

IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING BIBLE WORD PICTURES

Track 7 – Putting Together the Word Picture Trilogy in Matthew 24-25, Part 2...Lining Up the Pieces

Introduction/Review

We've spent some time up to this point talking about each of the three parables in Matthew 24 and 25 (The Good/Evil Servant, The 10 Virgins and the Talents). I've tried to show that each of them independently points to a future judgment, but that the judgment *doesn't* fit the church, or even a general judgment, on several levels; the future judgment that they all point to is about *national Israel*. But beyond the evidence I've given in the prior studies, is there "more" evidence to show that these parables are indeed tied to a future time when Israel will be held accountable for her responses to God's call upon her?

There are several passages in the Bible that point to a future judgment of Israel, specifically at the end of the tribulation. We will look at four passages in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament that will help us. Let's look at what each of them say, and then line them up with what we have seen in Matthew 24-25.

Servant/Virgins/Talents Trilogy: The Old Testament Prophecies

The **FIRST** passage we should look at is from the prophet Jeremiah. In chapter 30, he writes:

- **Jeremiah 30:7** Alas! For that day is great, So that none is like it; And it is the time of Jacob's trouble, But he shall be saved out of it. 8 'For it shall come to pass in that day,' Says the LORD of hosts, 'That I will break his yoke from your neck, And will burst your bonds; Foreigners shall no more enslave them. 9 But they shall serve the LORD their God, And David their king, Whom I will raise up for them. 10 'Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob,' says the LORD, 'Nor be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar, And your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, And no one shall make him afraid. 11 For I am with you,' says the LORD, 'to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, Yet I will not make a complete end of you. *But I will correct you in justice, And will not let you go altogether unpunished.*'

The topics covered in Jeremiah chapters 30 and 31 include "the time of Jacob's trouble" (also referred to as "the day of the Lord" and "the tribulation") and the time we would refer to as "the millennium", when Christ will rule the world for a thousand years. In the middle, between the tribulation and the millennium, we see that there will be a judgment, and part of that judgment will involve the nation of Israel. From this passage, we also see a prophecy concerning the resurrection of David as Israel's king, which obviously has not yet happened! This demonstrates that these events, including the judgment of national Israel, will occur sometime in the future.

The **SECOND** passage we should consider is from the prophet Ezekiel. In chapter 20, he writes:

- **Ezekiel 20:33** "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. 34 *I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out.* 35 *And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face.* 36 Just as I

pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you,” says the Lord GOD. 37 *“I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; 38 I will purge the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against Me; I will bring them out of the country where they dwell, but they shall not enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 39 “As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord GOD: “Go, serve every one of you his idols—and hereafter—if you will not obey Me; but profane My holy name no more with your gifts and your idols. 40 For on My holy mountain, on the mountain height of Israel,” says the Lord GOD, “there all the house of Israel, all of them in the land, shall serve Me; there I will accept them, and there I will require your offerings and the firstfruits of your sacrifices, together with all your holy things. 41 I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles. 42 Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for which I raised My hand in an oath to give to your fathers.*

From this passage, we see some things that *haven’t happened yet*... We know from many passages that the tribulation, among other things, will be a time for the *purging of Israel*, as we see here. But notice that this judgment (“I will plead my case with you face to face”) will determine Israel’s entrance into the (physical) land, and will occur in the presence of God after He regathers the nation. When this happens, it will be a fulfillment of His promises to them (20:42).

The **THIRD** Old Testament passage comes from the prophet Amos:

- **Amos 9:8** “Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, And I will destroy it from the face of the earth; Yet *I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob,*” Says the LORD. 9 “For surely, *I will command, and will sift the house of Israel among all nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve;* Yet not the smallest grain shall fall to the ground. 10 *All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword,* who say, ‘The calamity shall not overtake nor confront us.’ 11 “On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; 12 That they may possess the remnant of Edom, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name,” says the LORD who does this thing. 13 “Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “When the plowman shall overtake the reaper, And the treader of grapes him who sows seed; The mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. 14 *I will bring back the captives of My people Israel;* They shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; They shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. 15 *I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them,*” says the LORD your God.

