



JOSEPH SMITH—MATTHEW; MATTHEW 24–25; MARK 12–13; LUKE 21

LAST DAY OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY

The last day of Jesus' public ministry begins with teaching at the temple and ends with a discussion about the destruction of the temple and His Second Coming. At that time, Jesus Himself did not know when these events would occur, so His prophecies may seem overlapping. The Book of Mormon explains us that Jesus' First and Second Coming are typified and represented throughout covenant history in both the Old and New Testaments.¹ After His last public event, Jesus leaves the temple and retires to a secluded setting on the Mount of Olives to answer His disciples' questions. They ask Him about the timing of His Kingdom. After His explanation, He illuminates His message with four parables.

The Widow's Mite

Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4

Mark 12:41; Luke 21:1 “Jesus sat over against the treasury” As Jesus teaches in the Court of the Women, He can see the “treasury” under a colonnade along the north and south walls of the courtyard. (The Court of the Women was actually for all Israelites, but it was the last courtyard where women and children were allowed to join in temple worship—if they remained in one corner—hence the name.) The temple treasury included thirteen donation boxes placed along the north and south walls, and the two large storage rooms behind them.

The collection containers each had a wooden box base, and a brass funnel opening. The brass portion was in the shape of a trumpet, so they were called trumpets. The brass also amplified the sound of the coins as they were dropped in. Each of the thirteen were labeled for different offerings (e.g. “New Shekel dues,” “Gold for the mercy-seat,” “freewill-offerings,” or “sin-offerings,” etc.). One of the chief priests set the prices for each of the various offerings and the prices changed dramatically at times (suggesting they were not always honest or fair).

Mark 12:42; Luke 21:2 “a certain poor widow” We do not know the widow’s age—she may have been 18 or 80, walking alone, or with young children clinging to her knees. A mite or copper was the smallest monetary denomination. The contrast between the widow’s donation and the “the rich men casting their gifts” was significant financially and emotionally.



The Widow's Mite by James Tissot, 1899.

Mark 12:43–44; Luke 21:3–4 “. . . cast in all the living that she had” No one seems to notice the widow—except Jesus, and He seems to see everything. He points her out to His disciples. The amount of money is not the issue, but her sacrifice and faith in God. The same principle extends to realizing that the Lord does not need our tithes and offerings—the amount doesn’t matter. Yet we need to learn how to selflessly give our all to God.

Jesus Prophecies of the Temple’s Fall

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:1-3; Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6; D&C 45

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:2–3; Matthew 24:1–2; Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6 “**Master, show us concerning the buildings of the Temple**” (JST). Matthew, Mark, and John record that Jesus and His followers leave the temple courtyards and walk eastward to the Mount of Olives. Looking backwards across the Kidron Valley at the temple and courtyards from that vantage point was spectacular. Even though the outbuildings were still under construction, the temple continued functioning every day for the entire expansion project (between 19 BC and AD 63).

As to not defile the sacred space, Herod trained thousands of priests as stone masons to work on the Sanctuary. Moses revealed that each furnishing and ritual of the temple typified the Messiah or the Anointed One (2 Nephi 11:4; Mosiah 3:15; Alma 13:16; Exodus 29:36–37; 40:10; etc.). But Herod designed the temple’s expansion to be the most beautiful building in the Roman world.²

Josephus served in this temple as a priest and described it. Herod’s construction teams flattened the mountain to make a 33-acre platform for the Sanctuary. The outmost courtyard walls were 16 feet thick. The Sanctuary stood 150 feet, or nine stories high. (As a modern perspective, it stood one-and-a-half times higher than the current Dome on the Rock.) It was covered in gold leaf that glistened in the sunlight. Josephus claims that the doors to enter the Sanctuary were 49 feet high and 24.5 feet wide.³

