

# Matthew 24 and 25



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week’s Study:** *Matt. 24:1–25, Rev. 13:11–17, Matt. 7:24–27, Luke 21:20, Matt. 25:1–30.*

**Memory Text:** “‘For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect’ ” (*Matthew 24:24, NIV*).

In Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus reveals important truths about end times and about how to be prepared. In a sense, these chapters were Christ’s teaching on last-day events. At the same time, He looks to the more immediate future and sees the impending destruction of Jerusalem, a tragedy of catastrophic proportions for His people.

But in Christ’s words to His disciples, He speaks also to His followers in the generations to come, including and especially the last one—the one that will be alive when He returns. Jesus doesn’t paint a pretty picture either. Wars, rumors of wars, pestilence, false christs, and persecution—this will be the lot of the world, and the lot of His church. Amazingly enough, looking back through time, we can see just how accurate His predictions were. Therefore, we can trust Him for the predictions not yet fulfilled in our lifetime.

But Jesus didn’t just warn about what was coming. In Matthew 25 He also told parables that, if heeded, will prepare His people for when He, the “‘Son of man,’” returns. Yes, hard times will come, but He will prepare a people to meet Him when He does come back.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 19.

## A Powerful Confirmation of Prophecy

In the final days before the Cross, the disciples spoke with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. Imagine them hearing Jesus say that the temple will be destroyed. Who knows exactly what went on in their minds, but the questions that the disciples asked afterward indicate that they linked the destruction of the temple with “ ‘the end of the world’ ” (*Matt. 24:3*).

**Read Matthew 24:1–25.** What overall message did Jesus give to His followers about the last days?

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Matthew 24:1–25 makes it clear that, among other things, Christ is concerned with deceptions that will confuse His people through the ages and into the end time. Among those deceptions will be false prophets and false christs. Some will come claiming to represent Christ (false prophets), and some will come claiming *to be* Christ. And the terrible thing is, people will believe them, too.

We have seen a sad but powerful confirmation of the Word of God. All through history, and even in our day, deceivers have indeed come, saying, “I am the Christ.” What a remarkable prophecy! Living in the time that we do, we can survey the long centuries of history and see (in ways those who lived in Christ’s time couldn’t) just how accurate that prediction was. We shouldn’t be surprised, either, if deceptions like these only increase as we near the final crisis.

Also, in the context of affirmation of faith, look at how Jesus depicted the state of the world. At various times in earth’s history since Christ, people placed their hope in things they believed would eliminate or at least greatly reduce the sufferings and woe of humanity. Be it political movements or technology or science or reason—at one time or another people have placed great hope that these things would usher in a utopia here on earth. As the painful witness of history has shown again and again, these hopes always have proven ill-founded. The world today is just as Jesus said it would be. Christ’s words, spoken almost two thousand years ago, show just how misguided those hopes really have been.

**Read Matthew 24:25.** What can we take away from this that should help to affirm us in our faith?

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## Enduring to the End

**Read** Matthew 24:9 and Revelation 13:11–17. What parallels exist between what Jesus said here in Matthew and what He inspired John to write about in Revelation?

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Christ’s concern for His people in the end time includes a global deception that causes nations to oppose the true faith and to impose a false worship on the world. Those who stand firm will face hatred, tribulation, and even death.

**Read** Matthew 24:13. What is the key to being saved, to being faithful, even amid worldwide opposition?

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“None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 593. This statement means that all who fortify their minds with biblical truths will not be swept away in any of the end-time deceptions. They have to be grounded in what truth is for this time; otherwise, the deceptions will overwhelm them.

**Read** Matthew 7:24–27. What else is crucial for staying faithful to God?

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As important as it is to be grounded intellectually in the Word of God, according to Jesus that is still not enough to be able to stand amid the trials that we will face. We have to do what we have learned; that is, we have to obey the truth as it is in Jesus. In the parable above, both builders heard the sayings of Jesus. The difference between them, between enduring and not enduring, was obeying what Jesus had taught.

**Why does the one who obeys stand and the one who doesn’t obey fall? What difference does obedience make in keeping a person steady in the faith?**

## The “Abomination of Desolation”

In His great discourse on the end time, Christ points to “the abomination of desolation” (*Matt. 24:15*), an image from the book of Daniel (*Dan. 9:27, 11:31, 12:11*).

