

Expectant Hope



Week One

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Matthew 25:1–13



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HOPE REDISCOVERED

William Miller had no desire to preach about Jesus' return when he was first convicted that it would happen within the next twenty-five years. He wasn't a trained scholar, pastor, or teacher; he was a farmer who had become a deist and found his way back to Christianity through methodical personal Bible study. He studied and restudied his conclusions for fifteen years. In 1833, he finally heeded God's call and began to publicly share his findings. Coming from a skeptical background himself, his messages converted thousands of fellow skeptics and revived lifelong Christians who had been spiritually dead. Miller's explanation of the fulfilled prophecies from Daniel and Revelation inspired a firm faith in God, and his messages about Christ's soon return made his appeals urgent.

Our movement's consistent emphasis on the advent (even in our name, Adventist), can be traced back to the Millerite movement's significant influence in the 1830s and 40s. The renewed belief in the second coming's imminence was felt worldwide. These two decades saw significant revelations regarding the second coming and the sanctuary, but there were also significant errors that had to be rectified and, in some cases, unlearned. It was a revival that affected Christians across denominational lines and was truly based on people knowing the Bible for themselves.

Today, in a culture absorbed in materialistic thinking and living, the message of the second coming is as revolutionary as ever. May we also help others orient their lives to the imminent reality of Jesus' return.



inScribe

Write out Matthew 25:1–13 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out a portion of the primary passage. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.

inGest



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help memorization.

What can cause us to be like the five virgins who traveled to the wedding but didn't realize they had no oil until it was too late? How can we avoid being like them?

As you read through this chapter, which of these signs do you see as particularly relevant?



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GO TELL THE WORLD

The Great Advent Awakening of the late 18th and early 19th centuries laid the foundation for the Millerite movement. There was great interest during this time in the study of Revelation 6, which covers the events that precede the Second Coming. Verses 12 and 13 outline three separate events that took place during that time: the Great Lisbon Earthquake in 1755, the Dark Day of May 19, 1780, and the day the stars fell from the heavens—November 13, 1833. All three pointed toward Christ's second coming, and the people's interest and anticipation grew in the wake of these fulfilled prophecies.

There are several key passages that drove the Millerite movement, but Daniel 8:14, which predicted a sanctuary being cleansed at the conclusion of the 2,300-day timeline, was especially influential. Unfortunately, in their study, the Adventist pioneers wrongly accepted the popular interpretation that the cleansing of the sanctuary referred to the earth being cleansed by fire at the Second Coming. Combining this interpretation with their understanding of the 2,300-day prophecy, they reached the conclusion that Jesus would come in the year 1843.

William Miller started actively preaching in 1833, traveling thousands of miles and preaching to thousands of people over the next ten years. He initially believed Jesus would come sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844, but when both dates passed, he returned to the biblical texts and embraced the 10th day of the 7th month, the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29), as the date of Jesus' coming. This led his followers to determine that October 22, 1844 would finally bring the anticipated event.

Matthew 25 and the parable of the ten virgins became a key passage for the waiting believers. The chapter continues the dialogue from Matthew 24, in which Jesus gave the signs for both Jerusalem's destruction and the end of the world since the disciples couldn't comprehend that the two events would be separated by at least two thousand years. He then told a few parables that have direct relevance to the Second Coming. Chapter 25 has three such parables, the first of which is about the ten virgins. As the Millerites looked at this parable, they understood that Jesus is the bridegroom and the waiting church is the ten virgins. In the story, five virgins are wise, having brought extra oil to last them while the bridegroom postpones His coming, and five are foolish, being unprepared for the delay. These thirteen verses encapsulate the experience of those who expected Jesus to return in 1844, but they're also relevant to the church today as we continue to wait.

The history of early Adventism should remind us to be humble and very careful in our Bible study. Even people who were used by God in remarkable ways have at times accepted popular errors and been incorrect in their study. It's encouraging to see that God uses imperfect people in His work, but it should also warn us that just because God is blessing our ministry doesn't mean we won't make mistakes in our study.

