

THE LORD'S ESCHATOLOGICAL SPEAKING IN MARK 13 MOTIVATING HIS BELIEVERS TO LIVE PRUDENTLY AND SERVE FAITHFULLY

BY JAMES FITE

Despite many attempts to impose alternatives, the modern calendar demarcates a universally relevant historical event—the birth of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, who lived an inconspicuous human life until He began to publicly minister for approximately three and a half years, was cruelly executed by crucifixion, was resurrected on the third day, appeared visibly for a period of forty days, and then publicly ascended to the heavens (Acts 1:3, 9). While the apostles who witnessed the Lord's physical ascension from "the mount called Olivet" were looking heavenward, "two men in white clothing" said to them, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you beheld Him going into heaven" (vv. 10-12; cf. Dan. 7:13; Zech. 14:4).¹

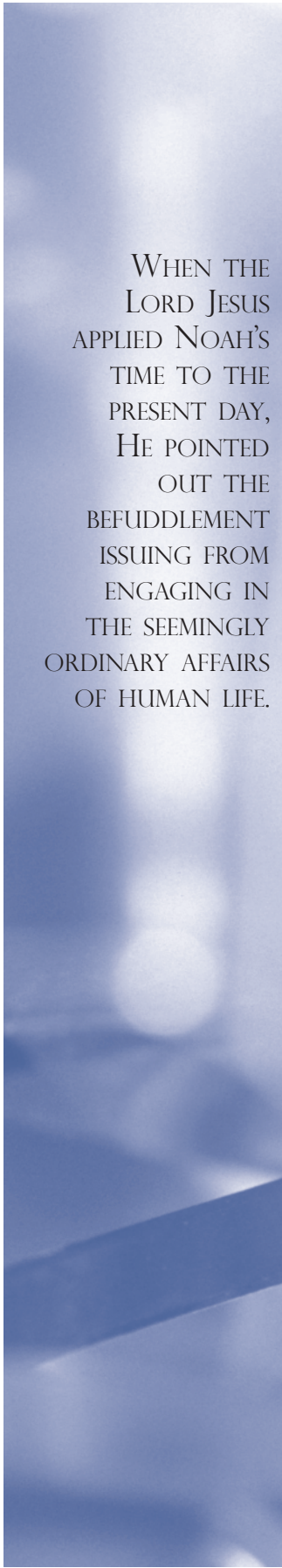
Concerning Christ's return, the synoptic Gospels provide overlapping accounts of the eschatological discourse of Jesus to His disciples on the Mount of Olives after His final visit to the temple in Jerusalem (Matt. 24—25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-36). All three accounts indicate that the disciples were awed by the physical aspects of that edifice—including its beautiful stones, wonderful buildings, and ritual offerings. In a prior visit Jesus had cleansed the temple from its commercial trappings by casting out those selling and buying within its confines and then declaring, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer...?' But you have made it a den of robbers" (Mark 11:17). As He left that temple for the final time, the Lord prophesied that all the stones of those great buildings would be thrown down (13:2; cf. Matt. 24:2).

After such a sobering statement in Mark 13:2, it seems that neither Jesus nor the disciples had anything more to say until He brought them to a specific spot on the Mount of Olives. Mark's account is unique in noting that their location on that mount was "opposite," that is, "across from," the temple (v. 3, NIRV), perhaps implying that the temple was clearly in view as Jesus spoke of its destiny. Four of the disciples, seemingly as spokesmen for the rest, asked, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" (v. 4; cf. Matt. 24:3).

There are multiple perspectives and attitudes toward the Lord's coming in the context of His divine economy. These perspectives differ with various categories of people and their explicit or implicit eschatological models. In His speaking on the Mount of Olives, the Lord provided key eschatological markers that enable His seekers to soberly discern the approaching end of this present age. In response, the Lord's lovers and servants should cooperate with Him, especially by prayer and by the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to further God's need, desire, and economy.

Attitudes and Perspectives concerning the Lord's Coming

Every human being has an eschatological "model," some perhaps more consciously than others. The unbelievers, the religious, and the seeking believers in Christ all have implicit and explicit assumptions concerning the coming of Christ.