The prophet Amos is essentially telling us the same thing we heard from Jeremiah and Ezekiel: Israel will undergo a future judgment, the unrighteous will be purged from the faithful remnant, and then Israel will find peace, prosperity and safety *in their land*. While some argue that this passage should be spiritualized, why then would the prophets continue to focus on the *land* God promised to *Israel*? And while the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was certainly a judgment, it did not accomplish all that Amos predicts here. The remnant has not returned to the land to find eternal peace and prosperity; that simply *has not happened yet*. And we see here that their return will be *preceded* by a national judgment.

The **FOURTH** Old Testament passage we will look at which addresses the future judgment of Israel is from chapter 3 found in the prophet Malachi's writing:

- **Malachi 3:1** “Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. 2 “But who can endure *the day of His coming*? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. 3 *He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver*, that they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness. 4 “Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years. 5 And *I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—* Because they do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts. 6 “For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore, you are not consumed, O *sons of Jacob*.

What we observe in Malachi is the same expectation that we saw in the other prophetic writings: God will judge national Israel at the end of the tribulation, separating the unrighteous of Israel from the righteous *remnant*.¹ That judgment will take place when the King of the Jews comes in judgment, and then He will establish His earthly kingdom.

The New Testament passage that will help us *connect the dots* is found in Matthew 19:

- **Matthew 19:27** Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore, what shall we have?” 28 So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that *in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Here Jesus gives a promise to His disciples that helps us with the *timing* of the future judgment of Israel. Notice that Jesus says that it will occur “when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory.” Jesus later uses a very similar phrase to talk about the Second Coming in Matthew 25:31, in that instance to speak about His judgment of the Gentiles/Nations. At the Second Coming of Christ to the earth, *He will come as a Judge* to prepare the earth for His reign. If Matthew 25:31-46 tell us about His judgment of the Gentiles, where is the fulfillment of His promise/prophecy to His disciples about *judging Israel*? If we take a look at the three parables immediately prior to His judgment of the Gentiles, we will find a perfect fit! Let’s take a look at these three parables and how they fit together to tell us about the judgment of the Jews at the end of the tribulation.

Servant/Virgins/Talents Trilogy: The Context in Matthew

After telling the disciples about the tribulation earlier in Matthew 24 and warning them to “watch” (24:42) and “be ready” (24:44)², Jesus proceeds to give 3 parables which all point to a future judgment. After sharing the three parables, Jesus shifts gears from parables to tell them about the future judgment of the Gentiles/Nations. If we are simply

¹ For an excellent discussion of the remnant of Israel (*believing* ethnic and national Israel in contrast to *unbelieving* Israel), please see Fruchtenbaum, Arnold G. Appendix X: The Remnant of Israel: Past, Present, and Future. *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*. Rev. ed. San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2020. 737-764.

² I would suggest that Matthew 24:43 is actually a *critical* verse to the interpretation of the passage, and points to Jesus’ knowledge that Israel’s leaders would *not* be “watching” or “ready”, and so *will* have their “house” broken into; in other words, the nation will in large part go into the tribulation in unbelief (because the leaders *won’t* be watching and will *not* lead the others to watch or prepare).

trying to put events in order, Matthew 24-25 would take us from (1) the tribulation to (2) the three parables, and then to (3) the judgment of the Gentiles/Nations. Given that perspective, what else *could* those three parables be about? If you believe, as I do, that “watching” will find *us* ready for the “surprise” that will ensnare the unbelieving world, then it is easy to see that Israel, who will be largely caught unaware, will then need to watch and prepare for the Groom (Jesus) to return with His bride (the Church) at the end of the tribulation. Look at how Luke 21, in the same context of the Day of the Lord, speaks about our relationship to it:

- **Luke 21:34** “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and *that Day come on you unexpectedly*. 35 *For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth*. 36 **Watch** therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy **to escape all these things that will come to pass**, and *to stand before the Son of Man*” (at the judgment seat of Christ).

