man be. It will be small at its first appearance and gradually become larger until every eye shall see it. Shall the Saints understand it? Oh yes. Paul says so [1 Thes. 5:4-5]. Shall the wicked understand? Oh no. They [will] attribute it to a natural cause. They will probably suppose it is two great comets coming in contact with each other. It will be small at first and will grow larger and larger until it will be all in a blaze, so that every eye shall see it.”<sup>18</sup>

#### **The sign of the Son of Man in heaven (Matt. 24.30)**

<sup>12</sup> D&C 76.24.

<sup>13</sup> Articles of Faith, number 3.

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:8-11; Mosiah 27:31; D&C 76:110; D&C 88:104.

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 24:29; Reb. 9:1; D&C 29:14; D&C 45:42; Joseph Smith-Matthew 1:33.

<sup>16</sup> Hymns, “Away in a Manger.”

<sup>17</sup> Neal A. Maxwell, [Christ the Creator, Special Witnesses of Christ](#), April 2000, emphasis added. This was a video presentation by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The presentation was broadcast by satellite between general conference sessions on 1–2 April 2000.

<sup>18</sup> [Joseph Smith's Commentary on the Bible](#), ed. by Kent P. Jackson, Deseret Book, 1994, 112-113.

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Matt. 24.30)

“Judah must return, Jerusalem must be rebuilt, and the temple, and water come out from under the temple, and the waters of the Dead Sea be healed [see Ezekiel 47:1–9]. It will take some time to rebuild the walls of the city and the temple, etc.; and all this must be done before the Son of Man will make His appearance. There will be wars and rumors of wars, signs in the heavens above and on the earth beneath, the sun turned into darkness and the moon to blood, earthquakes in divers places, the seas heaving beyond their bounds; then will appear one grand sign of the Son of Man in heaven. But what will the world do? They will say it is a planet, a comet, etc. But the Son of Man will come as the sign of the coming of the Son of Man, which will be as the light of the morning cometh out of the east.”<sup>19</sup>

### **The Parable of the Fig Tree (Matt. 24.32-35; Mark 13.28-31; Luke 21.29-33)**

In his discourse, Jesus included four short examples that help to illustrate the points he was making. The parable of the fig tree (Matt. 24:32-35) teaches that the signs, while not specifying the exact time, will give a general indication as to the "season" of the coming of the Son of Man; Jesus assured his disciples that all of these prophecies would indeed come to pass. **In its original context, the phrase in verse 34, "this generation shall not pass away," may have applied to the destruction in A.D. 70, which many at the time of Jesus would live to see.** In Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:34 it is related to the return of the Son of Man.

Using the example of the destruction in the days of Noah, Jesus taught that while the signs of the times will indicate the season, no one knows the day and the hour of the end. (Matt. 24:36.) As in the days of Noah, so the Son of Man will come while many are carrying on their normal day-to-day activities, and "two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left." (Matt. 24:40-41.)

Furthermore, because no one will know the precise moment, many will be unprepared when the end comes. Jesus illustrated the day of the Lord coming as a thief in the night and warned the disciples that they should always be ready: "for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." (Matt. 24:42-44.) This point is further emphasized by the parable of the wise and faithful servant (Matt. 24:45-51) who diligently fulfills his duties even when his master is away—in contrast to the evil servant who, because his master delays his coming, is caught unexpectedly abusing his stewardship when the master does arrive.

In short, the answer to the disciples' questions as to when these things will occur is that there will be many signs of the coming, and yet the end will come when many least expect it.<sup>20</sup>

### **Take heed, watch and pray (Matt. 24.36-44; Mark 13.32-37; Luke 21.34-36)**

#### **Do not take counsel from your fears**

<sup>19</sup> *History of the Church*, 5:337; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 6, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards. See also: *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 286-287.

<sup>20</sup> David Seely, "The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36)," *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, (Kent Jackson and Robert Millet editors), Deseret Book, 2004, emphasis added.



Elder Packer said: “My counsel can be said in seven words: ***Do not take counsel from your fears.***” He cited scriptures in which the Lord said: “Fear not, little flock” (D&C 6:34; see also D&C 35:27 and Luke 12:32), and “If ye are prepared ye shall not fear.” (D&C 38:30.) Elder Packer related an experience he had when he asked one of his senior brethren to help him with a problem. “To my surprise, he said, ‘Do you know what’s wrong with you?’” Elder Packer recalled. “Then he continued, ‘You want to see the end from the beginning.’ And then he quoted from the Book of Mormon: ‘Dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.’ (Ether 12:6.) Then he added, ‘You must learn to walk to the edge of the light, and then a few steps into the darkness, and the light will appear.’”