God declared something an “abomination” when it was a serious violation of His law, such as idolatry (*Deut. 27:15*) or immoral sexual practices (*Lev. 18:22*). Hence, this “abomination of desolation” involved some sort of religious apostasy.

**Read** Matthew 24:15 and Luke 21:20. How do these texts help us to understand better what Jesus was talking about in regard to the “abomination of desolation”?

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These two texts make it clear that Jesus’ prediction includes, in a more immediate sense, the terrible destruction that would come upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70, when pagan Rome would destroy not only the city but the sacred temple, as well.

However, there is a second fulfillment of this prophecy in which the more immediate events, such as the destruction of Jerusalem, stood as a type of future, end-time events. “Christ saw in Jerusalem a symbol of the world hardened in unbelief and rebellion, and hastening on to meet the retributive judgments of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 22.

In Daniel 12:11 and Daniel 11:31, the “abomination of desolation” appears in connection with the latter phase of Rome, the papal phase, in which an alternative system of mediation and salvation has been set up—one which seeks to usurp what Christ had done for us, and indeed continues to do for us now in the heavenly sanctuary.

Daniel 8, particularly verses 9–12, helps to place these events in their historical context, with a two-phased Roman power. The first phase, seen in the little horn’s rapid horizontal expansion (*Dan. 8:9*), shows the vast empire of pagan Rome. In the second phase (*Dan. 8:10–12*) the little horn grows vertically, casting down some of the stars (persecuting God’s people) and magnifying itself to the “prince of the host” (*Dan. 8:11*), Jesus. This represents the papal phase, which rose out of the collapse of the pagan Roman Empire but still remains Rome. (That’s why one symbol, the little horn, represents both phases of the same power.) The judgment in Daniel 7:9, 10, the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14, and the signs in the heavens of Matthew 24:29 all signal God’s intervention for His people in the last days.

## The Ten Virgins

After His discourse in Matthew 24 about the signs of His coming, in Matthew 25 Jesus talks about how to be prepared for it.

**Read** Matthew 25:1–13, the parable of the ten virgins. What is Jesus saying here that should help us to understand how we can be prepared for His return?

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Jesus starts this phase of His discourse by talking about ten virgins. The fact that they are called “virgins” suggests they represent those who profess to be Christians. They are not on Satan’s side of the controversy. Instead, they are likened to “the kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 25:1*). But in the end time, they all sleep (*Matt. 25:5*), even though Christ already has warned about keeping watch (*Matt. 24:42*), or staying awake so they will be ready when He returns.

All ten virgins have lamps, and all go out to meet the bridegroom, which means that they all are looking forward to His coming. There is a delay, and all of these believers in His coming fall asleep. Suddenly, in the dead of night, they all are awakened: the bridegroom is coming (*Matt. 25:1–6*).

The foolish virgins are startled, unprepared. Why? One version says “our lamps are gone out” (*Matt. 25:8*). Other versions, true to the Greek original, say the lamps are “going out.” There is still a flickering flame. The women still have a little oil, but not enough to be prepared to meet Christ.

What, then, is the problem?

These virgins represent Christians who are waiting for Christ to return but who have a superficial experience with Him. They have some oil, some working of the Spirit in their lives, but it is merely flickering; they are satisfied with little when they needed much.

“The Spirit works upon man’s heart, according to his desire and consent implanting in him a new nature; but the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 411.

**What are ways we can look at ourselves and make sure we aren’t making the same mistakes as these people did? If we see ourselves in this role, how can we change?**

## Using Your Talents

**Read** Matthew 25:13–30. What role does using our gifts have in preparing us for the return of Christ?

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Although Jesus told a different parable here from the one just before, both talk about being ready for the return of Christ. Both deal with those who were ready and those who weren't. And both show the fate of those who, through their own spiritual neglect, faced eternal loss.

Just as the oil represents the Holy Spirit for the ten virgins, so the “ ‘bag’ ” or “ ‘bags of gold’ ” (*Matt. 25:15, NIV*) represent talents, which is the Greek word (*talanta*) in the original language. “The talents represent special gifts of the Spirit, together with all natural endowments.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 510.

All the servants in the parable had received goods from their master. Notice, too, that they were the master's goods (*Matt. 25:14*), which were entrusted to them “ ‘each according to his own ability’ ” (*Matt. 25:15, NKJV*). The gifts given to the servants were given in trust; in a real sense, these servants were stewards of what they didn't own but were responsible for. That's why, when the master came back, he “ ‘settled accounts with them’ ” (*Matt. 25:19, NKJV*).

Spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit (*see 1 Cor. 12:1–11, 28–31; Eph. 4:11*). There is good news, therefore, for those who think they have the least gift. Gifts are never received without the Giver. So these people receive their gifts by receiving the greatest gift—the Holy Spirit.

The gifts are already ours in Christ, but our actual possession depends upon our reception of the Holy Spirit and surrender to Him. Here is where the unprofitable servant made his mistake. He had been given a gift but did nothing with it. He left his gift unimproved. He didn't make an effort to take what he had been graciously given and do something with it. As a result Jesus called him “ ‘wicked and lazy’ ” (*Matt. 25:26, NKJV*), a powerful condemnation.

**Jesus told this parable in the context of the last days and His return. What does it teach us, then, about how the use of our talents is crucial to being prepared for the last days?**

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**Further Thought:** “The man who received the one talent ‘went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.’

“It was the one with the smallest gift who left his talent unimproved. In this is given a warning to all who feel that the smallness of their endowments excuses them from service for Christ. If they could do some great thing, how gladly would they undertake it; but because they can serve only in little things, they think themselves justified in doing nothing. In this they err. The Lord in His distribution of gifts is testing character. The man who neglected to improve his talent proved himself an unfaithful servant. Had he received five talents, he would have buried them as he buried the one. His misuse of the one talent showed that he despised the gifts of heaven.

“ ‘ He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.’ Luke 16:10. The importance of the little things is often underrated because they are small; but they supply much of the actual discipline of life. There are really no nonessentials in the Christian’s life. Our character building will be full of peril while we underrate the importance of the little things.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 355, 356.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What have been some ideologies and ideals that people have believed would bring about a utopia on earth? What were those ideas, and why, without exception, have they all failed?
- 2 What is it about obedience to what God tells us to do that strengthens our faith? That is, why is faith without the corresponding works “dead” (*James 2:26*)? Considering the kind of trials awaiting those who “keep the commandments of God” (*Rev. 14:12*), why is it so important for us to be preparing now for what will come when we least expect it?
- 3 Think more about the ten virgins. Why should their story be a warning to us that, on the surface and in so many different ways, they all looked and acted alike? How can we make sure we are not as self-deceived as the foolish ones were?
- 4 What does it mean that, if possible, even “the elect” could be deceived? What is our understanding of “the elect”? (*See Matt. 24:31, Rom. 8:33, Col. 3:12.*) What does this tell us about how great the deceptions will be?

## Holy Spirit Moment

by CHRISTOPHER HOLLAND

I stopped going to the Roman Catholic Church when I was 16. The primary reason was that my parents, who taught marriage enrichment classes at the church, were going through a divorce. The priest, who had eaten at our house many times, never visited when my parents parted ways.

I decided that if this was what God and His church were all about, then this wasn't for me.

Four years passed. I moved from the Chicago area to northern Indiana, where I worked the late shift at a gas station. It was there that I met my future wife, Debbie, who worked up the street at a nursing home.

Debbie and I talked whenever she bought gas. She understood my interest in spiritual matters. My questions reawakened her own interest in her Seventh-day Adventist upbringing.

One night, we visited the Pioneer Memorial Church at nearby Andrews University. We had heard that something interesting was happening, and we walked in on the NET '95 satellite evangelistic series led by Mark Finley.

After the meetings ended, I began to study the Bible. I nearly joined another Protestant church, but Debbie stopped me with a Bible study on the secret rapture.

Debbie asked me whether I sincerely believed that Christians would be quietly whisked away to heaven. When I shrugged, she gave me a powerful Bible study about how every eye will see Jesus at His second coming. It was a Holy Spirit moment.

I was baptized in September 1995, and Debbie was rebaptized a month later. We were married the next spring.

I began to sense a real burden to share the gospel. But how?

The answer came when Andrews University hired me to run the Gazebo restaurant on campus. A perk of the job was a free class every semester. I signed up for a religion class and became convicted that God was calling me to be a minister.

My first evangelistic series took place in the Chicago area where I had grown up. It was like the Lord gave me the opportunity to make good. Several years later, Mark Finley, the evangelist whose NET '95 meetings introduced me to the Adventist message, teamed up with me to lead evangelistic meetings at 34 sites in the Chicago area. More than 500 people were baptized.