If those who “watch” can *escape* “all these things that will come to pass” and those things will ensnare “all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth”, doesn’t that sound like a *rapture*? And Jesus tells us that “escape” is something that happens *before* the “snare”, which is a reference to the tribulation. That should help us see that the three parables involve those who were *not* watching (Matthew 24:43). As a result, those who “allowed their house to be broken into” will be called upon to watch for the *return* of their Master.

Servant/Virgins/Talents Trilogy: The Common Threads

Let’s take an initial look at the 3 parables as we begin to consider how they fit together:

1. *The Parable of the Good/Evil Servant* (24:45-51): A “servant” who makes one of two choices, and therefore is either rewarded or punished. While Luke’s recounting of the parable (Luke 12:41-48) develops the idea and gives more possible “responses” to the Master, Matthew limits the servant’s choices to two.
2. *The Parable of the Ten Virgins* (25:1-13): Ten “virgins” who are either wise or unwise. The five wise ones are ready and enter a wedding feast, the unwise are excluded (a punishment). *This parable is found only in Matthew.*
3. *The Parable of the Talents* (25:14-30): Three “servants”, two of whom are granted entrance and rewarded for their choices, one of whom is denied entrance and punished. *This parable is (also) found only in Matthew.*

So, while the overall point is fairly obvious, *to whom* do these parables apply, and how would we know? Feel free to look over the preceding chapters if you’d like to consider all the details concerning the three parables; my goal here is to *tie together* the common threads to help us understand what Jesus is pointing to *through the three together*.

Here is a deeper look at the common threads the three parables share:

- In all three parables, one or more people are **given a specific responsibility**. In each case, **the people know what they are responsible for**.
 - **Servant Parable**: “his master *made (him) ruler over his household*, to give them food in due season” (Matthew 24:45).
 - **Virgins Parable**: “And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; *go out to meet him!*’” (Matthew 25:6).

- **Talents Parable:** a man who “called his own servants and *delivered his goods to them*. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability” (Matthew 25:14-15).
- In all three parables, those who failed **were part of the same group as those who succeeded, and had the same information.**
 - **Servant Parable:** “But if that evil *servant* says in his heart, ‘*My master is delaying his coming,*’ and begins to beat *his fellow servants...*” (Matthew 24:48-49).
 - **Virgins Parable:** “Then *ALL those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.*” “Afterward the *other* (unwise) *virgins* came also, saying, ‘*Lord, Lord, open to us!*’” (Matthew 25:7,11).
 - **Talents Parable:** a man who “called *his own servants* and delivered his goods to *them*. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability.” “But *his lord* answered and said to *him*, ‘You wicked and lazy *servant*, you *knew* that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed.’” (Matthew 25:14-15, 26).
- In all three parables, their **responses** related to the responsibility they had been given **occurred while their “master” (or the “bridegroom”) was away...**
 - **Servant Parable:** “his master *made (him) ruler over his household*, to give them food in due season” (Matthew 24:45). While this parable seems to assume that the master placed the servant as ruler because he was going away, it is easier to see this when we look at Mark’s Gospel and his account of Jesus’ words regarding the Day of the Lord: “It is like *a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work*, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch” (Mark 13:34). “His servants” had a choice to make concerning the “authority” that they had been given in His absence.
 - **Virgins Parable:** “But while the bridegroom was *delayed*, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, *the bridegroom is coming*’” (Matthew 25:5-6). With this parable found *only* in Matthew, some knowledge of the Jewish wedding is necessary³ to make sense of it. In this context, the groom has already come to take his bride on their “honeymoon”, and the “town” is waiting for his return. He would *return, with his bride*, late in the evening in order to celebrate the “wedding feast” with all those who were invited. That would include the village “maidens” (virgins) who would participate in the dances of the feast (see *Jeremiah 31:4 with regard to the future dance of the “virgin of Israel”, pointing to the Millennium*).
 - **Talents Parable:** “For the kingdom of heaven is like *a man traveling to a far country*, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; *and immediately he went on a journey*” (Matthew 25:14-15).
- In all three parables, the **judgment** for their choices **occurred when the “master” returned** (or the “bridegroom” *arrived* for the wedding feast). And the judgment **resulted either in (1) entry and reward, or (2) rejection and punishment.** In this particular aspect, it lines up with the judgment of the Gentiles/Nations, also called the Sheep and Goats judgment, which follows in Matthew 25:31-46. The Gentiles/