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The Unbelievers

It may at first seem illogical to ascribe an eschatological model to unbelievers, ostensibly so-designated because they “believe” that Jesus, if He existed at all, was at most an embellished historical human figure. The Lord Jesus likened the coming of the Son of Man to the days of Noah (vv. 37-39). Noah was unique in his day in that he found “favor in the sight of Jehovah,” was a righteous and blameless man, and was someone who walked with God (Gen. 6:8-9). Jehovah warned Noah that He would blot out and destroy the man whom He had created, because humankind had become greatly wicked on the earth and was full of every evil “imagination of the thoughts of his heart” continually (vv. 5, 7, 13). Simultaneously, Jehovah gave Noah a provision to escape His judgment. Peter calls Noah “a herald of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5), implying that both the building of the ark and Noah’s direct speaking were a clear and unambiguous message of warning to the fallen humankind of his day.

When the Lord Jesus applied Noah’s time to the present day, He pointed out the befuddlement issuing from engaging in the seemingly ordinary affairs of human life: “Even as it happened in the days of Noah, so will it be also in the days of the Son of Man: They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day in which Noah entered into the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:26-27). Paul aptly summarizes the basis of God’s condemnation on ungodly and unrighteous humankind, who “hold down the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18): although “they knew God, they...became vain in their reasonings,” which resulted in a darkened heart. lacking understanding (v. 21).

The eschatological model of the unbelievers is that there is no Christ—hence, no coming of Christ. Therefore, they derivatively and implicitly assume that there are no future consequences to them beyond the termination of their present human life in this age. Hence, to this category of humankind, the Lord’s coming will be a total surprise.

The Religious

The second category consists of the religious and, in this context, particularly comprises the self-righteous, the law-keeping Jews and the nominal Christians. In Romans 2:1-16 Paul describes the self-righteous as those who subscribe to certain standards of behavior. Negatively, they may hypocritically judge others according to their standard, when in fact they themselves cannot live up to those same expectations. Positively, persons in this self-righteous category may pay attention both to their conscience and to the God-created nature within them, which, albeit fallen, nevertheless corresponds and reasonably agrees with the principles of God’s righteousness and laws.

In Romans 2:17—3:8 Paul takes particular aim at those who “bear the name of Jew, and rest upon the law, and boast in God” (2:17). The passage may easily extend to a nominal Christian, who is a follower of Christ and His teaching in name only (though we include in this category some genuinely saved ones). Such a religious one may ostensibly rely on the precepts of the Old and New Testaments.

When Jesus visibly returns, the religious Jews—surprised to find out that this is not Christ’s first coming but His second—will repentantly weep, wail, and look upon the redeeming, only begotten Son of God whom they pierced in His first coming (Rev. 1:7). This repentance will result in their redemption and will lead to their regeneration by the life-giving first-born Son, who dispenses His eternal life to His many brothers (cf. Zech. 12:10; John 3:14-16; Rom. 3:1-4; 8:29).

At this time some percentage of the nominal Christians, who ostensibly have been genuinely regenerated, may discover at His return that additional transformational discipline is needed. Matthew 25 illustrates how the category of nominal believers includes admittedly regenerated believers who objectively acknowledge the Lord as their Master; though they believed into Him, they were negligent in practically serving Him, because

they considered their own convenience or priorities more important (vv. 18, 25). Matthew 25 also likens the Lord's believers to virgins, who represent those who genuinely love the Lord, have kept themselves for Him, and to some extent are anticipating His return (vv. 1-13). However, some of these virgins foolishly underestimate the amount of oil that is required in their vessels for their "lamps" to "not go out" in the event their Lord delays in returning. Having done the minimum preparation, they are, in retrospect, exposed as being foolish for not paying the additional price to have a reserve supply of the transforming Spirit in their mind, emotion, and will (vv. 3-4, 9).

While more difficult to ascribe an all-encompassing description, those in this category also have a generally consistent implicit eschatological model—an acknowledgment and expectation mixed with fear that Christ will come visibly and objectively. However, they do not recognize the urgency of the time frame and are only vaguely cognizant concerning the scope of preparedness needed.