Elder Packer then advised the graduates that as they go forward from BYU and move into a world of uncertainty, to “dispute not because ye see not, for ye receive no witness until after the trial of your faith.” He told the graduates, “If you walk to the edge of the light, and a few steps into the darkness, the light will appear before you. If you have studied the plan of redemption, you need not fear. ***Do not take counsel from your fears.***”<sup>21</sup>

### **The End of the World**

Teenagers also sometimes think, “What’s the use? The world will soon be blown all apart and come to an end.” That feeling comes from fear, not from faith. No one knows the hour or the day (see D&C 49:7), but the end cannot come until all of the purposes of the Lord are fulfilled. Everything that I have learned from the revelations and from life convinces me that there is time and to spare for you to carefully prepare for a long life.

One day you will cope with teenage children of your own. That will serve you right. Later, you will spoil your grandchildren, and they in turn spoil theirs. If an earlier end should happen to come to one, that is more reason to do things right.<sup>22</sup>

### **Matthew 25**

#### **The Ten Virgins (Matt. 25.1-13)**

President Kimball read this parable of the 10 virgins to represent the people of God, rather than the overall world population. He explained:

“I believe that the ***Ten Virgins represent the people of the Church of Jesus Christ*** and not the rank and file of the world. All of the virgins, wise and foolish, had accepted the invitation to the wedding supper; they had knowledge of the program and had been warned of the important day to come. They were not the gentiles or the heathens or the pagans, nor were they necessarily corrupt and reprobate, but they were knowing people who were foolishly unprepared for the vital happenings that were to affect their eternal lives.

They had the saving, exalting gospel, but it had not been made the center of their lives. They knew the way but gave only a small measure of loyalty and devotion. I ask you: What value is a car without an engine, a cup without water, a table without food, a lamp without oil?

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<sup>21</sup> President Boyd K. Packer instructs BYU graduates: Don’t take counsel from your fears, *LDS Church News*, 1994, 04/30/94.

<sup>22</sup> President Boyd K. Packer, To Young Women and Men, *Ensign*, April 1989.

Rushing for their lamps to light their way through the blackness, half of them found them empty. They had cheated themselves. They were fools, these five unprepared virgins. Apparently, the bridegroom had tarried for reasons that were sufficient and good. Time had passed, and he had not come. They had heard of his coming for so long, so many times, that the statement seemingly became meaningless to them. Would he ever come? So long had it been since they began expecting him that they were rationalizing that he would never appear. Perhaps it was a myth.

Hundreds of thousands of us today are in this position. Confidence has been dulled and patience worn thin. It is so hard to wait and be prepared always. But we cannot allow ourselves to slumber. The Lord has given us this parable as a special warning."<sup>23</sup>

### Salvation is a personal matter

Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: "Salvation is a personal matter. It comes only to those who keep the commandments and whose souls are filled with the Holy Spirit of God. No man can keep the commandments for and on behalf of another; no one can gain the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit in his life and give or sell that holy oil to another. Every man must light his own lamp with the oil of righteousness which he buys at the market of obedience."<sup>24</sup>

### The Parable of the Talents<sup>25</sup> (Matt. 25.14-30; Luke 19.11-27)

My main take away from this parable is that we all have *something* the Lord has given us. The key is that we try. Try and do some good with what he has given you. The sad thing is to sit and do nothing.

David Seely has given this commentary:

The parable of the talents is a continuation of the simile with the kingdom of heaven. While the phrase "the kingdom of heaven" does not appear in the Greek (as indicated by the italics in the King James Version), the Greek particles that do appear suggest that this phrase has been ellipsed, and, as with the first parable, that this one is to be compared with the kingdom of heaven.

The language of the parable is financial, perhaps because people have always been able to understand these terms. ***The meaning of the word talent as a "natural ability" is a secondary definition of a word that originally meant a Greek monetary weight or coin. The meaning of ability did not occur until the Middle Ages, perhaps due largely to its usage in this parable.*** While of course the meaning of talent as "natural ability" can well be one of the meanings of this parable, we should not be limited to this interpretation. The parable proceeds to show how the Lord has blessed everyone in the kingdom with

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<sup>23</sup> President Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle*, 252-253.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 3:468.

<sup>25</sup> A talent was a unit of weight and value used in the ancient Near East, including in the New Testament. It was the largest measurement used, and it was a massive amount of money. However, the exact weight of a New Testament talent is somewhat debated among scholars. Keener writes, "The exact value of a talent varied from period to period and place to place." Keener, *The IVP Academic Background Commentary: New Testament*, p. 111. One talent equaled about 60 minas or 3,000 shekels, approximately 75 pounds. A mina weighed approximately 1.25 pounds or .6 kilograms, and a shekel weighed about .4 ounces or 11 grams. Kent Jackson offers the estimate of about 58-80 pounds. (Kent Jackson, "Masada and Life in First-Century Judea," *BYU Studies*, Vol. 36, 1996-1997). The shekel was the most common standard used among the Hebrew people for both weight and value. The term shekel meant simply "weight." In New Testament times, a shekel was a silver coin weighing one shekel. Some estimates put this weight even higher.