The outer courtyard allowed all to gather, which gave it the name, “Court of the Gentiles.” This courtyard took up most of the acreage. The space became more holy as one approached the central area. To separate the gentiles, a large surrounding wall framed the Court of the Women and Court of the Priests. On the wall, a warning was written in three languages: 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 Passing through the Court of the Women and of Israel, only priests and Levites entered the exclusive inner courtyard where the temple workers washed daily in the Brazen Sea and served 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 wine once a week. Finally, the most sacred space, the Holy of Holies, was entered only by the one reigning high priest, one day a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

The architecture and engineering involved in its construction is mind boggling. The craftsmen maneuvered thousands of 5 to 90-ton blocks into place without needing any mortar between the stones. The enormous stones were meticulously carved with borders around each on the outer facade. The average size was the size of a modern dishwasher, but some were as large and heavy as two loaded airplanes. Those who saw it reported it absolutely breath taking. As the common phrase reported: “He who has not seen Herod’s temple has not seen beauty in all his life.”⁵ Yet, Jesus repeatedly prophesied that it would be destroyed. At that time, it was unfathomable; yet from AD 70 it stood as rubble for nearly 600 years and witnessed of Jesus’ words.

MARK 13:1-2

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!

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

JST MARK 13:1-2

And as Jesus went out of the temple, his disciples came to him saying, Master show us concerning the buildings of the Temple. And he said unto him, 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. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things, and do ye not understand them? Verily I say unto you, there shall be one left there upon this temple, one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And Jesus left them and went upon the mount of Olives.

In Matthew and Mark’s Gospels, the JST changes the disciples’ message from telling Jesus about the temple to asking Him about the future of the temple. (The JST Mark 13, also parallels much of the JST Matthew 24.)

Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:3; Luke 21:7-11 “. . . privately, saying, Tell us, when . . . ?” The account in Mark 13:3 has only Peter, Andrew, James and John (two groups of two brothers) asking Jesus about the timing of the future destruction, but the JST removes that sentence and replaces it with “the disciples came.” In either case, Jesus’ audience of believers—either some of the Twelve, or a combination of disciples—gather on the Mt. of Olives, overlooking the temple on Mount Moriah and continue to discuss Jesus’ prophecies.

MOUNT OF OLIVES DISCOURSE

Judgment and Delayed Second Coming

Joseph Smith—Matthew; Matthew 24:4–32; Mark 13:5–33; Luke 21:7–36

Jesus’ disciples want to learn more about the temple’s destruction, so they follow Him up the Mount of Olives and continue to ask more questions: “When shall these things be?” (Matthew 24:4; Luke 21:7). Jesus’ response has become known as His “Olivet Discourse.” Jesus’ 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 prophesies 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 to them, not knowing that the Roman War against Judea would be a type of the destruction before Jesus’ Second Coming.

Similar to Jesus’ disciples’ interest in the subject, the saints in Joseph Smith’s day (and the nation at large) were also fascinated by information on the Savior’s Second Coming and millennialism. When Joseph Smith translated Matthew 24, he felt inspired to re-arrange the Olivet Discourse in order to separate past and future events. The JST is 50% larger than Matthew 24, with every verse being changed/corrected, except one verse, Matthew 24:33.

As Joseph Smith and the early saints sought more information, the Lord revealed more answers. In addition to the JST of Matthew 24, the Prophet also received other revelations on Jesus’ Second Coming (e.g. D&C 1; 29; 38; 43; 45; 101; 116; 133, etc.).⁶ In D&C 45:16–45, the Lord repeated approximately 13 verses from the Mount of Olives Discourse.

Here is an outline of the Olivet Discourse as recorded in each of the Synoptic Gospels for your own study. This Come Follow Me guide follows the order and additions from Joseph Smith-Matthew (which is the JST of Matthew 24), now published in *The Pearl of Great Price*.

View of the present-day Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.
Photograph by Nemo via Wikimedia Commons.