BUILD UP THE RESERVES

Life for the early Advent believers was a mixture of faith and action. Leonard Hastings didn't harvest his potatoes because he believed Jesus was coming. Joseph Bates invested all his money in writing articles and preaching. The Stowell family sold their farm and moved in with the Andrews family. When Jesus failed to appear as they had hoped first in the spring of 1844 and then in October, the disappointment was deep and painful. They wrestled with humiliation, fear, and confusion as a thousand questions about what they believed assaulted them.

The parable of the ten virgins applies to both the waiting time in 1844 and the much longer waiting time the church has endured since then. Matthew 25:1–13 places particular emphasis on the importance of personal preparation for Christ's coming. Verses 3 and 4 outline the difference between the two types of women: the wise brought oil while the foolish didn't. Oil is a common symbol of the Holy Spirit (Zech. 4:1–5), something the foolish virgins lacked in their lives. They clearly had a biblical knowledge of truth and an outward appearance of deep piety, but that alone proved insufficient in the end.

This parable is the second of four parables that Jesus gave in Matthew 24:45—25:46. All four depict two groups in the church. The first three parables have a significant delay that tests the character of those waiting. Since at least the 1840s, God's people have been waiting for Jesus to return. The delay has caused many to doubt His promise to return; many have renounced their faith. These parables illustrate that those who continue to trust Jesus' promises will not be disappointed in the end.

One interesting aspect of this parable is that both the wise and foolish virgins "slumbered and slept" (v. 5) until midnight, when the call to meet the bridegroom woke them. Even the wise who brought the extra oil were unable to stay awake. Midnight signifies the spiritual darkness that will cover the world in the last days—"the darkest period of this earth's history" (Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons* [1900], 414). The sleeping virgins represent a sleeping church in the final moments before Jesus returns.

As the women awoke to the call to join the wedding procession, they realized they needed to trim their lamps so they would once again burn brightly after being unattended for such a long time. Sadly, it was impossible at this critical hour to share the remaining oil, for each of the wise had only enough for herself. When the emergency hit, it was too late to prepare. The crisis only revealed what they had lacked all along. What we will do in the crisis is determined by how we prepare today.

This parable ends on a sad note as the foolish return to the wedding feast after trying to buy more oil. They hear the devastating words uttered: "I do not know you" (v. 12). They had enough of a relationship with the bridegroom for them to at least join the procession, but in the end, the relationship was revealed to be superficial, lacking real depth and commitment.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?



What questions emerge after studying this lesson? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

The women carried their reserve supply of oil in special vessels. In what ways can we have the Holy Spirit in reserve? How can we apply this principle to our lives?



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What relationship do the following verses have with Matthew 25:1–13?

Revelation 6:12–17

Matthew 24:3–14

Matthew 24:36–44

Revelation 1:7

Habakkuk 2:1–3

Matthew 22:1–10

Matthew 7:21–23

1 Thessalonians 5:1–10

Revelation 3:14–22

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from Matthew 25:1–13.

A PAINFUL DELAY

Jesus is the bridegroom in the parable. He longs to be united to His bride, the church, you. There is nothing Jesus wants more than to take His children to heaven. This delay is something that pains God's heart, perhaps more than it pains us. This week's passage uses the example of a wedding celebration to illustrate the struggles the waiting church faces. No one likes a delayed wedding. Guests get restless, the groom gets fidgety, and the bride becomes fretful. Waiting for a long-anticipated event can be torture. That's why the parable of the ten virgins illustrates the emotional upheaval the church faces so well. Waiting is hard for everyone.

The misinterpretation of the Bible resulted in a painful disappointment for the waiting church in 1844. The events of October 22, which have come to be known as the Great Disappointment, splintered the Millerite movement. They had an understanding of Scripture, but when their faith met test and trial, it was not rooted deeply enough to hold them, and most gave up hope in Jesus' soon coming.