The Faithful and Prudent Believers

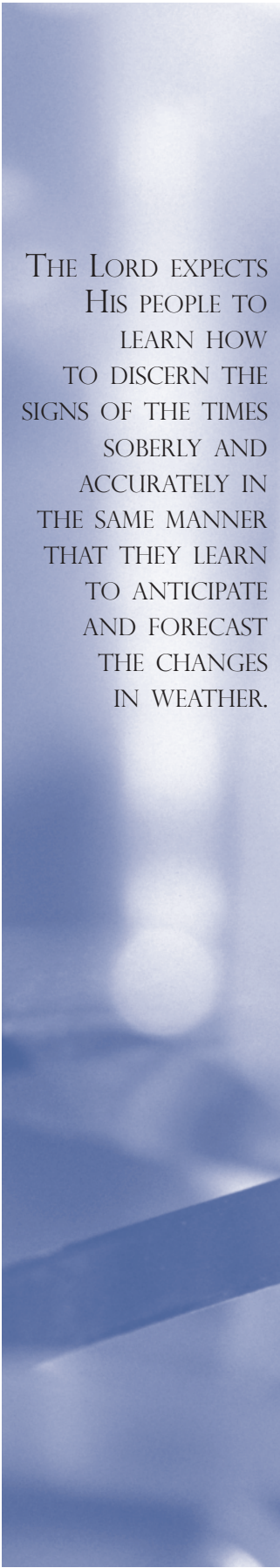
The third category consists of seeking, faithful, and prudent believers in Christ. Inwardly, they expectantly anticipate the Lord's coming. While they wait, they actively cooperate with the Lord by loving Him and growing in Him unto maturity. They pay the price, enabling the Spirit to fill not only their spirit but also their thoughts, feelings, and intentions (their soul). Furthermore, as His slaves, they are found faithfully serving their Lord in their measure for His interest and good pleasure by caring for His household. This service may include consistently feeding, shepherding, and protecting the younger believers. In the present time, such faithful and prudent believers likely have an all-encompassing eschatology that recognizes both the individual and corporate responsibility of the overcomers—to grow and mature in life and to build up the church as the Body of Christ and as the testimony of Jesus.

Mark 11 and 12 as the Context of Mark 13

The chapters leading up to the Lord's word in Mark 13, in which He told the disciples concerning the things to come, provide important context. Mark 10:32-34 describes how the disciples were both amazed and afraid as Jesus led the way determinedly while telling them what to expect: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and to the scribes. And they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles, and they will mock Him and spit at Him and scourge Him, and they will kill Him. And after three days He will rise." Daniel prophesied explicitly concerning the time that Christ as the Messiah would be cut off, that is, "sixty-two weeks" (Dan. 9:26). In his note on Daniel 9:24, C. I. Scofield asserts that "the 'seventy weeks' of the prophecy are weeks of years, an important sabbatical time-measure in the Jewish Calendar" (913). It is perhaps in light of this interpretation that Witness Lee concludes that the Lord's crucifixion took place 434 years after the rebuilding of Jerusalem (*Recovery Version*, v. 25, note 1).² Isaiah 53 further clarifies that Christ, "a man of sorrows," was wounded and cut off for the transgression of God's people (vv. 3, 5, 8). In the process of the fulfillment of these prophecies, John the Baptist introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Isaiah 50:6-7 further describes prophetically the voluntary determination of the Lord Jesus to present Himself to suffer: "I gave my back to those who strike me / And my cheeks to those who pluck out the hair; / I did not hide my face / From humiliation and spitting. / The Lord Jehovah helps me; / Therefore I have not been dishonored; / Therefore I have set my face like a flint, / And I know that I will not be put to shame."

As the sin-offering Lamb, Jesus deliberately went to the temple³ to be tested and examined to ensure that He was "without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19; cf. Lev. 4:3; 6:6). The religious and political leaders of the Jewish people—the chief priests, scribes, and elders—examined Him concerning His authority to do "these things," referring especially to Jesus' cleansing the temple of its commercial trappings (Mark 11:27-33). Political adversaries

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(the Pharisees and Herodians) united to question Him concerning paying taxes to Caesar, an occupying foreign ruler (12:13-17). The skeptical “modernists” of that era, the Sadducees, questioned Him concerning the resurrection (vv. 18-27). Finally, an erudite theological scribe asked Him concerning the greatest commandment (vv. 28-34). In turn, Jesus examined them, asking how the Christ could be both the son of David and the Lord of David (vv. 35-37), a question that muzzled all the questioners (Matt. 22:46).

After Jesus was arrested, the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the Jews, entertained many false and inconsistent testimonies concerning Him, to which He gave no answer. However, when questioned concerning His person, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” He unambiguously declared that He is both the Son of God and the coming Son of Man (Mark 14:61-62). He was then delivered to Pilate, the Gentile ruler of the occupied territory of Israel. Pilate repeatedly concluded, on behalf of all the examiners, that he found “no fault in Him” (John 18:38; 19:4, 6; cf. 1 Pet. 2:22). Jesus was thus validated as the spotless and qualified Lamb of God who would die as the sin offering on behalf of all the people (cf. John 11:49-52).