³ If you would like to know more about the elements of the *ancient Jewish wedding*, please communicate with Professor Tom and ask for his notes on the wedding from the Gospel of Matthew.

Nations are judged based upon their response to “these My brethren” (25:40, *after* the three parables concerning those “brethren”!).

- **Servant Parable:** “Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. 47 Assuredly, I say to you that *he will make him ruler over all his goods*. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, *and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites*. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 24:46-51). If context is important here (and I think it is), then “hypocrites” should be understood in light of its usage *seven times* in Matthew 23, just prior to Jesus’ discussion of the tribulation and its subsequent events: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, *hypocrites!*” “Serpents, brood of vipers! *How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*” (Matthew 23:13-15,23,25,27,29,33). Beyond that, the parallel account of this parable in Luke 12:42-48 makes the *identity* of the *hypocrites* clear: (the master) “will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the *unbelievers*” (Lk. 12:46).
- **Virgins Parable:** “...the bridegroom came, and *those who were ready went in with him to the wedding*; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open to us!’ But he answered and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, *I do not know you.*’” (Matthew 25:6). In a very similar context that points to the Messianic Kingdom, Luke 13:25-29 ties several elements of these parables together, and makes it clear that *once the door is shut, there will no longer be an opportunity* for those who are “outside”; they will be “thrust out” because they are “unknown”. And if you are familiar with the ancient Jewish wedding, it is clear that this “judgment” takes place when the Groom returns with His bride *after* He has come to take her away to their honeymoon. It is the “wedding feast” given *after* their honeymoon that is referred to in this parable, and the Bride is *already there*...
- **Talents Parable:** “*After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.*” “His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, *I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.*’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, *I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.*’” “But his lord answered and said to him, ‘You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So, you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. So, take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. ‘For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. *And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*’” (Matthew 25:19,21,23,26-30).
- **Sheep and Goats Judgment:** While in most aspects this judgment is distinct from, *and follows*, the judgment pictured in the three parables, here it lines up with the three parables because it also points to a *future judgment*. And like the three parables, people will either be granted entrance “into eternal life” *with reward* OR are sent “into the everlasting fire” *and punished*. If the context is the tribulation, then both the three parables and this judgment occur at the end, after both Jews and Gentiles have gone through a time of spiritual and physical tribulation like the world has never known. Notice that the *basis* for the judgment

is the Gentile response to “these My brethren”: “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, *inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of **these My brethren**, you did it to Me.*’ “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.*’ “Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, *inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.*’ And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:40-46).

Once we understand that the three parables and the Sheep and Goats judgment are both part of Jesus’ *earthly* judgments as Messiah *in order to establish His kingdom* (Revelation 19), then we can also see that His judgments do not involve the Church. In both (1) the three parables and (2) the Sheep and Goats judgment, the “judgment” is based on responses made *while the Master was away*. Their judgment occurs *after the return* of the Master (or “bridegroom”). Jesus will come in judgment at the end of the tribulation in order to initiate His reign on earth, as we’ve seen from several different prophets. If the three parables point to the judgment of national Israel, the only other group requiring judgment would be the Gentiles, which occurs in Matthew 25:31-46, immediately following the three parables.