OUTLINE OF JESUS' MOUNT OF OLIVES DISCOURSE

Signs of thy Coming and End	Matthew 24:3–8; Mark 13:3–8; Luke 21:7–11
Persecution Foretold	Matthew 24:9–14; Mark 13:9–13; Luke 21:12–19
Abomination of Desolation	Matthew 24:15–22; Mark 14–20; Luke 21:20–24
False Christs and Prophets	Matthew 24:23–28; Mark 13:21–23; Luke 21:25–38

Joseph Smith—Matthew

In 1851, the British mission president, Apostle Franklin D. Richards, wanted to share key passages from the JST and the D&C 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 Matthew 24. Over time, parts of that collection were canonized. Just as the JST of Genesis 1–7 received a new name, “The Book of Moses,” so too the JST of Matthew 24 became known as, Joseph Smith—Matthew.

The re-arranged order in the Joseph Smith—Matthew is organized below to separate the past and future events:

PAST

JST OR JS—M

24:1

24:2–6

24:7–11

24:12–18

24:19

24:20–21a

KJV MATT 24

24:39

24:1–5

24:9–13

24:15–21

24:8

24:22

FUTURE

JST OR JS—M

21b–22

23, 28

24–27

29

30

33

34–35

36–39

40–54

55

KJV MATT 24

24:23–24

24:6

24:25–28

24:7

24:12

24:29

24:34–35

24:30–33

24:36–51

Signs of Jerusalem's Impending Destruction

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:4–20

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:4 “What is the sign of thy coming, and the end of the world . . .?” The disciples did not understand what lay ahead in 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.” It is repeated again in Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31. The earth itself will not be destroyed though. We learn elsewhere that the earth will “receive its paradisiacal glory” and become the Celestial Kingdom. The destruction described can be defined as the end of worldliness and a purification (Article of Faith 10; D&C 88:10).

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:5–10 “Many shall deceive . . . then shall they . . . kill you” Jesus warned His disciples that deception and iniquity will abound. Because of the circulating falsehoods, they will all be persecuted, and many disciples will even suffer martyrdom. We usually honor Stephen as the first Christian martyr, although John the Baptist and Jesus were already martyred. James the son of Zebedee followed Stephen, and each of the other ten apostles also died as a martyr.⁷

Joseph Smith—Matthew 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 and His Spirit will escape. Just as the destroying angel passed over the homes of those who obeyed the prophet and covered their doorways with the blood of a lamb, so too will the “steadfast” receive eternal protection from the worst destructions of the Last Days. The same was true at the first destruction of Jerusalem because, as prophesied, all Christians who followed the apostolic leadership had left Jerusalem before the worst destruction.

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:12 “. . . see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel” In Daniel 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11 we can read of the tragic destruction of Jerusalem (other prophets also discussed this, such as Hosea 3:4 and Jeremiah 19:4). Even though very few villages had a copy of the book of Daniel, it appears that these prophecies were known.⁸ 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 to clean. But the Lord used similar language to mean more general 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.” (This counsel was given at a time of great persecution and destruction in Missouri.)

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:13–19 “in those days shall be great tribulations on the Jews . . . as was not before . . . nor ever shall be” Jesus prophecies of the extreme danger and speed of the upcoming destruction. The horrific massacre resulted due to the Jewish revolt in AD 66 (just thirty-three years after Jesus’ prophesy 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 Second Coming

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:21–37

Joseph Smith—Matthew 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. Joseph Smith defined God’s elect as they who choose to be chosen, or those who live their covenants.⁹ Those good people who prayerfully testify of Jesus have blessed many generations of the world—just as a sprinkling of salt and a ray of light.