Eschatological Models and Key Markers of the End of the Age

The Lord expects His people to learn how to discern the signs of the times soberly and accurately in the same manner that they learn to anticipate and forecast the changes in weather. The Lord’s rebuke of the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were asking Him to show them “a sign out of heaven” (Matt. 16:1), may be aptly applied as a warning to the Christian seeking signs of the Lord’s coming:

When evening falls, you say, There will be fair weather, for the sky is red; and in the morning, It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and gloomy. The face of the sky you know how to discern, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and a sign shall not be given to it, except the sign of Jonah. (vv. 2-4; cf. Luke 12:54-56)

What the Lord spoke in Matthew 16 related to discerning “the signs of the times” was a precursor to His later unveiling of Himself to His disciples as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” and of His intention to build His church upon this revelation, a revelation that Peter received from the Father and uttered at that moment (vv. 3, 16-18). As typified by Jonah, Christ, after having been buried in the heart of the earth for three days (12:39-40), would resurrect for the establishment of the kingdom of the heavens in its reality and subsequent manifestation. Therefore, Christ’s seekers today should be alert to recognize the key indicators, to both cooperate with and prepare for His imminent return.

On the Mount of Olives, the Lord, fully aware of His upcoming unrighteous arrest, intense examinations, brutal scourging, and agonizing crucifixion, calmly and patiently answered the questions of His closest disciples concerning the timing and the sign of the things to come (Mark 13:4). In His response Jesus outlined the significant things that would occur between the time when He as a man would leave (i.e., “go abroad”) after His resurrection and ascension and the time when He as “the Master of the house” would return again (vv. 34-35).

During His physical absence in the church age, the temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed, natural calamities and human catastrophes (e.g., wars, earthquakes, famines, and plagues) would take place, and the believers would be persecuted and martyred; nevertheless, the gospel will be proclaimed to all the nations (vv. 2, 7-13). In the final years of the present age, triggered by the abomination of desolation in the Holy Place of the rebuilt temple (v. 14; cf. Matt. 24:15), earth dwellers will suffer from a great tribulation, which will be centered around Jerusalem but will affect the entire earth (Mark 13:19; Matt. 24:21). The people on earth will also suffer from universal supernatural phenomena both at the beginning and end of this period of great tribulation (cf. Mark 13:24-25; Rev. 6:12; Matt. 24:29-30). The present age will then conclude when the Son of Man appears visibly with His angels and gathers His chosen ones from both earth and heaven (Mark 13:26-27).

Mark 13 especially describes some clearly observable outward events as eschatological markers. The first marker is the preaching of the gospel “to all the nations” (v. 10), which will take place in the context of persecution, suffering, and martyrdom, made even more painful when these are instigated by the closest of relatives (v. 12).

The second event is particularly related to the nation of Israel and the temple. The Lord Jesus predicted the thorough destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, the capital city of the nation of Israel (v. 2). This historically verifiable event took place in A.D. 70 at the hands of the Roman general Titus.⁴ After this time Israel, for all practical purposes, ceased to be a nation.

Third, Mark 13 refers to an unprecedented “time of tribulation” (vv. 19-20, 24). The Lord’s specific advice, “Let those in Judea flee to the mountains” (v. 14), pinpoints the eye of this tribulation vortex as being in the land of Israel. A reference to the “abomination of desolation,” which will stand in the Holy Place (v. 14; cf. Matt. 24:15), indicates that a desecrating and destructive power will forcibly interfere with the Jewish worship. This reference is also an implied prophecy that, prior to this desecration, the nation of Israel would have been restored (and it has been), the temple in Jerusalem would have been rebuilt, and there would have been a deliberate attempt to resume the Jewish sacrificial rituals (cf. Dan. 9:27).

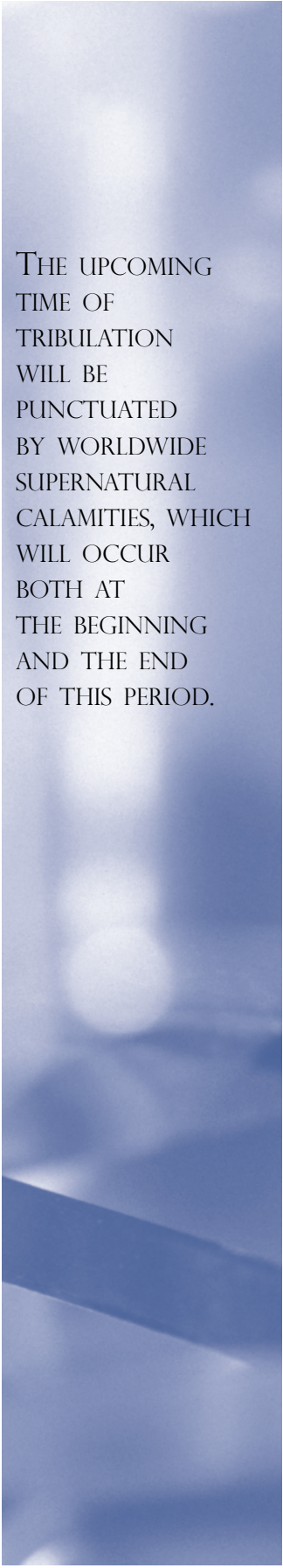
Fourth, this upcoming time of tribulation will be punctuated by worldwide supernatural calamities, which will occur both at the beginning and the end of this period. Mark 13:24-25 speaks of the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, and the stars falling out of heaven, which will take place “after that tribulation” (cf. Matt. 24:29). Other passages speak of calamities that will occur at the beginning of the great tribulation. For example, Revelation 6:12 speaks of a great earthquake, the sun becoming black, and the moon becoming like blood. The Old Testament prophets, referring to a more comprehensive period of time that overlaps with the great tribulation, “the day of Jehovah,” speak of similar calamities (cf. Joel 2:30-32; 3:14-15).