We can dismiss the Church from these parables for *at least* a couple of reasons:

1. The New Testament teaches that the future judgment of the Church will be at the Judgment Seat (*Bema*) of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:9-15, 2 Corinthians 5:9-10). It will occur *when we are with Him*, not when He is coming back to judge the world. That means that the judgment (a heavenly one) will only include believers! That doesn’t fit with the elements of these parables.
2. While Israel in the tribulation will include both *believing* Jews and *unbelieving* Jews, the Church cannot be divided like that, since every member of the body of Christ is a believer. And the Gentiles/Nations who are judged based on their response to the message delivered through Israel don’t constitute the Church either.

Let me give you another way to look at these judgments in relation to their context and the Second Coming of Christ:

Tribulation Judgments:	Audience	Reward	Punishment
Servant Parable	Israel	Messiah will make him ruler of all His goods	Messiah will cut him in two and appoint him a portion with the hypocrites (Rev. 19)
10 Virgins Parable	Israel	Granted entrance into the feast as maidens ready to dance for the Groom and His Bride	Denied entrance to the feast/unable to dance for the Groom and His Bride
Talents Parable	Israel	Messiah will make him ruler over many things	Cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth
Sheep/Goats Judgment	Gentiles/Nations	Inherit the kingdom	Everlasting fire/everlasting punishment

These parables point to the judgment of Israel...

When the three parables are understood to point to the future judgment of Israel at the end of the tribulation (Daniel's 70th week: Dan. 9:24-27), a number of puzzle pieces fall into place:

- All three parables involve a specific person or group.
- Matthew's early readers would most readily associate the words "servant" and "virgin" with Israel, and certainly *not* with Gentiles!
- All three parables involve being *given* (or *invited to*) a specific responsibility and *knowing* what it is (see Romans 9:1-5, for instance).
- All three parables are given just after Jesus has been speaking about the tribulation, also known as *the time of Jacob's trouble* and *Daniel's 70th week (for Israel)*. From a pre-tribulation perspective, the Church will already be gone for at least seven years, so the parables *after* Jesus' discussion of the tribulation point to *someone else*. And that "someone else" would be *neither* the Church (already gone!) *nor* the Gentiles (who are judged immediately following). The only other possible candidate would be ISRAEL (Jere. 30:7-11, Mal. 3:2-5).
- All three parables create a span of time when the master or bridegroom was "away". If Christ has come in the air to take the Church with Him *before* the tribulation, He will be "away" on His honeymoon with His Bride during the tribulation, and will return with her at the time of these judgments. That only fits together if the judgment in the three parables involves Israel.
- All three parables *and* the judgment of the Gentiles fit an "end of tribulation" context. Only those Jews who *believe* the message about their coming Master/King/Groom will *prepare* for His return and *endure* the resulting persecution. The Jews who know the message but *don't believe* it will not prepare, and so will be judged to hell as unbelievers. The Gentiles will be held accountable for their reception of the message given by the Jewish believers about the return of their Messiah.

Seeing that the three parables of Matthew 24-25 point to the judgment of Israel (*after the tribulation*) solves many problems. The judgment would include both believing Israel and unbelieving Israel. Israel is a *particular group* that does *not* include everybody on the planet... While they believed that they were "sons of the kingdom"⁴ and would therefore "enter", during the tribulation they will be challenged concerning their relationship and loyalty to the King. Either they will believe in Messiah Jesus as their coming King and prepare for His arrival, or they will refuse to believe and therefore will not prepare. If they prepare, they will not only enter; they will also receive reward (just think for a moment about the persecution they will endure during the tribulation!). If they reject their King, they will not simply be refused entry; they will be punished eternally in hell. And the judgment for their decisions will occur at the end of the tribulation, *precisely* where these three parables occur in Matthew's Gospel.

⁴ While some have argued that "sons of the kingdom" can only refer to believers based on Matthew 13:38, you'll notice that "sons of" is an expression simply of *some kind of relationship*. In Matthew 21:43, Jesus tells Israel's leaders that "*the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.*" In other words, Israel's *relationship* to the promises of the kingdom was being taken away because of their rejection of their Messiah.