Today I am broadcasting across Canada as director and speaker for *It Is Written Canada*. If you had told me my future when I was 17, I would have blown the froth off my beer and laughed. God leads in an amazing way.





## The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 25:13*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Understand the times in which humankind now lives and identify the symptoms of the end in the light of Jesus' warnings.

**Feel:** Sense the urgency of the moment and intensify his or her hope.

**Do:** Prepare to meet his or her Lord. Change his or her priorities. Do not believe in false messiahs.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: The Symptoms of the End**

**A** How should we inform ourselves in order to properly situate ourselves in the prophetic calendar?

**B** What are the signs of the end? How do we discern the false doctrines of the end and the false messiahs?

**C** Why is it not possible to know the exact time of the end?

**II. Feel: The Urgency of the Moment**

**A** Why are the events of the end so frightening? How should we cope with these sentiments?

**B** Why should we not be afraid of these troubles?

**C** Why do these events inspire our longing for the kingdom of God?

**III. Do: Prepare the Way of the Lord.**

**A** What should you do in your personal life to prepare for His coming?

**B** What should you do to help other people to prepare for His coming?

**C** What should you do to bring this news of His coming to the world?

► **Summary:** The last words of Jesus before His crucifixion are serious warnings of judgment that concern the end time and the destiny of the whole world.

## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *Matthew 24:42–44*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The news of the coming of the Son of man is not just about the sensational events that precede His coming; the event itself has an immediate effect on our spiritual lives. Now is the time to refresh our connection with the Lord. The future event of Christ’s coming imbues our present religious and spiritual journey with intention and significance. The closer we come to our Lord in our prayers and in our worship services, the more we will long to see Him face-to-face.

**Just for Teachers:** This lesson will focus on Jesus’ prophecies and teachings of His last discourse on the Mount of Olives. Jesus’ warning applies to His disciples of all generations, but especially to His disciples of the last days. Human history is going to end. Jesus warns us that this end time will be troubling and shaking, and He urges us to prepare accordingly. The accent should not be on scaring people, but on stimulating them to strengthen their faith and hope and to readjust priorities. Insofar as we have realized that the time of the end has arrived, Jesus’ recommendation to “ ‘seek first the kingdom of God’ ” (*Matt. 6:33, NKJV*) is more relevant than ever.

**Opening Discussion:** Why, and how, could we refresh the sense of our “Adventist” identity and mission that precisely concerns the time of the end and the very soon coming of Christ? As we consider our history, we may feel frustrated and discouraged and turn then to other points of emphasis. The Seventh-day Adventist movement has known disappointments; and now, after such a long time of proclaiming the same message, we have become a sophisticated and well-organized institution, and, at times, it may seem as though we have settled for good in this world.

#### Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ How can we combine the need for wise action on earth with the passion for the heavenly kingdom?
- ❷ How can we combine the need to feel comfortable in our lives with the sense of urgency to prepare for His coming?

## ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** The way Jesus engages in the proclamation of the end times and of His coming should inspire us. Jesus does not begin His sermon with an affirmation or theological message or with a PowerPoint presentation of an important point of doctrine. He begins with a direct question that concerns the contemporary situation: “Do you not see all these things?” (Matt. 24:2, NKJV). Then He shocks His disciples with the disturbing news that concerns their present reality, the temple. And only when the disciples ask their question, “Tell us, when . . . and what . . . ?” (Matt. 24:3), does Jesus, then, speak to their present situation from which He will infer His message: “Therefore . . .” (Matt. 24:15).

Note that Jesus’ first argument is taken from the Scriptures, a well-known line from the book of Daniel “the ‘abomination of desolation’” (Matt. 24:15, NKJV), and then He encourages His disciples to “read . . . [and] understand” (Matt. 24:15, NKJV). His first message is a prophecy about the “‘great tribulation’” (Matt. 24:21, NKJV). It is on the basis of this prophecy of the end times that He will then proceed and teach about “the kingdom of heaven” through parables (Matt. 24:22–25:30).

## Bible Commentary

### I. The Great Tribulation (Review Matthew 24:15–28 with your class.)

From the most ancient times, the sanctuary, and later the temple, represented the cosmos. When Moses wrote the book of Exodus, he described the process of the building of the sanctuary (*Exodus 25–40*) in parallel to the Creation story (*Gen. 1:1–2:4*). Both stories occur in seven stages and both end with the same technical phrase: “finished the work” (*Gen. 2:2, Exod. 40:33, NIV*).