Corporate and Personal Responsibility to Watchfully Cooperate with God’s Desire through Prayer

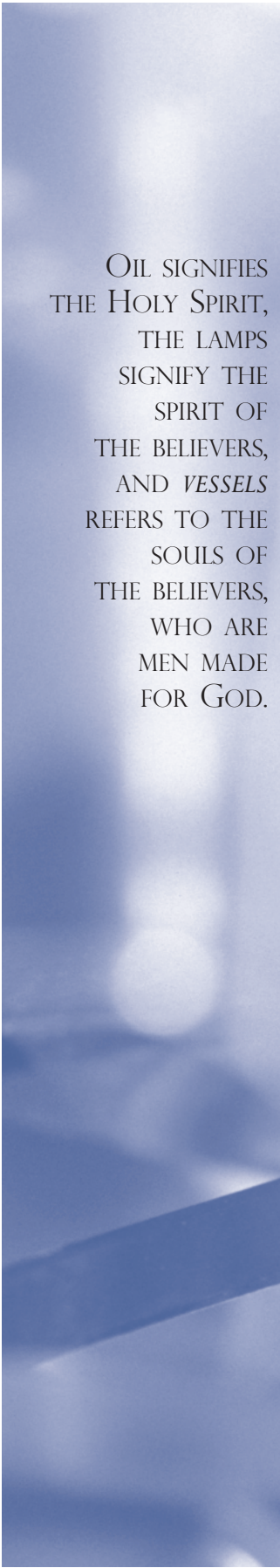
In Mark 13:28 the Lord told His disciples to “learn the parable from the fig tree” as a sign of the impending fulfilment of these events. In the context of 11:12-14, the fig tree must refer to the nation of Israel (cf. Jer. 24:2, 5, 8). Hence, the Lord was implicitly foretelling the renaissance of the nation of Israel, a prophecy fulfilled in 1948. In Mark 13:29-30 the Lord went on to say, “So also you, when you see these things happening, know that it is near, at the doors. Truly I say to you that this generation shall by no means pass away until all these things happen.”

Paradoxically, the Lord urged alert watchfulness by warning His disciples of the uncertainty in the timing of His appearing: “Concerning that day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father. Beware, be alert; for you do not know when the time is” (vv. 32-33). Here the Lord likened Himself to “a man who is about to go abroad, having left his house and given to his slaves authority, to each his work” (v. 34). In the parallel passage in Matthew 24, the Lord specifically called for “the faithful and prudent slave” set over His household to give His people “food at the proper time” (v. 45). In Mark 13 He particularly commanded “the doorkeeper” to be watchful: “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the Master of the house comes, whether in the evening or at midnight or at cockcrowing or in the morning; lest He come suddenly and find you sleeping” (vv. 34-36).

Matthew 25:14-30 illustrates more fully how the Lord entrusts His “possessions” as “talents” to each of His slaves, in proportion to their “own ability” (vv. 14-15), with the expectation that they would faithfully use and multiply these talents.⁵ In the *Life-study of Matthew* Lee applies this practically: “Today the Lord’s possessions primarily are the gospel, the truth, the believers, and the church. If you do not care for these things, you will not have any talents” (760-761). After the Lord’s slaves minister food, as spoken of in 24:45, so that “others are fed and given rich nourishment,” the “Lord’s possessions are multiplied” (763).