The Siege and Destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans Under the Command of Titus, A.D. 70. Painting by David Roberts, 1850. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:21–22 “there shall also arise false Christs and false prophets . . . they shall deceive the very elect” Jesus repeats His warning about false prophets (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:9). Paul also taught of the false prophets deceiving the elect when he spoke of the apostasy in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–3; Hebrews 9:26–28; Acts 20:29; as did Peter in 2 Peter 3:3–9. John describes anti-Christ in 1 John 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 (Revelation 19:10). In a Springfield, IL court of law, Joseph Smith used this New Testament teaching as his definition and evidence that he was a prophet.¹⁰ In addition to all

those who testify of Jesus, true prophets expose false prophets by exposing their misunderstood philosophies, or cunning counterfeits.

The early Christians expected the end of the world very soon after Jesus’ resurrection.¹¹ Yet, it was not the Second Coming that was imminent, but the apostasy. False teachings were already under way by the time of Paul’s ministry. It was neither passive nor gradual. Jesus foretold of this in Matthew 24:24. Jesus explains that He allows it: “Christ suffereth him to work, until the time is fulfilled that he shall be taken out of the way” (2 Thessalonians 2:7, JST).

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:23—37 “I speak these things . . . for the elect’s sake . . . for the coming of the Son of Man” The Lord outlines twenty signs of the times that will precede and accompany His Second Coming. He does this so that His covenant people will be prepared.

1. Wars and rumors of wars—repeated twice each (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:23; 28)
2. All will see Jesus’ Second Coming, as the sunrise covers the earth (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:26)
3. The elect will gather together (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:27)
4. Nation will rise against nation (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:29—in opposition to the Millennium described in Isaiah 2:4)
5. Famine (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:29)
6. Pestilence (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:29)
7. Earthquakes in divers places (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:29)
8. Iniquity will abound (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:30)
9. People’s love will “wax cold” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:30)
10. Those who are not overcome will be saved (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:30)
11. The gospel will be preached in all the world (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31)
12. The wicked will be destroyed (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:31)
13. Daniel’s prophecy of the abomination of desolation will be fulfilled (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:32)
14. The sun and moon will be darkened (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:33)
15. Stars will fall (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:33)
16. In the generation that these are fulfilled, Jesus’ will come again (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:34–36)
17. The tribes of the earth will mourn (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:36)
18. Jesus will come in the clouds “with power and great glory” (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:36)
19. Those who treasure God’s word will not be deceived (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37)
20. Angels come before Jesus, like a trumpet, to gather the elect in heaven (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:37)

God’s promise to the generation who has to endure his tragic list of destruction, is filled with hope and encouragement if they “treasureth up my word.”

FOUR PARABLES

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38–54

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

1. The Parable of the Fig Tree

Matthew 24:32–42; Mark 13:28–37; Luke 21:29–36

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:38–39 “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 is ripe. Jesus encourages us to watch in the same way that as we prepare for His coming. His final restraint is a surprising revelation that even He did not know when He would return.



Image by Luisella Planeta Leoni via Pixabay

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:41–43 “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 divinely-directed history) repeats itself. In spite of all the destruction and calamities that will precede Jesus’ Second Coming, people will continue to go about their lives as they did before the great flood in Noah’s day.¹² I’m sure those people initially saw the extra heavy rain as only an annoyance, and not as something life-threatening. In 2004, President Gordon B. Hinckley equated our times with the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah.¹³ We also have received an apostolic warning as recently as April 2019 General Conference, “Let us be about building up Zion to hasten that day.”¹⁴

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:46–48 “What I say unto one, I say unto all . . . watch . . . in such an hour, ye think not” Jesus repeatedly instructs His disciples to watch until the end (Matthew 28:19–20; Luke 21:32; Acts 2:16). Many met *their end* at the *end of their lives*, not the final destruction of the wicked. In that case, they will be those angels who join the Lord at His glorious coming (Revelation 6:12, 18). Whenever we meet the Lord, the counsel “to watch” calls for active engagement. Rather than passively wait for His timing, the Lord asks disciples to actively wait by becoming spiritually stronger. Our preparation is affecting God’s timing. The righteous saints can help shorten the destruction (Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:20–21).