varying abilities and opportunities to serve. Those who are willing to use these blessings are able to double their worth to the kingdom. The one who is unwilling to use his endowment from the Lord is cast out as an "unprofitable servant," and that which was given to him is lost. In fact, the nature of service in the kingdom may well be referred to in the section following the parable, Matthew 25:35-46, where the Lord defines what a "profitable" servant does in order to "inherit the kingdom prepared" for him in the hereafter. Again, the parable relates to two basic issues: (1) "after a long time the lord of those servants cometh" (Matt. 25:19), which suggests that there will be delay in his coming; and (2) at his coming many will not be prepared.<sup>26</sup>

#### Ordinary person

"When you come to the temple and receive your endowment, and kneel at the altar and be sealed, you can live an ordinary life and be an ordinary soul-struggling against temptation, failing and repenting, and failing again and repenting, but always determined to keep your covenants-and that marriage ordinance will be sealed by the Holy Spirit of Promise. Then the day will come when you will receive the benediction: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord' (Matthew 25:21)."<sup>27</sup>

### **The Sheep and Goats (Matt. 25.31-46)**

#### **Judgment**

The Son of Man was going to come to reign for God (Dan 7:13-14; cf. the Similitudes of Enoch, of uncertain date), and some Jewish apocalypses (perhaps following Greek images of the realm of the dead) described human judges before the final day of judgment. But the description of absolute authority afforded Jesus here fits most precisely the standard Jewish picture of God judging the nations in the day of judgment.

#### **Sheep and Goats**

God judging the nations (e.g., Is 2:4; Mic 4:3) was a standard part of Jewish expectation for the future. God would distinguish among the sheep (Ezek 34:17). Although sheep and goats grazed together, some scholars write that Palestinian shepherds normally separated sheep and goats at night because goats need to be warm at night while sheep prefer open air. Certainly sheep were considered more valuable than goats, so that owners usually had many more sheep than goats (though this is not part of Jesus' analogy here; cf. 7:13-14). The greater profitability of sheep may have influenced how these terms would be heard figuratively; for instance, in a pagan dream handbook sheep were associated with good while goats were associated with trouble. Most people in the eastern Mediterranean preferred goats' and sheep's cheese to that made from cows' milk. Sheep were shorn for wool twice a year; people used both sheepskins and goatskins for leather when the animals died, but preferred goatskins.<sup>28</sup>

#### **The Right and the Left Hand**

<sup>26</sup> David Seely, "The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36)," *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, (Kent Jackson and Robert Millet editors), Deseret Book, 2004, emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> Boyd K. Packer, *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled*, Deseret Book, 2010, 257.

<sup>28</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 112.

The right is the preferred side in ancient texts; in the few scenes of judgment where it occurs, the right side is for the righteous and the left for the wicked (e.g., the *Testament of Abraham* recension A).<sup>29</sup>

### **Hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, in prison (Matt. 25.35-36)**

Except for visiting the imprisoned, the deeds Jesus lists are standard righteous deeds in Jewish ethics. Providing for the poor, giving hospitality to the stranger and visiting the sick were basic to Jewish piety.<sup>30</sup>

### **“The least of these” (Matt. 25.40)**

In some Jewish apocalyptic texts, the nations would be judged for how they treated Israel. In the Bible, God also judged people for how they treated the poor (e.g., Prov 19:17). But given the use of “brothers” or “sisters” (12:50; 28:10; the Greek term can include both genders) and perhaps “least” (5:19; 11:11; cf. 18:4; 20:26; 23:11) elsewhere in Matthew, many argue that this passage refers to receiving messengers of Christ. Such missionaries needed shelter, food and help in imprisonment and other complications caused by persecution; see comment on 10:11-14. Receiving them was like receiving Christ. The judgment of all nations thus had to be preceded by the proclamation of the kingdom among them (24:14).<sup>31</sup>

David Seely shared this connection:

With these words Jesus summed up the substance of the Mosaic law that had been on the lips of all the prophets before him—echoing the words of Jeremiah in the shadow of the temple when he warned the people that their survival did not depend on ritual purity and sacrificial offerings, but that they "oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow." (Jer. 7:6.)

In the events of the ensuing days, Jesus would himself become as the "least" in kingdom, and he would descend below all things in order to raise man from death and sin. He, as the Suffering Servant, would take upon himself the sins of all mankind, and he would give his life that man might live. He would set the ultimate example for all who would take upon themselves his name and witness that "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep [oneself] unspotted from the world." (James 1:27.)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>32</sup> Seely, “The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36),” *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, (Kent Jackson and Robert Millet editors), Deseret Book, 2004.