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Lee further illustrates how this multiplication takes place: “For example, the more we preach the gospel, the richer the gospel becomes. It is the same with the truths. As we minister the truths to others, the truths multiply. This is also true of the saints and the churches. Both the believers and the churches will multiply. Thus, five talents are multiplied into ten, and two talents are multiplied into four” (763). Both of these examples—the dispensing of food and the management of talents—illustrate how the fulfillment of God’s desire and His economy requires man’s cooperation.

Between the parable in 24:45-51 urging His servants to be the faithful and prudent slaves who feed their Master’s household with “food at the proper time” (v. 45) and the parable urging the talent-given slaves to faithfully manage and multiply their Master’s possessions (25:14-30), the Lord urged His lovers, as watchful virgins, to prudently pay the price for a personal reserve supply of the Spirit (vv. 1-13). All ten of these virgins had an initial amount of oil in their lamps, but with the five foolish ones, their lamps were “going out” (v. 8). The prudent, however, had an additional supply of oil because they “took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (v. 4).

Concerning this parable, Lee notes that the oil signifies the Holy Spirit (*Recovery Version*, v. 3, note 1; cf. Isa. 61:1; Heb. 1:9), the lamps signify the spirit of the believers (*Recovery Version*, Matt. 25:1, note 4; cf. Prov. 20:27), and *vessels* refers to the souls of the believers, who are men made for God (*Recovery Version*, Matt. 25:4, note 1; cf. Rom. 9:21, 23-24). To “buy for yourselves” (Matt. 25:9) indicates that there is a cost, a price to be paid, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, “such as giving up the world, dealing with self, loving the Lord above all, and counting all things loss for Christ” (*Recovery Version*, v. 9, note 3).


As a conclusion to the parable of the virgins, the Lord said, “Watch therefore, for you do not know the day nor the hour” (v. 13). The New Testament repeatedly relates watchfulness and prayer and, to some extent, considers the exercise of both as interchangeable. At Gethsemane the Lord asked His most intimate disciples to watch with Him when He went forward and prayed (Matt. 26:38-39). When He found them sleeping, He said to Peter, “Were you not able to watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not come into temptation” (Mark 14:37-38). Paul also speaks of “praying at every time...and watching...in all perseverance and petition” (Eph. 6:18).

In His eschatological speaking, the Lord indicated that prayer can affect certain details and timing of events: “Pray that it may not happen in winter” (Mark 13:18), and “pray that your flight may not be...on a Sabbath” (Matt. 24:20). Revelation describes intense tribulation of at least three and a half years. However, in speaking to His disciples, the Lord indicated that the time of tribulation can be shortened (Mark 13:20), thereby providing a basis for the Lord’s people to pray for this limitation.⁶

It is through watchful prayer that the Lord’s disciples can prevent being ensnared by the sinful things or being weighed down by the anxieties of life and, instead, have strength to “prevail to escape all these things...and stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34, 36). According to Luke 11:13, contacting the Lord in prayer is the way to gain more oil, that is, to receive more of the Spirit into our vessel. In Mark, the Lord repeatedly told His disciples to watch and pray, especially in light of His imminent return (13:34-35, 37; 14:34, 37-39). It is by prayer that the Lord’s disciples remain alert and on guard, stay awake, and do not lose heart (13:33; Luke 18:1).

Conclusion

When the Lord returns, He will come manifestly by setting foot on the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4). However, He will not be alone; He will come with His armies—the overcoming saints (v. 5; Rev. 17:14; 19:14), those who paid the price to overcome the degradation of the church in the present age (cf. 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 20-21). These persistent, pure, and undefiled followers of the Lamb (14:4) seek to be raptured, expecting to come back with Him in His manifested return (cf. 1 Thes. 3:13; Jude 14). When He comes as the “Son of Man...in the glory of His Father,” the angels will also accompany Him (Matt. 16:27; 25:31; Mark 8:38).

The eschatological context of Mark 13 should thus serve as motivation for His believers to live as the prudent virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) by gaining the transforming Spirit of God (the oil) and to cooperate diligently with the operating Spirit by faithfully managing as His slaves the Lord's assets (His possessions, especially the gospel) (24:45-51). The Lord's forthcoming appearing, His coming back, will usher in a new era. Hence, His promised, imminent, visible return remains a prayerful expectation that concludes both the New Testament and the entire Bible: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). 