2. The Parable of the Servants

Matthew 24:43–51; Mark 13:34

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:49–50 “a faithful and wise servant . . . shall find so doing” To be ready for the Lord, we must be serving God. The “wise” in the scripture are those men 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 (Helaman 5:12). Now the wise servants are those who are faithful and who are doing the Lord’s work.

Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:51–54 “that evil servant shall say . . . My lord delayeth his coming . . . appoint him his portion with the hypocrites . . .” This group are still “servants” or disciples of God. People who have

feigned allegiance to serve God, but have not maintained His image in their countenance, mind, and heart. If we lose faith in God's plan, do not see His hand in the unfolding of the world, or become self-centered—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 Judgement.

Joseph Smith—Matthew 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, like the ripening fig, that it was not time for the harvest 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.”¹⁵

3. Parable of the Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1–13; also referenced in D&C 33; 45; 63; 88; 132:62–63; 133

Jesus wants to emphasize that His disciples will need to prepare as they wait for His Second Coming, so He illustrates it with two powerful parables: The Ten Virgins and The Talents. In the Doctrine and Covenants, there are two revelations that reference the parable of The Talents (D&C 60:2, 13; 80:18), and six revelations that cite the Ten Virgins (D&C 33:16–17; 45:56–57; 63:54). This is more than any other parable. It confirms the modern need to understand the parable of the Ten Virgins as we prepare for Jesus' great Second Coming.

Matthew 25:1 “the kingdom of heaven” In the NT, this three-word phrase is exclusive to Matthew, who uses it 32 times. The phrase “Kingdom of Heaven” is found in the Book of Mormon and the D&C, but no other author uses it in the Bible. The other Gospels all use the phrase, “Kingdom of God,” when introducing other parables or teachings. It appears that Matthew does not want to not overuse the name “God.”

“ . . . likened unto ten virgins . . . to meet the bridegroom”¹⁶ The main character of this parable is the bridegroom; symbolically, He is the Son of God. When we look at the parable symbolically, the ten virgins and bride represent the church or God's chosen, covenant people. In the Old Testament, Zion and Jerusalem represented the bride of Jehovah. This symbolism stemmed from Isaiah 62:5, “As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.” This image of marriage was carried further, so that whenever the Israelites broke their covenant with God for idolatry or sins, the Old Testament referred to it as “adultery.” (See also Isaiah 50:1; 62:5; Jeremiah 3:8; Hosea 2:2–5.) A “bill of divorcement” was spoken of when God's people broke their covenant (Isaiah 50:1; Jeremiah 3:8).

Jesus' parable incorporates part of the wedding festivities that occurred at that time. After the wedding was arranged, the families held a betrothal ceremony. Then about a year later, family and friends gathered the final wedding ceremony. A week of feasting usually took place at the home of the groom. After everything was pre-

pared, his 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 to and from the bride's home.

In the meantime, the young bride's closest companions (usually between 12 and 15 years of age) prepared her by helping her bathe, dress, put on perfume, and prepare her hair. This was the only public exposure of her hair for the rest of her life. After her wedding, she must always wear a veil over her head and face in public.¹⁷ Both the bride and groom wore a wreath or gold 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."¹⁸ After the ceremony, the bride moved into the groom's family home for a few years until they were old enough to financially live on their own.¹⁹

Matthew 25:2 "five . . . wise, and five . . . foolish" Jesus' story-telling grabs attention immediately. His simple well-known images have an unusual or new twist that draws in the reader to listen more closely. His labels



The Parable of Wise and Foolish Virgins (unfinished) by Peter von Cornelius, 1813. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

immediately engage the listeners to wonder what makes one wise and another foolish. Elder Dallin Oaks used this parable in General Conference to encourage us to prepare for the Second Coming.²⁰

Elder Marvin J. Ashton taught, “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 they were foolishly unprepared for the coming of the bridegroom . . . They have been warned their entire lives.’ . . . These are cautionary tales to all disciples: look to your own life and behaviors.”²¹

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

“vessels” The KJV uses a vessel of oil, others translate it as flask, jar, or container (ESV, NIV, GNT). John W. Welch points out that the Greek word, *aggeiois*, is also used for blood vessels.²² Taking this image a step further, like the blood vessels, the vessels of oil can represent our need to internalize the oil of the Spirit, so that it can run through our whole being to give us light and direction.