Just like in Matthew 25, the Millerites needed extra oil for their lamps after they had waited until their darkest hour—their midnight. From their experience, we can see that the oil is not transferable. When the crisis hits, nobody can borrow trust in God from a friend. Everybody must live out their own faith. Jesus freely offers salvation to all, but He expects each of us to individually surrender to Him and develop the character of Christ in our lives. Just like Jesus had a role in salvation that He alone could fill, we too must play our own parts: we must surrender all to Christ and allow Him to work freely in our lives. The character that has been transformed by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:13) is not something that can be shared with others. We can share His love and be a light to the world in this dark time, but character is not transferable. Soon the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom is coming" (Matt. 25:6) will go out to the world. As the waiting and working church, we need to be abiding in Christ daily in the here and now so we're ready when He comes. We can only be prepared through the oil of the Holy Spirit daily filling our hearts and shaping our characters.

While the ten virgins slept, nobody could see any difference between the wise and the foolish. The difference was discovered only when the crisis came. How many of us in church look fine on the outside but lack the personal work of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives? Perhaps the real crisis happens before the emergency. Perhaps times of normality and even prosperity are the most hazardous. Now, while things are still a little bit normal, is the time to let the Holy Spirit into every corner of our lives so that when peoples' characters are revealed, the living, indwelling Christ is seen in us.



inVite

Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.



What is He saying to you personally through these texts?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

How do you think Jesus feels about being perceived as late for His own celebration?

Prayer Response:



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Expectant Hope



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study of the
chapter, what are some personal
applications you are convicted of
in your life?

What are some practical
applications you must make in
your school, family, workplace,
and church life?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
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THE ADVENT MESSAGE

"To William Miller and his colaborers it was given to preach the warning in America. This country became the center of the great advent movement. It was here that the prophecy of the first angel's message had its most direct fulfillment. The writings of Miller and his associates were carried to distant lands. Wherever missionaries had penetrated in all the world, were sent the glad tidings of Christ's speedy return. Far and wide spread the message of the everlasting gospel: 'Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come.'

"The testimony of the prophecies which seemed to point to the coming of Christ in the spring of 1844 took deep hold of the minds of the people. As the message went from state to state, there was everywhere awakened widespread interest. Many were convinced that the arguments from the prophetic periods were correct, and, sacrificing their pride of opinion, they joyfully received the truth. Some ministers laid aside their sectarian views and feelings, left their salaries and their churches, and united in proclaiming the coming of Jesus. There were comparatively few ministers, however, who would accept this message; therefore it was largely committed to humble laymen. Farmers left their fields, mechanics their tools, traders their merchandise, professional men their positions; and yet the number of workers was small in comparison with the work to be accomplished. The condition of an ungodly church and a world lying in wickedness, burdened the souls of the true watchmen, and they willingly endured toil, privation, and suffering, that they might call men to repentance unto salvation. Though opposed by Satan, the work went steadily forward, and the advent truth was accepted by many thousands.

"Everywhere the searching testimony was heard, warning sinners, both worldlings and church members, to flee from the wrath to come. Like John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, the preachers laid the ax at the root of the tree and urged all to bring forth fruit meet for repentance. Their stirring appeals were in marked contrast to the assurances of peace and safety that were heard from popular pulpits; and wherever the message was given, it moved the people. The simple, direct testimony of the Scriptures, set home by the power of the Holy Spirit, brought a weight of conviction which few were able wholly to resist. Professors of religion were roused from their false security. They saw their backslidings, their worldliness and unbelief, their pride and selfishness. Many sought the Lord with repentance and humiliation. The affections that had so long clung to earthly things they now fixed upon heaven. The Spirit of God rested upon them, and with hearts softened and subdued they joined to sound the cry: 'Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come.' " (Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* [1911], 368, 369.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



Why do you think God allowed the early Advent believers to make a mistake in their interpretations?

Why do you think William Miller was so hesitant to share his findings, and in what ways do we interact with God's Word and share it with others in a similar fashion?

How can we keep the freshness and urgency of the advent message alive for us today even though it's something many of us have known for a long time?

The foolish virgins had apparently gotten used to borrowing oil, which brought them trouble. What could this borrowing look like in our lives today and how can we avoid doing it?

In what ways can we cooperate with the Holy Spirit so we can be considered wise?

What other stories or passages reveal a similar dichotomy between the wise and foolish in the church? What are these descriptions trying to warn us of?

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