Notes

¹The Lord's departure after His resurrection had a secret aspect and a public aspect. The account in John 20:11-18 must refer to a secret ascension of the Lord from the tomb almost immediately after His resurrection and forty days prior to His public ascension recorded in Acts 1:9. The Gospel of John speaks of Mary the Magdalene seeing two angels in the tomb early in the morning on the day of resurrection (20:12). They asked her why she was weeping. She then turned backward and saw Jesus standing there (v. 14). When Jesus said to her, "Mary!" (v. 16), she recognized Him and must have attempted to embrace Him, because He prevented her by saying, "Do not touch Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brothers and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" (v. 17). It is striking to note that in the evening of that same day, the Lord appeared to the disciples and said, "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Touch Me..." (Luke 24:39). It is as if Jesus deliberately waited for Mary, His loving seeker, who "came early to the tomb while it was yet dark" to see Him (John 20:1), both to comfort her and to enable her to be a human witness of the freshness of His resurrection, which would satisfy the Father in this secret ascension.

In the same manner, the Lord's return will have both a secret and public aspect. Verses such as Matthew 24:30 speak of the Son of Man coming visibly and openly "on the clouds...with power and great glory" (cf. 26:64; 1 Thes. 4:16; Rev. 18:1). Conversely, other verses speak of Him coming secretly and unexpectedly (e.g. "like a thief in the night"—1 Thes. 5:2; "clothed with a cloud"—Rev. 10:1; "when you do not expect it"—Matt. 24:44; Luke 12:40; cf. Rev. 3:3).

²In this note on the "seven weeks and sixty-two weeks" in Daniel 9:25, Lee explains that each week represents seven years:

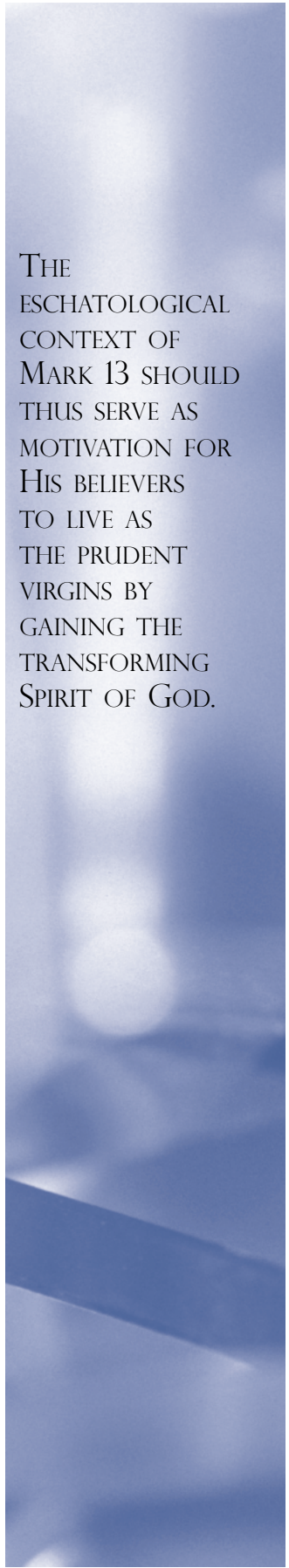
First, seven weeks (forty-nine years) were apportioned from the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1-8) to the completion of the rebuilding. Second, sixty-two weeks (434 years) were apportioned from the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem to the cutting off (crucifixion) of the Messiah (Dan. 9:26).

The restoration of the city of Jerusalem provided the base and ground for the rebuilding of the temple.

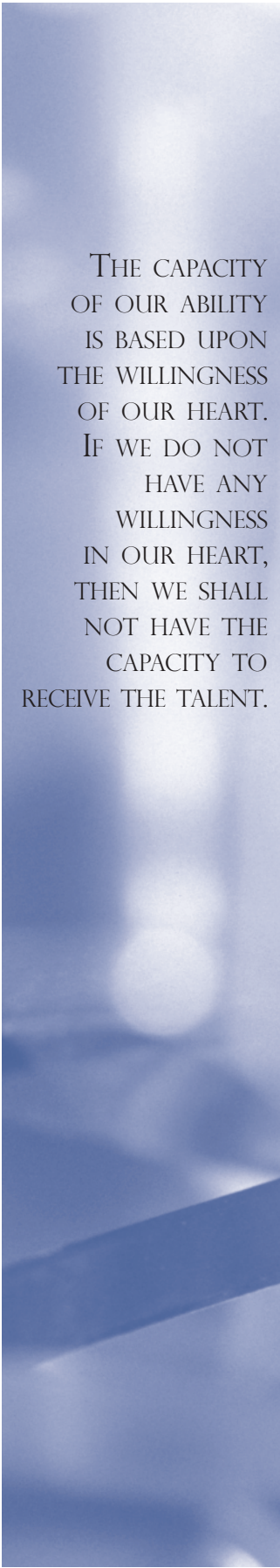
³The Gospels affirm repeatedly that the Lord Jesus regularly visited the temple in Jerusalem. See, for example: "Went year by year to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Passover" (Luke 2:41); "after three days they found Him in the temple" (v. 46); "He entered into Jerusalem, into the temple" (Mark 11:11); "walking in the temple" (v. 27); and "teaching in the temple" (12:35). Both the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the subsequent restoration of the temple initially built by Solomon were sovereignly arranged beforehand in anticipation of the first coming of Christ as the incarnated Son of God.