“oil” The oil is identified as the Holy Ghost in D&C 45:56–57; “They are wise and have received of the truth and have taken the Holy Spirit as 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” (also see 1 Samuel 16:13, the anointing of David).

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 or “Holy oil” for anointing the Tabernacle, priests, kings, prophets, alters, and in preparing the Passover lambs. As mentioned previously, Jesus’ 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. In early Christianity, olive oil symbolized the Spirit (Acts 10:38; 1 John 2:20).

Matthew 25:5–6 “the bridegroom tarried, they . . . slept. And at midnight . . .” The bridegroom is 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 (Mark 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” (Mark 13:33).

Matthew 25:7 “. . . arose, and trimmed their lamps” This verse is referenced and elaborated 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. It is the anointing of the Spirit which brings us to Christ through the power of the at-one-ment.

Matthew 25:8 “Give us your oil” This verse can be confusing. As a people who try to share our goods and give to those in need, this may sound selfish or startling. I have asked myself, “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, right?” But Jesus’ oil is not the same. What the Lord is talking about cannot be shared. President Spencer 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.²³

This oil or spirituality must be experienced and developed individually (D&C 122:7). We must cultivate our



The Parable of The Talents by Willem de Poorter. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

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.

Matthew 25:9 “buy for yourselves” Olive oil was readily available as a basic staple—it was used in the temples, as food, for light, and as body oils. The problem with availability is the hour of the night.

Matthew 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 or Spirit, they could not be rekindled. 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. Thereby showing that...

Matthew 25:12 “Ye know me not” (JST) The JST makes a substantial change in the message. The difference is understanding the character of the God we worship. Our God *always* knows us: it is we who do not know Him (also see D&C 6:14, 20–22; D&C 121–122:7; Romans 5:4; 8:37–39; etc.).

4. Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14–30

Matthew 25:14 “. . . called his own servants and delivered unto them . . .” This parable continues with the same theme phrase as many past parables that refer to the Judgment and Second Coming of the Lord. However, it is *italicized* which means it is not in the Greek text, but rather is assumed to follow the earlier well-established pattern. Jesus begins with a man traveling to a far country referring to the second estate (i.e. 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.

Matthew 25:15 “five talents, to another two, and to another one” A talent was the most expensive quantity of money, a monetary weight or coin (the modern word definition did not gain its meaning of “abilities” until the Middle Ages—perhaps from this parable). Historians surmise different values for the monies. One estimate is that one talent was worth fifteen years of labor for a servant/slave. Another suggests that one talent was worth 6,000 denarii, with one *denari* worth a day’s wages. Also, two denarii provided a man and his family one day’s living.

Thus, 1 talent provided 3,000 days of living for an entire family, or nearly a decade. Remember in the Greco-Roman world, household slaves were often given money at the end of their service to start up on their own. These different amounts may have represented the different amount of years each slave worked.

Matthew 25:16 “traded . . . and gained other five” (JST) Those who are able to use these blessings are able to double their worth for the kingdom. 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.

Matthew 25:21, 23, “well done good and faithful servant” God’s love will bless the Judgement with mercy, but His judgments will reflect how well we have carried out our stewardships. It is difficult in the modern western culture to really understand the master-servant relationship. By using some creative thinking though, we should be able to realize that 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 other’s feet, heal, feed, clothe, and comfort everyone who asked for help; we should do likewise.