Likewise, the construction of the temple by Solomon develops in seven stages and ends with the phrase: “finished all the work” (*1 Kings 7:40, 51, RSV*). This particular phrase appears only in these three passages. The parallel between the construction of the sanctuary/temple and the Creation of the world indicates clearly that, for Moses, there was a relationship between the world and the sanctuary/temple (see also *Ps. 78:69; compare with 134:3; 150:1, 6*). So, when Jesus spoke about the end of the temple, the disciples understood immediately that He was referring to the end of the world.

The phrase “abomination of desolation” is a very rare expression that Daniel uses to predict the destruction of Jerusalem that took place in

A.D. 70 (*Dan. 9:27, Dan. 12:11*). And indeed, Jesus applies this expression to that event. But Jesus applies it also to the final destruction of the world, of which the temple was considered a figure. Thus, Jesus speaks to both audiences—His disciples who will be contemporary to the destruction of Jerusalem, and His disciples of the end times who will be contemporary to the events taking place at the time of the end.

Like Jesus' disciples and the Jews of that time, we need to understand first that there will be an end. Jesus simply states the fact without indicating any time for it. This message is, therefore, relevant in a general manner for any generation of Christians. But Jesus specifically has in mind the generation of Christians who will actually live through these events. These disciples are the only ones who will be able to recognize and “see” those final events (*Matt. 24:15*). They will be able to “see” and recognize Jesus as their Messiah because He warned them beforehand about false messiahs (*Matt. 24:25*).

**Consider This:** Discuss Jesus' pedagogical method. How could we apply His method to our evangelistic strategies? What is Jesus' first focus? What can we learn about Jesus' approach to Scriptures? How do Scriptures relate to our lives and to history? How can we prevent ourselves from falling into the traps of false messiahs and false interpretations of prophecies?

## II. The Kingdom of Heaven (*Review Matthew 25:1–30 with your class.*)

Although Jesus announces that He will speak about the “kingdom of heaven” (*Matt. 25:1, 14*), He does not intend to describe it. The kingdom of heaven is suggested through a comparison; it is “likened to.” Then Jesus focuses on the situation on earth in our daily life. The first parable, the “virgins,” belongs to the personal domain. The second parable, the “talents,” belongs to the business domain. When we compare the two parables, we can find similar, but also different, lessons that should help us in our preparation for “the kingdom of heaven.”

One common lesson: the oil, like the talents, symbolizes the gifts of God—the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures. The idea is that we cannot produce light by ourselves. We need the light from the external divine source. We should learn to take these precious gifts seriously. We should be careful to preserve the oil. The foolish virgins despised their old oil just as the bad servant despised his talent.

To the lesson that urges for faithfulness and encourages us to care about our heritage, the parable of the talents adds the lesson of being creative. We should not just preserve what we have received; we should also find new ways to multiply our gifts. This holds true also for the searching of the Scriptures. It is not enough to keep repeating the same old truths; we should study the

biblical text to find new gems. This lesson also applies to the life of the church. It is not enough to maintain our members. We need to help them grow, and we need to gather in new members.

**Discussion Questions:** Why did Jesus not describe the kingdom of heaven? How do the common lessons of the two parables apply to our preparation for the kingdom of God? Why are not all the virgins and all the servants accepted? How do we reconcile the biblical idea of a loving and gracious God with the picture of the harsh bridegroom or master?

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** One of the reasons Jesus taught in parables about the heavenly kingdom is that He did not want His disciples just to understand and appreciate the profound and rich truths; He wanted them also to incorporate these truths into their daily lives.

**Application Questions:** How does the parable of the virgins and the parable of the talents apply to our daily lives? Find examples in your job or in your personal life that illustrate the lessons of these two parables.

**Activity:** Invite your class to compare the two parables and list the lessons between the two that are similar or different. How do the different lessons complement each other?

### ►STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Just as Jesus used parables to teach some of the most difficult truths, we should be able to do the same. Note that some of the parables were found in the cultural folklore of the people of that time. What could we learn from Jesus about His familiarity with surrounding culture and also about His capacity to bring forth from it something new?

#### Activities:

- ① How true are these two parables in ordinary life? Find concrete cases in your daily life that show the truths of these two parables of Jesus.
- ② Challenge the members of your class to find stories or parables within their cultural folklore that could illustrate spiritual lessons.