

## TEN VIRGINS

*Interpreting the Parables of Jesus* by Craig Blomberg<sup>1</sup>

### SIMPLE 3-POINT PARABLES

The Parable of the Ten Virgins - (Matthew 24:1-3, 25:1-13)

#### I. The three main characters and their correlating identities

<u>Ten Virgins</u>	<u>Who they represent</u>
Bridegroom	→ God (Jesus)
Wise Young Women	→ Those prepared for Judgment Day
Young Foolish Women	→ Those NOT prepared for Judgment Day (Those who masquerade as the true people of God)

#### II. Things to consider about the parable - (Discussing the color provided by Jesus)

- If the problem facing the wicked servant in the previous parable was the surprisingly quick return of his master, then the opposite problem faces the five foolish bridesmaids in the very next passage in Matthew. Here the theme of delay explicitly enters in (Mt 25:5). But the delay of the bridegroom was a standard feature of Jewish weddings, so this detail need not reflect any late stage of the tradition. In fact, most of the parable is fairly realistic by the standards of Jesus' day.
- The story starts naturally enough. Following typical Jewish marriage customs ... a groom left his parents' home with a contingent of friends to go to the home of his bride, where nuptial ceremonies were carried out. After this, the entire wedding party formed a processional to a wedding banquet, normally at the home of the bridegroom. The wedding feast was often held at night (22:13; 25:6).
- "The portable torches for outdoor use would be bundles of cloth mounted on a carrying stick and soaked with oil." The jars would have held the oil and the girls would have dipped their torches into the oil before lighting them. "A torch without a jar of oil was as useless as a modern flashlight without a battery."
- Even shops being open late at night would have fit the special, festive occasion, lest the celebration run out of certain supplies. Last-minute planning in a world not obsessed with time as in the modern West could be prolonged at length, not to mention any haggling that might be going on between sets of parents over the bride's dowry or the value of other presents received.
- The "cry" (Mt 25:6) would have been a herald's announcement, often made more than once due precisely to this uncertain timing. Thus only very foolish bridesmaids would come without plenty of extra oil in case their lamps needed to stay lit for a considerable time. The most implausible detail of all is the reaction of the bridegroom in refusing to open the door for the foolish bridesmaids and in claiming not even to know them. But at an allegorical level these features make good sense, when the story is seen as warning about the irreversible judgment that awaits those who have masqueraded as true people of God.
- Probably the incident with the oil simply supports the main theme of preparedness and is to be interpreted in the broadest possible sense as anything an individual must do to be ready to meet the Lord. Then the sellers have no independent significance in the parable's interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, Second Edition. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2012). **Almost all of this study is taken directly from Blomberg while small portions are italicized to identify a synthesis of his book or a question generated for the purpose of this study.**

- The inability of the wise virgins to share their supply at least suggests the theme of individual accountability—spiritual preparedness is not transferrable from one person to the next. But this point represents an allegorical waver; one may not affirm it with as much confidence. Moreover, the wise girls' response to their companions does not reflect "selfishness but rather preparation and wisdom to know what it will take to get the task accomplished."
- Once again those who find God's ultimate rejection of anyone intolerable, especially portrayed as young women like these bridesmaids, will seriously object to this parable and the picture of God it contains or else they will deny all allegorical applications to God and the people of this world. But Jesus uses bridesmaids to illustrate both good and bad ways to prepare for the bridegroom, so there is hardly anything misogynistic (strong prejudice against women) here. To the extent that those during Jesus' lifetime most unprepared for his announcement of the inaugurated eschaton (final event in the divine plan) were key, Jewish, male, religious leaders, Herman Waetjen is correct that the parable in fact "subverts the world of male domination and its nationalistic ideology of ethnic identity as God's elect people."
- It is too easy to read the parable of the ten virgins too rapidly and assume these girls are truly repenting while God is banishing them forever. Theological objections would then indeed be in order. But no passage of Scripture elsewhere ever teaches that God can rebuff genuine repentance, so it is more likely that these five bridesmaids are still trying to maintain control themselves, precisely what Castelo reminds us is impossible. They failed to take responsibility for one of the most fundamental and obvious tasks of preparing for the wedding, they tried to "mooch" off their companions and deprive them of participating, and now they are trying to command the master of the house himself ("Lord, Lord ... open the door for us!"). **If the "gates" of heaven appear to be locked on the outside, it is because the gates of hell are locked on the inside.**

### III. Three main characters and three main points

- (1) Like the **bridegroom**, God may delay his coming longer than people expect.
- (2) Like the **wise bridesmaids**, his followers must be prepared for such a delay—discipleship may be more arduous than the novice suspects.
- (3) Like the **foolish bridesmaids**, those who do not prepare adequately may discover a point beyond which there is no return—when the end comes it will be too late to undo the damage of neglect.

**Contemporary Application** - None noted. Thoughts? How about the "fellow student" in high school who tried to make you feel ashamed because you would not give them the answers to the homework the morning of class. Were they really students or "partiers" masquerading students? (What about a kingdom context?)

### IV. Personal Application

1. *Are we "posers" or the actual kingdom people of God?*
2. *How have those who masquerade as the people of God in your life tried to or have successfully taken you away from your preparation for final entry into the Kingdom of God, that is, your time spent working on your own sanctification or advancing the kingdom in other's lives?*
3. *How might we address the "posers" who go through the motions of Christianity but never show any real sign of sanctification?*

**Looking Ahead:** Another Simple 3-Point Parable (The Wheat and the Tares - Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)