Matthew 25:26, 30 “slothful servant . . . outer darkness ... weeping and gnashing of teeth” represents a place for the un-repentant. (See D&C 76:44, 103,109; 85:9, 101:81–91.) The story begs an application of stewardship responsibilities. It also speaks of repentance.

Jesus will Judge the World

Matthew 25:31–46

Matthew 25:31–33 “as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” Jesus associates His judgement with a pastoral scene of a shepherd in the field separating his animals, not a cold, foreign room where an austere figure demands respect and silence. He will also have His closest friends helping with the task of making sure everyone goes where they desire.

Matthew 25:34–40 “as ye have done it unto one of the last of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” The blessing of serving those around us is doubly magnified on God’s judgement day. In addition to helping the stranger, naked, hungry, and prisoners, 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.

Header Image: The Prophecy of the Destruction of the Temple by James Tissot, 1899.

ENDNOTES

1. 2 Nephi 11:4; 25:20; Mosiah 3:15; 13:30-33; 16:13; Alma 25:15; 33:19-21; 34:14; 37:38-40; Ether 13:6; etc.
2. Cyrus Adler, ed., *Jewish Encyclopedia* (NYC, NY: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906), George A. Barton, “Temple of Herod.” “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.”
3. Josephus, *Jewish War*, V.5.1; VI.1.3; VI.2.6; and *Antiquities of the Jews*, XV.11.3, 5; and *Bellum Judaicum*, v. 5, 5; etc.
4. Adler, ed., *Jewish Encyclopedia*, “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* 4.
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; Isaiah 13:9-11; 40:3-5; 45:23; 49:11; 52:10; 60:2; 63:1; Daniel 7:13; Joel 3:16; Micah 1:3; Zechariah 12:10; 13:6; 13:6; 14:4; Malachi 3:2; Matthew 24; Jude 1:14; Revelation 1:7; 3:11; 6:12, 17-18; 8:1; and LDS scriptures’ Topical Guide.
7. Peter: Crucified upside-down in Rome, ca. AD 64; James son of Zebedee: beheaded ca. AD 44; Andrew: crucified; Philip: crucified ca. AD 54; Bartholomew: crucified; Matthew: halberd ca. AD 60; Thomas: spear; James son of Alphaeus: beaten by club, after crucified and stoned; Jude: crucified; Simon the Zealot: crucified ca. AD 7.
8. Large cities had synagogues with multiple scrolls, but smaller towns could only afford the first five books of Moses and the Psalms. After those six the next most common biblical scroll available at the time of Jesus was Isaiah.
9. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint 1844, 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” (Phil. 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 Ehat and Lindon Cook, *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
10. Smith, *History*, 5.215–216. “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”

11. Early American Christians from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also expected an eminent Second Coming (especially the 20,000 Millerites who gathered for the event in 1844, only to be very disappointed).
12. President Thomas S. Monson, General Conference, October 2011, quoted Pres. 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.” Two and a half decades ago, at 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.”
13. President Gordon B. Hinckley, *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, 10 Jan. 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.”
14. D. Todd Christofferson, General Conference, April 2019. “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.”
15. Russell M. Nelson, General Conference, April 2019.
16. In the Aramaic manuscript of this chapter it ends with “went to meet the groom and the bride” (ABPE), but most only include meeting the groom
17. *Mishnah, Ketuboth* 2.1; “She went forth [to the marriage] in a litter and with hair unbound . . .” (brackets in Danby’s translation). Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 13.565; “Until the destruction of the temple both the bride and groom wore distinctive headdresses, sometimes of gold.”
18. 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, at . . . 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.” Neusner, ed, *Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 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. Skolnik, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 13.566.

19. For more see, Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: GP, 2015), chapter 4.
20. Dallin Oaks, "Preparation for the Second Coming," *General Conference*, April 2004.
21. John W. and Jeannie Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2019), 143.
22. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus*, 142. "From it we get the English word angiogram, an X-ray procedure for the detection of blockages in blood vessels."
23. Spencer W. Kimball, *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1972), 253–256.