⁴In *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus describes the uncontrollable rage of the Roman soldiers as they unconsciously fulfilled this prophecy:

7. And now, since Caesar [Titus] was no way able to restrain the enthusiastic fury of the soldiers, and the fire proceeded on more and more, he went into the holy place of the temple, with his commanders, and saw it, with what was in it, which he found to be far superior to what the relations of foreigners contained, and not inferior to what we ourselves boasted of and believed about it. But as the flame had not as yet reached to its inward parts, but was still consuming the rooms that were about the holy house, and Titus supposing what the fact was, that the house itself might yet be saved, he came in haste and endeavored to persuade the soldiers to quench the fire, and gave order to Liberalius the centurion, and one of those spearmen that were about him, to beat the soldiers that were refractory with their staves, and to restrain them; yet were their passions too hard for the regards they had for Caesar, and



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CAPACITY TO
RECEIVE THE TALENT.

the dread they had of him who forbade them, as was their hatred of the Jews, and a certain vehement inclination to fight them, too hard for them also. Moreover, the hope of plunder induced many to go on, as having this opinion, that all the places within were full of money, and as seeing that all round about it was made of gold. And besides, one of those that went into the place prevented Caesar, when he ran so hastily out to restrain the soldiers, and threw the fire upon the hinges of the gate, in the dark; whereby the flame burst out from within the holy house itself immediately, when the commanders retired, and Caesar with them, and when nobody any longer forbade those that were without to set fire to it. And thus was the holy house burnt down, without Caesar's approbation.

8. Now although any one would justly lament the destruction of such a work as this was, since it was the most admirable of all the works that we have seen or heard of, both for its curious structure and its magnitude, and also for the vast wealth bestowed upon it, as well as for the glorious reputation it had for its holiness; yet might such a one comfort himself with this thought, that it was fate that decreed it so to be, which is inevitable, both as to living creatures, and as to works and places also. However, one cannot but wonder at the accuracy of this period thereto relating; for the same month and day were now observed, as I said before, wherein the holy house was burnt formerly by the Babylonians. Now the number of years that passed from its first foundation, which was laid by king Solomon, till this its destruction, which happened in the second year of the reign of Vespasian, are collected to be one thousand one hundred and thirty, besides seven months and fifteen days; and from the second building of it, which was done by Haggai, in the second year of Cyrus the king, till its destruction under Vespasian, there were six hundred and thirty-nine years and forty-five days. (ch. 4)

⁵Lee elaborates on the interrelationship between ability, learning, and willingness: "Although the talents are not our ability, but the Lord's possession, they are delivered to us according to our ability. Our ability is constituted by God's creation and our learning. The capacity of our ability is based upon the willingness of our heart. If we do not have any willingness in our heart, then we shall not have the capacity to receive the talent. The capacity to receive the talent is measured by the willingness of our heart" (*Life-study of Matthew* 762).

⁶While some Bible expositors refer to a seven-year tribulation, perhaps on the basis of the last week of seven years in Daniel 9:27, Revelation speaks of the duration of the great tribulation in this way: "forty-two months" (11:2), "a thousand two hundred and sixty days" (v. 3; 12:6), and "a time and times and half a time" (v. 14; cf. Dan. 12:7). These descriptions support a more precise time frame of three and a half years. There are a variety of interpretations concerning Daniel's seventy weeks, with variants that differ significantly particularly when it comes to the matter of the last week and when combined with the topic of the rapture of the saints. While a thorough discussion of these alternatives is left for a future time, the reader may preliminarily deduce the author's bias in favor of a yet-unfulfilled future of multiple raptures, that is, at least one before and one after the great tribulation of three and a half years.

The important point here is that the will of God interacts with man's will, and man's prayer, when aligned with God's objectives, gives Him the ground to operate. "Your will be done, as in heaven, so also on earth" (Matt. 6:10) is not a mere recitation when declared corporately by the church (cf. Acts 4:24-31) and uttered persistently and perseveringly by persons who are joined to the Lord as one spirit (Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; 1 Cor. 6:17).

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